Storm: Immensee

Storm's most famous early Novelle, Immensee, opens with a brief description of an elderly man returning home from a walk; he sits in his room as darkness falls (he has told his servant Brigitte not to bring the lamp in yet) until a shaft of moonlight catches a little portrait in a black frame. The old man says 'Elisabeth' softly, and then recalls his childhood. We see two children, Reinhard (10) and the somewhat younger Elisabeth (5) playing together; they live near each other and seem to share the fact of a dead or absent father. The boy is adventurous, the girl more timid. Reinhard, who reads a lot and tells Elisabeth stories, plans adventures in faraway countries, but Elisabeth can only envisage travelling if her mother comes too. We meet the pair again seven years later, on the day before Reinhard has to go off to University in another town; meanwhile they have regularly played together, and Reinhard has written poems for Elisabeth as well as writing down some of the stories he used to tell her. On this last day, in June, there is a picnic for all the local young people, who are sent off by the old folk to hunt for strawberries to add to their lunch. Reinhard and Elisabeth are unsuccessful in finding any, but the time with Elisabeth has kindled new feelings in the young poet which he renders in verse:

Upon this sloping hillside
The wind has vanished quite;
Beneath the hanging branches
There sits the child in white.

She sits 'twixt thyme and elder
And all the perfumes there,
And blue-black flies go humming
And flashing through the air.

The forest stands so silent,
So knowing is her gaze;
Around her chestnut tresses
The sunlight pours its rays.

Far off, a cuckoo's laughter;
Her eyes have golden sheen;
It flashed across my senses:
Here sits the forest's queen.

Thus she was not only his protegée, she embodied everything that was wonderful and lovely in his burgeoning life.

We then abruptly cut to a scene in the University town:

Christmas Eve came round. It was still afternoon when Reinhard was already sitting with other students round the oak table at the tavern in the Town Hall cellars. The lamps on the wall had been lit, for twilight already reigned down here; but as yet there was only a handful of customers and the waiters were leaning idly against the buttresses. In one corner of the vaulted room sat a fiddler and a girl with a zither, both with finely-etched gypsy features. Their instruments were resting on their laps and they seemed to be staring vacantly into space.

At the students' table a champagne cork popped. 'Have a drink, my bohemian darling', cried a young man of aristocratic appearance, handing a full glass to the girl.

'I don't want one', she replied, without shifting her position.

'Well, sing to us then', cried the young squire, lobbing a silver coin into her lap. The girl combed her fingers slowly through her black hair, while the fiddler whispered something in her ear, but she tossed her head back and propped her chin on her zither. 'I'm not playing for him', she said.

Reinhard jumped up, glass in hand, and faced her.

'What do you want?' she asked truculently.

'To see your eyes.'

'What business are they of yours?'

Reinhard looked down at her, his own eyes sparkling. 'They are faithless eyes, that I know well enough!' She cupped her cheek on her palm and gave him a searching look. Reinhard raised his glass to his lips. 'To your lovely sinful eyes!' he said, and took a drink.

She gave a laugh and threw back her head. 'Give it to me', she said. Then, fixing her black eyes on his, she slowly drained the glass. She picked up her three-stringed zither and sang in a deep, passionate voice:

All of my beauty is
But for today;
Ah, come tomorrow
It must pass away.

Just for this fleeting hour
You are my own;
Death, when it finds me, will
Will find me alone.

While the fiddler was striking up his postlude in a quicker tempo, a new arrival joined the group.

‘I went to look for you, Reinhard’, he said, ‘but you’d already left. Your Christmas presents have arrived.’

“Christmas presents?’ said Reinhard. ‘I’m too old to get those any more.’

‘Rubbish! Your whole room was smelling of Christmas trees and gingerbread.’

Reinhard put down his glass and reached out for his cap.

‘Where are you going?’ the girl asked.

‘I’ll be coming back.’

She frowned. ‘Stay here!’ she called out softly, and gave him a free-and-easy look.

Reinhard hesitated. ‘I can’t’, he said.

She pushed him away with the point of her foot. ‘Off you go then!’ she said. ‘You’re no good; none of you lot is any good.’ And as she turned away from him, Reinhard began slowly climbing the stairs that led out of the cellar.

