

# LITERATURE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

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# LITERAURE (1902)

A Comedy in One Act  
By Arthur Schnitzler

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## CHARACTERS

MARGARET  
CLEMENT  
GILBERT

*Scene, a decently but not richly furnished room, belonging to MARGARET. Table, small writing-desk, chairs, a cupboard, two windows up stage, doors right and left. At rise of curtain, CLEMENT is discovered leaning against mantelpiece, in a very elegant dark gray morning suit, smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper. MARGARET stands by window, then walks up and down, finally comes behind CLEMENT and runs her hands through his hair. She seems rather restless. CLEMENT goes on reading, then seizes her hand and kisses it.*

CLEMENT. Horner is sure of his game — or rather my game.

Waterloo five to one, Barometer twenty to one, Busserl seven to one, Attila sixteen to one.

MARGARET. Sixteen to one!

CLEMENT. Lord Byron six to four — that's us, darling!

MARGARET. I know.

CLEMENT. Besides, it's still six weeks to the race.

MARGARET. Apparently he thinks it's a dead certainty.

CLEMENT. The way she knows all the terms . . . !

MARGARET. I've known these terms longer than I have you. And is it quite settled that you'll ride Lord Byron yourself?

CLEMENT. How can you ask? The Ladies' Plate! Whom else should I put up? If Horner didn't know I was going to ride him myself, he wouldn't be standing at six to four, you may be sure of that.

MARGARET. I believe you. You're so handsome on horseback— simply fit to take one's breath away! I shall never forget how you looked at Munich, the day I got to know you . . .

CLEMENT. Don't remind me of it! I had awful luck that day. Windisch would never have won the race if he hadn't got ten lengths start. But this time — ah . . . ! And the next day we go away.

MARGARET. In the evening.

CLEMENT. Yes . . . But why?

MARGARET. Because in the morning we shall be getting married, I suppose.

CLEMENT. Yes, yes, darling.

MARGARET. I'm so happy! (*Embraces him.*) And where shall we go?

CLEMENT. I thought we'd agreed about that — to my place in the country.

MARGARET. Yes, later. But can't we have a little while on the Riviera first?

CLEMENT. That'll depend on the Ladies' Plate; if I win it . . .

MARGARET. Dead certainty!

CLEMENT. And anyhow, in April the Riviera really isn't the thing any more.

MARGARET. Oh, that's it, is it?

CLEMENT. Of course that's it, child. You've retained from your old life certain conceptions of what's the thing which are — you'll forgive me for saying it — just a little like those of the comic papers.

MARGARET. Really, Clement . . .

CLEMENT. Oh well, we'll see. (*Goes on reading.*) Badegast fifteen to one . . .

MARGARET. Badegast? He won't be in it.

CLEMENT. How do you know that?

MARGARET. Szigrati himself told me.

CLEMENT. How was that? Where?

MARGARET. Why, yesterday up at the Freudenu, while you were talking to Milner.

CLEMENT. To my way of thinking, Szigrati isn't the right sort of company for you.

MARGARET. Jealous?

CLEMENT. Nonsense! Anyhow, after this I shall introduce you everywhere as my fiancée. (*She kisses him.*) Well, what did Szigrati tell you?

MARGARET. That he wasn't going to enter Badegast for the Ladies' Plate.

CLEMENT. Oh, you mustn't believe everything Szigrati tells you. He's spreading the report that Badegast won't run just in order that the odds may be longer.

MARGARET. Why, that's just like speculation.

CLEMENT. Well, don't you suppose we've got any speculators among us? For many men the whole thing is a business. Do you suppose a man like Szigrati, has the slightest feeling for sport? He might just as well be on the stock exchange. But for the matter of that, as far as Badegast is concerned, people might well lay a hundred to one against him.

MARGARET. Oh? I thought he looked splendid this morning.

CLEMENT. Oh, she's seen Badegast too!

MARGARET. To be sure — didn't Butters give him a gallop this morning after Busserl?

CLEMENT. But Butters doesn't ride for Szigrati. That must have been a stable-boy. Well, anyhow, Badegast may look as splendid as you like, it makes no difference — he's no good. Ah, Margaret, with your brains you'll soon learn to distinguish real greatness from false. It's really incredible, the quickness with which you've already — what shall I say? — initiated yourself into all these things — it surpasses my boldest expectations.

MARGARET (*annoyed*). Why does it surpass your expectations? You know very well that all these things are not so new to me. Some, very good people used to visit my parents' house—

Count Libowski and various others; and also at my husband's .

. .

CLEMENT. Oh, of course — I know . . . At bottom I've really got nothing against the cotton business.

MARGARET. What has it to do with my personal views that my husband had a cotton factory? I always continued my education in my own fashion. But let's not talk any further about those days — they're far enough away, thank God!

CLEMENT. But there are others that are nearer.

MARGARET. To be sure. But what does that mean?

CLEMENT. Oh, I only mean that in your Munich surroundings you can't have heard much of sporting matters, as far as I am able to judge.

MARGARET. I wish you'd stop reproaching me with the surroundings in which you learned to know me.

