

HANDS AROUND

[REIGEN]

A Cycle of Ten Dialogues By

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COMPLETELY RENDERED INTO ENGLISH

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By
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INTRODUCTION

Humanity seems gayest when dancing on the brink of a volcano. The culture of a period preceding a social cataclysm is marked by a spirit of light wit and sophisticated elegance which finds expression in a literature of a distinct type. This literature is light-hearted, audacious and self-conscious. It can treat with the most charming insouciance subjects which in another age would have been awkward or even vulgar. But with the riper experience of a period approaching its end the writers feel untrammelled in the choice of theme by pride or prejudice knowing that they will never transgress the line of good taste.

So it was in the declining days of the Roman civilization when Lucian of Samosata wrote his *Dialogues of the Hetaerai* and countless poets penned their intricate epigrams on the art and experience of love. So it was in England when the fine vigor of the Elizabethan and Miltonic age gave way to the Restoration and the calculating brilliance of a Congreve or a Wycherly.

But the exquisite handling of the licentious was elaborated into a perfect technique in eighteenth century France. The spirit of the Rococo with its predilection for the well-measured pose was singularly well adapted to the artistic expression of what in a cruder age could only have been voiced with coarseness and vulgarity. In the literature of this period we meet again the spirit that animates the gracious paintings of Watteau and Fragonard. The scenes we admire in their panels recur in literary style in works like Choderlos de Laclos' *Liaisons dangereuses* and Louvet de Couvray's *Les amours du Chevalier de Faublas*. Again the same note is heard in Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in which the society of the period is travestied with brilliant wit and worldly philosophy. The court of Louis XVI., quite unaware, looked on and applauded a play which Napoleon later characterized as "the revolution already in action." During the closing years of the nineteenth century a similar spirit has hovered over Vienna, when it was the last and staunchest stronghold of aristocracy in the modern world. Its literature reflected the charm of a fastidious amatory etiquette which is forbidden in sterner and soberer environment, while it gayly ignored the slow gathering of the clouds which foreshadowed its own catastrophe and martyrdom. As Percival Pollard once so well put it: "All that rises out of that air has had fascination, grace, insinuation, and intrigue. Neither tremendous passion nor tremendous problems have stirred, to all appearances, these polite artists of Vienna. Passion might be there, but what was to be artistically expressed was, rather, the witty or ironically mournful surfaces of passion."

The literary master of this world is concededly Arthur Schnitzler, in whom are curiously combined the sophisticated elegance of the Viennese man of letters and the disenchanting wisdom of the

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

What is the matter?

YOUNG MAN

You've never been so beautiful.

YOUNG WIFE

How is that?

YOUNG MAN

Alone . . . alone with you—Emma—
(He kneels down beside her chair, takes both her hands, and covers them with kisses)

YOUNG WIFE

And now . . . now let me go again. I have done what you asked me to do.

YOUNG MAN

(Lets his head sink into her lap)

YOUNG WIFE

You promised me to be good.

YOUNG MAN

Yes.

YOUNG WIFE

It is stifling hot in this room.

YOUNG MAN

(Gets up) You still have your coat on.

YOUNG WIFE

Put it with my hat.

YOUNG MAN

(Takes off her coat, and puts it on the sofa)

YOUNG WIFE

And now—good-by—

YOUNG MAN

Emma—! Emma—!

YOUNG WIFE

The five minutes are long past.

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YOUNG MAN

Not one yet!—

YOUNG WIFE

Alfred, tell me truly now, how late it is.

YOUNG MAN

It is now exactly a quarter past six.

YOUNG WIFE

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

YOUNG MAN

You can see your sister any time . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Oh, Merciful Heaven, Alfred, why did you tempt me to come?

YOUNG MAN

Because . . . I adore you, Emma!

YOUNG WIFE

To how many have you said the same thing?

YOUNG MAN

Since I met you, to no one.

YOUNG WIFE

What a foolish woman I am! If anybody had predicted . . . just a week ago . . . or even yesterday . . .

YOUNG MAN

But you had already promised me the day before yesterday.

YOUNG WIFE

You plagued me so. But I didn't want to do it. God is my witness—I didn't want to do it . . . Yesterday, I was firmly decided . . . Do you know I even wrote you a long letter last night?

YOUNG MAN

I didn't receive any.

YOUNG WIFE

I tore it up later. Oh, if only I had sent it to you.

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YOUNG MAN

It is better as it is.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh, no, it's awful . . . of me. I don't understand myself. Good-by, Alfred, let me go.

YOUNG MAN

(Seizes her, and covers her face with burning kisses)

YOUNG WIFE

So . . . is that the way you keep your word . . .

YOUNG MAN

One more kiss—one more.

YOUNG WIFE

The last.
(He kisses her, and she returns the kiss; their lips remain joined for a long time)

YOUNG MAN

Shall I tell you something, Emma? It is now for the first time that I know what happiness is.

YOUNG WIFE

(Sinks back into the armchair)

YOUNG MAN

(Sits on the arm of the chair, and puts one arm lightly about her neck) . . . or rather, I know now what happiness might be.

YOUNG WIFE

(Sighs deeply)

YOUNG MAN

(Kisses her again)

YOUNG WIFE

Alfred—Alfred, what are you doing to me!

YOUNG MAN

Wasn't I right?—It isn't so awfully uncomfortable here . . . And we are so safe here. It's a thousand times better than those meetings outdoors . . .

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YOUNG WIFE

Oh, don't remind me of them.

YOUNG MAN

I shall always recall them with a thousand delights. Every minute you have let me spend with, you is a sweet memory.

YOUNG WIFE

Do you remember the ball at the Manufacturers' Club?

YOUNG MAN

Do I remember it . . . ? I sat beside you through the whole supper—quite close to you. Your husband had champagne . . .

YOUNG WIFE

(Looks at him with a hurt expression)

YOUNG MAN

I meant to speak only of the champagne. Emma, would you like a glass of cognac?

YOUNG WIFE

Only a drop, but first give me a glass of water.

YOUNG MAN

Surely . . . But where is—oh, yes, I remember . . .
(He opens the portieres, and goes into the bedroom)

YOUNG WIFE

(Follows him with her eyes)

YOUNG MAN

(Comes back with a water-bottle and two glasses)

YOUNG WIFE

Where have you been?

YOUNG MAN

In . . . the adjoining room.
(Pours her a glass of water)

YOUNG WIFE

Now I'm going to ask you something, Alfred—and you must tell me the truth.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG MAN

I swear—

YOUNG WIFE

Has there ever been any other woman in these rooms?

YOUNG MAN

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

YOUNG WIFE

You know what I mean, Alfred . . . in these rooms, with you!

YOUNG MAN

With me—here—Emma!—It's not kind of you even to imagine such a thing.

YOUNG WIFE

Then there was . . . how shall I . . . But, no, I'd rather not ask. It is better that I shouldn't ask. It's my own fault. Every fault has its punishment.

YOUNG MAN

But what is wrong? What is the matter with you? What fault?

YOUNG WIFE

No, no, no, I mustn't think . . . Otherwise I would sink through the floor with shame.

YOUNG MAN

(With the water-bottle in his hand, shakes his head sadly) Emma, if you only knew how you hurt me.

YOUNG WIFE

(Pours a glass of cognac)

YOUNG MAN

I want to tell you something, Emma. If you're ashamed of being here—if you don't care for me—if you don't feel you are all the happiness in the world for me—then you'd better go.—

YOUNG WIFE

Yes, I shall go.

YOUNG MAN

(Taking hold of her hand) But if you feel that I cannot live without you, that a kiss upon your hand means more to me than all the caresses of all the women in the whole world. . . Emma, I'm not like

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other young men, who are experienced in love-making—perhaps, I am too naive . . . I . . .

YOUNG WIFE

But suppose you were like other young men?

YOUNG MAN

Then you wouldn't be here to-night—because you are not like other women.

YOUNG WIFE

How do you know that?

YOUNG MAN

(Drawing her close beside him on the sofa) I have thought a lot about it. I know you are unhappy.

YOUNG WIFE

(Pleased) Yes.

YOUNG MAN

Life is so dreary, so empty—and then—so short—so horribly short! There is only one happiness—to find some one who loves you.—

YOUNG WIFE

(Takes a candied pear from the table, and puts it into her mouth)

YOUNG MAN

Give me half of it!
(She offers it to him with her lips)

YOUNG WIFE

(Catches the hands of the YOUNG MAN that threaten to stray)
What are you doing, Alfred? . . . Is that the way you keep your promise?

YOUNG MAN

(Swallows the pear, then, more daringly) Life is so short.

YOUNG WIFE

(Weakly) But that's no reason—

YOUNG MAN

(Mechanically) Oh, yes.

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YOUNG WIFE

(Still more weakly) Alfred, you promised to be good . . . and then it's so light . . .

YOUNG MAN

Come, come, you only, only . . .
(He lifts her from the sofa)

YOUNG WIFE

What are you doing?

YOUNG MAN

It's not so light in the other room.

YOUNG WIFE

Is there another room?

YOUNG MAN

(Drawing her with him) A beautiful one . . . and quite dark.

YOUNG WIFE

We'd better stay in here.

YOUNG MAN

(Already past the bedroom portieres with her, loosening her waist)

YOUNG WIFE

You are so . . . O merciful Heaven, what are you doing with me!—Alfred!

YOUNG MAN

I adore you, Emma!

YOUNG WIFE

So then wait, wait a little . . . *(Weakly)* Go . . . I'll call you.

YOUNG MAN

Let you help me—let us help you *(becoming confused)* . . . let . . . me—help—you.

YOUNG WIFE

But you'll tear everything.

YOUNG MAN

You have no corset on?

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YOUNG WIFE

I never wear a corset. Odilon (*a Parisian dancer famous in the 1890s*) doesn't wear any either. But you can unbutton my shoes.

YOUNG MAN

(*Unbuttons her shoes and kisses her feet*)

YOUNG WIFE

(*Slips into bed*) Oh, how cold it is.

YOUNG MAN

It'll be warm in a minute.

YOUNG WIFE

(*Laughing softly*) Do you think so?

YOUNG MAN

(*Slightly hurt, to himself*) She ought not to have said that.
(*He undresses in the dark*)

YOUNG WIFE

(*Tenderly*) Come, come, come!

YOUNG MAN

(*Mollified*) In a minute, dear—

YOUNG WIFE

It smells like violets here.

YOUNG MAN

That's you Yes (*To her*) you, yourself.

YOUNG WIFE

Alfred . . . Alfred!!!!

YOUNG MAN

Emma . . .

* * *

YOUNG MAN

Apparently I love you too much . . . yes . . . I am as if out of my senses.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

* * *

YOUNG MAN

I have been beside myself all these days. I was afraid of this.

YOUNG WIFE

Don't mind.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, certainly not. It's perfectly natural, if one . . .

YOUNG WIFE

No . . . don't. . . . You are nervous. Calm yourself first.

YOUNG MAN

Do you know Stendhal?

YOUNG WIFE

Stendhal?

YOUNG MAN

The "Psychologie de l'amour."