Outside on the street darkness had begun to fall. He felt the chill winter air cooling his hot forehead. Here and there the bright lights of an illuminated Christmas tree were shining from a window, and now and again from inside the houses came the sounds of little pipes and tin trumpets intermingled with the jubilant voices of children. Beggar children were going the rounds of the houses in groups, or climbing up on the balustrades to try and glimpse through the windows the wonderful things that were denied them. Occasionally a door would be flung open and scolding voices would drive a swarm of these little callers away from the brightness of the houses and into the dark street outside. At other houses the waits were singing old carols in the entrance ways, with the clear voices of girls sounding amongst them.
But Reinhard did not hear them, he walked quickly past all these things, crossing one street after another. When he reached his lodgings, it was almost completely dark. He stumbled up the staircase and went into his room. He was greeted by a sweet smell which had a homely feel to it, being redolent of the living-room back home when his mother had made it ready for Christmas. With trembling fingers he lit the lamp; there was a huge parcel on the table, and when he opened it those brown cakes that are so much a part of Christmas tumbled out. Some had his initials marked out in sugar-icing on them; only Elisabeth could have done that. Then a little packet with delicately embroidered linen came to light, handkerchiefs and cuffs, and underneath them letters from his mother and from Elisabeth. Reinhard opened the latter first. Elisabeth wrote:

‘The pretty sugar initials will tell you who helped to make the gingerbread; the same person sewed the cuffs for you. We are going to spend Christmas Eve very quietly here. Nowadays Mother always puts the spinning-wheel away in the corner by half-past nine; it has been so lonely this winter without you here. And another thing: last Sunday the linnet died, the one you gave me as a present. I shed many tears for it, but I had looked after him properly. He always used to sing in the afternoons, when the sun shone on his cage; you remember how Mother would often hang a cloth over him to silence him when he started piping at the top of his voice. So now it is much quieter in our room, except that your friend Erich sometimes comes to visit us. You once said that he looked just like his brown overcoat.

I am always reminded of that when he comes in through the door, and it's really awfully funny; but don't say anything to my mother about it, she's inclined to be cross about such things. Just imagine what I'm going to give your mother for Christmas! - You can't guess? Myself! Erich is doing a charcoal drawing of me, I've already had to sit for him three times, a whole hour each time. I found it truly hateful that a strange person should get to know my face so intimately. I didn't want to, but Mother insisted, she said that kind Frau Werner would be so terribly pleased.

But you haven't kept your promise, Reinhard, you haven't sent me any fairy-stories. I've often complained to your mother about you, but she just keeps saying you're too busy to find time for such childish things. But I don't believe her, I think there's something else.'

Then Reinhard read his mother's letter too, and once he had finished reading them both and slowly folded them up and put them away, he experienced uncontrollable pangs of homesickness. He paced up and down his room for a while, talking softly and then half-aloud to himself:

When he had almost gone astray
And knew not where to roam,
A child was standing by the way
And pointed him back home.

He went to his desk, took some money out and went down to the street again. In the meantime it had grown quieter out there, the candles on the Christmas trees had burned down, and there were no more groups of carolling children about. The wind was sweeping through empty streets, old and young alike were sitting at home with their families; the second part of Christmas Eve had begun.

As Reinhard came towards the Town Hall, he heard the sound of the fiddle and the singing of the girl with the zither coming up from the tavern in the cellar. Then the bell on the door to the cellar rang out, and a dark figure stumbled uncertainly up the broad, poorly lit staircase. Reinhard stepped back into the shadows cast by the houses, and then hastily walked past. Some time later he came to the lighted window of a jeweller's shop, and after going in and purchasing a small cross of red coral, he went back the same way he had come.

Not far from his lodgings he noticed a little girl wrapped in pathetic rags standing by a high front door, vainly trying to open it. 'Can I help you?' he said. The child made no reply, but let go of the heavy door-latch. Reinhard had already opened the door. 'No', he said, 'they might chase you away. Come with me, and I'll give you Christmas cakes.' Then he closed the door again and took the little girl by the hand; without saying a word, she accompanied him back to his lodgings.

He had left his lamp burning. 'Here are some cakes for you', he said, and tipped half of his treasure into her skirt, while keeping back all those with sugar letters on. 'Now go back and give some of them to your mother.' The child looked up at him timidly; she seemed unused to such kindness and was unable to find anything to say in reply. Reinhard opened the door of his room and held the lamp to light the way for her. Carrying her cakes, the child flew down the steps and out of the house like a bird.

Reinhard poked up the fire in his stove and put his dusty inkwell on the table; then he sat down and wrote letters to his mother and to Elisabeth, all through the night. The remainder of the Christmas cakes lay beside him untouched, but he buttoned on the cuffs Elisabeth had made for him: they went very oddly with his white petersham coat. He was still sitting there when the first rays of the winter sun struck the frozen window panes and showed him his pale, serious face reflected in the mirror opposite.