CLEMENT. Reproaching you? There can't be any question of that. But it has always been and still is incomprehensible to me how you got in with those people.

MARGARET. You talk exactly as if they had been a gang of criminals!

CLEMENT. Child, I give you my word, there were some of them that looked exactly like highway-robbers. What I can't understand is how you, with your well-developed sense of . . . Well, I won't say anything more than your taste for . . . cleanliness and nice perfumes . . . could bear living among those people, sitting down at the table with them.

MARGARET (*smiling*). Didn't you do it too?

CLEMENT. I sat down near them — not with them. And you know it was for your sake, exclusively for your sake, that I did it. I won't deny that some of them improved on closer acquaintance; there were some really interesting people among them. And you mustn't get the idea, darling, that when I'm among ill-dressed people I have a feeling of conscious superiority. It's not that — but there's something in their whole bearing, in their very nature, that makes one nervous.

MARGARET. Oh, I think that's rather a sweeping statement.

CLEMENT. Now don't get offended with me, darling. I've just said there were some very interesting people among them. But how a *lady* can feel at home with them for any length of time, I shall never be able to understand.

MARGARET. You forget one thing, my dear Clement — that in a certain sense I belong to their circle, or did belong to it.

CLEMENT. You — I beg your pardon!

MARGARET. They were artists.

CLEMENT. Ah good — we're back on that subject again!

MARGARET. Yes — and that's the thing that always hurts me, that you can't feel with me there.

CLEMENT. “Can’t feel with you” . . . I like that! I can feel with you all right — but you know what it was I always disliked about your scribbling, and you know that it’s a very personal thing.

MARGARET. Well, there are women who in my situation at that time would have done worse things than write poetry.

CLEMENT. But such poetry! (*He picks up a little book on the mantelpiece.*) That’s the whole question. I can assure you, every time I see it lying there, every time I even think of it, I’m ashamed to think it’s yours.

MARGARET. You simply don’t understand it. No, you mustn’t be vexed with me; if you had just that one thing more, you’d be perfect — and that probably is not to be. But what is it that disturbs you in the verses? You surely know that I haven’t experienced anything like that.

CLEMENT. I hope not!

MARGARET. You know it’s all imagination.

CLEMENT. But then I can’t help asking myself . . . how comes a lady to have such an imagination? (*Reads.*)

“So, drunk with bliss, I hang upon thy neck  
And suck thy lips’ drained sweetness . . .”

(*Shakes his head.*) How can a lady write such stuff, or allow it to be printed? Everybody who reads it must call up a picture of the authoress and the neck and . . . the intoxication.

MARGARET. When I give you my word that such a neck has never existed . . .

CLEMENT. No, I can’t believe that it has. Lucky for me that I can’t — and . . . for you too, Margaret. But how did you ever come by such fancies? All these glowing emotions can’t possibly be referred to your first husband — you told me yourself he never understood you.

MARGARET. Of course he didn’t — that’s why I got a divorce from him. You know all about that. I simply couldn’t exist by the side of a man who had no ideas beyond eating and drinking and cotton.

CLEMENT. Yes, I know. But all that’s three years ago — and you wrote the verses later.

MARGARET. Yes . . . But just think of the position in which I found myself . . .

CLEMENT. What sort of a position? You hadn’t any privations to put up with, had you? From that point of view your husband, to give him his due, behaved really very well. You weren’t forced to earn your own living. And even if they gave you a hundred florins for a poem — they certainly wouldn’t give more — you weren’t obliged to write a book like that.

MARGARET. Clement, dear, I didn't mean the word "position" in a material sense; I meant the position in which my soul was. Haven't you any conception . . . ? When you first met me, it was much better — to a certain extent I had found myself; but at first . . . ! I was so helpless and distracted. I did everything I could — I painted, I even gave English lessons in the boardinghouse where I was living. Just think what it was like, to be there as a divorced woman at twenty-two, to have no one . . .

CLEMENT. Why didn't you stay quietly in Vienna?

MARGARET. Because I was not on good terms with my family. No one has really understood me. Oh, these people . . . ! Do you suppose any of my relations could conceive that one should want anything else from life except a husband and pretty clothes and a position in society? Oh, good heavens. . . ! If I had had a child, things might have been very different — and again they might not. I am a very complex creature. But after all, what have you to complain of? Wasn't my going to Munich the best thing I could have done? How else should I ever have known you?

CLEMENT. That's all right — but you didn't go there with that purpose in view.

MARGARET. I went because I wanted to be free — inwardly free. I wanted to see if I could make the thing go on my own resources. And you must admit that it looked as if I should be able to. I was on the road to becoming famous. (CLEMENT *looks at her dubiously*.) But I cared more for you than even for fame.

CLEMENT (*good-naturedly*). And I'm a bit more dependable.

MARGARET. I wasn't thinking about that. I loved you from the very first moment — that was the thing that counted. I had always dreamed of some one just like you; I had always known that no other sort of man could make me happy. Blood isn't a mere empty word; it's the only thing that counts. Do you know, that's why I always have a kind of idea . . .

CLEMENT. What?

