

STEFAN ZWEIG. FANTASTIC NIGHT

Original:
Phantastische Nacht



1922

Translated from the German by Anthea Bell

He is distinguished, rich, a member of fashionable society-utterlybored. But, over the course of one fantastic night, a young Baron becomes a thief, unashamed, and awakes to life for the first time.

Ebook: <http://originalbook.ru>

Fantastic night by Stefan Zweig

ASEALED PACKET containing the following pages was found in the desk of Baron Friedrich Michael von R ... after he fell at the battle of Rawaruska in the autumn of 1914, fighting with a regiment of dragoons as a lieutenant in the Austrian reserve. His family, assuming from the title and a fleeting glance at the contents that this was merely a literary work by their relative, gave it to me

to assess and entrusted me with its publication. Myself, I do not by any means regard these papers as fiction; instead, I believe them to be a record of the dead man's own experience, faithful in every detail, and I therefore publish his psychological self-revelation without any alteration or addition, suppressing only his surname.

This morning I suddenly conceived the notion of writing, for my own benefit, an account of my experiences on that fantastic night, in order to survey the entire incident in its natural order of occurrence. And ever since that abrupt moment of decision I have felt an inexplicable compulsion to set my adventure down in words, although I doubt whether I can describe its strange nature at all adequately. I have not a trace of what people call artistic talent, nor any literary experience, and apart from a few rather light-hearted squibs for the Theresianum I have never tried to write anything. I don't even know, for instance, if there is some special technique to be learnt for arranging the sequence of outward events and their simultaneous inner reflection in order, and I wonder whether I am capable of always finding the right word for a certain meaning and the right meaning for a certain word, so as to achieve the equilibrium which I have always subconsciously felt in reading the work of every true storyteller. But I write these lines solely for my own satisfaction, and they are certainly not intended to make something that I can hardly explain even to myself intelligible to others. They are merely an attempt to confront an incident which constantly occupies my mind, keeping it in a state of painfully active fermentation, and to draw a line under it at last: to set it all down, place it before me, and cover it from every angle.

I have not told any of my friends about the incident, first because I felt that I could not make them understand its essential aspects, and then out of a certain sense of shame at having been so shattered and agitated by something that happened quite by chance. For the whole thing is really just a small episode. But even as I write this, I begin to realise how difficult it is for an amateur to choose words of the right significance when he is writing, and what ambiguity, what possibilities of misunderstanding can attach to the simplest of terms. For if I describe the episode as small, of course I mean it only as relatively small, by comparison with those mighty dramatic events that sweep whole nations and human destinies along with them, and then again I mean it as small in terms of time, since the whole sequence of events occupied no more than a bare six hours. To me, however, that experience—which in the general sense was minor, insignificant, unimportant—meant so extraordinarily much

that even today, four months after that fantastic night, I still burn with the memory of it, and must exert all my intellectual powers to keep it to myself. Daily, hourly, I go over all the details again, for in a way it has become the pivot on which my whole existence turns; everything I do and say is unconsciously determined by it, my thoughts are solely concerned with going over and over its sudden intrusion into my life, and thereby confirming that it really did happen to me. And now I suddenly know, too, what I certainly had not yet guessed ten minutes ago when I picked up my pen: that I am recording my experience only in order to have it securely and, so to speak, objectively fixed before me, to enjoy it again in my emotions while at the same time understanding it intellectually. It was quite wrong, quite untrue when I said just now that I wanted to draw a line under it by writing it down; on the contrary, I want to make what I lived through all too quickly even more alive, to have it warm and breathing beside me, so that I can clasp it to me again and again. Oh, I am not afraid of forgetting so much as a second of that sultry afternoon, that fantastic night, I need no markers or milestones to help me trace the path I took in those hours step by step in memory: like a sleepwalker I find myself back under its spell at any time, in the middle of the day or the middle of the night, seeing every detail with that clarity of vision that only the heart and not the feeble memory knows. I could draw the outline of every single leaf in that green spring landscape on this paper, even now in autumn I feel the mild air, the soft and pollen-laden wafts of chestnut blossom. So if I am about to describe those hours again, it is done not for fear of forgetting them but for the joy of bringing them to life again. And if I now describe the changes that took place that night, all exactly as they occurred, then I must control myself for the sake of an orderly account, for whenever I begin to think of the details of my experience ecstasy wells up from my emotions, a kind of intoxication overcomes me, and I have to hold back the images of memory to keep them from tumbling over one another in wild confusion, colourful and frenzied. With passionate ardour, I still relive what I experienced on that day, the 7th of June, 1913, when I took a cab at noon ...

But once more I feel I must pause, for yet again, and with some alarm, I become aware of the double-edged ambiguity of a single word. Only now that, for the first time, I am to tell a story in its full context do I understand the difficulty of expressing the ever-changing aspect of all that lives in concentrated form. I have just written "I", and said that I took a cab at noon on the 7th of June, 1913. But the word itself is not really straightforward, for I am

by no means still the “I” of that time, that 7th of June, although only four months have passed since that day, although I live in the apartment of that former “I” and write at his desk, with his pen, and with his own hand. I am quite distinct from the man I was then, because of this experience of mine, I now see him now from the outside, looking coolly at a stranger, and I can describe him like a playmate, a comrade, a friend whom I know well and whose essential nature I also know, but I am not that man any longer. I could speak of him, blame or condemn him, without any sense that he was once a part of me.

The man I was then differed very little, either outwardly or inwardly, from most of his social class, which we usually describe here in Vienna, without any particular pride but as something to be taken entirely for granted, as ‘fashionable society’. I was entering my thirty-sixth year, my parents had died prematurely just before I came of age, leaving me a fortune which proved large enough to make it entirely superfluous for me to think thereafter of earning a living or pursuing a career. I was thus unexpectedly spared a decision which weighed on my mind a great deal at the time. For I had just finished my university studies and was facing the choice of a future profession. Thanks to our family connections and my own early inclination for a contemplative existence proceeding at a tranquil pace, I would probably have opted for the civil service, when this parental fortune came to me as sole heir, suddenly assuring me of an independence sufficient to satisfy extensive and even luxurious wishes without working. Ambition had never troubled me, so I decided to begin by watching life at my leisure for a few years, waiting until I finally felt tempted to find some circle of influence for myself. However, I never got beyond this watching and waiting, for as there was nothing in particular that I wanted, I could have anything within the narrow scope of my wishes: the mellow and sensuous city of Vienna, which excels like no other in bringing leisurely strolls, idle observation and the cultivation of elegance to a peak of positively artistic perfection, a purpose in life of itself, enabled me to forget entirely my intention of taking up some real activity. I had all the satisfactions an elegant, noble, well-to-do, good-looking young man without ambition could desire: the harmless excitement of gambling, hunting, the regular refreshment of travels and excursions, and soon I began cultivating this peaceful way of life more and more elaborately, with expertise and artistic inclination. I collected rare glasses, not so much from a true passion for them as for the pleasure of acquiring solid knowledge in the context of an

undemanding hobby, I hung my apartment with a particular kind of Italian Baroque engravings and landscapes in the style of Canaletto—acquiring them from second-hand shops or bidding for them at auction provided the excitement of the chase without any dangers—I followed many other pursuits out of a liking for them and always with good taste, and I was seldom absent from performances of good music or the studios of our painters. I did not lack for success with women, and here too, with the secret collector's urge which in a way indicates a lack of real involvement, I chalked up many memorable and precious hours of varied experience. In this field I gradually moved from being a mere sensualist to the status of a knowledgeable connoisseur. All things considered, I had enjoyed many experiences which occupied my days pleasantly and allowed me to feel that my life was a full one, and increasingly I began to relish the easy-going, pleasant atmosphere of a youthful existence that was lively but never agitated. I formed almost no new wishes, for quite small things could blossom into pleasures in the calm climate of my days. A well-chosen tie could make me almost merry; a good book, an excursion in a motor car or an hour with a woman left me fully satisfied. It particularly pleased me to ensure that this way of life, like a faultlessly correct suit of English tailoring, did not make me conspicuous in any way. I believe I was considered pleasant company, I was popular and welcome in society, and most who knew me called me a happy man.

I cannot now say whether the man of that time, whom I am trying to conjure up here, thought himself as happy as those others did, for now that this experience of mine has made me expect a much fuller and more fulfilled significance in every emotion, I find it almost impossible to assess his happiness in retrospect. But I can say with certainty that I felt myself by no means unhappy at the time, for my wishes almost never went unsatisfied and nothing I required of life was withheld. But the very fact that I had become accustomed to getting all I asked from destiny, and demanded no more, led gradually to a certain absence of excitement, a lifelessness in life itself. Those yearnings that then stirred unconsciously in me at many moments of half-realisation were not really wishes, but only the wish for wishes, a craving for desires that would be stronger, wilder, more ambitious, less easily satisfied, a wish to live more and perhaps to suffer more as well. I had removed all obstacles from my life by a method that was only too reasonable, and my vitality was sapped by that absence of obstacles. I noticed that I wanted fewer things and did not want them so much, that a kind of paralysis had come over

my feelings, so that—perhaps this is the best way to express it—so that I was suffering from emotional impotence, an inability to take passionate possession of life. I recognised this defect from small signs at first. I noticed that I was absent more and more often from the theatre and society on certain occasions of great note, that I ordered books which had been praised to me and then left them lying on my desk for weeks with their pages still uncut, that although I automatically continued to pursue my hobbies, buying glasses and antiques, I did not trouble to classify them once they were mine, nor did I feel any particular pleasure in unexpectedly acquiring a rare piece which it had taken me a long time to find.

However, I became really aware of this lessening of my emotional vigour, slight but indicative of change, on a certain occasion which I still remember clearly. I had stayed in Vienna for the summer—again, as a result of that curious lethargy which left me feeling no lively attraction to anything new—when I suddenly received a letter written in a spa resort. It was from a woman with whom I had had an intimate relationship for three years, and I even truly thought I loved her. She wrote fourteen agitated pages to tell me that in her weeks at the spa she had met a man who meant a great deal to her, indeed everything, she was going to marry him in the autumn, and the relationship between us must now come to an end. She said that she thought of our time together without regret, indeed with happiness, the memory of me would accompany her into her marriage as the dearest of her past life, and she hoped I would forgive her for her sudden decision. After this factual information, her agitated missive surpassed itself in truly moving entreaties, begging me not to be angry with her, not to feel too much pain at her sudden termination of our relationship, I mustn't try to get her back by force, or do anything foolish to myself. Her lines ran on, becoming more and more passionate: I must and would find comfort with someone better, I must write to her at once, for she was very anxious about my reception of her message. And as a postscript she had hastily scribbled, in pencil: "Don't do anything stupid, understand me, forgive me!" I read this letter, surprised at first by her news, and then, when I had skimmed all through it, I read it a second time, now with a certain shame which, on making itself felt, soon became a sense of inner alarm. For none of the strong yet natural feelings which my lover supposed were to be taken for granted had even suggested themselves to me. I had not suffered on hearing her news, I had not been angry with her, and I had certainly not for a second contemplated any violence against either her or myself, and this coldness of

my emotions was too strange not to alarm me. A woman was leaving me, a woman who had been my companion for years, whose warm and supple body had offered itself to me, whose breath had mingled with mine in long nights together, and nothing stirred in me, nothing protested, nothing sought to get her back, I had none of those feelings that this woman's pure instinct assumed were natural in any human being. At that moment I was fully aware for the first time how far advanced the process of paralysis already was in me—it was as if I were moving through flowing, bright water without being halted or taking root anywhere, and I knew very well that this chill was something dead and corpse-like, not yet surrounded by the foul breath of decomposition but already numbed beyond recovery, a grimly cold lack of emotion. It was the moment that precedes real, physical death and outwardly visible decay.

After that episode I began carefully observing myself and this curious paralysis of my feelings, as a sick man observes his sickness. When, shortly afterwards, a friend of mine died and I followed his coffin to the grave, I listened to myself to see if I did not feel grief, if some emotion did not move in me at the knowledge that this man, who had been close to me since our childhood, was now lost to me for ever. But nothing stirred, I felt as if I were made of glass, with the world outside shining straight through me and never lingering within, and hard as I attempted on this and many similar occasions to feel something, however much I tried, through reasonable argument, to make myself feel emotion, no response came from my rigid state of mind. People parted from me, women came and went, and I felt much like a man sitting in a room with rain beating on the window-panes; there was a kind of sheet of glass between me and my immediate surroundings, and my will was not strong enough to break it.

Although I felt this clearly, the realisation caused me no real uneasiness, for as I have said, I took even what affected myself with indifference. I no longer had feeling enough to suffer. It was enough for me that this internal flaw was hardly perceptible from the outside, in the same way as a man's physical impotence becomes obvious only at the moment of intimacy, and in company I often put on a certain elaborate show, employing artificially passionate admiration and spontaneous exaggeration to hide the extent to which I knew I was dead and unfeeling inside. Outwardly I continued my old comfortable, unconstrained way of life without any change of direction; weeks, months passed easily by and slowly, gathering darkly into years. One morning when I looked in the glass I saw a streak of grey at my temple, and felt that my youth was slowly departing. But what others call youth had long ago ended in me, so

taking leave of it did not hurt very much, since I did not love even my own youth enough for that. My refractory emotions preserved their silence even to me.