YOUNG WIFE

No. Why do you ask me?

YOUNG MAN

There's a story in that book which is very much to the point.

YOUNG WIFE

What kind of a story?

YOUNG MAN

There is a gathering of cavalry officers—

YOUNG WIFE

Yes.

YOUNG MAN

And they are telling each other about their love affairs. And each one of them tells that with the woman he loved best—most passionately, you know . . . that with him, that then—well, in short, that the same thing happened just as it happened to me now.

YOUNG WIFE

Yes.

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YOUNG MAN

That is very characteristic.

YOUNG WIFE

Yes.

YOUNG MAN

The story is not yet ended. One of them maintained . . . that this thing had never in his life happened to him, but, adds Stendhal—he was known as a great boaster.

YOUNG WIFE

And—

YOUNG MAN

And, yet, it makes you feel blue—that's the stupid side of it, even though it's so unimportant.

YOUNG WIFE

Of course. Anyway, you know . . . you promised me to be good.

YOUNG MAN

Sh-h! Don't laugh. That doesn't help things any.

YOUNG WIFE

But no, I'm not laughing. That story of Stendhal's is really interesting. I have always thought that only older people . . . or people who . . . you know, people who have lived fast . . .

YOUNG MAN

The idea! That has nothing to do with it. By the way, I had completely forgotten the prettiest of Stendhal's stories. One of the cavalry officers went so far as to say that he stayed for three or even six nights . . . I don't remember now—that is he stayed with a woman, whom he wanted for weeks—*desirée*—you understand—and nothing happened all those nights except that they wept for happiness . . . both . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Both?

YOUNG MAN

Yes. Does that surprise you? It seems very comprehensible—especially when two people love each other.

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YOUNG WIFE

But surely there are many who don't weep.

YOUNG MAN

(Nervously) Certainly . . . however, that is an exceptional case.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh—I thought Stendhal said that all cavalry officers weep on such an occasion.

YOUNG MAN

Look here, now you are laughing at me.

YOUNG WIFE

What an idea! Don't be childish, Alfred.

YOUNG MAN

Well, it makes me nervous anyway. . . . Besides I have the feeling that you are thinking about it all the time. That embarrasses me still more.

YOUNG WIFE

I'm not thinking of it at all.

YOUNG MAN

If I were only sure that you love me.

YOUNG WIFE

Do you want still further proofs?

YOUNG MAN

Didn't I tell you . . . you are always laughing at me.

YOUNG WIFE

How so? Come, let me hold your sweet little head.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, that feels so good.

YOUNG WIFE

Do you love me?

YOUNG MAN

Oh, I'm so happy.

YOUNG WIFE

But you needn't cry about it.

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YOUNG MAN

(Moving away from her, highly irritated) There! Again! I begged you not to . . .

YOUNG WIFE

To tell you that you shouldn't cry . . .

YOUNG MAN

You said: "You needn't cry about it."

YOUNG WIFE

You are nervous, sweetheart.

YOUNG MAN

I know.

YOUNG WIFE

But you ought not to be. It is beautiful even that . . . that we are together like good comrades . . .

YOUNG MAN

Now you are beginning again.

YOUNG WIFE

Don't you remember! That was one of our first talks. We wanted to be comrades, nothing more. Oh, how nice that was . . . at my sister's ball in January, during the quadrille. . . . For heaven's sake, I should have gone long ago. . . . My sister expects me—what shall I tell her. . . . Good-by, Alfred—

YOUNG MAN

Emma!—You will leave me in this way!

YOUNG WIFE

Yes—so!—

YOUNG MAN

Five minutes more. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

All right. Five minutes more. But you must promise me . . . not to move? . . . Yes? . . . I want to give you a good-by kiss. . . . Psst . . . be still . . . don't move, I told you, otherwise I'll get up at once, you, my sweetheart, sweet . . .

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG MAN

Emma . . . my ador.

* * *

YOUNG WIFE

My Alfred!

YOUNG MAN

Oh, it is heaven to be with you.

YOUNG WIFE

But now I've really got to go.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, let your sister wait.

YOUNG WIFE

I must go home. It is much too late to see my sister. How late is it?

YOUNG MAN

How should I know?

YOUNG WIFE

You might look at your watch.

YOUNG MAN

My watch is in my waistcoat.

YOUNG WIFE

Get it.

YOUNG MAN

(Gets up with a jump) Eight o'clock.

YOUNG WIFE

(Jumps up quickly) For heaven's sake. . . . Quick, Alfred, give me my stockings. What shall I say? They must be waiting for me at home . . . eight o'clock. . . .

YOUNG MAN

When shall I see you again?

YOUNG WIFE

Never.

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YOUNG MAN

Emma! Don't you love me any more?

YOUNG WIFE

Just for that reason. Give me my shoes.

YOUNG MAN

Never again? Here are your shoes.

YOUNG WIFE

My button-hook is in my bag. Please, be quick. . . .

YOUNG MAN

Here is the button-hook.

YOUNG WIFE

Alfred, this may cost us our lives.

YOUNG MAN

(Unpleasantly moved) In what way?

YOUNG WIFE

What shall I say, if he asks me where I've been?

YOUNG MAN

At your sister's.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh, if I only could lie.

YOUNG MAN

Well, you'll have to.

YOUNG WIFE

Everything for a man like you. Oh, come here . . . let me give you a last kiss. *(She embraces him)*—And now—leave me by myself, go in the other room.—I can't dress, if you are around.

YOUNG MAN

(Goes into the drawing-room, where he dresses. He eats some pastry and drinks a glass of cognac)

YOUNG WIFE

(Calls after a while) Alfred!

YOUNG MAN

Yes, sweetheart.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

Isn't it better that we didn't weep?

YOUNG MAN

(Smiling, not without pride) How can you talk so frivolously?—

YOUNG WIFE

Oh, how difficult it will be now—if we should meet by chance in company?

YOUNG MAN

By chance?—sometime? . . . Surely you are coming to Lobheimer's to-morrow?

YOUNG WIFE

Yes. You too?

YOUNG MAN

Of course. May I ask for the cotillion?

YOUNG WIFE

Oh, I shall not go. What do you imagine?—I would . . . *(She enters the drawing-room fully dressed, and takes a piece of chocolate pastry)* sink through the floor.

YOUNG MAN

To-morrow at Lobheimer's. That's fine.

YOUNG WIFE

No, no . . . I shall decline . . . certainly decline—

YOUNG MAN

Well, the day after to-morrow . . . here.

YOUNG WIFE

The idea!

YOUNG MAN

At six. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

There are cabs at this corner, aren't there?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, as many as you want. Well, the day after to-morrow, here at six o'clock. Please say "yes" sweetheart.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

. . . We'll discuss that to-morrow night during the cotillion.

YOUNG MAN

(Embracing her) My angel.

YOUNG WIFE

Don't muss my hair again.

YOUNG MAN

Well then, to-morrow night at Lobheimer's, and the day after to-morrow in my arms.

YOUNG WIFE

Good-by. . . .

YOUNG MAN

(Suddenly anxious again) And what will you—tell *him* to-night?—

YOUNG WIFE

Don't ask me . . . don't ask me . . . it's too terrible.—Why do I love you so?—Good-by—If I meet any one again on the stairway, I shall faint.—Ugh!

YOUNG MAN

(Kisses her hand for the last time)

YOUNG WIFE

(Exit)

YOUNG MAN

(Remains standing. Then he sits down on the couch. He smiles reflectively, and says to himself) Now, at last, I have an affair with a respectable woman.

THE YOUNG WIFE AND THE HUSBAND

A comfortable bedroom. It is half past ten at night. The Wife is lying abed and reading. The Husband enters the room in a dressing gown.

YOUNG WIFE

(Without looking up) You have stopped working?

HUSBAND

HANDS AROUND

Yes. I'm too tired. And besides . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Well?—

HUSBAND

I felt so lonely at my desk all at once. A longing for you came over me.

YOUNG WIFE

(Looking up) Really?

HUSBAND

(Sitting down on the bed beside her) Don't read any more tonight. You will ruin your eyes.

YOUNG WIFE

(Closing the book) What's the matter with you?

HUSBAND

Nothing, child. I'm in love with you. But you know that.

YOUNG WIFE

One might almost forget it sometimes.

HUSBAND

One *must* forget it sometimes.

YOUNG WIFE

Why?

HUSBAND

Because, otherwise, marriage would be something imperfect. It would . . . how shall I express it . . . it would lose its sanctity.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh. . . .

HUSBAND

Believe me—it is so. . . . If we hadn't sometimes forgotten that we are in love with each other during the five years we have been married—we might not be in love any longer.

YOUNG WIFE

That's beyond me.

HUSBAND

The case is simply this. We have had perhaps ten or twelve love-

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affairs with each other. . . . Doesn't it seem that way to you, too?

YOUNG WIFE

I haven't counted them!

HUSBAND

If we had enjoyed the first one to the last drop, if I had from the very beginning surrendered without restraint to my passion for you, the same thing would have happened to us that has happened to millions of other lovers. We would be tired of each other.

YOUNG WIFE

Ah . . . do you mean that?

HUSBAND

Believe me—Emma—in the early days of our marriage, I was afraid that this would happen.

YOUNG WIFE

I, too.

HUSBAND

See? Am I not right? Therefore, it is wise every now and then to live only as good friends.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh.

HUSBAND

And some can always experience new honeymoons, especially since I am careful never to let such weeks of honeymoon . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Run into months.

HUSBAND

That is true.

YOUNG WIFE

And now . . . now it seems we are at the end of another such period of friendship—?

HUSBAND

(Pressing her tenderly to him) So it might seem.

YOUNG WIFE

But if . . . if I should feel differently?

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HUSBAND

You couldn't. You are the wisest and most delicious being in the world. I am very happy to have found you.

YOUNG WIFE

You know how to make love very well—every now and then.

HUSBAND

(Who has also gone to bed) Well, for a man who has looked about in the world a bit—come, lay your head on my shoulder—who has seen something of the world, marriage is really something much more mysterious than it is for you sheltered young girls. You come to us entirely innocent and . . . to a certain degree, at least, ignorant of things, and therefore you really understand the essence of love much better than we.

YOUNG WIFE

(Laughing) Oh!

HUSBAND

Certainly. For we get all tangled up by the many experiences that we have to go through before marriage. You women, of course, hear a lot of things, you know a lot of things, no doubt read too much, but you can't have any real idea of the things men experience. We men really become quite disgusted with this thing people call love, for the kind of creatures to which we are restricted really are. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Tell me—what kind of creatures are they?

HUSBAND

(Kissing her on the forehead) You ought to be glad, dear child, that you never have had a glimpse of relations like that. After all most of the poor things deserve pity—it is not for us to throw stones.

YOUNG WIFE

But—this pity—it doesn't seem quite appropriate to me.

HUSBAND

(With gentle benevolence) They deserve it. You young girls of good family, who wait quietly under the care of your parents for the man who desires you in marriage—you won't know the misery that drives most of these poor creatures into the arms of sin.

YOUNG WIFE

Do all of them really sell themselves?