MARGARET. At least now and then the thought comes to me that there may be some noble blood in my veins too.

CLEMENT. How so?

MARGARET. Well, it would be a possibility.

CLEMENT. I don't understand.

MARGARET. I told you that there used to be aristocratic visitors at my parents' house . . .

CLEMENT. Well, and if there were . . . ?

MARGARET. Who knows . . . ?

CLEMENT. Oh, I say, Margaret! How can you talk of such things?

MARGARET. Oh, when you're about one can never say what one thinks! That's the only thing the matter with you — if it weren't for that you'd be perfect. (*She nestles up to him.*) I do love you so tremendously. The very first evening, when you came into the cafe with Wangenheim, I knew it at once — knew that you were the man for me. You know you strode in among those people like a being from another world.

CLEMENT. I hope so. And you, thank goodness, didn't look as if you belonged to that one. No . . . when I remember that crowd — the Russian girl, for example, who looked like a student with her close-cropped hair, only that she didn't wear the cap . . .

MARGARET. She's a very talented artist, the Baranzewich.

CLEMENT. I know — you showed her to me in the Pinakothek, standing on a ladder, copying pictures. And then the fellow with the Polish name . . .

MARGARET (*Begins to recall the name*). Zrkd . . .

CLEMENT. Oh, don't bother—you won't need to pronounce it any more. Once he delivered a lecture in the cafe, when I was there, without seeming in the least embarrassed.

MARGARET. He's a great genius — you may take my word for it.

CLEMENT. Oh, of course — they're all great geniuses at the cafe. And then there was that insufferable cub . . .

MARGARET. Who?

CLEMENT. Oh, you know the fellow I mean — the one that was always making tactless remarks about the aristocracy.

MARGARET. Gilbert — you must mean Gilbert.

CLEMENT. That's the one. Of course I don't undertake to defend everybody in my station of life; there are clowns and boobies in every rank, even among poets, I've been told. But it's unmannerly of the fellow, one of us being there . . .

MARGARET. Oh, that was his way.

CLEMENT. I had to take myself sharply in hand, or I should have said something rude.

MARGARET. He was an interesting man for all that . . . yes. And besides — he was fearfully jealous of you.

CLEMENT. So I thought I noticed. (*Pause.*)

MARGARET. Oh, they were all jealous of you. Naturally . . . you were so different. And then they all paid court to me, just because they were all quite indifferent to me. You must have noticed that, too, didn't you? What are you laughing at?

CLEMENT. It's comical . . . If any one had prophesied to me that I should marry one of the crowd at the Cafe Maximilian! The ones I liked best were the two young painters — they were really just as if they'd stepped out of a farce at the theatre. You know, those two that looked so much alike, and shared every-

thing together — I fancy even the Russian girl on the step-ladder.

MARGARET. I never troubled my head about such things.

CLEMENT. Those two must have been Jews, weren't they?

MARGARET. What makes you think so?

CLEMENT. Oh . . . because they were always cutting jokes — and then their pronunciation . . .

MARGARET. I think you might dispense with anti-Semitic remarks.

CLEMENT. Come, child, don't be so sensitive. I know you're half-Jewish. And really, you know, I've nothing against the Jews. I even had an instructor once, who put me through my Greek for my final exam. He was a Jew, if you like — and a splendid fellow. One meets all kinds of people . . . And I'm not sorry to have had a chance to see your Munich circle — it's all a bit of experience.— But, you admit, I must have appeared to you as a kind of life-saver.

MARGARET. Yes, indeed you did. Oh, Clement, Clement . . . !  
(*She embraces him.*)

CLEMENT. What are you laughing at?

MARGARET. Oh, a thought struck me . . .

CLEMENT. Well . . . ?

MARGARET. "So, drunk with bliss, I hang upon thy neck . . ."

CLEMENT (*annoyed*). I don't know why you always have to spoil a fellow's illusions!

MARGARET. Tell me honestly, Clement — wouldn't you be proud if your girl — if your wife — were a great, famous authoress?

CLEMENT. I've told you already what I think. You may call me narrow if you like, but I assure you that if you began writing poems again, or, even more, having them printed, in which you gushed about me or told the world all about our happiness, there'd be an end of the marriage — I should be up and off.

MARGARET. And you say that — you, a man who has had a dozen notorious affairs!

CLEMENT. Notorious or not, my dear, I never told anybody about them; I never rushed into print when a girl hung, drunk with bliss, about my neck, so that anybody could buy it for a gulden and a half. That's the thing, you see. I know that there are people who get their living that way — but I don't consider it the thing to do. I tell you it seems worse to me than for a girl to show herself off in tights as a Greek statue at the Ronacher. At least she keeps her mouth shut — but the things that one of your poets blabs out, well, they're past a joke!

MARGARET. (*uneasily*). Dearest, you forget that a poet doesn't always tell the truth. We tell things which we haven't experienced at all, but what we've dreamed, invented.

CLEMENT. My dear Margaret, I wish you wouldn't always keep saying "we." Thank heaven, you're out of that sort of thing now!

MARGARET. Who knows?

CLEMENT. What do you mean by that?