At Home

When Easter came round, Reinhard travelled back home. On the morning after his arrival he went round to Elisabeth's. 'How you've grown up!' he said, as the beautiful slender girl came towards him with a smile. She blushed, but made no reply, and gently sought to withdraw the hand he had taken in his own as he greeted her. He looked at her uncertainly; that was something she had never done before. It felt as though something unfamiliar had come between them. And that was how matters remained, even after he had been back home for some time, even though, day after day, he came round to call on her. Whenever they were sitting together on their own there were pauses in the conversation that he found embarrassing and nervously tried to bridge over. In order to have some shared activity, he began to teach Elisabeth botany, a subject with which he had eagerly occupied himself during the first months of his time at University. Elisabeth, who was accustomed to following his lead in everything and moreover was an apt pupil, happily agreed to this. So they made excursions to the open fields or to the heath several times a week, and after returning home at lunchtime with their green vasculum full of plants and flowers, Reinhard would appear again a few hours later to share their joint discoveries with Elisabeth.

It was with this purpose that he came into her house one afternoon, to find Elisabeth standing by the window, putting fresh chickweed into a gilded birdcage he had never seen there before. In the cage was a canary that fluttered its wings and screeched as it pecked at Elisabeth's finger. It stood in the place where formerly Reinhard's bird had been. 'Has my poor linnet been transformed after his death into a golden bird?' he asked cheerfully.

'That's not the kind of thing linnets do', said Elisabeth's mother. She was sitting in the arm-chair at her spinning-wheel. 'Your friend Erich had it sent from his estate for Elisabeth this very afternoon.'

'From what estate?'

'You mean you haven't heard?'

'Heard what?'

'That Erich took over his father's second estate a month ago, the estate at Immensee?'

'But you never said a word to me about that!'

'Well now, you never once asked after your friend, did you? He's such a kind and sensible young man.'

She left the room to prepare coffee. Elisabeth had her back turned to Reinhard and was still busily constructing her little arbour. 'Just a little while longer, if you don't mind', she said, 'I'll be finished directly.'

Since Reinhard, contrary to his usual custom, made no reply, she turned round. There was a sudden look of grief in his eyes which she had never seen there before. Moving close to him, she asked: 'What's the matter, Reinhard?'

'The matter?' he said absently, letting his eyes rest dreamily in hers.

'You look so sad.'

'Elisabeth', he said, 'I can't bear that yellow bird.'

She looked at him in astonishment; she did not know what he meant. 'You're so strange', she said.

He grasped both her hands; calmly she let him hold them. Soon her mother came back into the room.

After they had drunk coffee her mother settled down at her spinning-wheel. Reinhard went into the next room to sort out their plants. Filaments were counted, leaves and blossoms were carefully spread out, and two samples of each kind were carefully placed to dry between the pages of a large folio volume. The peace of a sunlit afternoon reigned, broken only by the humming of the spinning-wheel from the other room and from time to time by Reinhard's subdued voice calling out the classes and orders of the plants, or correcting Elisabeth's clumsy pronunciation of the Latin names.

'I don't seem to have the lily of the valley we found the other day', she said, once the whole treasure-trove had been identified and sorted.

Reinhard drew a small white vellum book from his pocket. 'Here is a lily for you', he said, taking out a half-dried stem.

When Elisabeth caught sight of the pages with writing on, she asked him: 'Have you been writing fairy-stories again?'

'These aren't fairy-stories', he replied, and handed her the book.

It was full of poems, mostly under a single page in length. Elisabeth turned over one page after another, seeming only to read the titles: 'When she was scolded by the schoolmaster', 'When they lost their way in the forest', 'To accompany the Easter fairy-story', 'When she wrote to me for the first time' – almost all of them had headings like this. Reinhard looked at her searchingly, and as she went on turning the leaves he saw a tender blush appear on her white cheeks and gradually spread all across her face. He would have liked to see her eyes, but Elisabeth did not look up, and finally she laid the book down in front of him without saying anything.

'Don't just give it back to me like that', he said.

She picked a brown spray out of the tin box. 'I'll put your favourite plant inside it', she said, and laid the book in his hands.

– At length the last day of his vacation came round, and the morning of his departure. After asking her mother's permission, Elisabeth was allowed to walk with her friend to the post-coach, which stopped a few streets away from her house. As they came out of her front door together, Reinhard offered her his arm, and walked along in silence beside the slender girl. The nearer they came to their goal, the more he felt that there was something he must convey to her before he took leave of her for such a long time: something on which the whole value and the whole charm of his future life depended, and yet he could not bring to mind the words that would break the ice. That worried him, and he walked more and more slowly.

'You'll be too late', she said. 'St Mary's has already chimed ten o'clock.'

But that did not make him quicken his step. At last he stammered out: 'Elisabeth, you won't see me for two whole years - will you be just as fond of me when I come back again as you are now?'

She nodded and looked at him amiably. 'I stood up for you, too', she said after a pause.

'Stood up for me? Against whom?'

