

Literature

BY ARTHUR SCHNITZLER TRANSLATED BY PIERRE
LOVING.

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PERSONS

MARGARET. CLEMENT. GILBERT.

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LITERATURE

A COMEDY BY ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

[SCENE: *Moderately well, but quite inexpensively furnished apartments occupied by Margaret. A small fireplace, a table, a small escritoire, a settee, a wardrobe cabinet, two windows in the back, entrances left and right.*

As the curtain rises, Clement, dressed in a modish, tarnished-gray sack suit, is discovered reclining in a fauteuil near the fireplace. He is smoking a cigarette and perusing a newspaper. Margaret is standing at the window. She walks back and forth, finally goes up directly behind Clement, and playfully musses his hair. Evidently she has something troublesome on her mind.]

CLEM. [*reading, seizes her hand and kisses it*]. Horner's certain about his pick and doubly certain about mine; Waterloo five to one; Barometer twenty-one to one; Busserl seven to one; Attila sixteen to one.

MARG. Sixteen to one!

CLEM. Lord Byron one and one-half to one--that's us, my dear.

MARG. I know.

CLEM. Besides, it's sixteen weeks yet to the Handicap.

MARG. Evidently he looks upon it as a clean "runaway."

CLEM. Not quite--but where did you pick up your turf-lingo, Brava?

MARG. Oh, I used this kind of talk before I knew you. Is it settled that you are to ride Lord Byron yourself?

CLEM. How absurd to ask! You forget, it's the Damenpreis Handicap. Whom else could I get to ride him? And if Horner thought for a moment that I wasn't going to ride him, he'd never put up one and a half to one. You may stake all you've got on that.

MARG. I'm well aware of that. You are *so* handsome when you mount a horse--honest and truly, too sweet for anything! I shall never forget that day in Munich, when I first made your acquaintance--

CLEM. Please do not remind me of it. I had rotten luck that day. But you can believe me, Windy would never have won if it weren't for the ten lengths he gained at the start. But this time--never! You know, of course, it is decided; we leave town the same day.

MARG. Same evening, you mean.

CLEM. If you will--but why?

MARG. Because it's been arranged we're to be married in the morning, hasn't it?

CLEM. Quite so.

MARG. I am so happy. [*Embraces him.*] Now, where shall we spend our honeymoon?

CLEM. I take it we're agreed. Aren't we? On the estate.

MARG. Oh, of course, later. Aren't we going to take in the Riviera, as a preliminary tidbit?

CLEM. AS for that, it all depends on the Handicap. If we win--

MARG. Surest thing!

CLEM. And besides, in April the Riviera's not at all good *ton*.

MARG. Is that your reason?

CLEM. Of course it is, my love. In your former way of life, there were so few opportunities for your getting a clear idea of fashion-- Pardon me, but whatever there was, you must admit, really had its origin in the comic journals.

MARG. Clem, please!

CLEM. Well, well. We'll see. [*Continues reading.*] Badegast fifteen to one--

MARG. Badegast? There isn't a ghost of a show for him!

CLEM. Where did you get that information?

MARG. Szigrati himself gave me a tip.

CLEM. Where--and when?

MARG. Oh, this morning in the Fredenau, while you were talking with Milner.

CLEM. Now, look here; Szigrati isn't fit company for you.

MARG. Jealous?

CLEM. Not at all. Moreover, let it be understood that from now on I shall introduce you everywhere as my fiancée. [*Margaret kisses him.*]

CLEM. Now, what did Szigrati say?

MARG. That he's not going to enter Badegast in the Handicap at all.

CLEM. Well, don't you believe everything Szigrati is likely to say. He's circulating the rumor that Badegast will not be entered so that the odds may be bigger.

MARG. Nonsense! That's too much like an investment.

CLEM. So you don't believe there is such a thing as investment in this game? For a great many it's all a commercial enterprise. Do you think that a fellow of Szigrati's ilk cares a fig for sport? He might just as well speculate on the market, and wouldn't realize the difference. Anyway, as far as Badegast is concerned, one hundred to one wouldn't be too much to put up against him.

MARG. Really? I found him in first-rate fettle this morning.

CLEM. Then you saw Badegast, too?

MARG. Certainly. Didn't Butters put him through his paces, right behind Busserl?

CLEM. But Butters isn't riding for Szigrati. He was only a stableboy. Badegast can be in as fine fettle as he chooses--it's all the same to me. He's nothing but a blind. Some day, Margaret, with the aid of your exceptional talent, you will be able to distinguish the veritable somebodies from the shams. Really, it's remarkable with what proficiency you have, so to speak, insinuated yourself into all these things. You go beyond my expectations.