This inner rigidity made my days more and more similar, despite all the varied occupations and events that filled them, they ranged themselves side by side without emphasis, they grew and faded like the leaves of a tree. And the single day I am about to describe for my own benefit began in a perfectly ordinary way too, without anything odd to mark it, without any internal premonition. On that day, the 7th of June, 1913, I had got up later than usual because of a subconscious Sunday feeling, something that lingered from my childhood and schooldays. I had taken my bath, read the paper, dipped into some books, and then, lured out by the warm summer day that compassionately made its way into my room, I went for a walk. I crossed the Graben in my usual way, greeted friends and acquaintances and conducted brief conversations with some of them, and then I lunched with friends. I had avoided any engagement for the afternoon, since I particularly liked to have a few uninterrupted hours on Sunday which I could use just as my mood, my pleasure or some spontaneous decision dictated. As I left my friends and crossed the Ringstrasse, I felt the beauty of the sunny city doing me good, and enjoyed its early summer finery. All the people seemed cheerful, as if they were in love with the Sunday atmosphere of the lively street, and many details struck me, in particular the way the broad, bushy trees rose from the middle of the asphalt wearing their new green foliage. Although I went this way almost daily, I suddenly became aware of the Sunday crowd as if it were a miracle, and involuntarily I felt a longing for a great deal of greenery, brightness and colour. I thought with a certain interest of the Prater, where in late spring and early summer the great trees stand to right and left of the main avenue down which the carriages drive, motionless like huge green footmen as they hold up their white candles of blossom to the many well-groomed and elegant passers by. Used as I was to indulging the most fleeting whim at once, I hailed the first cab I saw, and when the cabby asked where I was going I told him the Prater. "Ah, to the races, Baron, am I right?" he replied obsequiously, as if that was to be taken for granted. Only then did I remember that there was a fashionable race meeting today, a preview of the local Derby, where Viennese high society foregathered. How strange, I thought as I got into the cab, only a few years ago how could I possibly have forgotten or failed to attend such a day? When I thought of my

forgetfulness I once again felt all the rigidity of the indifference to which I had fallen victim, just as a sick man feels his injury when he moves.

The main avenue was quite empty when we arrived, and the racing must have begun long ago, for I did not see what was usually a handsome procession of carriages; there were only a few cabs racing along, hooves clattering, as if catching up with some invisible omission. The driver turned on his box and asked whether he should make the horses trot faster, but I told him to let them walk slowly, I didn't mind arriving late. I had seen too many races, and had seen the racegoers too often as well, to mind about arriving on time, and as the vehicle rocked gently along it matched my idle mood better to feel the blue air, with a soft rushing sound in it like the sea when you are on board ship, and at my leisure to view the handsome, broad and bushy chestnut trees which sometimes gave up a few flower petals as playthings to the warm, coaxing wind, which then raised them gently and sent them whirling through the air before letting them fall like white flakes on the avenue. It was pleasant to be rocked like that, to sense the presence of spring with eyes closed, to feel carried away and elated without any effort at all. I was quite sorry when the cab reached the Freudenua and stopped at the entrance. I would have liked to turn round and let the soft, early summer day continue to cradle me. But it was already too late, the cab was drawing up outside the racecourse. A muffled roar came to meet me. It re-echoed with a dull, hollow sound on the far side of the tiers of seats, and although I could not see the excited crowd making that concentrated noise I couldn't help thinking of Ostend, where if you walk up the small side-streets from the low-lying town to the beach promenade you feel the keen, salty wind blowing over you, and hear a hollow boom before you ever set eyes on the broad, grey, foaming expanse of the sea with its roaring waves. There must be a race going on at the moment, but between me and the turf on which the horses were probably galloping stood a colourful, noisy, dense mass swaying back and forth as if shaken by some inner turmoil: the crowd of spectators and gamblers. I couldn't see the track, but I followed every stage of the race as their heightened excitement reflected it. The jockeys must have started some time ago, the bunched formation at the beginning of the race had thinned out, and a couple of horses were disputing the lead, for already shouts and excited cries were coming from the people who mysteriously, as it seemed, were watching the progress of a race which was invisible to me. The turn of their heads indicated the bend which the horses and jockeys must just have reached on the long oval of turf, for the whole chaotic crowd was now moving

its gaze as if craning a single neck to see something out of my line of vision, and its single taut throat roared and gurgled with thousands of hoarse, individual sounds, like a great breaker foaming as it rises higher and higher. And the wave rose and swelled, it already filled the whole space right up to the blue indifferent sky. I looked at a few of the faces. They were distorted as if by some inner spasm, their eyes were fixed and sparkling, they were biting their lips, chins avidly thrust forward, nostrils flaring like a horse's. Sober as I was, I found their frenzied intemperance both a comic and a dreadful sight. Beside me a man was standing on a chair. He was elegantly dressed, and had what was probably a good-looking face in the usual way, but now he was raving, possessed by an invisible demon, waving his cane in the air as if lashing something forward; his whole body—in a manner unspeakably ridiculous to a spectator—passionately mimed the movement of rapid riding. He kept bobbing his heels up and down on the chair, as if standing in the stirrups, his right hand constantly whipped the air like a riding crop, his left hand convulsively clutched a slip of white card. And there were more and more of those white slips fluttering around, like sparkling wine spraying above the grey and stormy tide that swelled so noisily. A few horses must be very close to each other on the bend now, for suddenly the shouting divided into three or four individual names roared out like battle cries again and again by separate groups, and the shouts seemed like an outlet for their delirious state of possession.

I stood amidst this roaring frenzy cold as a rock in the raging sea, and I remember to this day exactly what I felt at that moment. First I thought how ridiculous those grotesque gestures were, I felt ironic contempt for the vulgarity of the outburst, but there was something else too, something that I was unwilling to admit to myself—a kind of quiet envy of such excitement, such heated passion, envy of the life in this display of fervour. What, I thought, would have to happen to excite me so much, rouse me to such fever pitch that my body would burn so ardently, my voice would issue from my mouth against my own will? I could not imagine any sum of money that would so spur me on to possess it, any woman who could excite me so much, there was nothing, nothing that could kindle such fire within me in my emotional apathy! If I faced a pistol suddenly aimed at me, my heart would not thud as wildly in the second before I froze as did the hearts of these people around me, a thousand, ten thousand of them, just for a handful of money. But now one horse must be very near the finishing line, for a certain name rang out above the tumult like a

string stretched taut, uttered by a thousand voices and rising higher and higher, only to end all at once on an abrupt, shrill note. The music began to play, the crowd suddenly dispersed. One of the races was over, the contest was decided, their tension was resolved into swirling movement as the excited vibrations died down. The throng, just a moment ago a fervent concentration of passion, broke up into many individuals walking, laughing, talking; calm faces emerged from behind the Maenad mask of frenzy; social groups formed again out of the chaos of the game that for seconds on end had forged these thousands of racegoers into a single ardent whole, those groups came together, they parted, I saw people I knew who hailed me, and strangers who scrutinised and observed each other with cool courtesy. The women assessed one another's new outfits, the men cast avid glances, that fashionable curiosity which is the real occupation of the indifferent began to show, the racegoers looked around, counted others, checked up on their presence and their degree of elegance. Scarcely brought down to earth again from their delirium, none of them knew whether the real object of their meeting in company here was the races themselves or this interlude of walking about the racecourse.

I walked through this relaxed, milling crowd, offering and returning greetings, and breathing in with pleasure—for this was the world in which I lived—the aura of perfume and elegance that wafted around the kaleidoscopic confusion. With even more pleasure I felt the soft breeze that sometimes blew out of the summery warmth of the woods from the direction of the Prater meadows, sometimes rippling like a wave among the racegoers and fingering the women's white muslins as if in amorous play. A couple of acquaintances hailed me; the pretty actress Diane nodded invitingly to me from a box, but I joined no one. I was not interested in talking to any of these fashionable folk today; I found it tedious to see myself reflected in them. All I wanted was to experience the spectacle, the crackling, sensuous excitement that pervaded the heightened emotion of the hour (for the excitement of others is the most delightful of spectacles to a man who himself is in a state of indifference). A couple of pretty women passed by, I boldly but without any inward desire scrutinised the breasts under the thin gauze they wore, moving at every step they took, and smiled to myself to see their half-awkward, half-gratified embarrassment when they felt that I was assessing them sensuously and undressing them with my eyes. In fact none of the women aroused me, it simply gave me a certain satisfaction to pretend to them that they did; it pleased me to play with their idea that I wanted to touch them physically and felt a magnetic attraction of

the eye, for like all who are cold at heart I found more intense erotic enjoyment in arousing warmth and restlessness in others than in waxing ardent myself. It was only the downy warmth lent to sensuality by the presence of women that I loved to feel, not any genuine arousal, only stimulation and not real excitement. So I walked through the promenading crowd as usual, caught glances, tossed them back as lightly as a shuttlecock, took my pleasure without reaching out a hand, fondled women without physical contact, warmed only slightly by the mildly amorous game.

But soon I found this tedious too. The same people kept passing; I knew their faces and gestures by heart now. There was a chair nearby, and I took it. A new turbulence began in the groups around me, passers by moved and pushed more restively in the confusion; obviously another race was about to start. I was not interested in that, but sat at my ease and as if submerged beneath the smoke from my cigarette, which rose in white rings against the sky, turning brighter and brighter and disintegrating like a little cloud in the springtime blue. And at that very second the extraordinary, unique experience that still rules my life today began. I can fix the moment exactly, because it so happens that I had just looked at my watch: the hands were crossing, and I watched with idle curiosity as they overlapped for a second. It was sixteen minutes past three on the afternoon of the 7th of June, 1913. With cigarette in hand, then, I was looking at the white dial of the watch, entirely absorbed in this childish and ridiculous contemplation, when I heard a woman laugh out loud just behind my back with the ringing, excited laughter that I love in women, springing warm and startled out of the hot thickets of the senses. I instinctively leant my head back to see the woman whose sensuality, boldly proclaimed aloud, was forcing its way into my carefree reverie like a sparkling white stone dropped into a dull and muddy pond—and then I controlled myself. A curious fancy for an intellectual game, a fancy of the kind I often felt for a small and harmless psychological experiment, held me back. I didn't want to see the laughing woman just yet; it intrigued me to let my imagination work on her first in a kind of anticipation of pleasure, to conjure up her appearance, giving that laughter a face, a mouth, a throat, a neck, a breast, making a whole living, breathing woman of her.

At this moment she was obviously standing directly behind me. Her laughter had turned to conversation again. I listened intently. She spoke with a slight Hungarian accent, very fast and expressively, her vowels soaring as if in song. It amused me to speculate on the figure that went with her voice, elaborating

my imaginary picture as richly as I could. I gave her dark hair, dark eyes, a wide and sensuously curving mouth with strong, very white teeth, a little nose that was very narrow but had flared, quivering nostrils. I put a beauty spot on her left cheek and a riding crop in her hand; as she laughed she slapped it lightly against her thigh. She talked on and on. And each of her words added some new detail to my rapidly formed image of her: a slender, girlish breast, a dark green dress with a diamond brooch pinned to it at a slant, a pale hat with a white feather. The picture became clearer and clearer, and I already felt as if this stranger standing invisible behind my back was also on a lighted photographic plate in the pupil of my eye. But I didn't want to turn round yet, I preferred to enhance my imaginary game further. A touch of lust mingled with my audacious reverie, and I closed both eyes, certain that when I opened them again and turned to her my imagined picture would coincide exactly with her real appearance.

At that moment she stepped forward. Instinctively I opened my eyes—and felt disappointment. I had guessed quite wrong. Everything was different from my imaginary idea, and indeed was distressingly at odds with it. She wore not a green but a white dress, she was not slim but voluptuous and broad-hipped, the beauty spot I had dreamed up was nowhere to be seen on her plump cheek, her hair under her helmet-shaped hat was pale red, not black. None of my details fitted her real appearance; however, this woman was beautiful, challengingly beautiful, although with my psychological vanity injured, foolishly overweening as it was, I would not acknowledge her beauty. I looked up at her almost with hostility, but even in my resistance to it I felt the strong sensuous attraction emanating from this woman, the enticing, demanding, animal desirability in her firm yet softly plump opulence. Now she laughed aloud again, showing her strong white teeth, and I had to admit that this warm, sensuous laughter was in harmony with her voluptuous appearance; everything about her was vehement and challenging, the curve of her breasts, the way she thrust her chin out as she laughed, her keen glance, her curved nose, the hand pressing her parasol firmly to the ground. Here was the feminine element incarnate, a primeval power, deliberate, pervasive enticement, a beacon of lust made flesh. Beside her stood an elegant, rather colourless officer talking earnestly to her. She listened to him, smiled, laughed, contradicted him, but all this was only by the way, for at the same time her nostrils were quivering as her glance wandered here and there as if to light on everyone; she attracted attention, smiles, glances from every passing man, and

from the whole male part of the crowd standing around her too. Her eyes moved all the time, sometimes searching the tiers of seats and suddenly, with joyful recognition, responding to someone's wave, turning now to right, now to left as she listened to the officer, smiling idly. But they had not yet rested on me, for I was outside her field of vision, hidden from her by her companion. I felt some annoyance and stood up—she did not see me. I came closer—now she looked up at the tiers of seats again. I stepped firmly up to her, raised my hat to her companion, and offered her my chair. She looked at me in surprise, a smiling light flickered in her eyes, and she curved her lips into a cajoling smile. But then she simply thanked me briefly and took the chair without sitting down. She merely leant her voluptuous arm, which was bare to the elbow, lightly on the back of the chair, employing this slight bending movement to show off her figure more visibly.