'My mother. We had a long talk about you yesterday evening after you had gone. Mother said you weren't so good a person as you were before.'

Reinhard said nothing for a moment. Then he took her hand in his, looked gravely into her innocent eyes and said: 'I'm just as good as I always was, you must believe that! Do you believe that, Elisabeth?'

'Yes', she said. He let go of her hand and walked quickly down the last street. The nearer the time of parting came, the more cheerful his expression became; now he was walking almost too quickly for her.

'What is it, Reinhard?' she asked.

'I've got a secret, a special one!' he said, looking at her with eyes aglow. 'When I'm back again in two years, I'll let you know what it is.'

Meanwhile they had reached the coach; Reinhard was just in time. He took her hand once more. 'Farewell', he said, 'farewell, Elisabeth. Don't forget.'

She shook her head, 'Farewell', she said. Reinhard climbed aboard and the horses pulled away.

As the coach rumbled round the street corner, he saw her dear figure one last time, walking slowly back the way they had come.

A Letter

Almost two years later, Reinhard was sitting by his lamp, surrounded by books and papers, waiting for the arrival of a fellow-student with whom he was going to do some work. He heard someone coming up the stairs. 'Come in!' It was his landlady. 'A letter for you, Herr Werner.' Then she went out again.

Since his visit home Reinhard had not written to Elisabeth, nor had he received a letter from her. This was not from her either, it was in his mother's hand. He opened it and began reading, and soon came to the following passage:

'At your age, my child, almost every year has its own distinctive features, for youth is always ready to enlarge its horizons. Here too things have changed, and in ways that I think will pain you at first, if I understood you aright before. Yesterday Erich finally obtained Elisabeth's consent, having twice had his proposal turned down in the last quarter of a year. She could not make up her mind to this step, but now at last she has taken it; she's so terribly young, too. The wedding is to take place soon and then they will be leaving here, together with Elisabeth's mother.'

Immensee

Several more years had elapsed. One warm spring afternoon a young man with a strong, sunburned face came striding down the slope of a shaded forest path. His grave grey eyes kept looking out keenly into the distance as though he were expecting some change in the monotonous progress of the path, but none came. At last a cart came slowly up the slope towards him. 'Hey there', shouted the walker to the farmer trudging along beside the cart, 'is this the right way for Immensee?'

'Keep straight on', replied the man, tugging at his round hat.

'Is it far now?'

'You're all but there, sir, scarce half a pipeful of tobacco, and you're at the lake; the big house lies right beside it.'

The farmer moved on, and the walker strode out more briskly between the trees. A quarter of an hour later the shade on his left-hand side came to an abrupt end; he was walking along the brow of a hill so steep that the crowns of hundred year-old oak-trees barely reached up to the path. Over the tops of them a broad and sunlit landscape presented itself to the view. Down below was the lake, calm, dark blue in colour, and almost entirely surrounded by sunny green woodland. Through a single gap in the woods a long vista opened up, occluded only by blue mountains in the far distance. Opposite the gap, nestling in the green foliage of

the woods, was what appeared to be a patch of snow: it was fruit trees in blossom, among which, standing on the raised bank of the lake, was the white manor house with its red-tiled roof. A stork flew up from one of the chimneys and circled slowly over the water. 'Immensee!' cried the walker. He seemed to feel he had already reached his goal, for he stood there motionless, looking over the treetops below him to the farther shore of the lake, where the mirror image of the house was floating, gently rocked by the water. Then, all at once, he continued his walk.

The path went almost directly down the steep hillside, so that the trees further down began to provide shade again, at the same time cutting off the view of the lake, which only every so often shimmered through gaps in the branches. After a while the path went gently uphill again, and now the woods on either side came to an end. Instead there were vines in full leaf running alongside the path, which was immediately bordered by blossoming fruit-trees full of the humming activity of bees. A well-built man in a brown overcoat came to meet the walker. When he was almost up to him, he waved his cap in the air and called out in ringing tones: 'Welcome, brother Reinhard, welcome! Welcome to the Immensee estate!'

'Greetings to you, Erich, and my thanks for the welcome', replied the other.

With that they were standing together and shaking hands. 'But is it really you?' asked Erich, peering into the grave face of his old schoolmate.

'Of course it's me, Erich, and you're the same too - except that you look almost more cheerful than you always did in the old days.'

A happy smile spread over Erich's simple features as Reinhard spoke these words, and made his face appear even merrier. "Ah, but since then, brother Reinhard', he said, shaking his friend by the hand once again, 'as well you know, I've carried off first prize in the lottery.' Then he rubbed his hands together and exclaimed brightly: 'What a surprise it'll be for her! You're one person she's not expecting, not in a thousand years!'