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

I would hardly say that. I don't mean the material misery alone. There is also—one might call it—a moral misery, a lack of appreciation for what is permissible, and, especially, for what is noble.

YOUNG WIFE

But why are they to be pitied?—They seem to enjoy themselves.

HUSBAND

You have strange ideas, my child. You must not forget that such people are predestined by nature to sink lower and lower. There is no stopping them.

YOUNG WIFE

(Cuddling to him) It seems pleasant to fall.

HUSBAND

(Hurt) How can you say things like that, Emma? I should think that to good women like you, nothing could be more repulsive than those who are not!

YOUNG WIFE

Of course, Karl, of course. I was just thinking. Go on, tell me more. I like it when you talk like this. Tell me something.

HUSBAND

What?—

YOUNG WIFE

Why—about these people.

HUSBAND

The idea!

YOUNG WIFE

But, I asked you a long time ago—you know, when we were first married to tell me something of your younger days.

HUSBAND

Why does that interest you?

YOUNG WIFE

Aren't you my husband? Isn't it a sort of injustice that I really know nothing about your past?

HUSBAND

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You surely don't think I have such bad taste, as to—No, Emma . . . it would be like a profanation.

YOUNG WIFE

And yet you have . . . heaven knows how many other women you have held in your arms, just as you are holding me now.

HUSBAND

Don't say "women." You are *the* woman.

YOUNG WIFE

But you must answer one question . . . otherwise . . . otherwise . . . there won't be any honeymoon.

HUSBAND

That's a nice way to talk . . . remember you are a mother. . . our little girl is sleeping in there. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

(*Snuggling against him*) But I want a boy, too.

HUSBAND

Emma!

YOUNG WIFE

Don't be silly . . . of course, I am your wife . . . but I'd like also to be . . . to be your sweetheart.

HUSBAND

Would you? . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Well—now my question.

HUSBAND

(*Accommodating*) All right.

YOUNG WIFE

Was there . . . a married woman . . . amongst them?

HUSBAND

Why? What do you mean?

YOUNG WIFE

You know what I mean.

HUSBAND

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(Slightly disconcerted) What makes you think of a thing like that?

YOUNG WIFE

I would like to know if . . . I mean—there are such women. . . . I know that very well. But did you? . . .

HUSBAND

(Seriously) Do you know such a woman?

YOUNG WIFE

Well, I hardly know.

HUSBAND

Is there, perhaps, such a woman among your friends?

YOUNG WIFE

How can I be sure that there is—or that there isn't?

HUSBAND

Did any of your friends . . . women talk about a lot of things—alone among themselves—did any of them ever confess—?

YOUNG WIFE *(Uncertainly)* No.

HUSBAND

Do you suspect any of your friends—that she

YOUNG WIFE

Suspect . . . oh . . . suspect.

HUSBAND

It would seem so.

YOUNG WIFE

No, indeed, Karl, most certainly not. When I think things over—I don't believe there is any one.

HUSBAND

No one?

YOUNG WIFE

Not among my friends

HUSBAND

Promise me something, Emma.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

Well?

HUSBAND

That you will never associate with a woman about whom you have the slightest suspicion that she . . . doesn't lead a completely blameless life.

YOUNG WIFE

And you think it necessary for me to promise that?

HUSBAND

I know that you will not seek out the company

of such women. But, it might happen that you . . . in fact it often happens that such women, whose reputations are not of the best, seek out good women, partly to give them standing, and partly because they feel . . . how shall I say? . . . because they feel a certain homesickness for virtue.

YOUNG WIFE

Do they?

HUSBAND

Yes. I believe what I just said is very true. Homesickness for virtue. For all of these women are at heart very unhappy; you can believe that.

YOUNG WIFE

Why?

HUSBAND

You ask me, Emma?—How can you even ask? —Just imagine what a life these women lead! Full of lies, perfidy, vulgarity, and danger.

YOUNG WIFE

Yes, of course. You are right.

HUSBAND

Truly . . . they pay for their little happiness . . . their little . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Pleasure.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Why “pleasure”? Why do you call it “pleasure”?

YOUNG WIFE

Well—there must be something in it—! Otherwise, they wouldn’t do it.

HUSBAND

It is nothing . . . an intoxication.

YOUNG WIFE

(Pensively) An intoxication . . .

HUSBAND

No, it is not even intoxication. Like everything—it is dearly paid for, that much is certain.

YOUNG WIFE

Well . . . it has happened to you, hasn’t it?

HUSBAND

Yes, Emma.—And it is the thing I most regret.

YOUNG WIFE

Who was she? Tell me! Do I know her?

HUSBAND

The idea!

YOUNG WIFE

Was it long ago? Was it very long before you married me?

HUSBAND

Don’t ask me. Please, don’t ask.

YOUNG WIFE

But, Karl!

HUSBAND

She is dead.

YOUNG WIFE

Are you in earnest?

HUSBAND

Yes . . . it sounds almost ridiculous, but I have the feeling that all such women die young.

HANDS AROUND

YOUNG WIFE

Did you love her very much?

HUSBAND

One doesn't love women who lie.

YOUNG WIFE

Then why . . .

HUSBAND

An intoxication. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Really?

HUSBAND

Don't talk about it any more, please. All that is passed long ago. I have only loved one woman—that is you. You only love where there is purity and truth.

YOUNG WIFE

Karl!

HUSBAND

Oh, how secure, how happy one feels in such arms. Why didn't I know you as a child? I am sure I wouldn't then even have looked at other women.

YOUNG WIFE

Karl!

HUSBAND

And how beautiful you are! . . . beautiful! . . . Oh, come. . . .
(He puts the light out)

* * *

YOUNG WIFE

Do you know what I am thinking of to-night?

HUSBAND

What, sweetheart?

YOUNG WIFE

Of . . . of . . . of Venice.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Our first night. . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Yes. . . .

HUSBAND

What then? Tell me!

YOUNG WIFE

You love me as much to-day.

HUSBAND

Yes, just as much.

YOUNG WIFE

Oh . . . if you would always . . .

HUSBAND

(In her arms) If I would what?

YOUNG WIFE

My Karl!

HUSBAND

What do you mean? If I would always? . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Well, yes.

HUSBAND

Well, what then, if I would always? . . .

YOUNG WIFE

Then I would always know that you love me.

HUSBAND

Yes. But you must know that anyway. One cannot always be a lover, sometimes one has to go out into the cold world to struggle and achieve! Don't forget that, my child. There is a time for everything in marriage—that is the beauty of it. There are not many who can remember their Venice after five years.

YOUNG WIFE

True!

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

And now . . . good-night, my child.

YOUNG WIFE

Good-night!

THE HUSBAND AND THE SWEET YOUNG MISS

A private dining-room, in the Riedhof, comfortably furnished with moderately good taste. A gas-grate is burning. The HUSBAND and the SWEET YOUNG MISS are disclosed. The remains of dinner are on the table, cream-cakes, fruit, cheese. In the wine-glasses is a Hungarian white wine.

HUSBAND

(Is smoking a Havana cigar, and leaning against the corner of a sofa)

MISS

(Sits beside him in an armchair, eating the cream out of a cake with a spoon, and tasting it with satisfaction)

HUSBAND

Is it good?

MISS

(Without stopping) Oh!

HUSBAND

Do you want another?

MISS

No. I've eaten too much already.

HUSBAND

Your wine is all gone.

(He fills her glass)

MISS

No . . . stop. I'll leave it anyway.

HUSBAND

Why are you so shy?

MISS

Am I?—Well, it takes time to get acquainted.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Come and sit here with me.

MISS

Right away. . . . I'm not ready yet.

HUSBAND

(Rises and stands behind her chair, and puts his arms around her, turning her face toward him)

MISS

What's the matter?

HUSBAND

I want a kiss.

MISS

(Kissing him) You are . . . excuse me, you have a lot of nerve.

HUSBAND

You're just finding that out?

MISS

Oh, no, I knew that long ago . . . from the first, in the street.—
You must—

HUSBAND

What?

MISS

You must have a nice opinion of me.

HUSBAND

Why?

MISS

Because I went right away with you to a private dining room.

HUSBAND

Well, you can hardly say "right away."

MISS

But you asked in such a nice way.

HUSBAND

Do you think so?

HANDS AROUND

MISS

And, after all, what is the harm?

HUSBAND

Of course.

MISS

Whether we go walking or—

HUSBAND

Besides, it's much too cold for walking.

MISS

Yes, it was too cold.

HUSBAND

But here it's nice and warm, isn't it?

(He sits down again, puts his arms around the girl, and draws her to his side)

MISS

(Weakly) Don't.

HUSBAND

Tell me. . . . You noticed me before, didn't you?

MISS

Certainly. Several blocks before you spoke to me.

HUSBAND

I don't mean to-day. I mean yesterday and the day before, when I was following you.

MISS

A lot of people follow me.

HUSBAND

I don't doubt that. But did you notice me?

MISS

Guess . . . do you know what happened to me the other day? My cousin's husband followed me in the dark, and didn't recognize me.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Did he speak to you?

MISS

What do you suppose? Do you imagine every one is as bold as you?

HUSBAND

But they sometimes do, don't they?

MISS

Of course, they do.

HUSBAND

Well, and what do you do?

MISS

Why nothing—I just don't answer.

HUSBAND

Hm-m . . . but you answered me.

MISS

Are you sorry?

HUSBAND

(Kisses her violently) Your lips taste like cream-cakes.

MISS

Oh, they are sweet by nature.

HUSBAND

I suppose many have told you that?

MISS

Many! What are you dreaming of?

HUSBAND

Now, be honest. How many have kissed this mouth before?

MISS

Why do you ask? You wouldn't believe me anyhow, if I told you.

HUSBAND

Why not?

MISS

HANDS AROUND

Guess, then.

HUSBAND

All right, I'll guess—but you mustn't get angry!

MISS

Why should I get angry?

HUSBAND

Well, then, I'll guess . . . twenty.

MISS

(Slipping away from him) So—why not make it a hundred?

HUSBAND

Oh, I was just guessing.

MISS

You guessed badly.

HUSBAND

Say—ten.

MISS

(Offended) Oh, of course. A girl who lets a man talk to her on the street, and goes right away with him to a private dining-room!

HUSBAND

Don't be childish. Whether we walk about in the streets or sit in a room. . . . We are in a restaurant. The waiter may come in at any moment—it doesn't signify anything at all. . . .

MISS

That's just what I thought.

HUSBAND

Have you ever been in a private dining-room before?

MISS

If I must tell the truth—yes.

HUSBAND

I am glad that you are honest with me at least.

MISS

HANDS AROUND

But it wasn't—no it wasn't the way you imagine. I was in a private dining-room with a friend and her fiancé, once during the carnival.

HUSBAND

It wouldn't have been anything tragic, if you had ever gone—with your sweetheart—

MISS

Of course, it wouldn't have been anything serious. But I haven't any sweetheart.

HUSBAND

Oh, come now.

MISS

I swear, I haven't.

HUSBAND

But you don't expect to make me believe that I . . .