My vexation over my psychological failure was long forgotten; now I was intrigued by the game I was playing with this woman. I retreated slightly, moving to the side of the stand, where I could look at her freely but unobtrusively, leaning on my cane and trying to meet her eyes. She noticed, turned slightly towards my observation post, but in such a way that the movement seemed to be made quite by chance, did not avoid my glance and now and then answered it, but noncommittally. Her eyes kept moving, touching on everything, never resting anywhere—was it I alone whose gaze she met with a dark smile, or did she give that smile to everyone? There was no telling, and that very uncertainty piqued me. At the moments when her own gaze fell on me like a flashing light it seemed full of promise, although she responded indiscriminately and with the same steely gleam of her pupils to every other glance that came her way, out of sheer flirtatious pleasure in the game, but without letting her apparent interest in her companion's conversation lapse for an instant. There was something dazzlingly audacious about that passionate display, which was either virtuoso dalliance or an outburst of overflowing sensuality. Involuntarily, I came a step closer: her cold audacity had transferred itself to me. I no longer gazed into her eyes but looked her up and down like a connoisseur, undressed her in my mind and felt her naked. She followed my glance without appearing insulted in any way, smiled at the loquacious officer with the corners of her mouth, but I noticed that her knowing smile was acknowledging my intentions. And now, when I looked at her small, delicate foot just peeping out from under the hem of her white dress, she checked it and smoothed her skirt down with a casual air.

Next moment, as if by chance, she raised the same foot and placed it on the first rung of the chair I had offered her, so that through the open-work fabric of her dress I could see her stockings up to the knee. At the same time, the smile she gave her companion seemed to take on a touch of irony or malice. She was obviously playing with me as impersonally as I with her, and I was obliged, with some animosity, to admire the subtle technique of her bold conduct, for while she was offering me the sensuousness of her body in pretended secrecy, she appeared to be flattered by and immersing herself in her companion's whispered remarks at the same time, giving and taking in the game she was playing with both of us. In fact I felt vexed, for in other women I disliked this kind of cold, viciously calculating sensuality, feeling that it was incestuously related to the absence of feeling of which I was conscious in myself. Yet I was aroused, perhaps more in dislike than in desire. I boldly came closer and made a brutal assault on her with my eyes. My gestures clearly said, "I want you, you beautiful animal", and I must involuntarily have moved my lips, for she smiled with faint contempt, turning her head away from me, and draped her skirt over the foot she had just revealed. Next moment, however, those flashing black eyes were wandering here and there again. It was quite obvious that she was as cold as I myself and was a match for me, that we were both playing coolly with a strange arousal that itself was only a pretence of ardour, though it was a pretty sight and amusing to play with on a dull day.

Suddenly the intent look left her face, her sparkling eyes clouded over, and a small line of annoyance appeared around her still smiling mouth. I followed the direction of her gaze; a small, stout gentleman, his garments rumpled, was steering a rapid course towards her, his face and brow, which he was nervously drying with his handkerchief, damp with agitation. His hat, which he had perched askew on his head in his hurry, revealed a large bald patch on one side of his head (I could not help thinking that when he took the hat off there were sure to be large beads of sweat gathering on it, and I found him repulsive). His ringed hand held a whole bundle of betting slips. He was puffing and blowing excitedly, and paying no attention to his wife addressed the officer at once in loud Hungarian. I immediately recognised him as an aficionado of the turf, some horse-dealer of the better kind for whom the sport was the only form of ecstasy he knew, a surrogate for sublimity. His wife must obviously have admonished him in some way (she was evidently irked, and disturbed in her elemental confidence by his presence), for he straightened his hat, apparently at her behest, then laughed jovially and clapped her on the shoulder with

good-natured affection. She angrily raised her eyebrows, repelled by this marital familiarity, which embarrassed her in the officer's presence and perhaps even more in mine. He seemed to be apologising, said a few more words in Hungarian to the officer, who replied with an agreeable smile, and then took her arm, tenderly and a little deferentially. I felt that she was ashamed of his intimacy in front of us, and with mingled feelings of derision and disgust I relished her humiliation. But she was soon in control of herself again, and as she pressed softly against his arm she gave me an ironic sideways glance, as if to say, "There, you see, he has me and you don't." I felt both anger and distaste. I really wanted to turn my back on her and walk away, showing her that I was no longer interested in the wife of such a vulgar, fat fellow. But the attraction was too strong. I stayed.

At that moment the shrill starting signal was heard, and all of a sudden it was as if the whole chattering, dull, sluggish crowd had been shaken into life. Once again, and from all directions, it surged forward to the barrier in wild turmoil. It cost me some effort not to be carried along with it, for I wanted to stay near her in all this confusion; there might be an opportunity for a meaningful glance, for a touch, a chance for me to take some spontaneous liberty, though just what I didn't yet know, so I doggedly made my way towards her through the hurrying people. At that very moment the stout husband was forging his own path through the crowd, obviously to get a good place in the stand, and so it was that the pair of us, each impelled by a different passion, collided with each other so violently that his hat flew to the ground, and the betting slips loosely tucked into the hatband were scattered wide, drifting like red, blue, yellow and white butterflies. He stared at me for a moment. I was about to offer an automatic apology, but some kind of perverse ill-will sealed my lips, and instead I looked coolly at him with a slight but bold, offensive touch of provocation. As red-hot anger rose in him but then timidly gave way, his glance flickered uncertainly for a moment and then cravenly sank before mine. With unforgettable, almost touching anxiety he looked me in the eye for just a second, then turned away, suddenly seemed to remember his betting slips, and bent to pick them and his hat up from the ground. His wife, who had let go of his arm, flashed me a glance of unconcealed fury, her face flushed with agitation, and I saw with a kind of erotic pleasure that she would have liked to strike me. But I stood there very cool and nonchalant, watched the fat husband, smiling and offering no help as he bent, puffing and panting, and crawled around at my feet picking up his betting slips. When he bent over his

collar stood away from him like the ruffled feathers of a chicken, a broad roll of fat was visible at the nape of his red neck, and he gasped asthmatically at every movement he made. Seeing him panting like that, I involuntarily entertained an improper and distasteful idea: I imagined him alone with his wife engaged in conjugal relations, and this thought put me in such high spirits that I smiled in her face at the sight of the anger she could barely rein in. There she stood, impatient and pale again now, scarcely able to control herself—at last I had wrested a real, genuine feeling from her: hatred, unbridled rage! I would have liked to prolong this distressing scene to infinity; I watched with cold relish as he struggled to gather his betting slips together one by one. Some kind of devil of amusement was in my throat, chuckling continuously and trying to burst into laughter; I would have liked to laugh heartily at that soft, scrabbling mass of flesh, or to tickle him up a little with my cane. I really couldn't remember ever before being so possessed by an evil demon as I was in that delightful moment of triumph at his bold wife's humiliation. Now the unfortunate man finally seemed to have picked up all his slips except one, a blue betting slip which had fallen a little further away and was lying on the ground just in front of me. He turned, puffing and panting, looked round with his short-sighted eyes—his pince-nez had slipped to the end of his damp, sweating nose—and my sense of mischief used that second to prolong his ridiculous search. Obeying the boyish high spirits that had seized on me without my own volition, I quickly moved my foot forward and placed the sole of my shoe on the slip, so that for all his efforts he couldn't find it as long as it pleased me to let him go on looking. And he did go on looking for it, on and on, now and then counting the coloured slips of card again and again, panting as he did so; it was obvious that he knew one of them—mine!—was still missing, and he was about to start searching again in the middle of the noisy crowd when his wife, deliberately avoiding my scornful gaze and with a grim expression on her face, could no longer restrain her angry impatience. "Lajos!" she suddenly and imperiously called, and he started like a horse hearing the sound of the trumpet, cast one last searching glance at the ground—I felt as if the slip hidden under the sole of my shoe were tickling me, and could hardly conceal an urge to laugh—and then turned obediently to his wife, who led him away from me with a certain ostentatious haste and into the tumultuous crowd, where excitement was rising higher and higher.

I stayed behind, feeling no wish to follow the two of them. The episode was over as far as I was concerned, the sense of erotic tension had resolved into

mirth, doing me good. I was no longer aroused, nothing was left but a sense of sound satisfaction after following my sudden mischievous impulse, a jaunty, almost boisterous complacency at the thought of the trick I had played. Ahead of me the crowd was thronging close together, waves of excitement were beginning to rise, surging up to the barrier in a single black, murky mass, but I did not watch, it bored me now. I thought of walking over to the Krieau or going home. But as soon as I instinctively raised my foot to step forward I noticed the blue betting slip lying forgotten on the ground. I picked it up and held it idly between my fingers, not sure what to do with the thing. I vaguely thought of returning it to “Lajos”, which might serve as an excellent excuse to be introduced to his wife, but I realized that she no longer interested me, that the fleeting ardour this adventure had made me feel had long since cooled into my old apathy. I wanted no more of Lajos’s wife than that single combative, challenging exchange of glances—I found the fat man too unappetising to wish to share anything physical with him. I had experienced a tingling of the nerves, but now felt only mild curiosity and a pleasant sense of relaxation.

There was the chair, abandoned and alone. I made myself comfortable on it and lit a cigarette. Ahead of me the breakers of excitement were rising again, but I did not even listen; repetition held no charms for me. I watched the pale smoke rising and thought of the Merano golf course promenade where I had sat two months ago, looking down at the spray of the waterfall. It was just like this: at Merano too you heard a strongly swelling roar that was neither hot nor cold, meaningless sound rising in the silent blue landscape. But now impassioned enthusiasm for the race had reached its climax again; once more parasols, hats, handkerchiefs and loud cries were flying like sea-spray above the black breakers of the throng, once again the voices were swirling together, once again a shout—but of a different kind—issued from the crowd’s gigantic mouth. I heard a name called out a thousand, ten thousand times, exultantly, piercing, ecstatically, frantically. “Cressy! Cressy! Cressy!” And once again the sound was suddenly cut short, as if it were a taut string breaking (ah, how repetition makes even passion monotonous!). The music began to play, the crowd dispersed. Boards were raised aloft showing the numbers of the winning horses. I looked at them, without conscious intent. The first number was a distinct SEVEN. Automatically, I glanced at the blue slip I was still holding and had forgotten. It said SEVEN too. I couldn’t help laughing. The slip had won; friend Lajos had placed a lucky bet. So my mischief had actually tricked the fat husband out of money: all of a sudden my exuberant mood had returned, and I

felt interested to know how much my jealous intervention had cost him. I looked at the piece of blue card more closely for the first time: it was a twenty-crown bet, and Lajos had put it on the horse to win. That could amount to a considerable sum. Without thinking more about it, merely obeying my itch of curiosity, I let myself be carried along with the hurrying crowd to the tote windows. I was pushed into some kind of queue, put down the betting slip, and next moment two busy, bony hands—I couldn't see the face that went with them behind the window—were counting out nine twenty-crown notes on the marble slab in front of me.

At that moment, when the money, real money in blue banknotes was paid out to me, the laughter died in my throat. I immediately felt an unpleasant sensation. Involuntarily, I withdrew my hands so as not to touch the money which was not mine. I would have liked to leave the blue notes lying on the marble slab, but people were pushing forward behind me, impatient to cash their winnings. So there was nothing I could do but, feeling very awkward, take the notes with reluctant fingers: the banknotes burned like blue fire, and I unconsciously held my spread fingers well away from me, as if the hand that had taken them was not my own any more than the money was. I immediately saw all the difficulty of the situation. Without my own volition, the joke had turned to something that a decent man, a gentleman, an officer in the reserve ought not to have done, and I hesitated to call it by its true name even to myself. For this was not money that had been withheld; it had been obtained by cunning. It was stolen money.

