THE FOURTH DAY

FROM GÖHREN TO THIESSOW

We left Göhren at seven the next morning and breakfasted outside it where the lodging-houses end and the woods begin. Gertrud had bought bread, and butter, and a bottle of milk, and we sat among the nightshades, whose flowers were everywhere, and ate in purity and cleanliness while August waited in the road. The charming little flowers with their one-half purple and other half yellow are those that have red berries later in the year and are called by Keats ruby grapes of Proserpine. Yet they are not poisonous, and there is no reason why you should not suffer your pale forehead to be kissed by them if you want to. They are as innocent as they are pretty, and the wood was full of them. Poison, death, and Proserpine seemed far enough away from that leafy place and the rude honesty of bread and butter. Still, lest I should feel too happy, and therefore be less able to bear any shocks that might be awaiting me at Thiessow, I repeated the melancholy and beautiful ode for my admonishment under my breath. It had no effect. Usually it is an unfailing antidote in its extraordinary depression to any excess of cheerfulness; but the wood and the morning sun and the bread and butter were more than a match for it. No incantation of verse could make me believe that Joy's hand was for ever at his lips bidding adieu. Joy seemed to be sitting contentedly beside me sharing my bread and butter; and when I drove away towards Thiessow he got into the carriage with me, and whispered that I was going to be very happy there.

Outside the wood the sandy road lay between cornfields gay with corncockles, bright reminders that the coming harvest will be poor. From here to Thiessow there are no trees except round the cottages of Philippshagen, a pretty village with a hoary church, beyond which the road became pure sand, dribbling off into mere uncertain tracks over the flat pasture land that stretches all the way to Thiessow.

The guide-book warmly recommends the seashore when the wind is in the east (which it was) as the quickest and firmest route from Göhren to Thiessow; but I chose rather to take the road over the plain because there was a poem in the guide-book about the way along the shore, and the guide-book said it described it extremely well, and I was sure that if that were so I would do better to go the other way. This is the poem — the translation is exact, the original being unrhymed, and the punctuation is the poet's —

Splashing waves
Rocking boat
Dipping gulls —
Dunes.

Raging winds
Floating froth,
Flashing lightning
Moon !

Fearful hearts
Morning grey —
Stormy nights
Faith !

I read it, marvelled, and went the other way.

Thiessow is a place that has to be gone to for its sake alone, as a glance at the map will show. If you make up your mind to journey the entire length of the plain that separates it from everywhere else you must also make up your mind to journey the entire length back again, to see Göhren once more, to pass through Baabe, and to make a closer acquaintance with Sellin which is on the way to the yet unvisited villages going north. It is a singular drive down to Thiessow, singular because it seems as though it would never leave off. You see the place far away in the distance the whole time, and you jolt on and on at a walking pace towards it, in and out of ruts, over grass-mounds, the sun beating on your head, sea on your left rolling up the beach in long waves, more sea on your right across the undulating greenness, a distant hill with a village by the water to the west, sails of fisher-boats,

people in a curious costume mowing in a meadow a great way off, and tethered all over the plain solitary sheep and cows, whose nervousness at your approach is the nervousness begotten of a retired life. There are no trees; and if we had not seen Thiessow all the time we should have lost our way, for there is no road. As it is, you go on till you are stopped by the land coming to an end, and there you are at Thiessow. I believe in the summer you can get there by steamer from Göhren or Baabe; but if it is windy and the waves are too big for the boats that land you to put off, the steamer does not stop; so that the only way is over the plain or along the shore. I walked nearly all the time, the jolting was so intolerable. It was heavy work for the horses, and straining work for the carriage. Gertrud sat gripping the bandbox, for with every lurch it tried to roll out. August looked unhappy. His experiences at Göhren had been worse than ours, and Thiessow was right down at the end of all things, and had the drawback, obvious even to August, that whatever it was like we would have to endure it, for swelter back again over the broiling plain only to stay a second night at Göhren was as much out of the question for the horses as for ourselves. As for me, I was absolutely happy. The wide plain, the wide sea, the wide sky were so gloriously full of light and life. The very turf beneath my feet had an eager spring in it; the very daisies covering it looked sprightlier than anywhere else; and up among the great

