

'About husbands,' I repeated blandly, in a voice of milk and honey. '*Geehrte Anwesende*, in the course of an uneventful existence I have had much leisure for reflection, and my reflections have led me to the conclusion, erroneous perhaps, but fixed, that having got a husband, taken him of one's own free will, taken him sometimes even in the face of opposition, the least one can do is to stick to him. Now, Charlotte, where is yours? What have you done with him? Is he here? And if not, why is he not here, and where is he?'

Charlotte got up hastily and brushed the sand out of the folds of her dress. 'You haven't changed a bit,' she said with a slight laugh. 'You are just as——'

'Silly?' I suggested.

'Oh, I didn't say that. And as for Bernhard, he is where he always was, marching triumphantly along the road to undying fame. But you know that. You only ask because your ideas of the duties of woman are mediæval, and you are shocked. Well, I'm afraid you must be shocked then. I haven't seen him for a whole year.'

Luckily at this moment, for I think we were going to quarrel, Gertrud came heaving through the sand towards us with a packet of letters. She had been to the post, and knowing I loved getting letters came out to look for me so that I might have them at once; and as I eagerly opened them and buried myself in them, Charlotte confined her occasional interjections to deprecating the obviously inferior shape of Gertrud's head.

THE FIFTH DAY

FROM THIESSOW TO SELLIN

MANY a time have I wondered at the unworthy ways of Fate, at the pettiness of the pleasure it takes in frustrating plans that are small and innocent, at its entire want of dignity, at its singular spitefulness, at the resemblance of its manners to those of an evilly-disposed kitchen-maid; but never have I wondered more than I did that night at Thiessow.

We had been for a walk after tea through the beechwood, up a hill behind it to the signal station, along a footpath on the edge of the cliff with blue gleams of sea on one side through a waving fringe of blue and purple flowers, and the ryefields on the other. We had stood looking down at the village of Thiessow far below us, a cluster of picturesque roofs surrounded on three sides by sunlit water; had gazed across the vast plain to the distant hill and village of Gross Zickow; watched the shadows passing over meadows miles away; seen how the sea to the west had the calm colours of a pearl; how the sea beneath us through the parting stalks

of scabious and harebells was quiet but very blue; and how behind us, over the beech-tops, there was the eastern sea where the wind was, as brilliant and busy and foam-flecked as before. It was all very wide, and open, and roomy. It was a place to bless God in and cease from vain words. And when the stars came out we went down into the plain, and wandered out across the dewy grass in the gathering night, our faces towards the red strip of sky where the sun had set.

Charlotte had not been silent all this time; she had been, on the contrary, passionately explanatory. She had passionately explained the intolerableness of her life with the famous Nieberlein; she had passionately justified her action in cutting it short. And listening in silence, I had soon located the real wound, the place she did not mention where all the bruises were; for talk and explain as she might it was clear that her chief grievance was that the great man had never taken her seriously. To be strenuous, to hold intense views on questions that seem to you to burn, and to be treated as an airy nothing, a charming nothing perhaps, but still a nothing, must be, on the whole, disconcerting. I do not know that I should call it more than disconcerting. You need not, after all, let your vision be blocked entirely by the person with whom you chance to live; however vast his intellectual bulk may be, you can look round him and see that the stars and the sky are still there, and you need not run away from him to do that. If the great Nieberlein had not taken Charlotte

sufficiently seriously, she had manifestly taken him much too seriously. It is better to laugh at one's Nieberlein than to be angry with him, and it is infinitely more personally soothing. And presently you find you have grown old together, and that your Nieberlein has become unaccountably precious, and that you do not want to laugh at all, — or if you do, it is a very tender laughter, tender almost to tears.

And then, as we walked on over the wonderful starlit plain in the huge hush of the brooding night, the air, heavy with dew and the smell of grass cut that afternoon in distant meadows, so sweet and soft that it seemed as if it must smooth away every line of midday eagerness from our tired faces, Charlotte paused; and before I had done praising Providence for this refreshment, she not yet having paused at all, she began again in a new key of briskness, and said, 'By the way, I may as well come with you when you leave this. I have nothing particular to do. I came down here for a day or two to get away from some English people I was with at Binz who had rather got on to my nerves. And I have so much to say to you, and it will be a good opportunity. We can talk all day, while we are driving.'

'Talk all day while we were driving! If Hazlitt saw no wit in talking and walking, I see less than none in talking and driving. It was this speech of Charlotte's that set me marvelling anew at the maliciousness of Fate. Here was I, the most harmless of women, engaged in the most harmless

of little expeditions, asking and wanting nothing but to be left alone; a person so obscure as to be, one would think, altogether out of the reach of the blind Fury with the accursed shears; a person with a plan so mild and humble that I was ashamed of the childishness of the Fate that could waste its energies spoiling it. Yet before the end of the fourth day I was confronted with the old familiar inexorableness, taking its stand this time on the impossibility of refusing the company of a cousin whom you have not seen for ten years.