MARGARET (*tenderly*). Clem, I really must tell you?

CLEMENT. Why, what's up now?

MARGARET. Well, I'm not out of it — I haven't given up writing.

CLEMENT. You mean by that . . . ?

MARGARET. Just what I say — that I'm still writing, or at least that I have written something. Yes, this impulse is stronger than other people can conceive. I believe I should have gone to pieces if I hadn't written.

CLEMENT. Well, what have you been writing this time?

MARGARET. A novel. I had too much in my breast that wanted to be said — I should have choked if I hadn't got it out. I haven't said anything about it before — but of course I had to tell you sooner or later. Künigel is delighted with it.

CLEMENT. Who is Künigel?

MARGARET. My publisher.

CLEMENT. Then somebody's read the thing already?

MARGARET. Yes — and many more will read it. Clement, you'll be proud — believe me!

CLEMENT. You're mistaken, my dear child. I think you have . . . Well, what sort of things have you put into it?

MARGARET. That's not so easy to explain in one word. The book contains, so to say, the best of what is to be said about things.

CLEMENT. Brava!

MARGARET. And so I am able to promise you that from this time on I shan't touch a pen. There's no more need.

CLEMENT. Margaret, do you love me or not?

MARGARET. How can you ask? I love you, and you alone. Much as I have seen, much as I have observed, I have felt nothing — I waited for you.

CLEMENT. Then bring it here, your novel.

MARGARET. Bring it here? How do you mean?

CLEMENT. That you felt you had to write it — may be; but at least no one shall read it. Bring it here — we'll throw it in the fire.

MARGARET. Clement . . . !

CLEMENT. I ask that much of you — I have a right to ask it.

MARGARET. Oh, it isn't possible! It's . . .

CLEMENT. Not possible? When I wish it — when I explain that I make everything else dependent on it . . . you understand me . . . it may perhaps turn out to be possible.

MARGARET. But, Clement, it's already printed.

CLEMENT. What — printed?

MARGARET. Yes . . . in a few days it'll be for sale everywhere.

CLEMENT. Margaret . . . ! And all this without a word to me . . .

MARGARET. I couldn't help it, Clement. When you see it, you'll forgive me — more than that, you'll be proud of me.

CLEMENT. My dear girl, this is past a joke.

MARGARET. Clement . . . !

CLEMENT. Good-by, Margaret.

MARGARET. Clement . . . ! What does this mean? You are going?

CLEMENT. As you see.

MARGARET. When will you be back?

CLEMENT. That I can't at the present moment say. Good-by.

MARGARET. Clement . . . ! (*Tries to restrain him.*)

CLEMENT. If you please . . . [Exit]

MARGARET (*alone*). Clement . . . ! What does this mean? He's leaving me? Oh, what shall I do? — Clement! — Can he mean that all is over . . . ? No — it's impossible! Clement! I must follow him . . . (*Looks about for her hat. The bell rings.*) Ah . . . he's coming back! He was only trying to frighten me . . . Oh, my Clement! (*Goes toward door. Enter GILBERT.*)

GILBERT (*to maid, who has opened door for him*). I told you I was sure she was at home. Good morning, Margaret.

MARGARET (*taken aback*). You . . . ?

GILBERT. Yes, I — Amandus Gilbert.

MARGARET. I . . . I'm so surprised . . .

GILBERT. That is evident. But there's no reason why you should be. I am only passing through — I'm on my way to Italy. And really I've come to see you just for the purpose of bringing you a copy of my latest work in remembrance of our old friendship. (*Hands her the book. As she does not take it at once, he lays it on the table.*)

MARGARET. You're very kind . . . thank you.

GILBERT. Oh, not at all. You have a certain right to this book. So this is where you live . . .

MARGARET. Yes. But . . .

GILBERT. Oh, it's only temporary, I know. For furnished rooms they aren't bad. To be sure, these family portraits on the walls would drive me to distraction.

MARGARET. My landlady is the widow of a general.

GILBERT. Oh, you needn't apologize.

MARGARET. Apologize . . . ? I wasn't thinking of it.

GILBERT. It's very queer, when one comes to think . . .

MARGARET. To think of what?

GILBERT. Why shouldn't I say it? Of the little room in the Steinsdorfer Strasse, with the balcony looking out on the Isar. Do you remember it, Margaret?

MARGARET. Do you think you'd better call me Margaret . . . now?

GILBERT. As you please . . . (*Pause. Suddenly.*) You know really you behaved very badly . . .

MARGARET. What?

GILBERT. Or do you prefer that I should speak in paraphrases? Unfortunately I can't find any other expression for your conduct. And it was all so unnecessary — it would have been just as well to be honest with me. There was nothing to be gained by stealing away from Munich in the dead of night.

MARGARET. It wasn't the dead of night — I left Munich by the express at 8.30 A.M., in bright sunshine.

GILBERT. Well, anyhow, you might just as well have said good-bye, mightn't you? (*Sits.*)

MARGARET. The Baron may come in at any moment.

GILBERT. Well, what if he does? You surely haven't told him that once upon a time you lay in my arms and adored me. I am just an old acquaintance from Munich — and as such I have surely the right to call on you?