'A surprise?' asked Reinhard. 'How do you mean? For whom?'

'For Elisabeth.'

'For Elisabeth! You mean you have said nothing to her about my visit?'

'Not a word, brother Reinhard, she's not expecting you, neither is her mother. I wrote to you in total secret, so that the pleasure of seeing you again would be all the greater. You know I was always fond of my secret little plans.'

Reinhard grew pensive, and seemed to be breathing more and more heavily the nearer they came to the house. The vineyards on the left came to an end, and gave way to an extensive kitchen garden which stretched down almost to the shore of the lake. The stork had meanwhile flown down to the ground and was strutting solemnly about between the vegetable beds. 'Hey there, longshanks!' Erich shouted, and clapped his hands. 'Trying to steal my pea-sticks again, you Egyptian robber you!' The bird rose slowly up into the sky and flew over to the roof of a new building that stood at the end of the kitchen garden, with walls covered in espaliered peach and apricot trees. 'That's the distillery', Erich said. 'I only put it

up two years ago. The farm buildings were all renovated by my late father, the house itself was put up by my grandfather. So you see we keep expanding, little by little.'

As he spoke, they reached a broad open space bounded on both sides by rustic farm buildings, and at the back by the manor house, along the two wings of which was a high garden wall; behind this wall taxus hedges could be glimpsed, and at various points philadelphus trees drooped their blossoming boughs down into the courtyard. Men with faces flushed from the sun and hard work were crossing the courtyard, passing the time of day with Erich and Reinhard, while Erich called out to this one and that with a commission or a question about the day's work. After that they came to the house where a cool and lofty hallway received them; at the end of it they turned left into a somewhat darker passage. Here Erich opened a door, and they came into a large garden room where green twilight reigned on both sides due to the dense mass of leaves covering the windows to left and right. In between, however, were two high folding doors which stood wide open, allowing the full radiance of the spring sunlight to shine in and offering the prospect of a garden with circular flowerbeds and tall, sheer walls of foliage. It was divided down the middle by a broad, straight alley along which there was a view of the lake and the woods on the further shore. As the two friends entered the room, the scent of blossom was wafted towards them on the breeze.

On the terrace beyond the door to the garden was seated the youthful figure of a woman in white. She stood up and approached the two men, but then stopped halfway as though rooted to the spot and stared fixedly at the stranger. With a smile he put out his hand to her. 'Reinhard!' she cried. 'Reinhard! Good heavens, it's you! It's such a long time since we saw one another.'

'A long time', he said, and could say nothing further, for as soon as he heard her voice he felt a sharp stab of pain in his heart. When he raised his eyes to look at her, she was standing facing him, the same slight and graceful figure he had bidden farewell to years before, in his native town.

Erich, his face beaming with pleasure, had hung back by the door. 'Well, Elisabeth', he said, 'what about that, eh? You weren't expecting him, were you, not in a thousand years!'

Elisabeth threw him a glance of sisterly affection. 'You're so good to me, Erich', she said.

He took her slim hand in his own and caressed it. 'And now that we have him', he said, 'we shan't let him go again in a hurry. He's been in strange parts for so long that we'll have to accustom him to our ways again. Just see how foreign and distinguished-looking he has turned out!'

Shyly Elisabeth looked up for a moment into Reinhard's face. 'It's only because we haven't been together for such a long time', he said.

At that moment Elisabeth's mother came into the room with a small key-basket over her arm. 'Herr Werner!' she said when she caught sight of Reinhard, 'well now, a visitor as unexpected as he is welcome.' And now the conversation took its regular course, with questions and answers. The women settled down to their work, and while Reinhard partook of the refreshments that had been prepared for him, Erich lighted his solid Meerschaum pipe and sat beside him puffing away and discoursing on this and that.

The next day Erich insisted on taking Reinhard out with him to visit the fields, the vineyards, the hopyards and the distillery. Everything was in splendid shape; all the people working in the fields and at the distillery vats looked healthy and contented. At lunchtime the family gathered in the garden room, and after that, depending on how much free time his hosts could spare, Reinhard would spend the day together with them. But the hours before dinner, like the first hours of the morning, Reinhard spent alone, working in his room. For years he had been collecting the rhymes and songs that were still circulating among ordinary folk, wherever he could come across them, and now he was broaching the task of ordering his trove and, where possible, extending it by noting down new examples from the countryside round about. Elisabeth was invariably gentle and friendly; Erich's constant solicitude for her was something she accepted with almost humble gratitude, and from time to time Reinhard found himself reflecting that the jolly child of yesteryear had presaged a rather less placid woman.