piled clouds the blessed little larks were fairly drunk with delight. I walked some way ahead of the carriage so as to feel alone. I could have walked for ever in that radiance and freshness. The black-faced sheep ran wildly round and round as I passed, tugging at their chains in frantic agitation. Even the cows seemed uneasy if I came too close; and in the far-off meadow the mowers stopped mowing to watch us dwindle into dots. In this part of Rügen the natives wear a peculiarly hideous dress, or rather the men do — the women's costume is not so ugly — and looking through my glasses to my astonishment I saw that the male mowers had on long baggy white things that were like nothing so much as a woman's white petticoat on either leg. But the mowers and their trousers were soon left far behind. The sun had climbed very high, was pouring down almost straight on to our heads, and still Thiessow seemed no nearer. Well, it did not matter. That is the chief beauty of a tour like mine, that nothing matters. As soon as there are no trains to catch a journey becomes magnificently simple. We might loiter as long as we liked on the road if only we got to some place, any place, by nightfall. This, of course, was my buoyant midday mood, before fatigue had weighed down my limbs and hunger gnawed holes in my cheerfulness. The wind, smelling of sea and freshly-cut grass, had quite blown away the memory of how tragic life had looked the night before when set about by too many beds and not enough

wash-stand; and I walked along with what felt like all the brightness of heaven in my heart.

The end of this walk — I think of it as one of the happiest and most beautiful I have had — came about one o'clock. At that dull hour, when the glory of morning is gone and the serenity of afternoon has not begun, we arrived at a small grey wooden hotel, separated from the east sea by a belt of fir-wood, facing a common to the south, and about twenty minutes' walk from Thiessow proper, which lies on the sea on the western and southern shore of the point. It looked clean, and I went in. August and Gertrud sat broiling in the sun of the shelterless sandy road in front of the lily-grown garden. Somehow I had no doubts about being taken in here, and I was at once shown a spotless little bedroom by a spotless landlady. It was a corner room in the south-west corner of the house, and one window looked south on to the common and the other west on to the plain. The bed was drawn across this window, and lying on it I could see the western sea, the distant hill on the shore with its village, and grass, grass, nothing but grass, rolling away from the very wall of the house to infinity and the sunset. The room was tiny. If I had had more than a hold-all I should not have been able to get into it. It had a locked door leading into another bedroom which was occupied, said the chambermaid, by a quiet lady who would make no noise. Gertrud's room was opposite mine. August cheered up when I went out and told him he could go to the stables and

put up, and Gertrud was visibly agreeably surprised by the cleanliness of both our rooms.

I lunched on a verandah overlooking the common, with the Madonna lilies of the little garden within reach of my hand; and the tablecloth and the spoons and the waiter were all in keeping with the clean landlady. The inn being small the visitors were few, and those I saw dining at the other little tables on the verandah appeared to be quiet, inoffensive people such as one would expect to find in a quiet, out-of-the-way place. The sea was not visible, but I could hear it on the other side of the belt of firs; and the verandah facing south and being hot and airless, a longing to get into the cool water took hold of me. The waiter said the bathing-huts were open in the afternoon from four to five, and I went upstairs to tell Gertrud to bring my things down to the beach at four, when she would find me lying in the sand. While I was talking, the quiet lady in the next room began to talk too, apparently to the chambermaid, for she talked of hot water. I broke off my own talk short. It was not that the partition was so thin that it seemed as if she were in the same room as myself, though that was sufficiently disturbing — it was that I thought for a moment I knew the voice. I looked at Gertrud. Gertrud's face was empty of all expression. The quiet lady, continuing, told the chambermaid to let down the sun-blinds, and the note in her voice that had struck me was no longer there. Feeling relieved, for I did not want to come across acquaintances,