MARG. [*chagrined*]. Pray, why do I go beyond your expectations? All this, as you know, is not so new to me. At our house we entertained very good people--Count Libowski and people of that sort--and at my husband's--

CLEM. Quite so. No question about that. As a matter of principle, you realize, I've no grudge against the cotton industry.

MARG. Even if my husband happened to be the owner of a cotton mill, that didn't have to effect my personal outlook on life, did it? I always sought culture in my own way. Now, don't let's talk of that period of my life. It's dead and buried, thank heaven!

CLEM. Yes. But there's another period which lies nearer.

MARG. I know. But why mention it?

CLEM. Well, I simply mean that you couldn't possibly have heard much about sportsmanship from your friends in Munich--at least, as far as I am able to judge.

MARG. I do hope you will stop tormenting me about those friends in whose company you first made my acquaintance.

CLEM. Tormenting you? Nonsense! Only it's incomprehensible to me how you ever got amongst those people.

MARG. You speak of them as if they were a gang of criminals.

CLEM. Dearest, I'd stake my honor on it, some of them looked the very picture of pickpockets. Tell me, how did you manage to do it? I can't understand how you, with your refined taste--let alone your purity and the scent you used--could have tolerated their society. How could you have sat at the same table with them?

MARG. [*laughing*]. Didn't you do the same?

CLEM. Next to them--not with them. And for your sake--merely for your sake, as you know. To do them justice, however, I will admit that many bettered upon closer acquaintance. There were some interesting people among them. You mustn't for a moment believe, dearest, that I hold myself superior to those who happen to be shabbily dressed. That's nothing against them. But there was something in their conduct, in their manners, which was positively revolting.

MARG. It wasn't quite so bad.

CLEM. Don't take offense, dear. I said there were some interesting people among them. But that a lady should feel at ease in their company, for any length of time, I cannot and do not pretend to understand.

MARG. You forget, dear Clem, that in a sense I'm one of them--or was at one time.

CLEM. Now, please! For my sake!

MARG. They were artists.

CLEM. Thank goodness, we've returned to the old theme.

MARG. Yes, because it hurts me to think you always lose sight of that fact.

CLEM. Lose sight of that fact! Nonsense! You know what pained me in your writings--things entirely personal.

MARG. Let me tell you, Clem, there are women who, in my situation, would have done worse than write poetry.

CLEM. But what sort of poetry! What sort of poetry! [*Takes a slender volume from the mantel-shelf.*] That's what repels me. I assure you, every time I see this book lying here; every time I think of it, I blush with shame that it was you who wrote it.

MARG. That's why you fail to understand-- Now, don't take offense. If you did understand, you'd be quite perfect, and that, obviously, is impossible. Why does it repel you? You know I didn't live through all the experiences I write about.

CLEM. I hope not.

MARG. The poems are only visions.

CLEM. That's just it. That's what makes me ask: How can a lady indulge in visions of that character? [*Reads.*] "Abandoned on thy breast and suckled by thy lips" [*shaking his head*]. How can a lady

write such stuff--how can a lady have such stuff printed? That's what I simply cannot make out. Everybody who reads will inevitably conjure up the person of the authoress, and the particular breast mentioned, and the particular abandonment hinted at.

MARG. But, I'm telling you, no such breast ever existed.

CLEM. I can't bring myself to imagine that it did. That's lucky for both of us, Margaret. But where did these visions originate? These glowing passion-poems could not have been inspired by your first husband. Besides, he could never appreciate you, as you yourself always say.

MARG. Certainly not. That's why I brought suit for divorce. You know the story. I just couldn't bear living with a man who had no other interest in life than eating and drinking and cotton.

CLEM. I dare say. But that was three years ago. These poems were written later.

MARG. Quite so. But consider the position in which I found myself--

CLEM. What do you mean? You didn't have to endure any privation? In this respect you must admit your husband acted very decently toward you. You were not under the necessity of earning your own living. And suppose the publishers did pay you one hundred gulden for a poem--surely they don't pay more than that--still, you were not bound to write a book of this sort.

MARG. I did not refer to position in a material sense. It was the state of my soul. Have you a notion how--when you came to know me--things were considerably improved. I had in many ways found myself again. But in the beginning! I was so friendless, so crushed! I tried my hand at everything; I painted, I gave English lessons in the pension where I lived. Just think of it! A divorcee, having nobody--

CLEM. Why didn't you stay in Vienna?