Voices hummed and buzzed around me, people came thronging up on their way to and from the tote windows. I still stood there motionless, my spread hand held away from me. What was I to do? I thought first of the most natural solution: to find the real winner, apologise, and give him back the money. But that wouldn't do, least of all in front of that officer. After all, I was a lieutenant in the reserve, and such a confession would have cost me my commission at once, for even if I had found the betting slip by chance, cashing it in was a dishonest act. I also thought of obeying the instinct of my twitching fingers, crumpling up the notes and throwing them away, although that would also be too easily visible in the middle of such a crowd of people, and would look suspicious. However, I didn't want to keep the money that was not mine on me for a moment, let alone put it in my wallet and give it to someone later: the sense of cleanliness instilled into me from childhood, like the habit of wearing clean underclothes, was revolted by any contact, however fleeting, with those

banknotes. I must get rid of the money, I thought feverishly, I must get rid of it somewhere, anywhere! I instinctively looked around me, at a loss, wondering if I could see a hiding-place anywhere, a chance of concealing it unobserved, I noticed that people were beginning to flock to the tote windows again, but this time with banknotes in their hands. The idea was my salvation. I would throw the money back to the malicious chance that had given it to me, back into the all-consuming maw that was now greedily swallowing up new bets in notes and silver—yes, that was the thing to do, that was the way to free myself of it.

I impetuously hurried, indeed ran as I pushed my way in among the crowd. But by the time I realized that I didn't know the name of any horse on which to bet there were only two men in front of me, and the first was already at the tote window. I listened avidly to the conversation around me. "Are you backing Ravachol?" one man asked. "Yes, of course, Ravachol," his companion replied. "Don't you think Teddy has a chance?" "Teddy? Not a hope. He failed miserably in his maiden race. All show, no substance."

I drank in these words. So Teddy was a bad horse. Teddy was sure to lose. I immediately decided to bet on him. I pushed the money over, put it on Teddy, the horse I had only just heard of, to win, and a hand gave me the betting slips. All of a sudden I now had nine pieces of card in my fingers instead of just the one, this time red and white. I still felt awkward, but at least the slips didn't burn in so fiery, so humiliating a way as the crumpled banknotes.

I felt light at heart again, almost carefree: the money was gone now, the unpleasant part of the adventure was over, it had begun as a joke and now it was all a joke again. I leant back at ease in my chair, lit a cigarette and blew the smoke into the air at my leisure. But I did not stay there long; I rose, walked around, sat down again. How odd: my sense of pleasant reverie was gone. Some kind of nervousness was tingling in my limbs. At first I thought it was discomfort at the idea that I might meet Lajos and his wife in the crowd of people walking by, but how could they guess that these new betting slips were really theirs? Nor did the restlessness of the crowd disturb me; on the contrary, I watched closely to see when they would begin pressing forward again, indeed I caught myself getting to my feet again and again to look for the flag that would be hoisted at the beginning of the race. So that was it—impatience, a leaping inward fever of expectation as I wished the race would begin soon and the tiresome affair be over for good.

A boy ran past with a racing paper. I stopped him, bought the programme of today's meeting, and began searching the text and the tips, written in a strange and incomprehensible jargon, until I finally found Teddy, the names of his jockey and the owner of the racing stables, and the information that his colours were red and white. But why was I so interested? Annoyed, I crumpled up the newspaper and tossed it away, stood up, sat down again. I suddenly felt hot, I had to pass my handkerchief over my damp brow, my collar felt tight. And still the race did not begin.

At last the bell rang, people came surging up, and at that moment I felt, to my horror, that the ringing of that bell, like an alarm clock, had woken me from some kind of sleep. I jumped up from the chair so abruptly that it fell over, and eagerly hurried—no, ran forward into the crowd, betting slips held firmly between my fingers, as if consumed by a frantic fear of arriving too late, of missing something very important. I reached the barrier at the front of the stand by forcibly pushing people aside, and ruthlessly seized a chair on which a lady was about to sit down. Her glance of astonishment showed me just how wild and discourteous my conduct was—she was a lady I knew well, Countess R, and I saw her brows raised in anger—but out of shame and defiance I coldly ignored her and climbed up on the chair to get a good view of the field.

Somewhere in the distance, at the start, several horses were standing close together on the turf, kept in line with difficulty by small jockeys who looked like brightly clad versions of Punchinello. I immediately looked for my horse's colours among them, but my eyes were unpractised, and everything was swimming before them in such a hot, strange blur that I couldn't make out the red and white figure among all the other splashes of colour. At that moment the bell rang for the second time, and the horses shot off down the green racetrack like six coloured arrows flying from a bow. It would surely have been a fine sight to watch calmly, purely from an aesthetic point of view, as the slender animals stretched their legs in the gallop, hardly touching the ground as they skimmed the turf, but I felt none of that, I was making desperate attempts to pick out my horse, my jockey, and cursing myself for not bringing a pair of fieldglasses with me. Lean forward and crane my neck as I might, I saw nothing but four or five insects tangled together in a blurred, flying knot; however, at last I saw its shape begin to change as the small group reached the bend and strung out into a wedge shape, leaders came to the front while some of the other horses were already falling away at the back. It was a close race: three or four horses galloping full speed stuck together like coloured strips of

paper, now one and now another getting its nose ahead. I instinctively stretched and tensed my whole body as if my imitative, springy and impassioned movement could increase their speed and carry them along.

The excitement was rising around me. Some of the more knowledgeable racegoers must have recognised the colours as the horses came round the bend, for names were now flying up like bright rockets from the murky tumult below. A man with his hands raised in a frenzy was standing beside me, and as one horse got its head forward he stamped his feet and yelled in an ear-splitting tone of triumph, “Ravachol! Ravachol!” I saw that the jockey riding this horse did indeed wear blue, and I felt furious that my horse wasn’t winning. I found the piercing cries of “Ravachol! Ravachol!” from the idiot beside me more and more intolerable, I felt cold fury, I would have liked to slam my fist into the wide, black hole of his shouting mouth. I quivered with rage, I was in a fever, and felt I might do something senseless at any moment. But here came another horse, sticking close behind the first. Perhaps it was Teddy, perhaps, perhaps—and that hope spurred my enthusiasm again. I really did think it was a red arm now rising above the saddle and bringing something down on the horse’s crupper—it could be red, it must be, it must, it must! But why wasn’t the fool of a jockey urging him on? The whip again! Go on, again! Now, now he was quite close to the first horse. Hardly anything between them now. Why should Ravachol win? Ravachol! No, not Ravachol! Not Ravachol! Teddy! Teddy! Come on, Teddy! Teddy!

Suddenly and violently, I caught myself up. What on earth was all this? Who was shouting like that? Who was yelling “Teddy! Teddy!” I was shouting the name! And in the midst of my impassioned outburst I felt afraid of myself. I wanted to stop, control myself, in the middle of my fever I felt a sudden shame. But I couldn’t tear my eyes away, for the two horses were sticking very close to each other, and it must really be Teddy hanging on to Ravachol, the wretched horse Ravachol that I fervently hated, for others were now shouting louder around me, many voices in a piercing descant: “Teddy, Teddy!” The yells plunged me back into the frenzy from which I had emerged for one sober second. He should, he must win, and now, now a head did push forward past the flying horse ridden by the other jockey, just by the span of a hand, and then another, and now—now you could see the neck—and then the shrill bell rang, and there was a great cry of jubilation, despair and fury. For a second the name I longed to hear filled the whole vault of the blue sky above. Then it died away, and somewhere music started playing.

Hot, drenched in sweat, my heart thudding, I got off the chair. I had to sit down for a moment, so confused had my excited enthusiasm left me. Ecstasy such as I had never known before flooded through me, a mindless joy at seeing chance bow to my challenge with such slavish obedience; I tried in vain to pretend to myself it was against my will that the horse had won, I had really wanted to lose the money. But I didn't believe it myself, and I already felt a terrible ache in my limbs urging me, as if magically, to be off somewhere, and I knew where: I wanted to see my triumph, feel it, hold it, money, a great deal of money, I wanted to feel the crisp blue notes in my fingers and sense that tingling of my nerves. A strange and pernicious lust had come over me, and no sense of shame now stood in its way. As soon as I stood up I was hurrying, running to the tote window, I pushed brusquely in among the people waiting in the queue, using my elbows, I impatiently pushed others aside just to see the money, the money itself. "Oaf!" muttered someone whom I had jostled behind me; I heard him, but I had no intention of picking a quarrel. I was shaking with a strange, pathological impatience. At last my turn came, my hands greedily seized a blue bundle of banknotes. I counted them, both trembling and delighted. I had won six hundred and forty crowns.

I clutched them avidly. My first thought was to go on betting, to win more, much more. What had I done with my racing paper? Oh yes, I'd thrown it away in all the excitement. I looked round to see where I could buy another. Then, to my inexpressible dismay, I saw that the people around me were suddenly dispersing, making for the exit, the tote windows were closing, the fluttering flag came down. The meeting was over. That had been the last race. I stood there frozen for a moment. Then anger flared in me as if I had suffered some injustice. I couldn't reconcile myself to the fact that it was all over, not now that all my nerves were tense and quivering, the blood was coursing through my veins, hot as I hadn't felt it for years. But it was no use feeding hope artificially with the deceptive idea that I might have been mistaken, that was just wishful thinking, for the motley crowd was flowing away faster and faster, and the well-trodden turf already showed green among the few people still left. I gradually felt it ridiculous to be lingering here in a state of tension, so I took my hat—I had obviously left my cane at the tote turnstile in my excitement—and went towards the exit. A servant with cap obsequiously raised hurried to meet me, I told him the number of my cab, he shouted it across the open space through his cupped hands, and soon the horses came trotting smartly up. I told the cabby to drive slowly down the main avenue. For now that the

excitement was beginning to fade, leaving a pleasurable sensation behind, I felt an almost prurient desire to go over the whole scene again in my thoughts.

At that moment another carriage drove past; I instinctively looked at it, only to look away again very deliberately. It was the woman and her stout husband. They had not noticed me, but I felt a horrible choking sensation, as if I had been caught in the guilty act. I could almost have told the cabby to urge the horses on, just to get away from them quickly.

The cab moved smoothly along on its rubber tyres among all the other carriages, swaying along with their brightly clad cargoes of women like boats full of flowers passing the green banks of the chestnut-lined avenue. The air was mild and sweet, the first cool evening air was already wafting faint perfume through the dust. But my pleasant mood of reverie refused to return; the meeting with the man I had swindled had struck me a painful blow. In my overheated and impassioned state it suddenly went through me like a draught of cold air blowing through a crack. I now thought through the whole scene again soberly, and could not understand myself: for no good reason I, a gentleman, a member of fashionable society, an officer in the reserve, highly esteemed in general, had taken money which I did not need, had put it in my wallet, had even done so with a greedy and lustful pleasure that rendered any excuse invalid. An hour ago I had been a man of upright and blameless character; now I had stolen. I was a thief. And as if to frighten myself I spoke my condemnation half aloud under my breath as the cab gently trotted on, the words unconsciously falling into the rhythm of the horses' hooves: "Thief! Thief! Thief! Thief!"

But strange to say—oh, how am I to describe what happened now? It is so inexplicable, so very odd, and yet I know that I am not deceiving myself in retrospect. I am aware of every second's feelings in those moments, every oscillation of my mind, with a supernatural clarity, more clearly than almost any other experience in my thirty-six years, yet I hardly dare reveal that absurd chain of events, those baffling mood swings, and I really don't know whether any writer or psychologist could describe them logically at all. I can only set down them down in order, faithfully reflecting the way they unexpectedly flared up within me. Well, so I was saying to myself, "Thief, thief, thief." Then came a very strange moment, as it were an empty one, a moment when nothing happened, when I was only—oh, how difficult it is to express this!—when I was only listening, listening to my inner voice. I had summoned myself

before the court, I had accused myself, and now it was for the plaintiff to answer the judge. So I listened—and nothing happened. The whiplash of that word ‘thief’, which I had expected to terrify me and then fill me with inexpressible shame and remorse, had no effect. I waited patiently for several minutes, I then bent, as it were, yet closer to myself—for I could feel something moving beneath that defiant silence—and listened with feverish expectation for the echo that did not come, for the cry of disgust, horror, and despair that must follow my self-accusation. And still nothing happened. There was no answer. I said the word “Thief” to myself again, I said it out aloud, “Thief”, to rouse my numbed conscience at last, hard of hearing as it was. Again there was no answer. And suddenly—in a bright lightning flash of awareness, as if a match had suddenly been struck and held above the twilit depths—I realized that I only wanted to feel shame, I was not really ashamed, that down in those depths I was in some mysterious way proud of my foolish action, even pleased with it.