MISS

Make you believe what? . . . I haven't any—at least, haven't had for six months.

HUSBAND

I see. . . . But before then? Who was he?

MISS

Why are you so curious?

HUSBAND

I am curious because I love you.

MISS

Really?

HUSBAND

Of course! You should have noticed that. Tell me about him.
(Presses her tightly to him)

MISS

What do you want me to tell?

HUSBAND

Don't keep me in suspense so long. Who was he, that's what I want to know.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

(Laughing) Just a man.

HUSBAND

Well—well—who?

MISS

He looked something like you.

HUSBAND

No!

MISS

If you hadn't looked so much like him—

HUSBAND

Well, what then?

MISS

Now, don't ask, don't you see that . . .

HUSBAND

(Understanding) That's why you let me speak to you.

MISS

Yes, that's it.

HUSBAND

I really don't know whether I ought to be pleased or angry.

MISS

If I were you, I'd be pleased.

HUSBAND

All right.

MISS

You also remind me of him the way you speak . . . and the way you look at one. . . .

HUSBAND

What was he?

MISS

And then, the eyes—

HUSBAND

HANDS AROUND

What was his name?

MISS

Please don't look at me that way; please don't.

HUSBAND

(Embraces her. A long, burning kiss)

MISS

(Trembles, and tries to get up)

HUSBAND

Why do you want to leave me?

MISS

It's time to go home.

HUSBAND

Later.

MISS

No, I really have to get home. What do you think mother will say.

HUSBAND

You live with your mother?

MISS

Of course, I live with my mother. What did you imagine?

HUSBAND

So—with your mother. Do you live alone with her?

MISS

Oh, yes, alone! There are five of us! Two boys and two more girls.

HUSBAND

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

MISS

No, I'm the second. First comes Kitty. She's working in a flower store. Then come I.

HUSBAND

Where do you work?

HANDS AROUND

MISS

I stay at home.

HUSBAND

Always?

MISS

One of us has to stay home.

HUSBAND

Of course—and what do you tell your mother, when you—come home so late?

MISS

That happens so seldom.

HUSBAND

Well, to-day, for example. Your mother will ask you, won't she?

MISS

Of course, she'll ask. It doesn't matter how careful I am when I come home, she always wakes up.

HUSBAND

And what do you tell her?

MISS

Oh—that I've been to the theater.

HUSBAND

Does she believe that?

MISS

Why shouldn't she believe it? I often go to the theater. I saw an opera on Sunday with my friend and her fiancé, and my oldest brother.

HUSBAND

Where did you get the tickets?

MISS

My brother is a hairdresser.

HUSBAND

Oh, yes, a hairdresser . . . at the theater, I suppose?

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Why are you asking so many questions?

HUSBAND

Because I am interested. What does your other brother do?

MISS

He's still going to school. He wants to become a teacher. Just imagine!

HUSBAND

And you also have a little sister?

MISS

Yes, she is a mere child, but you have to keep an eye on her all the time already. You have no idea how girls are spoiled at school. Just imagine! The other day I caught her keeping a date.

HUSBAND

Really?

MISS

Yes! She was out walking one evening at half-past seven with a boy from the school across the way. A mere child like her!

HUSBAND

And what did you do?

MISS

I gave her a spanking.

HUSBAND

Are you as strict as all that?

MISS

Well, who would be if I wasn't? My older sister is working and mother does nothing but grumble—everything always depends on me.

HUSBAND

You are a dear, sweet girl! (*Kisses her, and grows more tender*)
You also remind me of some one.

MISS

So—of whom?

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Of no one in particular . . . of bygone days . . . of my youth.
Come, drink, child!

MISS

How old are you? . . . You . . . why . . . I don't even know your name.

HUSBAND

Karl.

MISS

Is it possible? Your name is Karl?

HUSBAND

Was his name also Karl?

MISS

No, but that's the queer thing . . . that is . . . the eyes. . . . (*shaking her head*) the way you look at me. . . .

HUSBAND

And who was he?—You haven't told me yet.

MISS

Oh, he was a bad man—that's sure, otherwise he wouldn't have gone away.

HUSBAND

Did you love him very much?

MISS

Of course, I loved him.

HUSBAND

I know what he was—a lieutenant.

MISS

No, he wasn't in the army. He couldn't pass the examinations. His father owns a house in . . . but why do you have to know?

HUSBAND

(*Kisses her*) You have gray eyes. I thought, at first, they were black.

MISS

Well aren't they pretty enough?

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

(Kisses her eyes)

MISS

Don't please—I can't bear it. . . . O, please don't . . . let me get up . . . only for a moment—please.

HUSBAND

(More tenderly still) No, indeed.

MISS

But, please, Karl. . . .

HUSBAND

How old are you?—eighteen—isn't it?

MISS

Just past nineteen.

HUSBAND

Nineteen . . . and I—

MISS

You are thirty. . . .

HUSBAND

And a little more—Don't let's talk about it.

MISS

He was thirty-two, when I first met him.

HUSBAND

How long ago was that?

MISS

I don't remember. . . . Listen, there must have been something in the wine.

HUSBAND

What makes you think so?

MISS

I am quite . . . see—everything is turning round about me.

HUSBAND

Then hold tight to me. So. . . . *(He holds her close to him, and*

HANDS AROUND

becomes more and more tender. She hardly resists) I'll tell you something, dear, we might go now.

MISS

Yes . . . home.

HUSBAND

Well, not exactly home. . . .

MISS

What do you mean? . . . O, no—no. . . . I won't go anywhere else. What do you think I am?

HUSBAND

But listen to me, child—the next time we meet, you know, we will arrange it so that . . . *(He has slipped to the floor with his head in her lap)* This is so comfy, oh, so comfy!

MISS

What are you doing? *(She kisses his hair)* Something must have been in that wine—I'm so sleepy . . . what would happen, if I couldn't get up again? But, but—look, but Karl . . . if some one should come in . . . please . . . the waiter.

HUSBAND

No . . . waiter . . . will ever come in . . . here. . . .

* * *

MISS

(Leaning with closed eyes in the corner of the sofa)

HUSBAND

(Pacing up and down the little room, after having lighted a cigarette)

(Long silence)

HUSBAND

(Looking for a long time at the girl; speaking to himself) Who knows what sort of a person she really is—Confound it . . . so quickly . . . that wasn't very cautious of me . . . hm-m. . . .

MISS

(Without opening her eyes) There must have been something in the wine.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

Why?

MISS

Otherwise. . . .

HUSBAND

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

MISS

Where are you? Why do you stay so far away? Come to me.

HUSBAND

(Sits beside her)

MISS

Now tell me if you really love me.

HUSBAND

But you know that . . . *(He interrupts himself quickly)* Of course.

MISS

Listen. . . . There must have . . . come, tell me the truth, what was in the wine.

HUSBAND

Well, do you think I . . . I would drug your wine?

MISS

Well, see, I can't understand it. I'm really not that kind. . . . We've known each other only since . . . Dear, I'm not that kind . . . honestly, I'm not—if you think that of me—

HUSBAND

Well—why worry about that? I don't think anything bad of you. I only think that you love me.

MISS

Yes. . . .

HUSBAND

After all, when two young people are alone in a room, and have dinner, and drink wine . . . there, doesn't need to be anything in the wine.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

I merely said it to say something.

HUSBAND

But, why?

MISS

(Almost defiantly) Because I was ashamed.

HUSBAND

How absurd! There is no reason to be. Especially, since I made you think of your first sweetheart.

MISS

Yes.

HUSBAND

Your first sweetheart.

MISS

Yes, yes. . . .

HUSBAND

Now I should like to know who the others were.

MISS

There weren't any.

HUSBAND

That is not true, it can't be true.

MISS

Oh, please, don't tease me.

HUSBAND

Would you like a cigarette?

MISS

No, thanks.

HUSBAND

Do you know how late it is?

MISS

Well?

HUSBAND

HANDS AROUND

Half-past eleven.

MISS

Really?

HUSBAND

Well . . . and your mother? She's used to this, is she?

MISS

Do you really want to send me home?

HUSBAND

But earlier in the evening you yourself wanted—

MISS

You are quite changed. What have I done to you?

HUSBAND

But, child, what is the matter with you, what do you imagine?

MISS

And it was only your looks, believe me, or you would have had to wait . . . many men have asked me to go with them to a private dining-room.

HUSBAND

Well, would you like . . . to come here again with me soon . . . or rather somewhere else?

MISS

I don't know.

HUSBAND

What do you mean by, "I don't know"?

MISS

Well, why don't you make a date?

HUSBAND

When? First of all, I must explain that I do not live in Vienna. I am only here for a few days' visit now and then.

MISS

Oh, you're not a Viennese?

HUSBAND

Yes, I am a Viennese. But I am living out of town now. . . .

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Where?

HUSBAND

Oh, well, that doesn't matter.

MISS

Oh, don't be frightened, I won't come to see you.

HUSBAND

If it would give you any pleasure you may come. I live in Graz.

MISS

Honestly?

HUSBAND

Yes, why does that surprise you?

MISS

You are married, aren't you?

HUSBAND .

(Greatly surprised) What makes you think that?

MISS

I just got the impression.

HUSBAND

And you wouldn't mind that at all?

MISS

Well, I would rather that you were single.—So you are married!—

HUSBAND

But, tell me first what made you think of that?

MISS

If a man says he doesn't live in Vienna, and he doesn't always have time—

HUSBAND

But that's not so improbable.

MISS

I don't believe it.

HANDS AROUND

HUSBAND

And wouldn't it hurt your conscience to have caused a married man to become unfaithful?

MISS

Oh, my, no doubt your wife acts just like you.

HUSBAND

(Very indignant) That will do. No more of such remarks.

MISS

I thought you didn't have a wife.

HUSBAND

Whether I have one or not—such remarks are uncalled for.
(He has risen)

MISS

But Karl, Karl, what is the matter? Are you angry? I really didn't know that you were married. I was just talking. Come, don't be angry.

HUSBAND

(Comes back to her after a few minutes) You are strange creatures, you . . . women.
(He becomes tender again)

MISS

Stop . . . don't . . . it's too late now.

HUSBAND

Well, listen to me a minute. Let's talk seriously. I would like to see you again, to see you often.

MISS

Would you?

HUSBAND

But one thing is necessary . . . that I can depend upon you. I can't look out for you.

MISS

Oh, I can look out for myself.

HUSBAND

You are . . . well, I can't just say inexperienced—but, you are young—and—men in general are pretty unscrupulous.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Oh, my!

HUSBAND

I don't mean on the moral side only.—Well, you know what I mean—

MISS

Tell me, what do you think I am?

HUSBAND

Look here—if you want me—me only—we can easily arrange it—even if I do generally live in Graz. In a place like this where some one may come in at any moment, it isn't very comfortable.

MISS

(Snuggles up to him)

HUSBAND

Next time . . . we shall go somewhere else, won't we?

MISS

Yes.

HUSBAND

Where we may be entirely alone.

MISS

Yes.