From the second day on he took a walk along the shore of the lake every evening. The path ran close below the garden, at the end of which, on a projecting bastion, stood a bench shaded by tall birches. Elisabeth's mother had christened it the evening bench because it was west-facing and was regularly used at that time of day to catch the setting sun. One evening, coming back from his walk along this path, Reinhard was caught in the rain. He found shelter under a lime tree by the lakeside, but soon the heavy raindrops began to come through the leaves. Once he was soaked through, he gave up sheltering and trudged slowly homewards. It was almost dark, and the rain was getting heavier. As he came close to the evening bench, he thought he could make out the white figure of a woman between the glistening birch trees. She was standing motionless and seemed – or so it looked to him as he approached – to be turned in his direction, as though she were waiting for someone. He fancied it was Elisabeth. But as he quickened his pace in order to join her and accompany her back to the house through the garden, she turned slowly away and disappeared down one of the side-paths. He could make no sense of this, and became almost angry at Elisabeth; yet at the same time he began to doubt whether it really had been her. He was reluctant to ask her about it, indeed on his return to the house he deliberately did not go to the garden room, in order to avoid the possibility of seeing Elisabeth making her way in through the door from the garden.

'Twas what my mother did decree

A few days later, when evening was drawing in, the family had gathered in the garden room as they usually did around this time. The doors were open; the sun had already sunk behind the woods on the far side of the lake.

Reinhard was asked to tell them about some folk songs which had been sent to him that afternoon; they had come from a friend of his who lived deep in the countryside. He went up to his room and came back shortly after with a roll of papers which appeared to be composed of single sheets in neat handwriting.

They all sat down at the table, Elisabeth beside Reinhard. 'We'll take them at random', he said. 'I haven't looked through them myself yet.'

Elisabeth unrolled the sheets. 'They have the tunes with them as well', she said. 'You'll have to sing them to us, Reinhard.'

Reinhard began by reading some Alpine ditties from the Tirol, from time to time, in an undertone, filling in the jolly tunes that went with them. A general mood of merriment spread through the little company. 'But who composed these fine songs?' Elisabeth asked.

'Oh, you can work that out just by listening to them', replied Erich. 'Tailors' apprentices and barbers and giddy folk of that sort.'

Reinhard said: 'They're not really composed at all. They grow, they fall from the sky, or they float hither and thither across the countryside like gossamer, and they're sung in a thousand different places all at the same time. What we rediscover in these songs are our most intimate actions and sufferings, it's as though we had all had a hand in creating them.'

He picked up another sheet. "I stood atop the mountains...".

'I know that one!' Elisabeth cried. 'You strike up the tune, Reinhard, and I'll join in.' And so together, with Elisabeth's somewhat muted alto accompanying Reinhard's bass, they sang the tune which is so enigmatic that it is hard to believe it was conceived by humans at all.

Meanwhile Elisabeth's mother was sitting working away at her embroidery. Erich folded his hands and listened solemnly. When they had finished singing, Reinhard put the manuscript sheet aside without saying anything. From the shore of the lake the tinkling of cowbells came ringing up to them through the hush of evening; instinctively they listened to the sound, and then they heard a clear treble voice singing:

I stood atop the mountains
And looked into the vale.

Reinhard smiled. 'D'you hear that? You see how these songs are handed on from one person to the next.'

'That's one which is often sung around here', said Elisabeth.

'Yes', put in Erich. 'That's Kaspar the cowherd, he's rounding up the oxen.'

They listened for a while longer, until the sound of the bells had died away behind the farm buildings further up the slope. 'Melodies like that are archetypal', said Reinhard. 'They slumber in the depths of forests. Goodness knows who first brought them to the light of day.'

He pulled out a fresh sheet.

It was darker in the room now; the red afterglow of sunset lay like spindrift on the woods beyond the lake. Reinhard unrolled the sheet, and Elisabeth laid a hand upon it from her side. Then Reinhard read aloud:

T'was what my mother did decree:
The other man should marry me;
What had been mine before
I should embrace no more.
My heart would not agree.

Oh, mother, I'm accusing you,
For see, you have not served me true.
What once was free from blame
Would now be sin and shame.
Alas! What can I do?

Now grief has swept aside
My former joy and pride.
Ah, were those bonds not made!
Could I but be a beggar-maid
And wander far and wide!

As he read, Reinhard could sense the paper trembling imperceptibly; when he had finished, Elisabeth softly pushed her chair back and without saying anything went out into the garden. Her mother followed her with her eyes. Erich made as if to go after her, but her mother said: 'There's something Elisabeth has to do outside.' And so he did nothing.