MARGARET. Any other old acquaintance — not you.

GILBERT. Why? You persist in misunderstanding me. I am really here only as an old acquaintance. Everything else is over — long ago over . . . Well, you'll see there. (*Points to his book.*)

MARGARET. What book is that?

GILBERT. My latest novel.

MARGARET. Oh, you're writing novels?

GILBERT. To be sure.

MARGARET. Since when have you risen to that?

GILBERT. What do you mean?

MARGARET. Oh, I remember that your real field was the small sketch, the observation of trivial daily occurrences . . .

GILBERT (*excitedly*). My field . . . ? My field is the world! I write what I choose to write — I don't allow any bounds to be set to my genius. I don't know what should prevent me from writing a novel.

MARGARET. Well, the standard critics used to say . . .

GILBERT. What standard critic do you mean?

MARGARET. I remember, for example, a feuilleton of Neumann's in the *Allgemeine* . . .

GILBERT (*angrily*). Neumann is an idiot! I've given him a blow in the face.

MARGARET. You've given him . . . ?

GILBERT. Oh, not literally . . . Margaret, you used to be as disgusted with him as I was — we agreed entirely in the view that Neumann was an idiot. “How can that mere cipher dare . . .” — those were your very words, Margaret, “How can he dare to set limits to you — to strangle your next book before its birth?” That’s what you said! And now you appeal to that charlatan!

MARGARET. Please don’t shout so. My landlady . . .

GILBERT. I can’t bother with thinking about generals’ widows when my nerves are on edge.

MARGARET. But what did I say? I really can’t understand your being so sensitive.

GILBERT. Sensitive? You call it being sensitive? You, who used to quiver from head to foot if the merest scribbler in the most obscure rag ventured to say a word of criticism!

MARGARET. I don’t remember that ever any disparaging words have been written about me.

GILBERT. Oh . . . ? Well, you may be right. People are usually gallant to a pretty woman.

MARGARET. Gallant . . . ? So they used to praise my poems only out of gallantry? And your own verdict . . .

GILBERT. Mine . . . ? I needn’t take back anything that I said — I may confine myself to remarking that your few really beautiful poems were written in our time.

MARGARET. And so you think the credit of them is really yours?

GILBERT. Would you have written them if I had never existed? Weren’t they written to *me*?

MARGARET. No.

GILBERT. What? Not written to me? Oh, that’s monstrous!

MARGARET. No, they were not written to you.

GILBERT. You take my breath away! Shall I remind you of the situations in which your finest verses had their origin?

MARGARET. They were addressed to an ideal . . . (GILBERT *points to himself*) . . . whose earthly representative you happened to be.

GILBERT. Ha! That’s fine! Where did you get it? Do you know what the French say in such circumstances? “That is literature!”

MARGARET (*imitating his tone*). “That is not literature!” That is the truth — the absolute truth. Or do you really believe that I meant you by the slender youth — that I sang hymns of praise to your locks? Even in those days you were . . . well, not slender; and I shouldn’t call this locks. (*Passes her hand over his hair. Taking the opportunity, he seizes her hand and kisses it. In a softer voice.*) What are you thinking of?

GILBERT. You thought so in those days — or at least that was your name for it. Ah, what won’t poets say for the sake of a smooth

verse, a sounding rhyme? Didn't I call you once, in a sonnet, "my wise maiden?" And all the time you were neither . . . No, I mustn't be unjust to you — you *were* wise, confoundedly wise, revoltingly wise! And it has paid you. But one oughtn't to be surprised; you were always a snob at heart. Well, now you've got what you wanted. You caught your prey, your blue-blooded youth with the well-kept hands and the neglected brain, the splendid rider, fencer, shot, tennis-player, heart-breaker — Marlitt couldn't have invented anything more disgusting. What more do you want? Whether it will always content you, that knew something higher once, is of course another question. I can only say this one thing to you — in my eyes you are a renegade from love.

MARGARET. You thought that up in the train.

GILBERT. I thought it up just now — just a moment ago!

MARGARET. Write it down, then — it's good.

GILBERT. What was it that attracted you to a man of this sort?

Nothing but the old instinct, the common instinct!

MARGARET. I don't think you've got any right . . .

GILBERT. My dear child, in the old days I had a soul too to offer you.

MARGARET. Oh, at times, only this . . .

GILBERT. Don't try now to depreciate our relation — you won't succeed. It will remain always your most splendid experience.

MARGARET. Bah . . . when I think that I tolerated that rubbish for a whole year!

GILBERT. Tolerated? You were entranced with it. Don't be ungrateful — I'm not. Miserably as you behaved at the last, for me it can't poison my memories. And anyhow, that was part of the whole.

MARGARET. You don't mean it!

GILBERT. Yes . . . And now listen to this one statement I owe to you: at the very time when you were beginning to turn away from me, when you felt this drawing toward the stable — *la nostalgie de l'écurie* — I was realizing that at heart I was done with you.

MARGARET. No . . . !