MARG. Because I couldn't get along with my family. No one appreciated me. Oh, what people! Did any one of them realize that a

woman of my type asks more of life than a husband, pretty dresses and social position? My God! If I had had a child, probably everything would have ended differently--and maybe not. I'm not quite lacking in accomplishments, you know. Are you still prepared to complain? Was it not for the best that I went to Munich? Would I have made your acquaintance else?

CLEM. You didn't go there with that object in view.

MARG. I wanted to be free spiritually, I mean. I wanted to prove to myself whether I could succeed through my own efforts. And, admit, didn't it look as if I was jolly well going to? I had made some headway on the road to fame.

CLEM. H'm!

MARG. But you were dearer to me than fame.

CLEM [*good-naturedly*]. And surer.

MARG. I didn't give it a thought. I suppose it's because I loved you from the very start. For in my dreams, I always conjured up a man of your likeness. I always seemed to realize that it could only be a man like you who would make me happy. Blood--is no empty thing. Nothing whatever can weigh in the balance with that. You see, that's why I can't resist the belief--

CLEM. What?

MARG. Oh, sometimes I think I must have blue blood in my veins, too.

CLEM. How so?

MARG. It's not improbable?

CLEM. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MARG. But I told you that members of the nobility were entertained at our house--

CLEM. Well, and if they were?

MARG. Who knows--

CLEM. Margaret, you're positively shocking. How can you hint at such a thing!

MARG. I can never say what I think in your presence! That's your only shortcoming--otherwise you would be quite perfect. [*She smiles up to him.*] You've won my heart completely. That very first evening, when you walked into the café with Wangenheim, I had an immediate presentiment: this is he! You came among that group, like a soul from another world.

CLEM. I hope so. And I thank heaven that somehow you didn't seem to be altogether one of them, either. No. Whenever I call to mind that junto--the Russian girl, for instance, who because of her close-cropped hair gave the appearance of a student--except that she did not wear a cap--

MARG. Baranzewitsch is a very gifted painter.

CLEM. No doubt. You pointed her out to me one day in the picture gallery. She was standing on a ladder at the time, copying. And then the fellow with the Polish name--

MARG. [*beginning*]. Zrkd--

CLEM. Spare yourself the pains. You don't have to use it now any more. He read something at the café while I was there, without putting himself out the least bit.

MARG. He's a man of extraordinary talent. I'll vouch for it.

CLEM. Oh, no doubt. Everybody is talented at the café. And then that yokel, that insufferable--

MARG. Who?

CLEM. You know whom I mean. That fellow who persisted in making tactless observations about the aristocracy.

MARG. Gilbert. You must mean Gilbert.

CLEM. Yes. Of course. I don't feel called upon to make a brief for my class. Profligates crop up everywhere, even among writers, I understand. But, don't you know it was very bad taste on his part while one of us was present?

MARG. That's just like him.

CLEM. I had to hold myself in check not to knock him down.

MARG. In spite of that, he was quite interesting. And, then, you mustn't forget he was raving jealous of you.

CLEM. I thought I noticed that, too. [*Pause.*]

MARG. Good heavens, they were all jealous of you. Naturally enough--you were so unlike them. They all paid court to me because I wouldn't discriminate in favor of any one of them. You certainly must have noticed that, eh? Why are you laughing?

CLEM. Comical--is no word for it! If some one had prophesied to me that I was going to marry a regular frequenter of the Café Maxmillian--I fancied the two young painters most. They'd have made an incomparable vaudeville team. Do you know, they resembled each other so much and owned everything they possessed in common--and, if I'm not mistaken, the Russian on the ladder along with the rest.

MARG. I didn't bother myself with such things.

CLEM. And, then, both must have been Jews?

MARG. Why so?

CLEM. Oh, simply because they always jested in such a way. And their enunciation.

MARG. You may spare your anti-Semitic remarks.

CLEM. Now, sweetheart, don't be touchy. I know that your blood is not untainted, and I have nothing whatever against the Jews. I once had a tutor in Greek who was a Jew. Upon my word! He was a capital fellow. One meets all sorts and conditions of people. I don't in the least regret having made the acquaintance of your associates in Munich. It's all the weave of our life experience. But I can't help thinking that I must have appeared to you like a hero come to rescue you in the nick of time.

MARG. Yes, so you did. My Clem! Clem! [*Embraces him.*]

CLEM. What are you laughing at?

MARG. Something's just occurred to me.

CLEM. What?

MARG. "Abandoned on thy breast and--"

CLEM. [*vexed*]. Please! Must you always shatter my illusions?

MARG. Tell me truly, Clem, wouldn't you be proud if your fiancée, your wife, were to become a great, a famous writer?