'Oh Charlotte,' I cried, seized her arm convulsively, struggling in the very clutches of Fate, 'what — what a good idea! And what a thousand pities that it can't be managed! You see it is a victoria, and there are only two places because of all the luggage, so that we can't use the little seat, or Gertrud might have sat on that ——'

'Gertrud? Send her home. What do you want with Gertrud if I am with you?'

I stared dismayed through the dusk at Charlotte's determined face. 'But she — packs,' I said.

'Don't be so helpless. As though two healthy women couldn't wrap up their own hair-brushes.'

'Oh it isn't only hair-brushes,' I went on, still struggling, 'it's everything. You can't think how much I loathe buttoning boots — I know I never would button them, but go about with them undone, and then I'd disgrace you, and I don't want to do that. But that isn't it really either,' I went on hurriedly, for Charlotte had opened her mouth to tell me, I felt certain, that she would

button them for me, 'my husband never will let me go anywhere without Gertrud. You see she looked after his mother too, and he thinks awful things would happen if I hadn't got her. I'm very sorry, Charlotte. It is most unfortunate. I wish — I wish I had thought of bringing the omnibus.'

'But is your husband such an absurd tyrant?' asked Charlotte, a robust scorn for my flabby obedience in her voice.

'Oh — tyrant!' I ejaculated, casting up my eyes to the stars, and mentally begging the unconscious innocent's pardon.

'Well, then, we must get a luggage cart and put the things into that.'

'Oh,' I cried, seizing her arm again, my thoughts whirling round in search of a loophole of escape, 'what — what another good idea!'

'And Gertrud can go in the cart too.'

'So she can. What — what a trilogy of good ideas! Have you got any more, Charlotte? What a resourceful woman you are. I believe you like fighting and getting over difficulties.'

'I believe I do,' said Charlotte complacently.

I dropped her arm, ceased to struggle, walked on vanquished. Henceforth, if no more interesting difficulties presented themselves, Charlotte was going to spend her time overcoming me. And besides an eloquent Charlotte sitting next to me, there would be a cart rattling along behind me all day. I could have wept at the sudden end to the peace and perfect freedom of my journey. I went

to bed, to a clean and pleasant bed that at another time would have pleased me, strongly of opinion that life was not worth while. Nor did it comfort me that from my pillow I looked out at the mysterious dark plain with its roof of stars and its faint red window in the north-west, because Charlotte had opened the door between our rooms and every now and then asked me if I were asleep. I lay making plans for the circumvention of Charlotte, and rejecting them one after the other as too uncousinly; and when I had made my head ache with the difficulty of uniting a becoming cousinliness with the cold-bloodedness necessary for shaking her off, I spent my time feebly deprecating the superabundance of cousins in the world. Surely there are too many? Surely almost everybody has more than he can manage comfortably? It must have been long after midnight that Charlotte, herself very restless, called out once more to know if I were asleep.

'Yes I am,' I answered; not quite kindly I fear, but indeed it is an irritating question.

We left Thiessow at ten the next morning under a grey sky, and drove, at the strong recommendation of the landlord, along the hard sands as far as a little fishing place called Lobberort, where we struck off to the left on to the plain again, and so came once more to Philipshagen and the high road that runs from there to Göhren, Baabe, and Sellin. I took the landlord's advice willingly, because I did not choose to drive on that grey morning in my

altered circumstances over the plain along which I had walked so happily only the day before. The landlord, as obliging a person as his wife was a capable one, had provided a cart with two long-tailed, raw-boned horses who were to come with us as far as Binz, my next stopping-place. Gertrud sat next to the driver of this cart looking grim. Her prospects were gloomy, for the seat was hard, the driver was dirty, the cart had no springs, and she had had to pack Charlotte's clothes. She did not approve of the Frau Professor; how should she? Gertrud read her *Kreuzzeitung* as regularly as she did her Bible, and believed it as implicitly; she knew all about the pamphlets, and only from the *Kreuzzeitung's* point of view. And then Charlotte made the mistake clever people sometimes do of too readily supposing that others are stupid; and it did not need much shrewdness on Gertrud's part to see that the Frau Professor disliked the shape of her head.

The drive along the wet sands was uninteresting because of the prevailing greyness of sky and sea; but the waves made so much noise that Charlotte, unable to get anything out of me but head-shakings and pointings to my ears, gave up trying to talk and kept quiet. The luggage cart came on close behind, the lean horses showing an undesirable skittishness, and once, in an attempt to run away, swerved so close to the water that Gertrud's gloom became absolutely leaden. But we reached Lobberort safely, ploughed up through the deep

sand on to the track again, and after Philipphshagen the sky cleared, the sun came out, and the world began on a sudden to sparkle.