GILBERT. It's quite characteristic, Margaret, that you hadn't the least perception of it. Yes, I was done with you. I simply didn't need you any more. What you could give me, you had given me; you had fulfilled your function. You knew in the depths of your heart, you knew unconsciously . . . that your day was over. Our relation had achieved its purpose; I do not regret having loved you.

MARGARET. I do!

GILBERT. That's splendid! In that one small observation lies, for the connoisseur, the whole deep distinction between the true

artist and the dilettante. To you, Margaret, our relation is today nothing more than the recollection of a few mad nights, a few deep talks of an evening in the alleys of the English Garden; I have made of it a work of art.

MARGARET. So have I.

GILBERT. How so? What do you mean?

MARGARET. What you've succeeded in doing, if you please, I've succeeded in doing too. I also have written a novel in which our former relations play a part, in which our former love — or what we called by that name — is preserved to eternity.

GILBERT. If I were in your place, I wouldn't say anything about eternity until the second edition was out.

MARGARET. Well, anyhow, it means something different when I write a novel from what it does when you write one.

GILBERT. Yes . . . ?

MARGARET. You see, you're a free man — you haven't got to steal the hours in which you can be an artist; and you don't risk your whole future.

GILBERT. Oh . . . do you?

MARGARET. I have! Half an hour ago Clement left me because I owned up to him that I had written a novel.

GILBERT. Left you? For ever?

MARGARET. I don't know. It is possible. He went away in anger. He is unaccountable — I can't tell beforehand what he will decide about me.

GILBERT. Ah . . . so he forbids you to write! He won't allow the girl he loves to make any use of her brains — oh, that's splendid! That's the fine flower of the nation! Ah . . . yes. And you — aren't you ashamed to experience the same sensations in the arms of such an idiot that you once . . .

MARGARET. I forbid you to talk like that about him! You don't understand him.

GILBERT. Ha . . . !

MARGARET. You don't know why he objects to my writing — it's only out of love. He feels that I live in a world which is closed to him; he blushes to see me exposing the innermost secrets of my soul to strangers. He wants me for himself, for himself alone. And that's why he rushed off . . . no, not rushed; Clement isn't the sort of person who rushes off . . .

GILBERT. An admirable bit of observation. But at any rate he's gone. We needn't discuss the tempo of his departure. And he's gone because he won't allow you to yield to your desire to create.

MARGARET. Oh, if he could only understand that! I could be the best, the truest, the noblest wife in the world, if the right man existed!

GILBERT. You admit by that expression that he isn't the right one.

MARGARET. I didn't say that!

GILBERT. I want you to realize that he is simply enslaving you, ruining you, seeking to crush your personality out of sheer egoism. Oh, think of the Margaret you were in the old days! Think of the freedom you had to develop your ego when you loved me! Think of the choice spirits who were your associates then, of the disciples who gathered round me and were your disciples too. Don't you sometimes long to be back again? Don't you sometimes think of the little room with the balcony . . . and the Isar flowing beneath the window . . . (*He seizes her hands and draws near to her.*)

MARGARET. O God . . . !

GILBERT. It can all be so again — it needn't be the Isar. I'll tell you what to do, Margaret. If he comes back, tell him that you have some important business to see to in Munich, and spend the time with me. Oh, Margaret, you're so lovely! We'll be happy once again, Margaret, as we used to be. You remember, don't you? (*very close to her.*) "So, drunk with bliss, I hang upon thy neck . . ."

MARGARET (*Retreats quickly from him*). Go — go! No. . . no . . . go, I tell you! You know I don't love you any more.

GILBERT. Oh, . . . h'm . . . Really? Well, then I can only beg your pardon. (*Pause.*) Good-by, Margaret . . . good-by.

MARGARET. Good-by.

GILBERT. Good-by . . . (*Turns back once more.*) Won't you at least, as a parting gift, let me have a copy of your novel? I gave you mine.

MARGARET. It isn't out yet — it won't be till next week.

GILBERT. If you don't mind telling me . . . what sort of a story is it?

MARGARET. It is the story of my life — of course disguised, so that no one can recognize me.

GILBERT. Oh . . . ? How did you manage that?

MARGARET. It was quite simple. The heroine, to begin with, is not a writer but a painter . . .

GILBERT. Very clever of you.

MARGARET. Her first husband was not a cotton-manufacturer but a great speculator — and she deceived him not with a tenor

. . .

GILBERT. Aha!

MARGARET. What are you laughing at?

GILBERT. So you deceived him with a tenor? That's something I didn't know.

MARGARET. How do you know I did?

GILBERT. Why, you've just informed me yourself.

MARGARET. I . . . ? How? I said the heroine of my novel betrays her husband with a baritone.

GILBERT. A basso would have been grander — a mezzo-soprano more piquant.

MARGARET. Then she goes not to Munich but to Dresden, and there has a relation with a sculptor.

GILBERT. Myself, I suppose . . . disguised?

MARGARET. Oh, very much disguised. The sculptor is young, handsome, and a genius. In spite of all that, she leaves him.

GILBERT. For . . . ?

MARGARET. Guess!

GILBERT. Presumably a jockey.

MARGARET. Silly!

GILBERT. A count, then? A prince?