HUSBAND

(Embracing her passionately) We'll discuss the rest on the way home. *(He rises, and opens the door)* Waiter . . . the bill!

THE SWEET YOUNG MISS AND THE POET

A small room, furnished with taste and comfort. Red curtains half darken the room. A large writing-table strewn with books and papers. A piano against the wall. The SWEET YOUNG MISS and the POET are disclosed. They are just entering. The POET closes the door.

POET

(Kisses her) My darling!

HANDS AROUND

MISS

(With hat and coat) Oh! It's very pretty here! Only you can't see anything!

POET

Your eyes will have to get used to this semi-darkness.—Those sweet eyes—

(Kisses her eyes)

MISS

But there won't be time enough.

POET

Why not?

MISS

Because I can only stop a moment.

POET

But, you can take your hat off, can't you?

MISS

Just for the sake of a minute?

POET

(Takes the pin out of her hat which he removes) And your coat—

MISS

The idea!—I have to leave right away.

POET

But you must rest a while first. We have been walking for three hours.

MISS

Riding, you mean.

POET

Yes, we rode home—but we ran around for a full three hours in the country. Now come, sit down, child . . . wherever you like—here at my desk;—no, that's not comfortable. Sit down on the sofa.—That's it. *(He presses her down)* If you are very tired, you may as well lie down. So. *(He stretches her out on the sofa)* There, put your head on the cushion.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

(Laughing) But I'm not tired at all!

POET

You merely imagine you're not. So—and if you are sleepy, you can go to sleep. I shall be very quiet. And what's more I can play you a lullaby . . . one of my own. . . .

(He goes to the piano)

MISS

One of yours.

POET

Yes.

MISS

But I thought, Robert, you were a professor.

POET

I? But I told you I was a writer. But what made you think of that?

MISS

Because you said the piece you are playing is your own.

POET

Yes . . . perhaps it is, perhaps it isn't. But that doesn't matter. Well? Anyway it doesn't matter who composed it, if only it is beautiful. Don't you agree?

MISS

Of course . . . it must be beautiful . . . that's the chief thing!—

POET

Do you know what I meant by that?

MISS

By what?

POET

By what I just said.

MISS

(Sleepily) Of course I do.

POET

HANDS AROUND

(Gets up, goes to her, and strokes her hair) You didn't understand a word.

MISS

I'm not as stupid as that.

POET

Certainly you are, but that is just the reason why I love you. It is so beautiful, when girls are stupid. I mean in the way you are.

MISS

Go on, you are talking nonsense.

POET

Angel, little one! Isn't it comfy on this soft, Persian couch cover?

MISS

Indeed, it is. Won't you play something else on the piano?

POET

No, I'd rather stay near you.

(Caressing her)

MISS

But hadn't you better light the lamp?

POET

Oh, no. . . . The dim light is so restful. We were as if bathed in sunbeams all day. Now we've just climbed out of the bath and slipped on . . . the twilight like a bathrobe—*(Laughs)* No— that ought to be expressed differently. . . . Don't you think so?

MISS

I don't know.

POET

(Moves slightly away from her) Absolutely divine, this stupidity!

(He takes out a notebook, and writes a few words in it)

MISS

What are you doing? *(She turns toward him)* What are you writing?

POET

(Softly) Sun, bath, twilight, cloak . . . so . . . *(He puts the notebook back. Aloud)* Nothing. . . . Now tell me, sweetheart, wouldn't you like something to eat or drink?

HANDS AROUND

MISS

I'm not thirsty, but I am hungry.

POET

Hm . . . it would suit me better, if you were thirsty. I have some cognac at home, but I have to send out for food.

MISS

Can't you send somebody?

POET

That is difficult, my servant isn't here now—but, wait a minute—I will go myself . . . what would you like?

MISS

Oh, really don't bother; I have to go home anyway.

POET

Child, that's out of the question. Now I will tell you something; when we leave, we will go together somewhere for supper.

MISS

Oh, no. I haven't time for that. And, then, where could we go? Somebody we know might see us.

POET

Do you know such a lot of people?

MISS

Well, it takes only one to make trouble for us.

POET

Why trouble?

MISS

Well, suppose mother should hear about it. . . .

POET

We can go somewhere, where no one can see us. There are plenty of restaurants with private dining-rooms.

MISS

(Singing) "Let's dine in a chambre séparée!"

POET

HANDS AROUND

Have you ever been in a private dining-room?

MISS

To tell the truth—yes.

POET

Who was the happy man?

MISS

Oh, it wasn't the way you imagine. . . . I went with a friend and her fiancé. They took me along.

POET

And you expect me to believe that?

MISS

You needn't believe it!

POET

(Close to her) Did you blush? You can hardly see anything. I can't even distinguish your features. *(He touches her cheeks with his hands)* But even so I recognize you.

MISS

Well, be careful that you don't take me for some one else.

POET

It is strange, I don't seem to remember how you look.

MISS

Thank you!

POET

(Seriously) It is almost uncanny. I can't imagine any longer how you look—In a certain way I have already forgotten you—Now, if I couldn't remember even the sound of your voice . . . what would you do then?—Something near and far away at the same time . . . it's uncanny.

MISS

What are you talking about?

POET

Nothing, my angel, nothing. Where are your lips? . . .
(He kisses her)

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Wouldn't it be better to light the lamp?

POET

No. . . . (*Very tenderly*) Tell me, do you love me?

MISS

Very much . . . oh, so much!

POET

Have you ever loved any one as much as me?

MISS

I told you already that I didn't.

POET

But . . .
(*He sighs*)

MISS

He was my fiancé.

POET

I'd rather you wouldn't think of him now.

MISS

Why . . . what's the difference . . . look.

POET

We might imagine now that we were in a palace in India.

MISS

I'm sure people there wouldn't be as wicked as you are.

POET

How idiotic! Perfectly divine—Ah, if you only know what you are to me. . . .

MISS

Well?

POET

Don't always push me away, I'm not going to hurt you—

MISS

My corset hurts me.

HANDS AROUND

POET

(Simply) Take it off.

MISS

Yes. But you must behave.

POET

Of course!

MISS

(Rises, and takes off her corset in the darkness)

POET

(Sits in the meantime on the sofa) Tell me, aren't you at all curious to know my name?

MISS

Yes, what is it?

POET

I'd rather not tell you my real name, but the name I go by.

MISS

What is the difference?

POET

I mean the name I use as a writer.

MISS

Oh, you don't write under your real name?

POET

(Close to her)

MISS

Oh . . . stop . . . don't.

POET

What fragrance! How sweet.

(He kisses her breasts)

MISS

You are tearing my chemise.

POET

Away with it . . . away with it . . . everything is superfluous.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Oh, Robert.

POET

And now enter into our Indian palace.

MISS

Tell me first—do you really love me?

POET

I adore you. (*Kisses her passionately*) I adore you, my sweetheart, my springtime . . . my . . .

MISS

Robert . . . Robert . . .

* * *

POET

It was heaven. . . . My name is . . .

MISS

Robert—oh, my Robert!

POET

I call myself Biebitz.

MISS

Why do you call yourself Biebitz?

POET

My name is not Biebitz—I just use it as a pseudonym . . . well, don't you recognize the name?

MISS

No.

POET

You don't know the name Biebitz? Ah—Perfectly divine! Really? You are just pretending you don't know it, aren't you?

MISS

No really, I never heard it.

POET

Don't you ever go to the theater?

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Oh, yes—I was at the opera only the other day with—you know, with one of my friends and her uncle, to hear Cavalleria Rusticana.

POET

Hm, you don't go then to see plays.

MISS

I never get tickets for them.

POET

I'll send you a ticket soon.

MISS

Oh, do! And don't forget it. But for something funny.

POET

Oh . . . something funny . . . you don't care to see anything sad?

MISS

Not very much.

POET

Not even if it is a play of mine.

MISS

A play of yours? Do you write for the theater?

POET

Let me light a candle now. I haven't seen you since you have become my best beloved —Angel!

(He lights a candle)

MISS

Don't. I'm ashamed. Give me a cover at least.

POET

Later!

(He approaches her with the light, and looks at her a long while)

MISS

(Covering her face with her hands) Go away, Robert!

POET

You are beautiful, you are Beauty itself. You are Nature herself. You are the simplicity which is holy.

HANDS AROUND

MISS

Ouch! You are dropping wax on me. Look, why aren't you more careful?

POET

(Puts the candle away) You are that for which I have long sought. You love me for my own sake. You would love me even if I were only a counter-jumper. That's balm to one's heart. I must confess I was suspicious until this moment. Tell me, honestly, you didn't have any notion that I am Biebitz?

MISS

Oh, pshaw, I don't even know what you are talking about. I never heard of any Biebitz.

POET

What is fame! No, forget what I have told you. Forget even the name. I am Robert and I want to remain Robert to you. I was only joking. *(Lightly)* I am not a writer at all. I'm a clerk, and in the evening I play the piano in a dance-hall.

MISS

But now I'm all mixed up . . . and the way you look at one. What is the matter, yes, what do you mean?

POET

It is very strange—something that has never happened to me, sweetheart; I am on the verge of tears. You move me deeply. We ought to live together. Will you? We will be very much in love with each other.

MISS

Is it true about the dance-hall?

POET

Yes, but don't ask any more about it. If you love me, don't ask me anything. Tell me, can't you get away for a few weeks?

MISS

How do you mean get away?

POET

Well, I mean, leave home?

MISS

HANDS AROUND

How absurd! How could I! What would mother say? And without me everything would be topsy-turvy at home in no time.

POET

It would be so wonderful to live with you a few weeks, all alone with you, somewhere far away, in the forest, in the world of nature . . . Nature. And then, some day, "Good-by"—each going, without the other knowing where.

MISS

You are talking already about saying good-by. And I thought that you loved me such a lot.

POET

That is just the reason—(*Bends over her, and kisses her upon the forehead.*) You sweet darling!

MISS

Please, hold me tight. I feel so cold.

POET

I fancy it's time for you to dress. Wait, I'll light a few more candles for you.

MISS

(*Rising*) Don't look this way.

POET

No. (*At the window*) Tell me, child, are you happy?

MISS

What do you mean?

POET

I mean are you happy the way things are in general?

MISS

Well, they might be better.

POET

You misunderstand me. You have told me enough about your conditions at home. I know you are not a princess. Leaving all that aside, do you feel alive. Do you feel life pulsing through you?

MISS

Come, have you a comb?

HANDS AROUND

POET

(Goes to the dressing-table, hands her a comb, and watches her)
Good Lord, how lovely you look!

MISS

Please . . . don't!

POET

Please, stay a while yet. I'll get something for supper, and . . .

MISS

But it is awfully late already.

POET

It is not yet nine.

MISS

Dear me, I must hurry. Please!

POET

When shall I see you again?

MISS

When would you like to see me?

POET

To-morrow.

MISS

What day is to-morrow?

POET

Saturday.

MISS

Oh, then I can't. I must take my little sister to her guardian.