Outside meanwhile the twilight was deepening over the garden and the lake, moths were whirring past the open doors, and through them the scent of flowers and plants floated in more and more intensely. From the lake came the croaking of frogs, somewhere beneath the windows a nightingale began to sing, and then another replied from further off in the garden; the moon peered over the trees. Reinhard sat for a while staring at the place where Elisabeth's delicate figure had disappeared between the avenues of trees; then he rolled up his manuscripts, nodded to the others and made his way through the house and down to the lake.

The trees stood silently, throwing their deep shadows far out over the water; the middle of the lake was bathed in the uncertain twilight of the moon. From time to time a gentle rustle ran through the trees, but there was no breeze, it was only the breathing of the summer night. Reinhard continued along the shore of the lake. A stone's throw from the edge he could make out a white water-lily. All at once he felt an urge to see it from closer up; he threw off his clothes and waded in.

The water was shallow; sharp plants and stones cut at his feet, and he could not yet find water deep enough to start swimming in. Then in an instant the bottom fell away, the water eddied over his head, and he took a while to come up to the surface again. He started swimming, going round in a circle until he could make out the place where he had walked into the lake. Then he saw the lily again, lying solitary between its large shining leaves. Slowly he made his way out to it, lifting his arms occasionally so that the drops of water as they fell down sparkled in the moonlight. But it seemed that the distance between him and the lily remained constant, even though when he turned to look back at the shore, it was shrouded in an increasingly nebulous haze. But he did not abandon his enterprise, and kept on swimming vigorously in the same direction. At last he came close enough to the flower to make out its individual silvery leaves; but at the same moment he felt as though he had

become trapped in a net: the smooth stems reaching up from the bottom wrapped themselves round his naked limbs. The unfamiliar water lay deep and black around him, behind him he heard a fish rising. He was seized with sudden apprehension in this alien element, which made him tear apart the tangle of stems in a violent movement and swim to the shore with breathless haste. When he looked back to the lake from there, the lily was lying as before, remote and lonely above the dark depths. He dressed and walked slowly back to the house. As he came into the room from the garden, he found Erich and his mother-in-law busy preparing for the short business trip they were to make the following day.

'What have you been up to so late at night?' Elisabeth's mother accosted him.

'I?' he replied. 'Oh, I wanted to pay the water-lily a visit, but it came to nothing.'

'There you go again, talking in riddles', said Erich. 'How on earth can you have had any business with a water-lily?'

'I knew her once', said Reinhard, 'but that was a long time ago now.'

Elisabeth

The following afternoon Reinhard and Elisabeth rambled along the further side of the lake, walking now through woodland, now along the high promontory above the water. Erich had commissioned Elisabeth, for the time that he and her mother were absent, to acquaint Reinhard with the most attractive views in the neighbourhood, especially the aspect of the manor house itself, seen from the further shore. Now they were making the rounds of these viewpoints. When after a time Elisabeth grew tired and sat down in the shade of overhanging branches, Reinhard stood facing her, his back against a tree-trunk. At that moment he heard a cuckoo calling from deep in the woods, and he suddenly had the feeling that he had experienced all this before. He looked at her with a strange smile. 'Shall we look for strawberries?' he asked.

'It's not the season for them', she said.

'But it will be soon.'

Elisabeth shook her head without replying; then she got to her feet and the two of them continued their walk. As she walked along beside him, he kept turning to look at her, for she had such a beautiful light gait, as though she were buoyed up by her clothes. Many a time, without realising it, he would lag a pace behind her, so that he could see all of her clearly at once. After a time they came to an open space overgrown with heather, which offered a view far across country. Reinhard bent down to pick some of the plants growing there. When he looked up again, there was an expression of intense suffering on his face. 'Do you recognise this plant?' he asked.

She threw him a questioning glance. 'It's erica. I've often picked it in the woods.'

'I have an old book at home', he said. 'Once upon a time I used to write all sorts of poems and rhymes in it, but I haven't done that now in a long while. Between the leaves of the book there is a sprig of erica, too, but only a dried and faded one. Do you know who gave it to me?'

She nodded dumbly, then lowered her eyes and only stared at the plant he was holding in his hand. They stood like this for a long time. When she looked up at him again, he could see that her eyes were full of tears.

'Elisabeth', he said, 'somewhere over those hills in the blue distance lies the world of our youth. What became of it?'

They exchanged no further words, and went down to the lake together in silence. The air was sultry, and dark clouds were blowing up from the west. 'There's a storm coming', said Elisabeth, quickening her step. Reinhard nodded without replying and they walked briskly along the shore to the place where they had left their boat.

As they crossed the lake, Elisabeth let her hand rest on the side of the boat. Reinhard looked up at her from the oars, but she was gazing past him into the distance, so his glance fell on her hand, and stayed there. The pale hand betrayed what her face had declined to reveal to him. He saw there the delicate trace of secret sorrow which so readily takes possession of beautiful female hands, such hands as every night lie upon sick hearts. When Elisabeth felt his gaze fixed upon her hand, she slowly let it slip over the side of the boat into the water.