I put *The Prelude* in my pocket and went out. The fir-wood was stuffy, and suggested mosquitoes, but several bath-guests had slung up hammocks and were lying in them dozing, so that there could not have been mosquitoes; and coming suddenly out on to the sands all idea of stuffiness vanished, for there was the same glorious, heaving, sparkling, splashing blue that I had seen from the dunes of Göhren the evening before at sunset. The bathing-house, a modest place with only two cells and a long plank bridge running into deep water, was just opposite the end of the path through the firs. It was locked up and deserted. The sands were deserted too, for the tourists were all dozing in hammocks or in beds. I made a hollow in the clean dry sand beneath the last of the fir trees, and settled down to enjoy myself till Gertrud came. Oh, I was happy! Thiessow was so quiet and primitive, the afternoon so radiant, the colours of the sea and of the long line of silver sand, and of the soft green gloom of the background of firs so beautiful. Commendably far away to the north I saw the coastguard hill belonging to Göhren. On my right the woods turned into beechwoods, and scrambled up high cliffs that seemed to form the end of the peninsula. I would go and look at all that later on after my bathe. If there is a thing I love it is exploring the little paths of an unknown wood, finding out the corners where it keeps its periwinkles and anemones, discovering its birds' nests, waiting motionless for its hedgehogs and squirrels, and even searching out those luscious

recesses, oozy and green, where it keeps its happy slugs. They tell me slugs are not really happy, that Nature is cruel, and that you only have to scratch the pleasant surface of things to get at once to blood-curdling brutalities. Perhaps if you were to go on scratching you might get to consolations and beneficiencies again; but why scratch at all? Why not take the beauty and be grateful? I will not scratch. I will not criticise my own mother who has sheltered me so long in her broad bosom, and been so long my surest guide to all that is gentle and lovely. Whatever she does, from thunderbolts to headaches, I will not criticise; for if she gives me a headache, is there not pleasure when it leaves off? And if she hurls a thunderbolt at me and I am unexpectedly exterminated, my body shall serve as a basis for fresh life and growth, and shall blossom out presently into an immortality of daisies.

I think I must have slept, for the sound of the waves grew very far away, and I only seemed to have been watching the sun on them for a few minutes, when Gertrud's voice floated across space to my ears; and she was saying it was past four, and that one lady had already gone down to bathe, and that, as there were only two cells, if I did not go soon I might not get a bathe at all. I sat up in my hollow and looked across to the huts. The bathing woman in the usual white calico sunbonnet was there, waiting on the plank bridge. No one was in the sea yet. It was a great bore that there should be any one else

bathing just then, for German female tourists are apt to be extraordinarily cordial in the water. On land, laced into suppressive whalebone, dressed, and with their hair dry and curled, they cannot but keep within the limits set by convention; but the more clothes they take off the more do they seem to consider the last barrier between human creature and human creature broken down, and they will behave towards you, meeting you on this common ground of wateriness, as though they had known you and extravagantly esteemed you for years. Their cordiality, too, becomes more pronounced in proportion to the coldness and roughness of the water; and the water that day looked cold and was certainly rough, and I felt that there being only two of us in it it would be impossible to escape the advances of the other one. Still, as the cells were shut at five, I could not wait till she had done, so I went down and began to undress.

While I was doing it I heard her leave her cell and anxiously ask the woman if the sea were very cold. Then she apparently put in one foot, for I heard her shriek. Then she apparently bent down, and scooping up water in her hand splashed her face with it, for I heard her gasp. Then she tried the other foot, and shrieked again. And then the bathing woman, fearful lest five o'clock should still find her on duty, began mellifluously to persuade. By this time I was ready, but I did not choose to meet the unknown emotional one on the plank bridge because the garments in

which one bathes in German waters are regrettably scanty; so I waited, peeping through the little window. After much talk the eloquence of the bathing woman had its effect, and the bather with one wild scream leapt into the foam, which immediately engulfed her, and when she emerged the first thing she did on getting her breath was to clutch hold of the rope and shriek without stopping for at least a minute. '*Unwürdiges Benehmen*,' I observed to Gertrud with a shrug. 'It must be *very* cold,' I added to myself, not without a secret shrinking. But to my surprise, when I ran along the planks above where the unfortunate clutched and shrieked, she looked up at me with a wet but beaming countenance, and interrupted her shrieks to gasp out, '*Prachtvoll!*'