POET

Then Sunday . . . hm . . . Sunday . . . on Sunday . . . now I'll have to explain something to you.—I'm not Biebitz, but Biebitz is a friend of mine. I'll introduce him to you sometime. Biebitz's play will be given Sunday. I'll send you tickets, and take you home after the performance. You will tell me then how you liked the play. Won't you?

MISS

Here you are talking about this Biebitz again—I don't understand

HANDS AROUND

what it is all about.

POET

I won't know you really, until I know what impression the play made on you.

MISS

Now . . . I'm ready.

POET

Come, sweetheart.
(They go out)

THE POET AND THE ACTRESS

A room in an inn in the country. It is an evening in spring; moonlight floods the meadows and hills; the windows are open. A deep silence reigns. The POET and the ACTRESS enter, and as they cross the threshold, the candle which the POET is carrying in his hand is blown out.

POET

Oh. . . .

ACTRESS

What's the matter?

POET

The candle—But we don't need any. Look, how light it is. Wonderful!

ACTRESS

(Sinks suddenly down at the window with her hands folded)

POET

What's the matter with you?

ACTRESS

(Remains silent)

POET

(Going to her) What are you doing?

ACTRESS

(Indignant) Can't you see that I am praying?—

HANDS AROUND

POET

Do you believe in God?

ACTRESS

Of course I do; I am not a fool.

POET

Oh, I see!

ACTRESS

Come, kneel down beside me. It will do you good to pray just once. None of the gems will drop out of your crown.

POET

(Kneels beside her, and puts his arm around her waist)

ACTRESS

Libertine!—*(Rises)*, And do you know to whom I prayed?

POET

To God, I suppose.

ACTRESS

(With deep sarcasm) Oh, of course! It was to you to whom I prayed.

POET

Then why did you look out of the window?

ACTRESS

Tell me rather where you have lured me.

POET

But, child, it was your idea. You wanted to go to the country—and picked out this very place.

ACTRESS

Well, wasn't I right?

POET

Certainly. It's charming here. When you consider that we are just two hours from Vienna—complete solitude. And delightful scenery!

ACTRESS

Isn't it? If you had any real talent, this place might inspire you to write.

HANDS AROUND

POET

Have you been here before?

ACTRESS

Have I been here before? Indeed I have! I have lived here for years.

POET

With whom?

ACTRESS

With Dick, of course.

POET

Oh, really!

ACTRESS

How I adored that man!—

POET

You've told me all about that already.

ACTRESS

I am sorry—I can go away again, if I bore you!

POET

You bore me? . . . You can't imagine what you mean to me. . . . You are a whole world in itself. . . . You are divine, you are a genius. . . . You are the simplicity which is holy. . . . Yes, you. . . . But you oughtn't to talk about Dick now.

ACTRESS

That was merely a slip! Well!—

POET

I am glad that you feel that way.

ACTRESS

Come, give me a kiss!

POET

(Kisses her)

ACTRESS

But now we had better say good night. Good night, darling!

HANDS AROUND

POET

What do you mean by that?

ACTRESS

I mean, I am going to lie down and go to sleep.

POET

Yes—that's very well, but when it comes to saying "good night" . . . where do I sleep?

ACTRESS

There are surely a lot of other rooms in this house.

POET

But they don't appeal to me. Don't you think I had better light a candle now?

ACTRESS

Yes.

POET

(Lights a candle, which stands upon the dressing-table) What a charming room . . . and what pious people they must be. Pictures of saints everywhere. . . . It would be interesting to spend some time among people like this . . . quite another world. How little we know of the lives of others!

ACTRESS

Don't talk nonsense, but just give me the bag from the table.

POET

Here, beloved!

ACTRESS

(Takes a small framed picture out of the handbag and puts it on the dressing-table)

POET

What's that?

ACTRESS

That's the Virgin.

POET

Do you always carry her around with you?

ACTRESS

HANDS AROUND

She is my talisman. And now go, Robert!

POET

You are joking? Can't I help you?

ACTRESS

No, you must go now.

POET

And when may I return?

ACTRESS

In ten minutes.

POET

(Kisses her) Au revoir!

ACTRESS

Where will you go?

POET

I shall walk up and down under your window. I love to wander about outdoors at night time. My finest inspirations come to me that way. And especially near you, under the breath of your longing, I might call it . . . entwined in your art.

ACTRESS

You talk like an idiot. . . .

POET

(Hurt) There are women who might say . . . like a poet.

ACTRESS

Oh, well, but do go now. But don't start to flirt with the waitress—

POET

(Goes)

ACTRESS

(Undresses. She hears the POET going down the wooden stairway, and, then hears his footsteps below her window. As soon as she is undressed, she goes to the window and looks down to where he stands waiting. She calls to him in a whisper) Come!

POET

HANDS AROUND

(Comes quickly upstairs and runs toward her. She in the meantime has gone to bed, and extinguished the light. He locks the door)

ACTRESS

So, now you may sit down beside me, and tell me a story.

POET

(Sits down on the bed beside her) Hadn't I better close the window? Isn't it too cold for you?

ACTRESS

Oh, no!

POET

Now, what shall I tell you?

ACTRESS

Tell me to whom you are unfaithful at this moment?

POET

I'm sorry, I'm not unfaithful yet.

ACTRESS

Well, if it's any satisfaction to you, I am unfaithful to some one too.

POET

So I can imagine.

ACTRESS

And who do you suppose it is?

POET

But, child, how do you expect me to know?

ACTRESS

Guess, then.

POET

Wait . . . your manager.

ACTRESS

My dear man, I'm not a chorus-girl.

POET

Well, I am only guessing.

HANDS AROUND

ACTRESS

Guess again.

POET

Then it's your leading-man . . . Bemmo —

ACTRESS

Nonsense! He doesn't care for women at all . . . didn't you know that? He carries on with his postman!

POET

No, really!—

ACTRESS

Now come, kiss me.

POET

(Embraces her)

ACTRESS

But what are you doing?

POET

Why do you torment me so?

ACTRESS

Listen, Robert, I have a suggestion to make to you. Come lie down in bed with me.

POET

I accept.

ACTRESS

Come quickly, come quickly!

POET

Yes . . . if I had had my way, I would have been there long ago. . . Listen. . . .

ACTRESS

What?

POET

The crickets are chirping outside.

ACTRESS

You are crazy, child, there are no crickets here.

HANDS AROUND

POET

But surely you hear them.

ACTRESS

Hurry up.

POET

(Beside her) Here I am.

ACTRESS

Now lie quite still. . . . Sh . . . don't move. . . .

POET

Yes, but why?

ACTRESS

You would rather like to have an affair with me?

POET

I should think that's obvious by now.

ACTRESS

There are many who would like that. . . .

POET

But it would seem that at the moment the odds are on my side. .

..

ACTRESS

Then, come, my cricket! I shall call you "cricket" from now on.

POET

All right. . . .

ACTRESS

Now, tell me, whom am I deceiving?

POET

Whom? . . . Perhaps me. . . .

ACTRESS

Child, you have softening of the brain.

POET

Or some one . . . some one whom you have never seen . . .
some one, whom you don't even know, some one—who is predes-

HANDS AROUND

tined for you and whom you will never find. . . .

ACTRESS

Please don't talk such magnificent nonsense.

POET

. . . Isn't it strange . . . you too—and yet one could think.—But no, it would destroy the best in you, if one should . . . come, come—come.—

* * *

ACTRESS

That's better than acting in idiotic plays. . . . Don't you think so?

POET

Well, it seems to me, that it is a good thing you sometimes have to act in an intelligent one.

ACTRESS

You conceited puppy. I suppose you are thinking of one of your own plays again.

POET

Yes, I am.

ACTRESS

(Seriously) It is really a splendid play!

POET

Well, then!

ACTRESS

You are a great genius, Robert!

POET

And you might also tell me now why you didn't turn up the day before yesterday. There was absolutely nothing the matter with you.

ACTRESS

Well, I wanted to annoy you.

POET

But why? What have I done to you?—

ACTRESS

HANDS AROUND

You were over-bearing.

POET

In what way?

ACTRESS

Everybody at the theater thinks you are.

POET

Really.

ACTRESS

But I told them, he has a perfect right to be over-bearing.

POET

And what did they say?

ACTRESS

What could they say? I am not on speaking-terms with any of them.

POET

Oh, I see.

ACTRESS

They would like nothing better than to poison me, every one of them. But they won't succeed.

POET

Don't think now of others. Let's be happy that we are here together, and tell me that you love me.

ACTRESS

What further proof can you want?

POET

It's a thing that can't be proven anyway.

ACTRESS

I like that! What else do you want?

POET

How many are there that you have tried to convince in this way . . . did you love all of them?

ACTRESS

HANDS AROUND

No, I have loved only one.

POET

(Embraces her) My. . . .

ACTRESS

Dick.

POET

My name is Robert. What can I mean to you, if you are thinking of Dick, now?

ACTRESS

You are a mood of mine.

POET

I am pleased to know it.

ACTRESS

Well, tell me, aren't you proud?

POET

Why should I be proud?

ACTRESS

It seems to me that you have good reason to be.

POET

Oh, because of that.

ACTRESS

Yes, because of that, my little cricket!—What about the chirping? Are they still chirping?

POET

All the time. Don't you hear them?

ACTRESS

Of course, I hear them. But, child, those are frogs.

POET

You are wrong. Frogs croak.

ACTRESS

Of course, they croak.

HANDS AROUND

POET

But this is not croaking, child, this is chirping.

ACTRESS

You are about the most stubborn person I have ever met. Kiss me, froggie.

POET

Please don't call me that. It gets on my nerves.

ACTRESS

Well, what shall I call you?

POET

My name is Robert.

ACTRESS

Oh, but that's stupid.

POET

But won't you please call me simply by my own name?

ACTRESS

Well, then, Robert, give me a kiss. . . . Ah! (*She kisses him*) Now, are you satisfied, froggie?

POET

May I light a cigarette?

ACTRESS

Give me one too. (*He takes his cigarette-case from the dressing-table; takes two cigarettes out; lights both, and gives her one*) By the way, you haven't said a word about my performance yesterday.

POET

What performance?

ACTRESS

Well.

POET

Oh, yes. I wasn't at the theater.

ACTRESS

You are joking.

POET

HANDS AROUND

Not in the least. When you didn't turn up the day before, I assumed you hadn't fully recovered yesterday, and so I decided not to go.

ACTRESS

You missed something wonderful.

POET

Yes.

ACTRESS

It was a sensation. The people actually grew pale.

POET

You saw that?

ACTRESS

Benno said: Child, you acted divinely.

POET

Hm! . . . And so ill the day before.

ACTRESS

Indeed I was. And do you know why? Because I felt such a longing for you.

POET

A little while ago you said that you stayed away just to annoy me.

ACTRESS

But what do you know about my love for you? Everything leaves you cold. And I have been delirious for nights. In a high fever—hundred and four degrees.

POET

Rather high for a mood.

ACTRESS

You call that a mood? I am dying for love of you, and you call it a mood—?

POET

And Dick . . . ?