How was that possible? I resisted this unexpected revelation, for now I really did feel afraid of myself, but it broke over me with too strong and impetuous a force. No, it was not shame seething in my blood with such warmth, not indignation or self-disgust—it was joy, intoxicated joy blazing up in me, sparkling with bright, darting, exuberant flames, for I felt that in those moments I had been truly alive for the first time in many years, that my feelings had only been numb and were not yet dead, that somewhere under the arid surface of my indifference the hot springs of passion still mysteriously flowed, and now, touched by the magic wand of chance, had leapt high, reaching my heart. In me too, in me too, part as I was of the living, breathing universe, there still glowed the mysterious volcanic core of all earthly things, a volcano that sometimes erupts in whirling spasms of desire. I too lived, I was alive, I was a human being with hot, pernicious lusts. The storm of passion had flung wide a door, depths had opened up in me, and I was staring down at the unknown in myself with vertiginous joy. It frightened and at the same time delighted me. And slowly—as the carriage wheeled my dreaming body easily along through the world of bourgeois society—I climbed down, step by step, into the depths of my own humanity, inexpressibly alone in my silent progress, with nothing above me but the bright torch of my suddenly rekindled awareness. And as a thousand people surged around me, laughing and talking, I sought for my lost self in myself, I felt for past years in the magical process of contemplation. Things entirely lost suddenly emerged from the dusty, blank

mirrors of my life. I remembered once, as a schoolboy, stealing a penknife from a classmate and then watching, with just the same demonic glee, as he looked for it everywhere, asking everyone if they had seen it, going to great pains to find it; I suddenly understood the mysteriously stormy nature of many sexual encounters, I realised that my passions had been only atrophied, only crushed by social delusions, by the lordly ideal of the perfect gentleman—but that in me too, although deep, deep down in clogged pipes and well-springs, the hot streams of life flowed as they flowed in everyone else. I had always lived without daring to live to the full, I had restrained myself and hidden from myself, but now a concentrated force had broken out, I was overwhelmed by rich and inexpressibly powerful life. And now I knew that I still valued it; I knew it with the blissful emotion of a woman who feels her child move within her for the first time. I felt—how else can I put it?—real, true, genuine life burgeon within me, I felt—and I am almost ashamed to write this—I felt myself, desiccated as I was, suddenly flowering again, I felt red blood coursing restlessly through my veins, feelings gently unfolded in the warmth, and I matured into an unknown fruit which might be sweet or bitter. The miracle of Tannhäuser had come to me in the bright light of a racecourse, among the buzz of thousands of people enjoying their leisure; I had begun to feel again, the dry staff was putting out green leaves and buds.

A gentleman waved to me from a passing carriage and called my name—obviously I had failed to notice his first greeting. I gave an abrupt start, angry to be disturbed in the sweet flow of the stream pouring forth within me, in the deepest dream I had ever known. But a glance at the man hailing me brought me out of myself; it was my friend Alfons, a dear school-mate of mine and now a public prosecutor. Suddenly a thought ran through me: now, for the first time, this man who greets you like a brother has power over you; you will be his quarry as soon as he is aware of your crime. If he knew about you and what you have done, he would be bound to snatch you out of this carriage, take you away from your whole comfortable bourgeois life, and thrust you down for three to five years into a dismal world behind barred windows, amidst the dregs of human life, other thieves driven to their dirty cells only by the lash of destitution. But it was only for a moment that cold fear grasped the wrist of my trembling hand, only for a moment did it halt my heartbeat—then this idea too turned to warmth of feeling, to a fantastic, audacious pride that now scrutinised everyone else around me with confidence, almost with contempt. How your sweet, friendly smiles, I thought, how the smiles with which you all

greet me as one of yourselves would freeze on your lips if you guessed what I really am! You would wipe away my own greeting with a scornful, angry hand, as if it were a splash of excrement. But before you reject me I have already rejected you; this afternoon I broke out of your chilly, skeletal world, where I was a cogwheel performing its silent function in the great machine that coldly drives its pistons, circling vainly around itself—I have fallen to depths that I do not know, but I was more alive in that one hour than in all the frozen years I spent among you. I am not one of you any more, no, I am outside you somewhere, on some height or in some depth, but never to tread the flat plain of your bourgeois comfort again. For the first time I have felt all mankind's desire for good and evil, but you will never know where I have been, you will never recognise me: what do any of you know about my secret?

How could I express what I felt in that moment as I, an elegantly clad gentleman, drove past the rows of carriages greeting acquaintances and returning greetings, my face impassive? For while my larva, the outward man of the past, still saw and recognised faces, so delirious a music was playing inside me that I had to control myself to keep from shouting something of that raging tumult aloud. I was so full of emotion that its inner swell hurt me physically, like a man choking I had to press my hand hard to the place on my chest beneath which my heart was painfully seething. But pain, desire, alarm, horror or regret—I felt none of these separately and apart from the others, they were all merged and I felt only that I was alive, that I was breathing and feeling. And this simplest, most primeval of feelings, one I had not known for years, intoxicated me. I have never felt myself as ecstatically alive for even a second of my thirty-six years as I did in the airy lightness of that hour.

With a slight jolt, the cab stopped: the driver had reined in his horses, turned on the box and asked if he should drive me home. I came back to myself, feeling dizzy, looked at the avenue, and was dismayed to see how long I had been dreaming, how far my delirium had spread out over the hours. It was growing dark, a soft wind stirred the tops of the trees, the chestnut blossom was beginning to waft its evening perfume through the cool air. And behind the treetops a veiled glimpse of the moon already shone silver. It was enough, it must be enough. But I would not go home yet, not back to my usual world! I paid the cabby. As I took out my wallet and counted the banknotes, holding them in my fingers, something like a slight electric shock ran from my wrist to my fingertips. So there must be something of my old self left in me, the man who was ashamed. The dying conscience of a gentleman was still twitching,

but my hand dipped cheerfully into the stolen money again, and in my joy I was generous with a tip. The driver thanked me so fervently that I had to smile, thinking: if only you knew! The horses began to move, the cab rolled away. I watched it go as you might look back from shipboard at a shore where you have been happy.

For a moment I stood dreamy and undecided in the midst of the murmuring, laughing crowd, with music drifting above it. It was about seven o'clock, and I instinctively turned towards the Sachergarten, where I usually ate with companions after going to the Prater. The cabby had probably set me down here on purpose. But no sooner did I touch the handle of the door in the fence of that superior garden restaurant than I felt a scruple: no, I still did not want to go back to my own world yet, I didn't want to let the wonderful fermentation so mysteriously filling me disperse in the flow of casual conversation, I didn't want to detach myself from the sparkling magic of the adventure in which I had been involved for hours.

The confused music echoed faintly somewhere, and I instinctively went that way, for everything tempted me today. I felt it delightful to give myself up entirely to chance, and there was something extraordinarily intriguing in being aimlessly adrift in this gently moving crowd of people. My blood was seething in this thick, swirling, hot and human mass: I was suddenly on the alert, all my senses stimulated and intensified by that acrid, smoky aroma of human breath, dust, sweat and tobacco. All that even yesterday used to repel me because it seemed vulgar, common, plebeian, all that the elegant gentleman in me had haughtily avoided for a lifetime now magically attracted my new responses as if, for the first time, I felt some relationship in myself with what was animal, instinctive, common. Here among the dregs of the city, mixing with soldiers, servant girls, ruffians I felt at ease in a way I could not understand at all; I almost greedily drank in the acidity of the air, I found the pushing and shoving of the crowd gathered around me pleasant, and with delighted curiosity I waited to see where this hour would take me, devoid as I was of any will of my own. The cymbals crashed and the brass band blared closer now, the mechanical orchestrions thumped out staccato polkas and boisterous waltzes with insistent monotony, and now and then I heard dull thuds from the side-shows, ripples of laughter, drunken I know now that I was drunk at the time. Everything was roaring in my blood at once, the ringing bells on the carousel, the high lusty laughter of the women as the men swung them up in the air, the chaotic music, the whirling skirts. Every single sound fell sharply into me and

then flickered up again, red and quivering, past my temples, I felt every touch, every glance with fantastically stimulated nerves (it was rather like seasickness), yet it came all together in a delirious whole. I cannot possibly explain my complex state in words, it can perhaps best be done by means of a comparison if I say I was brimming over with sound, noise, feeling, overheated like a machine operating with all its wheels racing to escape the monstrous pressure that must surely burst the boiler of my chest any moment. My fingertips twitched, my temples thudded, my heated blood pressed in my throat, surged in my temples—from a state of half-hearted apathy lasting many years I had suddenly plunged into a fever that consumed me. I felt that I must open up, come out of myself with a word, with a glance, unburden myself, flow out of myself, give my inner self away, bring myself down to the common level, be resolved—save myself somehow from the hard barrier of silence dividing me from the warm, flowing, living element. I had not spoken for hours, had pressed no one's hand, felt no one's glance rest on me, questioning and sympathetic, and now, under the pressure of events, this excitement was building up against the dam of silence. Never, never had I so strongly felt a need for communication, for another human being than now, when I was in the middle of a surging throng of thousands and tens of thousands, warmth and words washing around me, yet cut off from the circulating blood of that abundance. I was like a man dying of thirst on the sea. And at the same time, this torment increasing with every glance, I saw strangers meeting at every moment to right and left, touching lightly, coming together and parting in play like little balls of quicksilver. Envy came over me when I saw young men addressing strange girls as they passed by, taking their arms after the first word, seeing people find each other and join forces: a word exchanged beside the carousel, a glance as they brushed past each other was enough, and strangeness melted away in conversation, which might be broken off again after a few minutes, but still it was a link, a union, communication, and all my nerves burned for it now. But practised as I was in social intercourse, a popular purveyor of small talk and confident in all the social forms, I was now afraid, ashamed to address one of these broad-hipped servant girls for fear that she might laugh at me. Indeed, I cast my eyes down when someone looked at me by chance, yet inside I was dying of desire for a word. What I wanted from these people was not clear even to myself, but I could no longer endure to be alone and consumed by my fever. However, they all looked past me, every glance moved away from me, no one wanted to be with me. Once a lad of about twelve in ragged clothes did come near me, his eyes bright in the reflected

lights as he stared longingly at the wooden horses going up and down. His narrow mouth was open as if with thirst; he obviously had no money left for a ride, and was simply enjoying the screams and laughter of others. I made my way up to him and asked—though why did my voice tremble and break, ending on a high note?—I asked: “Wouldn’t you like a ride?” He looked up, took fright—why? why?—turned bright red and ran away without a word. Not even a barefoot child would let me give him pleasure; I felt there must be something terribly strange about me that meant I could never mingle with anyone, but was separate from the dense mass, floating like a drop of oil on moving water.

However, I did not give in; I could no longer be alone. My feet were burning in my dusty patent leather shoes, my throat was sore from the turbulent air. I looked round me: small islands of green stood to right and left among the flowing human crowds, taverns with red tablecloths and bare wooden benches where ordinary citizens sat with their glasses of beer and Sunday cigarettes. The sight was enticing: strangers could sit together here and fall into conversation, there was a little peace here among the wild frenzy. I went into one such tavern, looked round the tables until I found one where a family was sitting: a stout, sturdy artisan with his wife, two cheerful daughters and a little boy. They were nodding their heads together, joking with each other, and their happy, carefree glances did me good. I greeted them civilly, moved to a chair and asked if I might sit down. Their laughter stopped at once, for a moment they were silent as if each was waiting for another to give consent, and then the woman, in tones almost of dismay, said, “Oh yes, certainly, do.” I sat down and then felt that in doing so I had spoilt their carefree mood, for an uncomfortable silence immediately fell around the table. Without daring to take my eyes off the red check tablecloth where salt and pepper had been untidily spilt, I felt that they were all watching me uneasily, and at once—but too late!—it struck me that I was too elegant for this servants’ tavern in my race-going suit, my top hat from Paris and the pearl pin in my dove-grey tie, that my elegance, the aura of luxury about me at once enveloped me in an invisible layer of hostility and confusion. The silence of these five people made me sink my head lower and lower to look at the table, grimly, desperately counting the red squares on the cloth again and again, kept where I was by the shame of suddenly standing up again, yet too cowardly to raise my tormented glance. It was a relief when the waiter finally came and put the heavy beer glass down in front of me. Then I could at last move a hand and glance timidly over the rim of the glass as I drank: sure enough, all five were watching me, not as if they disliked me but in

silent embarrassment. They recognised an intruder into the musty atmosphere of their world, with the naïve instinct of their class they felt that I wanted something here, was looking for something that did not belong in my own environment, that I was brought here not by love or liking, not by the simple pleasure of a waltz, a beer, a wish to sit quietly in a tavern on a Sunday, but by some kind of desire which they did not understand and which they distrusted, just as the boy by the carousel had distrusted my offer, just as the thousands of others out there in the throng avoided my elegance and sophistication with unconscious hostility. Yet I felt that if I could find something careless, easy, heartfelt, truly human to say the father or mother would respond to me, the daughters would smile back, flattered, I could go to a shooting range with the boy and play childish games with him. Within five, ten minutes I would be released from myself, immersed in the carefree atmosphere of simple conversation, of readily granted, even gratified familiarity—but I could not think of that simple remark, that first step in the conversation. A false, foolish, but overpowering shame stuck in my throat, and I sat with my eyes downcast like a criminal at the table with these simple folk, immersed in the torment of feeling that my grim presence had spoilt the last hour of their Sunday. And as I doggedly sat there I did penance for all the years of haughty indifference when I had passed thousands and thousands of such tables and millions and millions of my fellow men without a glance, thinking only of ingratiating myself or succeeding in the narrow circles of elegant society, and I felt that the direct way to reach these people and talk to them easily, now that I was cast out and wanted contact in my hour of need, was barred to me on the inside.

So I sat, once a free man, now painfully inward-looking, still counting the red squares on the tablecloth until at last the waiter came by. I called him over, paid, left my almost untouched glass of beer and said a civil good evening. They thanked me in tones of friendly surprise; I knew, without turning round, that as soon as my back was turned they would resume their lively cheerfulness, and the warm circle of their conversation would close in as soon as I, the foreign body, had been thrust out of it.