'Really these bath-guests in the water——' I thought indignantly. What right had this one, only because my apparel was scanty, to smile at me and say *prachtvoll?* I was so much startled by the unexpected exclamation from a person who had the minute before been rending the air with her laments, that my foot slipped on the wet planks, I just heard the bathing woman advising me to take care, just had time to comment to myself on the foolishness of such advice to one already hurling through space, and then came a shock of all-engulfing coldness and wetness and suffocation, and the next moment there I was gasping and spluttering exactly as the other bath-guest had gasped and spluttered, but with this difference, that she had clutched the rope and

shrieked, and I, with all the convulsive energy of panic, was shrieking and clutching the bath-guest.

'*Prachtvoll, nicht?*' I heard her say with an odious jollity through the singing in my ears. Every wave lifted me a little off my feet. My mouth was full of water. My eyes were blinded with spray. I continued to cling to her with one hand, miserably conscious that after this there would be no shaking her off, and rubbing my eyes with the other looked at her. My shrieks froze on my lips. Where had I seen her face before? Surely I knew it? She wore one of those grey india-rubber caps, drawn tightly down to her eyes, that keep the water out so well and are so hopelessly hideous. She smiled back at me with the utmost friendliness, and asked me again whether I did not think it glorious.

'*Ach ja-ja*,' I panted, letting her go and groping blindly for the rope. 'Thank you, thank you; pray pardon me for having seized you so rudely.'

'*Bitte, bitte*,' she cried, beginning to jump up and down again.

'Who in the world is she?' I asked myself, getting away as fast as I could. 'Where have I seen her before?'

Probably she was an undesirable acquaintance. Perhaps she was my dressmaker. I had not paid her last absurd bill, and that and a certain faint resemblance to what my dressmaker would look like in an india-rubber cap was what put her into

my head; and no sooner had I thought it than I was sure of it, and the conviction was one of quite unprecedented disagreeableness. How profoundly unpleasant to meet this person in the water, to have come all the way to Rügen, to have suffered at Göhren, to have walked miles in the heat of the day to Thiessow, for the sole purpose of bathing *tête-à-tête* with my dressmaker. And to have tumbled in on top of her and clung about her neck! I climbed out and ran into my cell. My idea was to get dressed and away as speedily as possible; yet with all Gertrud's haste, just as I came out of my cell the other woman came out of hers in her clothes, and we met face to face. With one accord we stopped dead and our mouths fell open. 'What,' she cried, 'it is *you?*'

'What,' I cried, 'it is *you?*'

It was my cousin Charlotte whom I had not seen for ten years.

THE FOURTH DAY — *Continued*

AT THIESSOW

My cousin Charlotte was twenty when I saw her last. Now she was thirty, besides having had an india-rubber cap on. Both these things make a difference to a woman, though she did not seem aware of it, and was lost in amazement that I should not have recognised her at once. I told her it was because of the cap. Then I expressed the astonishment I felt that she had not at once recognised me, and after hesitating a moment she said that I had been making too many faces; and so with infinite delicacy did we avoid all allusion to those ten unhideable years.

Charlotte had had a chequered career; at least, beside my placid life it seemed to have bristled with events. In her early youth, and to the dismay of her parents, she insisted on being educated at one of the English colleges for women — it was at Oxford, but I forget its name — a most unusual course for a young German girl of her class to take. She was so determined, and made her relations so uncomfortable during their period