ACTRESS

Dick? . . . Don't talk to me about that galley-slave!—

HANDS AROUND

THE ACTRESS AND THE COUNT

The bedroom of the ACTRESS, luxuriously furnished. It is midday. The curtains are still down; a candle is burning on the dressing-table. The ACTRESS is disclosed in her four-poster bed. Many newspapers are strewn about on the cover. The COUNT in the uniform of a captain of the Dragoons enters. He remains standing at the door.

ACTRESS

Ah, Count.

COUNT

Your mother said I might, otherwise I would not—

ACTRESS

Please, come closer.

COUNT

I kiss your hand. Pardon me—when you come in from the street . . . I can't see a thing yet. So . . . here we are (*at her bed*). I kiss your hand.

ACTRESS

Please sit down, Count.

COUNT

Your mother said, My daughter isn't well. . . . Nothing serious, I hope.

ACTRESS

Nothing serious? I was on the verge of death.

COUNT

Oh, dear, oh, dear, is it possible?

ACTRESS

It is very good of you to have taken the trouble to call.

COUNT

On the verge of death! And only last night you acted divinely.

ACTRESS

It was a great triumph, wasn't it?

COUNT

HANDS AROUND

Tremendous! . . . The audience was carried away. I won't say anything about myself.

ACTRESS

Thanks, for the beautiful flowers.

COUNT

Nothing at all, Mademoiselle.

ACTRESS

(Indicating with her eyes a large flower-basket, which stands on a little table near the window) There they are.

COUNT

You were literally overwhelmed with flowers and wreaths yesterday.

ACTRESS

They are still in my dressing-room. All I brought home was your flowers.

COUNT

(Kissing her hand) How sweet of you.

ACTRESS

(Suddenly seizes his hand, and kisses it)

COUNT

But, Mademoiselle.

ACTRESS

Don't be frightened, Count, it doesn't put you under any obligations.

COUNT

You are a strange being . . . a sort of a problem almost—
(Pause)

ACTRESS

Miss Birken, I suppose, is much less of a problem.

COUNT

That little lady isn't a problem at all, although . . . I really know her only very slightly.

ACTRESS

Oh!

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

That's the actual truth. But you are a problem. I've always had a yearning for a problem. It's really been a deep personal loss to me, that until yesterday. . . . I *never* saw you act.

ACTRESS

Really?

COUNT

Yes! You see, going to the theater is so complicated. I am used to dining late . . . then when I get there, the best part of the play is over. Isn't that true?

ACTRESS

From now on, I suppose, you will dine earlier.

COUNT

I've thought of that too. Or maybe I won't dine at all. Dining isn't a special pleasure anyhow.

ACTRESS

Are there any pleasures left to an old man like you?

COUNT

That's a question I often ask myself. But I am not an old man. There must be some other reason.

ACTRESS

Do you think so?

COUNT

Yes. Bobby, for instance, says, that I am a philosopher. You know he means that I do too much thinking.

ACTRESS

Yes . . . thinking is a misfortune.

COUNT

I have too much time, that's why I reflect. You see, I've often thought if they would transfer me to Vienna, things would be better. There's diversion here, stimulation. But at the bottom, it's not really very different from up there.

ACTRESS

What do you mean by "up there"?

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

Well, down there, you know, in Hungary, in the God forsaken country towns, where I've been stationed most of the time.

ACTRESS

And what did you do in Hungary?

COUNT

Well, as I am telling you, military service.

ACTRESS

Yes, but why did you stay in Hungary so long?

COUNT

Oh, things happen that way.

ACTRESS

But it must be enough to drive one mad.

COUNT

But why? You have a lot more work there, than here. You know, drilling recruits, breaking in mounts . . . and the country really isn't as bad as they say. They are really quite beautiful, the lowlands—and marvelous sunsets. Too bad I'm not a painter, I've often thought if I were, I would paint them. We had a young chap, Splaný, in our regiment, who could do it.—But, dear me, what dull stories I am telling you.

ACTRESS

Please go on; they are delightful!

COUNT

Do you know, the nice thing about you is the way one can chat with you, Bobby told me all about it. And it's so seldom one can find any one like that.

ACTRESS

Down there in Hungary, I suppose.

COUNT

But it's quite the same in Vienna! People are always the same. Where there are more of them, the crowd is larger. That's the whole difference. Tell me, do you really like people?

ACTRESS

Like them—? I hate them! I hate to look at them. I never see any one. I'm always alone. Nobody enters my house.

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

You see, I sort of thought that you hated people. It must often be the case with artists. If one lives in the higher regions. . . . Well, you are lucky, you know at least why you live!

ACTRESS

Who told you that? I haven't the slightest notion what I'm living for!

COUNT

But really—to be famous—to be feted—

ACTRESS

Does that mean happiness?

COUNT

Happiness? There really is no such thing as happiness. All the things that people talk about most, don't exist . . . for instance, love. That's one of them.

ACTRESS

I suppose you are right.

COUNT

Enjoyment . . . intoxication . . . very good, nobody can deny them . . . they are something real. Now, when I am enjoying myself. . . very good, I am aware that I am enjoying myself. Or I am intoxicated, good. That also is something real. And when it's over, well then it's over.

ACTRESS

(Grandly) It is over.

COUNT

But as soon as one does not, how shall I express it, as soon as one does not give oneself up to the moment, I mean, if one thinks of the future or the past . . . well, everything is over in a moment. . . . Afterwards . . . there is sadness . . . before . . . there is uncertainty . . . in a word, one only becomes confused. Isn't that so?

ACTRESS

(Nods with wide open eyes) It seems, you have grasped the essence of things.

COUNT

And, you see, when you have once clearly grasped this, it really

HANDS AROUND

doesn't matter whether you live in Vienna or in the Puszta or in Steinamanger. You see, for instance . . . where may I put my cap? Yes, thank you . . . what were we talking about?

ACTRESS

About the Puszta.

COUNT

Of course. Well, as I said, there isn't much difference, whether I spend the evening in the officers' mess or at the club. It's all the same.

ACTRESS

And what about love?

COUNT

If you believe in it, some one will always be there who will love you.

ACTRESS

Like Miss Birken, for example.

COUNT

I really don't see why you always have to come back to that little lady.

ACTRESS

But she's your mistress, isn't she?

COUNT

Who says so?

ACTRESS

Everybody knows it.

COUNT

Except myself, strange to say.

ACTRESS

But you fought a duel on her account!

COUNT

Maybe. I was even killed without my knowing it.

ACTRESS

You are a gentleman, won't you sit closer to me?

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

With pleasure.

ACTRESS

Here. *(She draws him to her, and passes her hand through his hair)* I knew you would come to-day.

COUNT

How did you know?

ACTRESS

I knew it last night in the theater.

COUNT

You saw me from the stage, then?

ACTRESS

But man alive! Didn't you notice that I acted for you alone?

COUNT

No, really?

ACTRESS

I was as on wings, when I saw you sitting in the first row.

COUNT

As on wings? On my account? I hadn't the slightest suspicion that you noticed me!

ACTRESS

Your aristocratic reserve is enough to drive one to despair.

COUNT

But . . .

ACTRESS

"But"! . . . At least, take your saber off!

COUNT

If you permit.

(Takes it off, and leans it against the bed)

ACTRESS

And now give me a kiss.

COUNT

(Kisses her, she clings to him)

HANDS AROUND

ACTRESS

It would have been better if I had never seen you.

COUNT

But this seems better to me.

ACTRESS

Count, you are a poseur!

COUNT

I—why?

ACTRESS

Can't you imagine how happy many a man would be if he were in your place!

COUNT

I'm perfectly happy.

ACTRESS

Well, I thought happiness didn't exist. Why do you look at me that way? I believe you are afraid of me, Count!

COUNT

I told you, Mademoiselle, you are a problem.

ACTRESS

Oh, don't bother me with your philosophy . . . come to me. And ask me for anything at all . . . you can have whatever you want. You are so handsome.

COUNT

Well then, may I ask (*kissing her hand*) that I may call again this evening?

ACTRESS

This evening . . . but I have to act then.

COUNT

After the play.

ACTRESS

And you ask for nothing else?

COUNT

I shall ask for everything else after the play.

HANDS AROUND

ACTRESS

(Hurt) You can beg a long while then, you abominable poseur.

COUNT

But, see, we've been perfectly frank with each other so far . . . it seems to me it would be so much more beautiful after the play . . . much cozier than now, when . . . I have a sort of feeling the door might open any moment. . . .

ACTRESS

It does not open from the outside.

COUNT

Well, you see, I have an idea one shouldn't lightly spoil in advance something which may be very beautiful.

ACTRESS

Possibly! . . .

COUNT

To tell the truth, love in the morning seems rather horrible to me.

ACTRESS

Well—you are about the worst case of lunacy I have ever met!

COUNT

I am not talking about women in general . . . because in general it doesn't make any difference anyway. But women like you . . . no, you may call me a fool a hundred times over. But women like you . . . one doesn't take them before breakfast. And so . . . you know . . . so . . .

ACTRESS

Oh, but you are a darling!

COUNT

You understand, what I have said, don't you? I sort of imagine it like. . . .

ACTRESS

How do you imagine it?

COUNT

Like this. . . . I wait for you in a carriage after the play, then we drive somewhere for supper—

HANDS AROUND

ACTRESS

I am not Miss Birken.

COUNT

I didn't mean to say you were. Only, it seems to me, you have to be in the right sort of mood for everything. In my case the mood doesn't come until supper. The most beautiful thing of all is when we drive home together, and then . . .

ACTRESS

And then?

COUNT

And then . . . well, that depends upon circumstances.

ACTRESS

Do sit closer. Closer.

COUNT

(Sitting down on the bed) Seems to me, that out of the pillows comes a fragrance . . . mignonette—isn't it?

ACTRESS

It's very warm in here, don't you think so?

COUNT

(Bends down, and kisses her neck)

ACTRESS

Oh, Count, that is contrary to your program.

COUNT

Who said anything about "program." I never have any program.

ACTRESS

(Drawing him close to her)

COUNT

It really is very warm.

ACTRESS

Do you think so? And so dark, just as if it were evening. . . .
(Draws him toward her) It is evening . . . it is night. . . . Close your eyes, if there is too much light for you. Come! . . . Come! . . .

COUNT

HANDS AROUND

(Offers no further resistance)

* * *

ACTRESS

And what about atmosphere now, you poseur?

COUNT

You are a little devil.

ACTRESS

What a thing to say!

COUNT

Well, then an angel.

ACTRESS

You should have been an actor! Really! You understand women!
And do you know, what I shall do now?

COUNT

Well?

ACTRESS

I shall tell you that I shall never see you again.

COUNT

But why?

ACTRESS

Never, never. You are too dangerous! You would drive a woman
mad. Here you are standing before me, as though nothing had hap-
pened.

COUNT

But . . .

ACTRESS

Please remember, Count, I have just given you everything.

COUNT

I shall never forget it!

ACTRESS

And what about to-night?

COUNT

HANDS AROUND

What do you mean?

ACTRESS

Well—you wanted to wait for me after the theater?

COUNT

Oh, yes, let's say, the day after to-morrow.