On their return to the manor they encountered a scissors-grinder with his cart in front of the house. The man with long greasy black locks was working busily away at his wheel and humming a gipsy melody through his teeth, while a dog, harnessed to the cart, lay panting beside it. In the hallway, dressed in rags, was a girl with beautiful but distorted features, who held out her hand to beg from Elisabeth.

Reinhard put his hand in his pocket, but Elisabeth reacted more immediately and hastily emptied the entire contents of her purse into the beggar's open hand. Then she turned quickly away and Reinhard heard her going up the stairs, sobbing.

He was about to detain her, but he thought better of it and paused on the stairs. The beggar was standing motionless in the same position in the hallway, the charity she had received still in her hand. 'Is there something more you want?' Reinhard asked.

She started. 'There's nothing more I want', she said. Then, throwing her head back to look at him over her shoulder, staring at him with her mad eyes, she went slowly to the door. He called out a name, but she no longer heard it; with bowed head and arms folded over her breast she walked away across the courtyard.

Death,when it finds me,
Will find me alone.

An old song rang in his ears, he felt as though the breath had been knocked out of him; a moment or two passed and then he turned and went up to his room.

He sat down to study, but his mind was bare of thoughts. After spending an hour vainly trying to work, he went down to the sitting-room, but there was no one there; a green twilight filled the room. There was a red ribbon lying on Elisabeth's sewing-table, a ribbon she had worn round her neck that afternoon. He picked it up, but it caused him pain, and he put it down again. He could find no peace of mind, he went down to the lake again and untied the boat, he rowed across to the other side and retraced all the paths he had trodden only a short while before with Elisabeth. By the time he reached the house again, it was dark. In the courtyard he met the coachman taking his horses out to grass; the travellers had just returned. As Reinhard went into the hall he could hear Erich pacing up and down in the garden room. He did not go to join him; he paused for a moment and then quietly climbed the stairs to his room. Here he installed himself in the armchair by the window, pretending to himself that he wanted to listen to the nightingale that was singing in the yew hedge below; but all he could hear was the pounding of his own heart. Downstairs in the house everything gradually grew quiet, the night hours slipped away, he was unaware of them. For hours he sat in the same position. At length he stood up and lay down on the sill at the open window. Dew was dripping between the leaves, the nightingale had ceased singing. Little by little the deep blue of the night sky was displaced by a pale yellow shimmer coming from the east; a fresh breeze sprang up and ran across Reinhard's hot forehead; the first lark rose jubilantly into the heavens. Reinhard turned round abruptly and went to his desk; he felt around for a pencil and when he had found one he sat down and wrote a few lines on a blank sheet of paper. When he had finished, he picked up his hat and walking-stick; leaving the piece of paper behind he opened the door carefully and went downstairs into the hall. The half-light of early morning still lingered in every corner; the large family cat stretched itself out on the rush mat and arched its back against the hand which he absently reached out to it. Outside in the garden the sparrows were already twittering away in the branches, announcing to everyone that the night was over. Then he heard a door upstairs opening, he heard foootsteps coming down the stairs, and when he looked up Elisabeth was standing in front of him. She laid a hand on his arm, her lips moved, but he could not make out any words. Finally she said: 'You will not be coming back again. I know, don't pretend to me, you'll never come back again.'

'Never', he said. Her hand dropped and she said no more. He walked across the hallway towards the door, then he turned back once again. She was still standing in the same place, motionless, looking at him with lifeless eyes. He took a step towards her, and stretched out his arms to her. Then abruptly he turned and walked through the door. Outside the world was bathed in the fresh light of morning, the pearls of dew hanging in the cobwebs sparkled in the first rays of the sun. He did not look over his shoulder, he walked briskly onwards; the tranquil farmstead dropped further and further away behind him and the big wide world rose up before him.

The Old Man

The moon was no longer shining in at the window-panes, it had grown dark. But the old man was still sitting in his armchair, his hands folded, staring in front of him into the empty spaces of his room. Gradually the darkness of the twilight surrounding him stretched out in his mind's eye to fashion a broad dark lake; one stretch of black water took its place

behind another, each one deeper and further off than the previous one, and on the final lake, so far off that the old man's eye could scarcely reach to it, there floated, solitary between broad leaves, a white water-lily.

The door of his room opened, and a bright shaft of light fell into the room. 'I am glad you have come, Brigitte', said the old man. 'Just put the lamp on the table.'

Then he drew his chair up to the desk, picked up one of the open books and immersed himself in the studies to which he had once devoted the vigour of his youth.