Once again, but now more greedily, fervently and desperately, I threw myself back into the human whirlpool. The crowd had thinned out under the black trees that merged with the sky, there was not so dense and restless a torrent of people in the circle of light around the carousel, only shadowy forms scurrying around on the outskirts of the square. And the deep roar of the crowd, a noise like breathing in desire, was separating into many little sounds, always ringing

out when the music somewhere grew strong and frenzied, as if to snatch back the people who were leaving. Faces of another kind emerged now: the children with their balloons and paper confetti had gone home, and so had families on a leisurely Sunday outing. Now there were loud-mouthed drunks about; shabby characters with a sauntering yet purposeful gait came out of side alleys. During the hour when I had sat transfixed at the strangers' table, this curious world had descended to a lower plane. But in itself this phosphorescent atmosphere of audacity and danger somehow pleased me more than the earlier Sunday respectability. The instinct that had been aroused in me scented a similarly intent desire; I felt myself somehow reflected in the sauntering of these dubious figures, these social outcasts who were also roaming here with restless expectation in search of an adventure, of sudden excitement, and I envied even these ragged fellows the way they roamed so freely and openly, for I was standing beside the wooden post of a carousel and breathing with difficulty, impatient to thrust the pressure of silence and the pain of my isolation away from me and yet incapable of a movement, of a cry, of a word. I just stood there staring at the square that was illuminated by the flickering reflection of the circling lights, looking out from my island of light into the darkness, glancing with foolish hope at any human being who, attracted by the bright light, turned my way for a moment. But all eyes moved coldly away from me. No one wanted me, no one would release me.

I know it would be mad to try to describe or actually explain to anyone how I, a cultured and elegant man, a figure in high society, rich, independent, acquainted with the most distinguished figures of a city with a population of millions, spent a whole hour that night standing by the post of a tunelessly squeaking, constantly rocking carousel in the Prater, hearing the same thumping polka, the same slowly dragging waltz circle past me with the same silly horses' heads of painted wood, twenty, forty, a hundred times, never moving from the spot out of dogged defiance, a magical feeling that I could force fate to do my will. I know I was acting senselessly, but there was a tension of feeling in that senseless persistence, a steely spasm of all the muscles such as people usually feel, perhaps, only at the moment of a fatal fall and just before death. My whole life, a life that had passed so emptily, had suddenly come flooding back and was building up in me like pent-up water behind a dam. And tormented as I was by my pointless delusion, my intention of staying, holding out there until some word or glance from a human being

released me, yet I relished it too. In standing at the stake like that I did penance not so much for the theft as for the dull, lethargic vacuity of my earlier life, and I had sworn to myself not to leave until I received a sign that fate had let me go free.

And the more that hour progressed, the more night came on. Lights went out in one after another of the side-shows, and then there was always a kind of rising tide of darkness, swallowing up the light patch of that particular booth on the grass. The bright island where I stood was more and more isolated, and I looked at the time, trembling. Another quarter of an hour and then the dappled wooden horses would stand still, the red and green lights on their foolish foreheads would be switched off, the bloated orchestrion would stop thumping out its music. Then I would be wholly in the dark, all alone here in the faintly rustling night, entirely outcast, entirely desolate. I looked with increasing uneasiness at the now dimly lit square, where a couple on their way home now hurried past or a few drunken fellows staggered about only very occasionally: but over in the shadows hidden life quivered, restless and enticing. Sometimes there was a quiet whistle or a snap of the fingers when a couple of men passed by. And if the men, lured by the sound, moved into the darkness you would hear women's voices whispering in the shadows, and sometimes the wind blew scraps of shrill laughter my way. Gradually that hidden life emerged more boldly from the dark outskirts, coming closer to the circle of light in the illuminated square, only to plunge back into the shadows again as soon as the spiked helmet of a passing policeman shone in the reflected street light. But no sooner had he continued on his beat than the ghostly shadows returned, and now I could see their outlines clearly, so close did they venture to the light. They were the last dregs of that nocturnal world, the mud left behind now that the flowing torrent of humanity had subsided: a couple of whores, the poorest and most despised who have no bedstead of their own, sleep on a mattress by day and by night walk the streets restlessly, giving their worn, abused, thin bodies to any man here in the dark for a small silver coin, with the police after them, driven by hunger or by some ruffian, always roaming the darkness, hunters and hunted alike. They gradually emerged like hungry dogs, sniffing about near the lighted square for something male, for a forgotten denizen of the night whose lust they could slake for a crown or so to buy a glühwein in a café and keep the flickering candle-end of life going; it would soon enough be extinguished in a hospice or a prison. These girls were the refuse, the last liquid muck left after the sensuous tide of the Sunday crowd

had ebbed away—it was with boundless horror that I now saw those hungry figures flitting out of the dark. But my horror was also mingled with a magical desire, for even in this dirtiest of mirrors I recognised something forgotten and now dimly felt again: here was the swamp-like world of the depths through which I had passed many years ago, and it now rose in my mind again with a phosphorescent glow. How strange was what this fantastic night offered me, suddenly revealing matters closed to me before, so that the darkest of my past, the most secret of my urges now lay open to me! Dim feelings revived from my forgotten boyhood years, when my timid glance was curiously attracted to such figures, yet felt afraid of them, a memory of the first time I followed one of them up a damp and creaking staircase to her bed—and suddenly, as if lightning had riven the night sky, I sharply saw every detail of that forgotten hour, the bad print of an oil painting over the bed, the good-luck charm she wore round her neck, I felt every fibre of that moment, the uncertain heat of it, the disgust, my first boyish pride. All that surged through my body at once. I was suddenly flooded with immeasurable clarity of vision, and—how can I say it, this infinite thing?—I suddenly understood all that bound me to these people with such burning pity, for the very reason that they were the last dregs of life, and my instinct, once aroused by my crime, felt for this hungry sauntering, so like my own on this fantastic night, felt for that criminal availability to any touch, any strange, chance-come desire. I was magnetically drawn to them, the wallet full of stolen money suddenly burned hot on my breast as at last I sensed beings over there, human beings, soft, breathing, speaking, wanting something from others, perhaps from me, only waiting as I was to offer myself up, burning in my fervent desire for human contact. And suddenly I understood what drives men to such creatures, I saw that it is seldom just the heat in the blood, a growing itch, but is usually simply the fear of loneliness, of the terrible strangeness that otherwise rises between us, as my inflamed emotions felt for the first time today. I remembered when I had last dimly felt something like this: it was in England, in Manchester, one of those steely cities that roar under a lightless sky with a noise like an underground railway, and yet at the same time are frozen with a loneliness that seeps through the pores and into the blood. I had been staying there with relatives for three weeks, but spent all my evenings wandering around bars and clubs, visiting the glittering music-hall again and again just to feel some human warmth. And then, one evening, I had found such a woman, whose gutter English I could scarcely understand, but suddenly I was in a room, drinking in laughter from a strange mouth, there was a warm body there, something of

this earth, close and soft. Suddenly the cold, black city melted away, the dark and raucous lonely space: a being you did not know, who just stood there waiting for all comers, could release you, thaw the frost; you could breathe freely again, feel life, all light and bright in the middle of the steely dungeon. How wonderful for those who are lonely, shut up in themselves, to know or guess that there is something to support them in their fear, something to cling to, though it may be dirty from much handling, stiff with age, eaten away by corrosion. And this, this of all things I had forgotten in that hour of ultimate loneliness from which, staggering, I rose that night. I had forgotten that somewhere, in one final corner, there are always these creatures waiting to accept any devotion, let any desolation rest in their breath, cool any heat for a small coin, which is never enough for the great gift they give with their eternal readiness, the gift of their human presence.

Beside me the orchestrion of the carousel started droning away again. This was the last ride, the last fanfare of the circling light going round in the darkness before Sunday passed into the workaday week. But no one was riding now, the horses went round empty in their crazy circle, the tired woman at the cash desk was raking together the day's takings and counting them, the errand boy was ready with a hook to bring the shutters rattling down over the booth after this last ride. Only I stood there alone, still leaning against the post, and looked out at the empty square where nothing but those figures moved, fluttering like bats, seeking something just as I was seeking, waiting as I was waiting, yet with an impassably strange space between us. Now, however, one of them must have noticed me, for she slowly made her way forward, and I looked closely at her from under my lowered eyelids: a small, crippled, rickety creature without a hat, wearing a tasteless and showy cheap dress with worn dancing shoes peeping out from under it, the whole outfit probably bought bit by bit from a street stall or junk shop at third-hand, crumpled by the rain or some indecent adventure in the grass. She came over with an ingratiating look and stopped beside me, casting out a sharp glance like a fishing line and showing her bad teeth in an inviting smile. My breath stopped short. I could not move, could not look at her, and yet I could not tear myself away: as if I were under hypnosis, I felt that a human being was walking around me hopefully, that someone was wooing me, that with a word, with a gesture I could finally rid myself of my terrible loneliness, my painful sense of being an outcast. But I could not move, I was wooden as the post against which I was leaning, and in a kind of lascivious powerlessness I felt only—as the melody of

the carousel wearily wound down—this close presence, the will to attract me, and I closed my eyes for a moment, to feel to the full this magnetic attraction of something human coming out of the darkness of the world and flowing over me.

The carousel stopped, the waltz tune was cut short with a last groaning sound. I opened my eyes just in time to see the figure beside me turn away. Obviously she felt it tedious to wait beside a man standing here like a block of wood. I was horrified. I suddenly felt very cold. Why had I let her go, the only human being who had approached me this fantastic night, who was receptive to me? Behind me the lights were going out; the shutters rolled down with a rattle and a clatter. It was over.

And suddenly—oh, how can I describe to myself that warm sense like spindrift suddenly spraying up?—suddenly—and it was as abrupt, as hot, as red as if a vein had burst in my breast—suddenly something broke out of me, a proud, haughty man fully armoured with cool social dignity, something like a silent prayer, a spasm, a cry: it was my childish yet overpowering wish for this dirty, rickety little whore to turn her head again so that I could speak to her. For I was not too proud to follow her—my pride was all crushed, trodden underfoot, swept away by very new feelings—no, I was too weak, too much at a loss. So I stood there, trembling and in turmoil, alone at the martyr's stake of darkness, waiting as I had never waited since my boyhood years, as I had waited only once before, standing by a window in the evening as a strange woman slowly began undressing, and I kept lingering and hesitating as she unwittingly stripped herself naked—I stood crying out to God with a voice I did not recognise as my own for a miracle, for this crippled thing, this last scum of humanity, to try me once more, to turn her eyes to me again.

And yes—she did turn. Once more, quite automatically, she looked back. But so strong must my convulsive start have been, so strong the leaping of intense feeling into my eyes, that she stopped and observed me. She half turned again, looked at me through the darkness, smiled and nodded her head invitingly over to the shadowy side of the square. And at last I felt the terrible spell of rigidity in me give way. I could move again. I nodded my consent.

The invisible pact was made. Now she went ahead over the dimly lit square, turning from time to time to see if I was following. And I did follow: the leaden feeling had left my legs, I could move my feet again. I was magnetically impelled forward, I did not consciously walk but flowed along behind her, so to

speak, drawn by a mysterious power. In the dark of the alley between the booths of side-shows she slowed her pace. Now I was beside her.

She looked at me for a few seconds, scrutinising me distrustfully; something made her uncertain. Obviously my curiously timid lingering there, the contrast between the place and my elegance, seemed to her somehow suspicious. She looked round several times, hesitated. Then, pointing down the street that was black as a mine shaft: "Let's go there. It's dark behind the circus."

I could not answer. The dreadful vulgarity of this encounter numbed me. I would have liked to tear myself away somehow, bought myself off with a coin, an excuse, but my will had no more power over me. I felt as if I were on a toboggan run flinging myself round a bend, racing at high speed down a steep incline of snow, when the fear of death somehow mingles pleasantly with the intoxication of speed, and instead of braking you give yourself up to the sense of falling without your own volition, with delirious yet conscious weakness. I could not go back now, and perhaps I didn't want to. She pressed herself intimately against me, and I instinctively took her arm. It was a very thin arm, the arm not of a woman but of an underdeveloped, scrofulous child, and no sooner did I feel it through her lightweight coat than I was overcome, in the midst of my intense access of feeling, by gentle, overwhelming pity for this wretched, downtrodden scrap of life washed up against me by the night. And instinctively my fingers caressed the weak, feeble joints of her hand more respectfully and purely than I had ever touched a woman before.