We did not see Göhren again. The road, very hilly just there, passes behind it between steep grassy banks blue with harebells and with a strip of brilliant sky above it between the tops of the beeches. But once more did I rattle over the stones of the Lonely One, pass the wooden inn where the same people seemed to be drinking the same beer and still waiting for the same train, and drive along the dull straight bit between Baabe and the first pines of Sellin. At Sellin we were going to lunch, rest the horses, and then, late in the afternoon, go on to Binz. Sellin from this side is a pine-forest with a very deep sandy road. Occasional villas appear between the trees, and becoming more frequent join into a string and form one side of the road. After passing them we came to a broad gravel road at right angles to the one we were on, with restaurants and villas on either side, trim rows of iron lamp-posts and stripling chestnut trees, and a wide gap at the end at the edge of the cliff below which lay the sea.

This was the real Sellin, this single wide hot road, with its glaring white houses, and at the back of them on either side the forest brushing against their windows. It was one o'clock. Dinner bells were ringing all down the street, visitors were streaming up from the sands into the different hotels, dishes clattered, and the air

was full of food. On every balcony families were sitting round tables waiting for the servant who was fetching their dinner from a restaurant. Down at the foot of the cliff the sea lay in perfect quiet, a heavenly blue, out of reach in that bay of the wind that was blowing on Thiessow. There was no wind here, only intense heat and light and smells of cooking. 'Shall we leave August to put up, and get away into the forest and let Gertrud buy some lunch and bring it to us?' I asked Charlotte. 'Don't you think dinner in one of these places will be rather horrid?'

'What sort of lunch will Gertrud buy?' inquired Charlotte cautiously.

'Oh bread, and eggs, and fruit, and things. It is enough on a hot day like this.'

'My dear soul, it is not enough. Surely it is foolish to starve. I'll come with you if you like, of course, but I see no sense in not being properly nourished. And we don't know where and when we shall get another meal.'

So we drove on to the end hotel, from whose terrace we could look down at the deserted sands and the wonderful colour of the water. August and the driver of the luggage cart put up. Gertrud retired to a neighbouring café, and we sat and gasped under the glass roof of the verandah of the hotel while a hot waiter brought us boiling soup.

It is a barbarous custom, this of dining at one o'clock. Under the most favourable circumstances

one o'clock is a difficult hour to manage profitably to the soul. There is something peculiarly base about it. It is the hour, I suppose, when the life of the spirit is at its lowest ebb, and one should be careful not to extinguish it altogether under the weight of a gigantic menu. I know my spirit fainted utterly away at the aspect of those plates of steaming soup and at the smell of all the other things we were going to be given after it. Charlotte ate her soup calmly and complacently. It did not seem to make her hotter. She also ate everything else with equal calmness, and remarked that full brains are never to be found united to an empty stomach.

'But a full stomach is often to be found united to empty brains,' I replied.

'No one asserted the contrary,' said Charlotte; and took some more *Rinderbrust*.

I thought that dinner would never be done. The hotel was full, and the big dining-room was crowded, as well as the verandah where we were. Everybody talked at once, and the noise was like the noise of the parrot house at the Zoological Gardens. It looked as if it were an expensive place; it had parquet floors and flowers on the tables and various other things I had not yet come across in Rügen; and when the bill came I found that it not only looked so but was so. All the more, then, was I astonished at the numbers of families with many children and the necessary *Fräulein* staying in it. How did they manage it? There was a visitors' list on the table, and

turning it over I found that none of them, in the nature of things, could be well off. They all gave their occupations, and the majority were *Apotheker* and *Photographen*. There were two *Herren Pianofabrikanten*, several *Lehrer*, a *Herr Geheimcalculator* whatever that is, many *Bankbeamten* or clerks, and one surely who must have found the place beyond his means, a *Herr Schriftsteller*. All these had wives and children with them. 'I can't make it out,' I said to Charlotte.

'What can't you make out?'

'How these people contrive to stay weeks in a dear hotel like this.'

'Oh, it is quite simple. The *Badereise* is the great event of the year. They save up for it all the rest of the year. They live at home as frugally as possible so that for one magnificent month they can pretend to waiters and chambermaids and the other visitors that they are richer than they are. It is very foolish, sadly foolish. It is one of the things I am trying to persuade women to give up.'

'But you are doing it yourself.'

'But surely there is a difference in the method. Besides, I was run down.'

'Well, so I should think were the poor mothers of families by the time they have kept house frugally for a year. And if it makes them happy, why not?'