MARGARET. No — an archduke!

GILBERT. (*with a bow*). Ah, you've spared no expense.

MARGARET. Yes — an archduke, who abandons his position at court for her sake, marries her, and goes away with her to the Canary Islands.

GILBERT. The Canary Islands! That's fine. And then . . . ?

MARGARET. With their landing in . . .

GILBERT. . . . the Canaries . . .

MARGARET. . . . the novel ends.

GILBERT. Oh, I see . . . I'm very curious — especially about the disguise.

MARGARET. Even you would not be able to recognize me, if it were not . . .

GILBERT. Well . . . ?

MARGARET. If it were not that in the last chapter but two I've reproduced all our correspondence!

GILBERT. What?

MARGARET. Yes — all the letters you wrote me, and all those I wrote you are included.

GILBERT. Excuse me . . . but how did you get yours to me? I've got them all.

MARGARET. Ah, but I kept the rough drafts of them all.

GILBERT. Rough drafts?

MARGARET. Yes.

GILBERT. Rough drafts . . . ! Of those letters to me that seemed to be dashed off in quivering haste? "Just one word more, dearest, before I sleep — my eyes are closing already . . ." and then, when your eyes had quite closed, you wrote me off a fair copy?

MARGARET. Well, have you anything to complain of?

GILBERT. I might have suspected it. I suppose I ought to congratulate myself that they weren't borrowed from a Lover's

Manual. Oh, how everything crumbles around me . . . the whole past is in ruins! She kept rough drafts of her letters!

MARGARET. You ought to be glad. Who knows whether my letters to you will not be the only thing people will remember about you?

GILBERT. But it's an extremely awkward situation for another reason . . .

MARGARET. What is that?

GILBERT (*Points to his book*). You see, they're all in there too.

MARGARET. What? Where?

GILBERT. In my novel.

MARGARET. What's in your novel?

GILBERT. Our letters . . . yours and mine.

MARGARET. How did you get yours, then, since I have them?

Ah, you see you wrote rough drafts too!

GILBERT. Oh no — I only made copies of them before I sent them to you. I didn't want them to be lost. There are some in the book that you never got; they were too good for you — you'd never have understood them.

MARGARET. For heaven's sake, is that true? (*Quickly turns over the leaves of GILBERT'S book*.) Yes, it is! Oh, it's just as if we told the whole world that we had . . . Oh, good gracious . . . ! (*Excitedly turning over the leaves*.) You don't mean to tell me you put in the one I wrote you the morning after the first night . . .

GILBERT. Of course I did — it was really brilliant.

MARGARET. But that's too dreadful! It'll be a European scandal.

And Clement . . . O heavens! I'm beginning to wish that he may not come back. I'm lost — and you with me! Wherever you go, he'll know how to find you — he'll shoot you down like a mad dog!

GILBERT (*Puts his book in his pocket*). A comparison in very poor taste.

MARGARET. How came you by that insane idea? The letters of a woman whom you professed to love . . . ! It's easy to see that you are no gentleman.

GILBERT. Oh, that's too amusing! Didn't you do exactly the same thing?

MARGARET. I am a woman.

GILBERT. You remember it now!

MARGARET. It is true — I have nothing to boast of over you. We are worthy of each other. Yes . . . Clement was right; we are worse than the women at the Ronacher who exhibit themselves in tights. Our most hidden bliss, our sorrows, all . . . given to the world . . . Bah! I loathe myself! Yes, we two belong together — Clement would be quite right to drive me from him. (*Suddenly*.) Come, Amandus!

GILBERT. What are you going to do?

MARGARET. I accept your proposal.

GILBERT. Proposal? What proposal?

MARGARET. I'll fly with you! (*Looks about for her hat and cloak.*)

GILBERT. What are you thinking of?

MARGARET. (*very much excited, puts her hat on with decision.*)

It may all be as it was before — so you said just now. It needn't be the Isar . . . Well, I'm ready.

GILBERT. But this is perfectly crazy! Fly with me . . . ? What would be the use of that? Didn't you say yourself that he would know how to find me wherever I went? If you were with me, he would find you too. It would be a great deal more sensible for each of us alone . . .

MARGARET. You wretch! Would you abandon me now? And a few minutes ago you were on your knees to me! Have you no shame?

GILBERT. What is there to be ashamed of? I am an ailing, nervous man . . . I am subject to moods . . . (MARGARET, *at window, utters a loud cry.*) What's the matter? What will the general's widow think of me?

MARGARET. There he is! He's coming!

GILBERT. In that case . . .

MARGARET. What — you're going?

GILBERT. I didn't come here with the intention of calling on the Baron.

MARGARET. He'll meet you on the stairs — that would be worse still! Stay where you are — I refuse to be the only victim.

GILBERT. Don't be a fool! Why are you trembling so? He can't have read both novels. Control yourself — take off your hat. Put your cloak away. (*Helps her to take her things off.*) If he finds you in this state, he'll be bound to suspect . . .

MARGARET. It's all one to me — as well now as later. I can't endure to wait for the horror — I'll tell him everything at once.

GILBERT. Everything?