We crossed a dimly lit road and entered a little grove where huge treetops held the sombre, evil-smelling darkness in their embrace. At that moment, and although you could hardly make out an outline any more, I noticed that she turned very carefully on my arm, and did the same thing again a few steps later. And strangely enough, while I was, as it were, numbed and rigid as I slipped into this indecent adventure, my senses were perfectly bright and alert. With clear vision that nothing escaped, that took conscious note of every movement, I realized that something was following quietly behind us on the borders of the path we had crossed, and I thought I heard a dragging step. And suddenly—as when a crackling, white flash of lightning leaps across a landscape—I guessed, I knew it all: I was to be lured into a trap, this whore's pimps were lurking behind us, and in the dark she was taking me to the appointed place where I was to be their victim. I saw it all, with the supernatural clarity that one is said to have only in the concentrated seconds

between life and death, and I considered every possibility. There was still time to get away, the main road must be close, for I could hear the electric tram rattling along its rails, a shout or a whistle could summon aid. All the possibilities of flight and rescue leapt up in my mind, in sharply outlined images.

But how strange—this alarming realisation did not cool me but only further inflamed me. Today, awake in the clear light of an autumn day, I cannot explain the absurdity of my actions to myself: I knew, I knew at once with every fibre of my being that I was going into danger unnecessarily, but the anticipation of danger ran through my nerves like a fine madness. I knew there was something terrible and perhaps deadly ahead, I trembled with disgust at the idea of being forced into a criminal, mean and dirty incident somewhere here, but even death itself aroused a dark curiosity in me in my present state of life-induced intoxication, an intoxication I had never known or guessed at before, but now it was streaming over me, numbing me. Something—was it that I was ashamed to show fear, or was it weakness?—something drove me on. I felt intrigued to climb down to this last sewer of life, to squander my whole past, gamble it away. A reckless lust of the spirit mingled with the low vulgarity of this adventure. And although all my nerves scented danger, and I understood it clearly with my senses and my reason, I still went on into the grove arm-in-arm with this dirty little Prater tart who physically repelled rather than attracted me, and who I knew was bringing me this way just for her accomplices. Yet I could not go back. The gravitational pull of criminality, having taken hold of me that afternoon during my adventure on the racecourse, was dragging me further and further down. And now I felt only the daze, the eddying frenzy of my fall into new depths, perhaps into the last depths of all, into death.

After a few steps I stopped. Once again her glance flew uncertainly around. Then she looked expectantly at me.

“Well—what are you going to give me?”

Oh yes. I'd forgotten that. But the question did not sober me, far from it. I was so glad to give her something, to make her a present, to be able to waste my substance. I hastily reached into my pocket and tipped all the silver in it and a few crumpled banknotes into her outstretched hand. And now something so wonderful happened that even today my blood warms when I think of it: either this poor creature was surprised by the size of the sum—she must have been

used to getting only small change for her indecent services—or there was something new and unusual to her in the way I gave it readily, quickly, almost with delight, for she stepped back, and through the dense and evil-smelling darkness I felt her gaze seeking me in great astonishment. And at last I felt what I had not found all evening: someone was interested in me, was seeking me, for the first time I was alive to someone else in the world. The fact that it should be this outcast, this creature who carried her poor abused body round in the darkness, offering it for sale, and who had thrust herself on me without even looking at the buyer, now turned her eyes to mine, the fact that she was wondering about the human being in me only heightened my strange sense of intoxication, clear-sighted and dizzy as I was at one and the same time, both fully conscious and dissolving into a magical apathy. And already the stranger was pressing closer to me, but not in the businesslike way of a woman doing a duty that had paid for. Instead, I thought I felt unconscious gratitude in it, a feminine desire for closeness. I gently took her thin, rickety, childish arm, felt her small, twisted body, and suddenly, looking beyond all that, I saw her whole life: the borrowed, smeared bedstead in a suburban yard where she slept from morning to noon among a crowd of other people's children; her pimp throttling her; belching drunks falling on her in the dark; the special hospital ward; the lecture hall where her abused body was put on show, sick and naked, as a teaching aid to cheerful young medical students; and the end somewhere in a poorhouse to which she would be carted off in a batch of women and left to die like an animal. Infinite pity for her, for all of them came over me, a warmth that was tenderness without sensuality. Again and again I patted her small, thin arm. And then I bent down and kissed the astounded girl. shouting. Now I saw the carousels of my childhood going round and round among the trees, with lights crazily flashing. I stood in the middle of the square, letting all the tumult break over me, filling my eyes and ears: these cascades of sound, the infernal confusion of it all did me good, for there was something in this hurly-burly that stilled my own inner torrent of feeling. I watched the servant girls, skirts flying, getting themselves pushed up in the air on the swings with loud cries of glee that might have issued from their sexual orifices, I saw butchers' boys laughing as they brought heavy hammers down on the try-your-strength machine, barkers with hoarse voices and ape-like gestures cried their wares above the noise of the orchestrions, and all this whirling activity mingled with the thousand sounds and constant movement of the crowd, which was drunk, as if it had imbibed cheap spirits, on the music of the brass band, the flickering of the light, and their own warm pleasure in company. Now that I

myself had been awakened I suddenly felt other people's lives, I felt the heated arousal of the city as, hot and pent up, it poured out with its millions in the few leisure hours of a Sunday, as its own fullness spurred it on to sultry, animal, yet somehow healthy and instinctive enjoyment. And gradually, feeling people rub against me, feeling the constant touch of their hot bodies passionately pressing close, I sensed their warm arousal passing into me too: my nerves, stimulated by the sharp aroma, tensed and reached out of me, my senses played deliriously with the roar of the crowd and felt that vague stupor that inevitably mingles with all strong sensual gratification. For the first time in years, perhaps for the first time in my life, I felt the crowd, I felt human beings as a force from which lust passed into my own once separate being; some dam had been burst, and what was in my veins passed out into this world, flowed rhythmically back, and I felt a new desire, to break down that last barrier between me and them, a passionate longing to copulate with this hot, strange press of humanity. With male lust I longed to plunge into the gushing vulva of that hot, giant body, with female lust I was open to every touch, every cry, every allurements, every embrace—and now I knew that love was in me, and a need for love such as I had not felt since my twilight boyhood days. Oh, to plunge in, into the living entity, to be linked somehow to the convulsive, laughing, breathing passion of others, to stream on, to pour my fluids into their veins; to become a small and nameless part of the hurly-burly, something infused into the dirt of the world, a creature quivering with lust, sparkling in the slough with those myriads of beings—oh, to plunge into that fullness, down into the circling ripples, shot like an arrow from the bow of my own tension into the unknown, into some heaven of collective experience.

At that moment there was a rustle behind me. A twig cracked. I jumped back. And a coarse, vulgar male voice was laughing. "There we are. I thought so."

Even before I saw them I knew who they were. Not for one second, dazed and confused as I was, had I forgotten that I was surrounded, and indeed this was what my mysteriously lively curiosity had been waiting for. A figure now emerged from the bushes, and a second behind it: a couple of rough fellows boldly taking up their positions. The coarse laugh came again. "Turning a trick here, eh? A fine gentleman, of course! Well, we'll see to him now." I stood perfectly still, the blood beating in my temples. I felt no fear. I was simply waiting for what came next. Now I was in the very depths at last, in the final abyss of ignominy. Now the blow must come, the shattering end towards which I had half-intentionally been moving.

The girl had moved quickly away from me, but not to join them. She was in a way standing between us; it seemed that she did not entirely like the ambush prepared for me. The men, for their part, were vexed because I did not move. They looked at each other, obviously expecting some protest from me, a plea, some display of fear. “Oh, so he’s not talking!” said one of them at last, threateningly. The other approached me and said in commanding tones, “You’ll have to come down to the police station with us.”

I still did not answer. One of the men put his hand on my shoulder and gave me a slight push. “Move,” he said.

I began to move. I did not defend myself, for I did not want to: the extraordinary, degraded, dangerous nature of the situation left me dazed. But my brain remained perfectly clear: I knew that these fellows must fear the police more than I did, that I could buy myself off for a few crowns—but I wanted to relish the depths of horror to the full, I was enjoying the dreadful humiliation of the situation, in a kind of waking swoon. Without haste, entirely automatically, I went the way they had pushed me.

But the very fact that I moved towards the light so obediently and without a word seemed to confuse the men. They whispered softly, and then began to talk to each other again in deliberately raised voices. “Let him go,” said one (a pock-marked little fellow), but the other replied, with apparent decision: “No, that won’t do. If poor starving devils like us do such things they put us behind bars. But a fine gentleman like this—he really deserves punishment.” I heard every word, and in their voices I detected their clumsily expressed request for me to begin negotiating with them; the criminal in me understood the criminal in them, understood that they wanted to torment me with fears, while I was tormenting them with my docility. It was a silent battle between us, and—oh, how rich in experience this night was!—and in the midst of deadly danger, here in this insalubrious grove on the Prater, in the company of a couple of ruffians and a whore, I felt the frenzied enchantment of gambling for the second time in twelve hours, but this time for the highest of stakes, for my whole comfortable existence, even my life. And with all the force of my quivering nerves, tensed as they were to breaking point, I abandoned myself to this great game, to the sparkling magic of chance.

“Hey, there goes the cop,” said a voice behind me. “Our fine gentleman won’t like this, he’ll be behind bars a week or more.” It was meant to sound like a grim threat, but I heard the man’s hesitant uncertainty. I went placidly

towards the dim light, where I did indeed see light glint on a police officer's spiked helmet. Twenty more paces and I would have reached him. Behind me, the men had fallen silent. I realized they were slowing down. Next moment, I knew, they must retreat like cowards into the dark, into their own world, embittered by the failure of their trick, perhaps to vent their anger on the poor woman. The game was over: again, for the second time today, I had won, I had cheated other strangers of their malicious designs. Pale lantern light was already flickering ahead, and when I turned I looked for the first time into the two ruffians' faces: bitterness and a craven shame looked out of their uncertain eyes. They still stood there, but downcast and disappointed, ready to slink back into the dark. For their power was gone: it was I they feared now.

At that moment I was suddenly overcome—and it was like fermentation within me, bursting the staves in the barrel of my breast to pour out hot feeling into my blood—I was suddenly overcome by an infinite, fraternal sympathy for these two men. What had they wanted from me, these poor hungry, ragged fellows, what had they wanted from me, a satiated parasite, but a few miserable crowns? They could have strangled me there in the dark, they could have robbed me, killed me, but they had not; they had only tried to frighten me in a clumsy, amateurish way for the sake of the loose silver in my pocket. How could I, who had become a thief on a whim, out of a sense of audacity, who had turned criminal for the pleasure of my nerves, how could I dare to torment these poor devils further? And my infinite sympathy was mingled with infinite shame at having toyed with their fear and impatience for my own amusement. I pulled myself together: now that I was safe and the light of the nearby street protected me, I must go along with them and banish the disappointment from those bitter, hungry eyes.

With a sudden movement I stepped up to one of them. "Why would you want to report me to the police?" I said, taking care to inject a touch of stress and fear into my voice. "What good will it do you? Perhaps I'll be locked up, perhaps not. But it won't do you any good. Why do you want to make my life a misery?"

They both stared at me in embarrassment. They must have expected anything: cries, threats to make them cringe like growling dogs, not this subservience. At last one of them said, not threateningly at all, but as it were apologetically: "Justice have got to be done! We're only doing our duty, right?"

This comment was obviously prepared for such cases, yet it rang false. Neither of the pair dared look at me. They were waiting. And I knew what they were waiting for. They were waiting for me to beg for mercy and offer them money.

I still remember everything about those seconds. I recollect every nerve that stirred in me, every thought that shot through my mind. And I know what I maliciously wanted at first: I wanted to make them wait, torment them a little longer, relish the pleasure of keeping them on tenterhooks. But soon I forced myself to beg, because I knew it was time for me to relieve these two of their anxiety. I began putting on a show of being terrified, I begged for mercy, asked them to keep all this quiet and not make me wretched. I saw these poor amateur blackmailers begin to feel awkward, and the silence between us was milder now.

And then at last, at last I said what they had been longing to hear all this time. "I'll—I'll give you—I'll give you a hundred crowns."

All three started and looked at each other. They had not expected so much, not now that all was really lost for them. At last one of them, the pock-marked man with the shifty eyes, pulled himself together. He started to speak twice, but couldn't get it out. Then he said—and I felt that he was ashamed as he spoke—"Two hundred crowns."

"Oh, shut it!" the girl suddenly intervened. "You be glad he gives you anything. He ain't done nothing, he didn't hardly touch me. This is too much."

She was shouting at them in genuinely embittered tones. And my heart sang. Someone was sorry for me, someone was speaking up for me, kindness was born of something low and mean, blackmail gave rise to some dim desire for justice. How good it felt, how it responded to the swelling tide of my feelings! No, I must not play with these people or torment them in their fear and shame any longer—enough, enough!

"Very well, two hundred crowns."

All three fell silent. I took out my wallet. Slowly, very openly I held it in my hand. With one move they could have snatched it from me and fled into the dark. But they looked shyly away. There was some kind of secret pact between them and me, not a conflict and a gamble any more but a condition of trust and justice, a human relationship. I took the two notes from the bundle of stolen money and handed them to one of the men.

“Thank you,” he said automatically, and turned away. He himself obviously felt how ridiculous it was to thank me for money obtained by blackmail. He was ashamed, and his shame—for I could feel everything that night, I could read the meaning of every gesture—his shame distressed me. I did not want a human being to feel ashamed in front of me, one of his own kind, a thief like him, weak, cowardly, lacking in will-power. I felt pain for his humiliation, and wanted to lift it from him. So I refused his thanks.