ACTRESS

What do you mean by "the day after to-morrow"? We were talking about to-day.

COUNT

There wouldn't be much sense in that.

ACTRESS

Old man!

COUNT

You don't quite understand me. What I mean has rather to do, how shall I express myself, rather concerns the soul.

ACTRESS

What concern of mine is your soul?

COUNT

Believe me, it has much to do with it. It seems all wrong to me, this notion, that you can separate the two.

ACTRESS

Don't bother me with your philosophy. If I want any of that, I can read books.

COUNT

One never learns from books.

ACTRESS

Very true! And that's why you ought to wait for me to-night. As to the soul, we will come to some sort of an understanding, you villain!

COUNT

Well, then, if I may, I shall wait in my carriage. . . .

ACTRESS

You shall wait for me here in my home—

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

. . . After the play.

ACTRESS

Of course.

(He buckles on his sword)

ACTRESS

What are you doing?

COUNT

It seems to me it is time for me to go. For a formal call I have stayed a bit too long as it is.

ACTRESS

Well, this evening it shall be a formal call.

COUNT

Do you think so?

ACTRESS

I'll take care of that. And now give me a last kiss, you darling little philosopher. Here, you seducer, you . . . sweet child, you seller of souls, you . . . panther. *(After she has ardently kissed him several times, she thrusts him violently away)* Count, you have done me a great honor.

COUNT

Not at all, mademoiselle! *(At the door)* Au revoir.

ACTRESS

Good-by, and love to Steinamanger.

THE COUNT AND THE GIRL OF THE STREETS

It is morning toward six o'clock. A poorly furnished room with one window. The dirty yellowish blinds are down. Tattered, greenish curtains. On the dresser are several photographs, and beside them a cheap woman's hat of conspicuously bad taste. Behind the mirror are cheap Japanese fans. On the table over which is drawn a reddish cover is an oil-lamp. It is burning low with a disagreeable odor, and has a shade of yellow paper. Beside it is a pitcher with remains of beer, and a half-empty glass.—On the floor beside the bed a woman's clothes are lying in disorder. They look as though they had just been quickly thrown off. The Girl lies sleeping in the

HANDS AROUND

bed, breathing quietly. The COUNT is lying on the sofa fully dressed with his light overcoat on. His hat lies on the floor at the head of the sofa.

COUNT

(Stirs, rubs his eyes, sits up suddenly, remains seated, and looks around) Where am I? . . . Oh, yes . . . I actually went home with the woman, it seems. . . . *(He rises quickly, notices her bed)* Oh, there she is. . . . Queer, what sort of things can happen, even at my age. I haven't the faintest notion, did they carry me up here? No. . . . I remember—coming into the room. . . . I was still awake then, or waked up . . . or . . . or maybe it's only the room that reminds of something? . . . 'Pon my soul, yes, of course . . . it was yesterday I saw it. . . . *(Looks at his watch)* What! yesterday, a couple of hours ago!—But, I knew, that something had to happen . . . I felt it in my bones . . . when I began to drink yesterday, I felt that . . . and what has happened? . . . Nothing. . . . Or did there . . . ? 'Pon my soul . . . for . . . for ten years it hasn't happened to me that I don't know. . . . Well, let's be honest at any rate, I was drunk. . . . If I only knew since when . . . I remember perfectly when Bobby and I went into the all-night café, and . . . no, no. . . . We left together . . . and then on the way. . . . Yes, that's it, Bobby and I rode in my carriage. . . . But, why do I worry my brains about it? It doesn't really matter. Let's see that we get out of here. *(Rises. The lamp shakes)* Oh! *(Looks at the sleeping Girl)* Well, she sleeps the sleep of the just. I don't remember anything—but I'll put the money on the table . . . and then, good-by. . . . *(He stands in front of her, and looks at her for a considerable time)* If I didn't know what she is! *(Studies her)* I've known many who didn't look as virtuous even in their sleep. 'Pon my soul. . . . Bobby would say again, I'm philosophizing, but the truth is, sleep makes all equal, so it seems to me—like its brother, death. . . . Hm, I should like to know, whether. . . . No, I'd remember that. . . . No, no, I dropped like a log on the sofa right away . . . and nothing happened. . . . It is unbelievable how much alike all women sometimes look. . . . Well, let's go *(He is about to go)* Oh, of course.

(He takes his wallet, and is about to take out a banknote)

GIRL

(Awakening) Well . . . who's there so early in the morning—?
(Recognizing him) Good morning, sonny!

COUNT

Good morning. Have a good sleep?

GIRL

(Stretching) Oh, come here. Give me a little kiss.

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

(Bends down to her, considers, and draws back) I was just going.

...

GIRL

Going?

COUNT

It's really about time.

GIRL

You want to go away?

COUNT

(Half-embarrassed) Well. . . .

GIRL

Well, good-by, you'll come some other time.

COUNT

Yes, good-by. But, won't you give me your hand?

GIRL

(Reaches out her hand from under the cover)

COUNT

(Takes her hand, and kisses it mechanically, and becoming aware of it, he smiles) Just as with a princess. Besides, if one only. . . .

.

GIRL

Why do you look at me that way?

COUNT

If one only sees the head, as now . . . anyway, each and every one looks innocent when she first awakes . . . 'pon my soul, one might imagine almost anything, if the kerosene didn't smell so. . . .

GIRL

Yes, the lamps are always a nuisance.

COUNT

How old are you really?

GIRL

Well, what would you guess?

HANDS AROUND

COUNT
Twenty-four.

GIRL
Oh, of course!

COUNT
Older?

GIRL
I'm not yet twenty.

COUNT
And how long have you been . . .

GIRL
A year.

COUNT
You began early.

GIRL
Better too early, than too late.

COUNT
(Sits down upon her bed) Tell me, are you really happy?

GIRL
Am I, what?

COUNT
I mean, are things going well with you?

GIRL
Oh, things always go well with me.

COUNT
Yes. . . . Well, did it never occur to you that you might become something else?

GIRL
What might I become?

COUNT
Well. . . . You are a very pretty girl. You might take a lover, for

HANDS AROUND

example.

GIRL

Do you imagine I haven't any?

COUNT

Yes, I know that—But I mean just one single one, who would take care of you, so that you wouldn't have to go with everybody.

GIRL

I don't go with everybody. Thank heaven, I don't have to. I pick those I want.

COUNT

(Looks around the room)

GIRL

(Noticing it) We move downtown next month, to the Spiegelgasse.

COUNT

We? Who?

GIRL

Well, the Madam, and the couple of other girls who live here.

COUNT

There are others—

GIRL

Next door . . . don't you hear? . . . that is Milly. She was in the café too.

COUNT

I hear some one snoring.

GIRL

That's Milly. She will snore the whole day long until ten o'clock to-night. Then she gets up, and goes to the café.

COUNT

What an awful life!

GIRL

Of course it is. It annoys the Madam a lot. I'm always on the streets by noon.

HANDS AROUND

COUNT

What do you do on the streets at noon?

GIRL

What do you suppose I do? I'm going on my beat then.

COUNT

Oh, yes . . . of course. . . . (*Rises, takes out his wallet, and puts a banknote on the table*) Good-by!

GIRL

Going already. . . . Good-by. . . . Call again soon.
(*Turns on her side*)

COUNT

(*Stands still*) Tell me, is everything a matter of indifference to you already?

GIRL

What?

COUNT

I mean, don't you get pleasure out of anything any more?

GIRL

(*Yawning*) I want to sleep.

COUNT

It's all the same to you whether he is young or old or whether he . . .

GIRL

Why do you ask?

COUNT

. . . Well (*Suddenly hitting upon a thought*) 'pon my soul, now I know of whom you remind me, it's . . .

GIRL

Do I look like some one?

COUNT

Unbelievable, unbelievable. Now please, don't talk, at least not for a minute. . . . (*Looking at her*) The very same features. (*He kisses her suddenly on the eyes*), the very image.

HANDS AROUND

GIRL

Well. . . .

COUNT

'Pon my soul, it's too bad that you . . . aren't something different. . . . You could make your fortune!

GIRL

You talk just like Frank.

COUNT

Who is Frank?

GIRL

The waiter in our café.

COUNT

In what way am I just like Frank?

GIRL

He is also always telling me I might make my fortune, and wanting me to marry him.

COUNT

Why don't you?

GIRL

No thank you. . . . I don't want to marry, no, not for any price. . . . Later on, perhaps.

COUNT

The eyes . . . the very same eyes. . . . Bobby would surely call me a fool.—But I must kiss your eyes once more . . . so . . . and now God bless you, now I must go.

GIRL

Good-by. . . .

COUNT

(At the door) Tell me . . . aren't you a bit surprised? . . .

GIRL

At what?

COUNT

That I don't want anything of you.

HANDS AROUND

GIRL

There are many men who aren't in the mood in the morning.

COUNT

Of course. . . (*To himself*) Absurd, that I expect to be surprised. . . . Well, good-bye. . . . (*He is near the door*) But really, I'm disappointed. I ought to know that women like her care only about money . . . what am I saying . . . it is beautiful, that at least she doesn't pretend; should make one glad. . . (*Aloud*) Do you know, I shall come to see you again soon?

GIRL

(*With closed eyes*) All right.

COUNT

When are you at home?

GIRL

I'm always at home. You only have to ask for Leocadia.

COUNT

Leocadia. . . . All right—Well, God bless you. (*At the door*) The wine is still in my head. But after all it is sublime. . . . I am with a woman like her and haven't done anything but kiss her eyes, because she reminded me of some one. . . . (*Turns toward her*) Tell me, Leocadia, does it often happen that any one leaves you in this way?

GIRL

What way?

COUNT

As I do.

GIRL

In the morning?

COUNT

No . . . have you ever had any one with you—who didn't want anything of you?

GIRL

No, that has never happened to me.

COUNT

Well, what do you think then? Do you think I didn't like you?

HANDS AROUND

GIRL

Why shouldn't you like me? You liked me well enough by night.

COUNT

I like you now, too.

GIRL

But you liked me better last night.

COUNT

What makes you think that?

GIRL

Why ask such foolish questions?

COUNT

Last night . . . well, tell me, didn't I drop right down on the sofa?

GIRL

Certainly . . . with me.

COUNT

With you?

GIRL

Yes, don't you remember?

COUNT

I did . . . both of us. . . .

GIRL

But you fell asleep right away.

COUNT

Right away. . . . So . . . that's what happened? . . .

GIRL

Yes, sonny. But you must have been terribly drunk, that you don't remember.

COUNT

So. . . . And yet . . . there is a faint resemblance. . . . Good-by. . . .
(*Listens*) . . . What is the matter?

GIRL

The servant is up. Give her a tip as you go out. The outside

HANDS AROUND

door is open, so you won't have to give anything to the janitor.

COUNT

(In the anteroom) Well. . . . It would have been beautiful, if I had kissed her only on the eyes. It would have been almost an adventure. . . . But it wasn't my destiny. *(The servant opens the door)* Ah—here. . . . Good-night—

SERVANT

Good morning!

COUNT

Of course . . . good morning . . . good morning.