MARGARET. Yes, as long as you're here. If I come out honestly and confess everything, he may forgive me.

GILBERT. And what about me? I have better things to do in the world than to allow myself to be shot down like a mad dog by a jealous baron! (*Bell rings.*)

MARGARET. There he is — there he is!

GILBERT. You won't say anything!

MARGARET. Yes, I mean to speak out.

GILBERT. Oh, you will, will you? Have a care, then! I'll sell my skin dearly.

MARGARET. What will you do?

GILBERT. I'll hurl such truths into his very face as no baron ever heard before. (*Enter CLEMENT; rather surprised at finding him, very cool and polite.*)

CLEMENT. Oh . . . Herr Gilbert, if I'm not mistaken?

GILBERT. Yes, Baron. Happening to pass this way on a journey to the south, I could not refrain from coming to pay my respects . . .

CLEMENT. Ah, I see . . . (*Pause.*) I'm afraid I have interrupted a conversation — I should be sorry to do that. Please don't let me be in the way.

GILBERT (*to MARGARET*). Ah . . . what *were* we talking about?

CLEMENT. Perhaps I may be able to assist your memory. In Munich you always used to be talking about your books . . .

GILBERT. Ah . . . precisely. As a matter of fact, I was speaking, of my new novel . . .

CLEMENT. Oh . . . then please go on. It's quite possible to discuss literature with me — isn't it, Margaret? What is your novel? Naturalist? Symbolist? A chapter of experience?

GILBERT. Oh, in a certain sense we all write but of things we have lived.

CLEMENT. That's very interesting.

GILBERT. Even when one writes a Nero, it's absolutely indispensable that at least in his heart he shall have set fire to Rome . . .

CLEMENT. Of course.

GILBERT. Where else is one to get inspiration except from oneself? Where is one to find models except in the life around one? (*MARGARET is growing more and more uneasy.*)

CLEMENT. The trouble is that the model's consent is so seldom asked. I'm bound to say, if I were a woman, I shouldn't thank a man for telling the world . . . (*Sharply.*) In decent society we call that . . . compromising a woman.

GILBERT. I don't know whether I may include myself in "decent society" — but I call that doing honor to a woman.

CLEMENT. Oh!

GILBERT. The essential thing is to hit the mark. What, in the higher sense, does it matter whether a woman has been happy in one man's arms or another's?

CLEMENT. Herr Gilbert, I will call your attention to the fact that you are speaking in the presence of a lady!

GILBERT. I am speaking in the presence of an old comrade who may be supposed to share my views on these matters.

CLEMENT. Oh . . . !

MARGARET (*suddenly*). Clement . . . ! (*Throws herself at his feet.*) Clement . . . !

CLEMENT (*taken aback*). Really . . . really, Margaret!

MARGARET. Forgive me, Clement!

CLEMENT. But — Margaret . . . ! (*To GILBERT.*) It is extremely unpleasant for me, Herr Gilbert . . . Get up, Margaret — get up! It's all right. (*MARGARET looks up at him inquiringly.*) Yes — get up! (*She rises.*) It's all right — it's all settled. You may believe me when I tell you. All you've got to do is to telephone a single word to Künigel. I've arranged everything with him. We'll call it in — you agree to that?

GILBERT. What are you going to call in, may I ask? Her novel?

CLEMENT. Oh, you know about it? It would seem, Herr Gilbert, that the comradeship you speak of has been brought pretty well up to date.

GILBERT. Yes . . . There is really nothing for me to do but to ask your pardon. I am really in a very embarrassing position . . .

CLEMENT. I regret very much, Herr Gilbert, that you have been forced to be a spectator of a scene which I may almost describe as domestic . . .

GILBERT. Ah . . . well, I do not wish to intrude any further — I will wish you good day. May I, as a tangible token that all misunderstanding between us has been cleared up, as a feeble evidence of my good wishes, present you, Baron, with a copy of my latest novel?

CLEMENT. You are very kind, Herr Gilbert. I must own, to be sure, that German novels are not my pet weakness. Well, this is probably the last I shall read — or the next to the last . . .

MARGARET, GILBERT. The next to the last . . . ?

CLEMENT. Yes.

MARGARET. And the last to be . . . ?

CLEMENT. Yours, my dear. (*Takes a book from his pocket.*) You see, I begged Künigel for a single copy, in order to present it to you — or rather to both of us. (*MARGARET and GILBERT exchange distracted glances.*)

MARGARET. How good you are! (*Takes the book from him.*) Yes . . . that's it!

CLEMENT. We'll read it together.

MARGARET. No, Clement . . . no . . . I can't let you be so good! There . . . ! (*Throws the book into the fire.*) I don't want to hear any more of all that.

GILBERT (delighted). Oh, but . . . !

CLEMENT (*Goes toward the chimney*). Margaret . . . ! What are you doing?

MARGARET (*Stands in front of fire, throws her arms round CLEMENT*). Now will you believe that I love you?

GILBERT (*much relieved*). I think I am rather in the way . . . Good-by . . . good day, Baron . . . (*Aside.*) To think that I should have to miss a climax like that . . . ! [Exit.]