'Just that is another of the things I am working to persuade them to give up.'

'What, being happy?'

'No, being mothers of families.'

'My dear Charlotte,' I murmured; and mused in silence on the six Bernhards.

'Of unwieldily big ones, of course I mean.'

'And what do you understand by unwieldily big ones?' I asked, still musing on the Bernhards.

'Any number above three. And for most of these women even three is excessive.'

The images of the six Bernhards troubled me so much that I could not speak.

'Look,' said Charlotte, 'at the women here. All of them, or any of them. The one at the opposite table, for instance. Do you see the bulk of the poor soul? Do you see how difficult existence must be made for her by that circumstance alone? How life can be nothing to her but uninterrupted panting?'

'Perhaps she doesn't walk enough,' I suggested. 'She ought to walk round Rügen once a year instead of casting anchor in the flesh-pots of Sellin.'

'She looks fifty,' continued Charlotte. 'And why does she look fifty?'

'Perhaps because she is fifty.'

'Nonsense. She is quite young. But those four awful children are hers, and no doubt there is a baby, or perhaps two babies, upstairs, and they have finished her. How is such a woman to realise herself? How can she work out her own salvation? What energies she has must be spent on her children. And if ever she tries to think, she must fall asleep from sheer torpor of

brain. Now why should she be deprived of the use of her soul?'

'Charlotte, are you not obscure? Here, take my pudding. I don't like it.'

I hoped the pudding would stem the stream of her eloquence. I feared an impending lecture. She had resumed the pamphlet manner of the previous afternoon, and I felt very helpless. She took the pudding, and I was dismayed to find that though she ate it it had no effect whatever. She did not even seem to know she was eating it, and continued to address me with rapidly-increasing vehemence on the proper treatment of female souls. Now why could she not talk on this subject without being vehement? There is something about vehemence that freezes responsiveness out of me; I suppose it is what Charlotte would call the oyster characteristics coming out. Anyhow, by the time the waiter brought cheese and woolly radishes and those wicked black slabs of leather called *Pumpernickel*, I was sitting quite silent, and Charlotte was leaning across the little table hurling fiery words at me. And as for the stout lady who had set her ablaze, she ate almonds and raisins with a sublime placidity, throwing the almonds down on to the stone floor, cracking them with the heel of her boot, and exhibiting an unexpected nimbleness in picking them up again.

'Do you suppose that if she hadn't had those four children and heaven knows how many besides she wouldn't be different from what she is now?' asked Charlotte, leaning her elbows on the table

and fixing me with eyes whose brightness dazzled me, 'As different as day is from night? As health from disease? As briskness from torpor? She'd have looked and felt ten years younger. She'd have had all her energies unimpaired. She'd have had the use of her soul, her time, her individuality. Now it is too late. All that has been choked out of her by the miserable daily drudgery. What would the man, her smug husband there, say if he were made to help in the soul-killing work a woman is expected to do as a matter of course? Yet why shouldn't he help her bear her burdens? Why shouldn't he take them on his stronger shoulders? Don't give me the trite answer that it is because he has his own work to do — we know his work, the man's work, at its hardest full of satisfactions and pleasures, and hopes and ambitions, besides coming to an end every day at a certain hour, while she grows old in hopeless, hideous, never-ending drudgery. There is a difference between the two that makes my blood boil.'

'Oh don't let it boil,' I cried, alarmed. 'We're so hot as it is.'

'I tell you I think that woman over there as tragic a spectacle as it would be possible to find. I could cry over her — poor dumb, half-conscious remnant of what was meant to be the image of God.'

'My dear Charlotte,' I murmured uneasily. There were actual tears in Charlotte's eyes. Where I saw only an ample lady serenely crack-

ing almonds in a way condemned by the polite, Charlotte's earnest glance pierced the veil of flesh to the withered, stunted soul of her. And Charlotte was so sincere, was so honestly grieved by the hopeless dulness of the fulfilment of what had once been the blithe promise of young girlhood, that I began to feel distressed too, and cast glances of respectful sympathy at the poor lady. Very little more would have made me cry, but I was saved by something unexpected; for the waiter came round with newly-arrived letters for the visitors, and laying two by the almond-eating lady's plate he said quite distinctly, and we both heard him distinctly, *Zwei für Fräulein Schmidt*; and the eldest of the four children, a pert little girl with a pig-tail, cried out, *Ei, ei, hast Du heute Glück, Tante Marie*; and having finished our dinner we got up and went on our way in silence; and when we were at the door, I said with a suavity of voice and manner meant to be healing, 'Shall we go into the woods, Charlotte? There are a few remarks I should like to offer you on the Souls of Maiden Aunts;' and Charlotte said, with some petulance, that the principle was the same, and that her head ached, and would I mind being quiet.