“No, it is for me to thank you,” I said, surprised at the amount of true feeling in my voice. “If you had reported me to the police I’d have been done for. I’d have had to shoot myself, and you’d have gained nothing by that. It’s better this way. I will go right over there, and perhaps you will go the other way. Good night.”

They stood silent for a moment longer. Then one man said: “Good night,” and then the other, and last the whore, who had stayed in the dark all this time. The words sounded warm and heartfelt, like true good wishes. I sensed in their voices that somewhere deep in their dark natures they liked me, they would never forget this strange moment. It might perhaps return to their minds again in the penitentiary or the hospice; something of me lived on in them, I had given them something. And the pleasure of giving it filled me as no emotion had ever done before.

I walked alone through the night to the exit from the Prater. All inhibition had left me, I had been like a man missing, presumed dead, but now I felt my nature flowing out into the whole infinite world in a plenitude I had never known before. I sensed everything as if it lived for me alone, and as if in its own turn it linked me with that flow. The black trees stood around me, rustling, and I loved them. Stars shone down from above, and I breathed in their white salutation. I heard singing voices somewhere, and I felt they were singing for me. Now that I had torn away the carapace from my breast everything was suddenly mine, and the joy of lavish abandonment swept me on. Oh, how easy it is, I thought, to give pleasure and rejoice in that pleasure yourself: you have only to open yourself up and the living current will flow from one human being to another, falling from the heights to the depths, rising up again like spindrift from the depths into infinity.

At the exit of the Prater, beside a cab rank, I saw a street trader, tired and bowed over her paltry wares. She had baked goods for sale, covered with dust, and a few fruits; she had probably been sitting there since morning bending

over the few coins she had earned, and weariness bent her back. Why not make her happy too, I thought, now that I am happy? I chose a small pastry and put a banknote down in front of her. She began busily looking for change, but I was already walking on and saw only her start of delight, saw the bent back suddenly straighten, while her open mouth, frozen in amazement, sent a thousand good wishes after me. Holding the pastry, I went up to a horse standing wearily in the shafts. It turned and gave me a friendly snort, and its dark eyes showed gratitude when I stroked its pink nostrils and gave it the sweet morsel. And as soon as I had done that I wanted more: to give more pleasure, to feel how a few silver coins, a few notes printed on coloured paper can conquer fear, kill want, kindle merriment. Why were there no beggars here? Why no children who would have liked to have the bunches of balloons on strings which a surly, white-haired cripple was taking home, disappointed by the poor business he had done all this long, hot day. I went up to him. "I'll take the balloons." "Ten hellers each," he said suspiciously, for what would this elegant gentleman of leisure want with his coloured balloons at midnight? "I'll take them all," I said, giving him a ten-crown note. He swayed on his feet, looked at me as if something had dazzled him, and then, trembling, gave me the string that held the whole bunch together. I felt the taut string tug at my finger; the balloons wanted to be gone, to be free, to fly through the air. Go then, fly where you like, be free! I let go of the strings, and up they suddenly rose like so many coloured moons. Laughing people came up from all sides, lovers emerged from the shadows, drivers cracked their whips and called to each other, pointing out the freed balloons drifting over the trees towards the houses and rooftops. The onlookers all glanced cheerfully at each other, enjoying my happy folly.

Why did I never know before how easy and how good it is to give pleasure? All of a sudden the banknotes were burning a hole in my wallet again, twitching in my fingers like the strings of the balloons just now. They wanted to fly away from me into the unknown too. And I took them, those I had stolen from Lajos and my own—for I felt no difference between them now and no guilt—and kept them ready to be given to any who wanted one. I approached a street-sweeper morosely sweeping the deserted Praterstrasse. He thought I wanted to ask him the way, and looked up with a surly expression; I smiled and held out a twenty-crown note. He started, uncomprehending, then finally took it and waited to see what I wanted in return. But I just smiled at him again, said: "Buy something you like," and went on. I kept looking around to see if anyone

wanted something from me, and when no one came up I just handed the money out myself: I gave a note to a whore who accosted me, two notes to a lamplighter, I threw one into the open hatch of a basement bakery, and so I went on, leaving behind me a wake of amazement, thanks and pleasure, I walked on and on. Finally I crumpled notes up and scattered them around the empty street and on the steps of a church, liking the idea of the old ladies who would come to morning service, find all those banknotes and thank God, or of a poor student, a girl or a workman on their way out coming upon the money in amazement and delight, just as I had discovered myself in amazement and delight that night.

I couldn't say now where and how I scattered all those banknotes, and finally my silver too. There was some kind of delirium in me, an outpouring like love-making, and when the last pieces of paper had fluttered away I felt light, as if I could fly, and I knew a freedom I had never known before. The street, the sky, the buildings, all seemed to flow together and towards me, giving me an entirely new sense of possession and of belonging: never, even in the most warmly experienced moments of my life, had I felt so strongly that all these things were really present, that they were alive, that I was alive, and that their lives and mine were one and the same, that life is a great and mighty phenomenon and can never be hailed with too much delight. It is something that only love grasps, only devotion comprehends.

There was one last dark moment, and that came when, having walked happily home, I put the key in my door and the corridor leading to my rooms opened up black before me. I was suddenly overcome by fear that I would be returning to my old life if I entered the apartment of the man I had been until this moment, if I lay down in his bed and found myself once more connected with everything from which this night had so wonderfully released me. No, I must not be what I had been before, remote from the real world, I must not be the correct, unfeeling gentleman of yesterday and all the days before. I would rather plunge into any depths of crime and horror, but I must have the reality of life! I was tired, inexpressibly tired, yet I feared that sleep might close over me, and then its black silt would sweep away all the hot, glowing, living emotions that this night had aroused in me, and I might find that the whole experience had been as fleeting and without foundation as a fantastic dream.

But I woke cheerfully to a new morning next day, and none of that gratefully flowing emotion had run away into the sand. Four months have passed since

then, and my old paralysis of feeling has not returned. I still bloom warmly as I face the day. The magical intoxication of my experience when the ground of my old world suddenly gave way under my feet, plunging me into the unknown, when I felt the delirium of speed mingled with the profundity of all life as I fell into my own abyss—yes, that flowing heat is gone, but since that hour I have been conscious of my own warm blood with every breath I take, and I daily feel new lust for life. I know I am a different man now, with different senses; different things arouse me, and I am more aware than before. I dare not say, of course, that I have become a better man; I know only that I am a happier man because I have found some kind of meaning in an existence that had been so cold, a meaning for which I can find no term but life itself. Since then I hold back from nothing, for I feel the norms and formalities of the society in which I live are meaningless, and I am not ashamed in front of others or myself. Words like honour, crime, vice, have suddenly acquired a cold, metallic note, I cannot speak them without horror. I live by letting myself draw on the power I so magically felt for the first time on that night. I do not ask where it will carry me: perhaps to some new abyss, into what others call vice, or perhaps to somewhere sublime. I don't know and I don't want to know. For only he who lives his life as a mystery is truly alive.

But never—and I am sure of this—have I loved life more fervently, and now I know that all who are indifferent to any of the shapes and forms it takes, commit a crime (the only crime there is!). Since I began to understand myself, I have understood much of many other things: someone's avid glance into a shop window can distress me, the playfulness of a dog can delight me. I suddenly care for everything; I am indifferent to nothing now. In the paper (which I used to consult only in search of entertainment and auction sales) I read of a hundred things that excite me every day; books that once bored me suddenly reveal their meaning to me. And the strangest thing of all is that I can suddenly talk to people outside the bounds of polite conversation. My manservant, who has been with me for seven years, interests me and I often talk to him; the caretaker whom I used to pass by, thinking no more of him than if he were a moving pillar, recently told me about his little daughter's death, and it affected me more than the tragedies of Shakespeare. And this change—although I continue to lead my life in circles of polite tedium so as not to give myself away—this change seems to be gradually becoming evident. I find that many people are suddenly on terms of warm good friendship with me; for the third time this week a strange dog ran up to me in the street. And

friends tell me with a certain pleasure, as if speaking to one who has recovered from an illness, that I am quite rejuvenated.

Rejuvenated? I alone know that I am only just beginning to live. Well, it is a common delusion to think the past was nothing but error and preparation for the present, and I can well see that it is presumptuous of me to think that taking a cold pen in a warm, living hand and recording my feelings on dry paper means that I am really alive. But if it is a delusion, then it is the first ever to delight me, the first to warm my blood and open my senses to me. And if I write about the miracle of my awakening here, then I do it for myself alone, for I know the truth of this more profoundly than any words can say. I have spoken to no friend about it; my friends never knew how dead to the world I was, and they will never know how I live and flourish now. And should death strike me in the middle of this life of mine, and these lines should fall into another's hands, that idea does not alarm or distress me. For he who has never known the magic of such an hour will not understand, as I myself could not have understood half a year ago, that a few fleeting, apparently disconnected incidents on a single evening could so magically rekindle a life already extinguished. I feel no shame before such a man, for he will not understand me. But he who knows how those incidents are linked will not judge or feel pride. And I feel no shame before him, for he will understand me. Once a man has found himself there is nothing in this world that he can lose. And once he has understood the humanity in himself, he will understand all human beings.

[Stefan Zweig](#), 1922

Recommendations:

[Emma](#), [Northanger Abbey](#), [Pride and Prejudice](#), [Mansfield Park](#) , [Sense and Sensibility](#) by Jane Austen

[Gobseck](#), [Father Goriot](#), [The Magic Skin](#), [Cousin Bette](#) by Honoré de Balzac

[Uncle Tom's Cabin](#) by Harriet Beecher Stowe

[The Decameron](#) by Giovanni Boccaccio

[Wuthering Heights](#) by Emily Brontë

[Life Is A Dream](#) by Pedro Calderon De La Barca

[Alice in Wonderland](#) by Lewis Carroll

[Don Quixote of La Mancha](#) by Miguel de Cervantes

[The Divine Comedy](#), [The New Life](#) by Dante Alighieri

[Robinson Crusoe](#) by Daniel Defoe

[Oliver Twist](#), [David Copperfield](#), [A Tale of Two Cities](#) by Charles Dickens

[The Idiot](#), [The Brothers Karamazov](#), [Crime And Punishment](#), [The Insulted And The Injured](#), [Demons](#) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

[The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes](#), [His Last Bow](#) by Arthur Conan Doyle

[The Count of Monte Cristo](#), [The Three Musketeers](#) by A. Dumas

[Cleopatra](#), [The Emperor](#) by Georg Ebers

[The Great Gatsby](#) by F. Scott Fitzgerald

[The Red Lily](#), [Penguin Island](#) by Anatole France

[Dona Perfecta](#) by B. Perez Galdos

[Faust Parts I & II](#) , [The Sorrows of Young Werther](#) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

[The Overcoat](#), [The Nose](#), [Dead Souls](#) by Nikolai Gogol

[The Scarlet Letter](#) by Nathaniel Hawthorne

[The Hunchback of Notre-Dame](#) , [Les Misérables](#) , [The Man Who Laughs](#) by Victor Hugo

[The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#) by W. Irving

[Trois hommes dans un bateau. Sans oublier le chien!](#) by Jerome K. Jerome

[The Trial](#) , [Metamorphosis](#), [The Castle](#) by Franz Kafka

[Snow Country](#) by Yasunari Kawabata

[The Jungle Book](#) by Rudyard Kipling

[A Hero of Our Time](#), [The Demon](#) by M. Y. Lermontov

[Martin Eden](#) , [The Call of the Wild](#), [White Fang](#) by Jack London

[Bel Ami](#) by Guy de Maupassant

[Moby Dick Or The Whale](#), [Bartleby, The Scrivener](#) by Herman Melville

[Amphitryon](#) by Moliere

[Thus Spake Zarathustra](#), [The Birth of Tragedy](#) by Friedrich Nietzsche

[Henry IV](#), [Six Characters in Search of an Author](#), [The Late Mattia Pascal](#) by Luigi Pirandello

[Eugene Onegin](#) , [The Queen of Spades](#), [Boris Godunov](#), [The Captain's Daughter](#) by Alexander Pushkin

[The Headless Horseman](#) by Mayne Reid

[Treasure Island](#), [The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde](#) by Robert Louis Stevenson

[The Robbers](#), [Love And Intrigue](#), [Wilhelm Tell](#) by F. Schiller

[The Antiquary](#), [Quentin Durward](#) by Walter Scott

[Othello](#), [King Lear](#), [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Macbeth](#) by William Shakespeare

[Fathers and Sons](#) , [A House of Gentlefolk](#), [A Sportsman's Sketches](#) by Ivan Turgenev

[The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#), [The Prince And The Pauper](#) by Mark Twain

[Dick Sands, the Boy Captain](#) , [In Search of the Castaways](#) by Jules Verne

[The Picture of Dorian Gray](#) by Oscar Wilde

[Amok](#), [Chess Story](#), [24 Hours in the Life of a Woman](#) by Stefan Zweig