CLEM. I have already told you. I am rooted in my decision. And I promise you that if you begin scribbling or publishing poems in which you paint your passion for me, and sing to the world the progress of our love--it's all up with our wedding, and off I go.

MARG. You threaten--you, who have had a dozen well-known affairs.

CLEM. My dear, well-known or not, I didn't tell anybody. I didn't bring out a book whenever a woman abandoned herself on my breast, so that any Tom, Dick or Harry could buy it for a gulden and a half. There's the rub. I know there are people who thrive by it, but, as for me, I find it extremely coarse. It's more degrading to me than if you were to pose as a Greek goddess in flesh-colored tights at Ronacher's.

A Greek statue like that doesn't say "Mew." But a writer who makes copy of everything goes beyond the merely humorous.

MARG. [*nervously*]. Dearest, you forget that the poet does not always tell the truth.

CLEM. And suppose he only vaporizes. Does that make it any better?

MARG. It isn't called vaporizing; it's "*distillation*."

CLEM. What sort of an expression is that?

MARG. We disclose things we never experience, things we dreamed--plainly invented.

CLEM. Don't say "we" any more, Margaret. Thank goodness, that is past.

MARG. Who knows?

CLEM. What?

MARG. [*tenderly*]. Clement, I must tell you all.

CLEM. What is it?

MARG. It is not past; I haven't given up my writing.

CLEM. Why?

MARG. I'm still going on with my writing, or, rather, I've finished writing another book. Yes, the impulse is stronger than most people realize. I really believe I should have gone to pieces if it hadn't been for my writing.

CLEM. What have you written now?

MARG. A novel. The weight was too heavy to be borne. It might have dragged me down--down. Until to-day, I tried to hide it from you, but it had to come out at last. Künigel is immensely taken with it.

CLEM. Who's Künigel?

MARG. My publisher.

CLEM. Then it's been read already.

MARG. Yes, and lots more will read it. Clement, you will have cause to be proud, believe me.

CLEM. You're mistaken, my dear. I think--but, tell me, what's it about?

MARG. I can't tell you right off. The novel contains the greatest part, so to speak, and all that can be said of the greatest part.

CLEM. My compliments!

MARG. That's why I'm going to promise you never to pick up a pen any more. I don't need to.

CLEM. Margaret, do you love me?

MARG. What a question! You and you only. Though I have seen a great deal, though I have gadded about a great deal, I have experienced comparatively little. I have waited all my life for your coming.

CLEM. Well, let me have the book.

MARG. Why--why? What do you mean?

CLEM. I grant you, there was some excuse in your having written it; but it doesn't follow that it's got to be read. Let me have it, and we'll throw it into the fire.

MARG. Clem!

CLEM. I make that request. I have a right to make it.

MARG. Impossible! It simply--

CLEM. Why? If I wish it; if I tell you our whole future depends on it. Do you understand? Is it still impossible?

MARG. But, Clement, the novel has already been printed.

CLEM. What! Printed?

MARG. Yes. In a few days it will be on sale on all the book-stalls.

CLEM. Margaret, you did all that without a word to me--?

MARG. I couldn't do otherwise. When once you see it, you will forgive me. More than that, you will be proud.

CLEM. My dear, this has progressed beyond a joke.

MARG. Clement!

CLEM. Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Clement, what does this mean? You are leaving?

CLEM. As you see.

MARG. When are you coming back again?

CLEM. I can't say just now. Adieu.

MARG. Clement! [*Tries to hold him back.*]

CLEM. Please. [*Goes out.*]

MARG. [*alone*]. Clement! What does this mean? He's left me for good. What shall I do? Clement! Is everything between us at an end? No. It can't be. Clement! I'll go after him. [*She looks for her hat. The doorbell rings.*] Ah, he's coming back. He only wanted to frighten me. Oh, my Clement! [*Goes to the door. Gilbert enters.*]

GIL. [*to the maid*]. I told you so. Madame's at home. How do you do, Margaret?

MARG. [*astonished*]. You?

GIL. It's I--I. Amandus Gilbert.

MARG. I'm so surprised.

GIL. So I see. There's no cause for it. I merely thought I'd stop over. I'm on my way to Italy. I came to offer you my latest book for auld lang syne. [*Hands her the book. As she does not take it, he places it on the table.*]

MARG. It's very good of you. Thanks!

GIL. You have a certain proprietorship in that book. So you are living here?

MARG. Yes, but--

GIL. Opposite the stadium, I see. As far as furnished rooms go, it's passable enough. But these family portraits on the walls would drive me crazy.

MARG. My housekeeper's the widow of a general.

GIL. Oh, you needn't apologize.

MARG. Apologize! Really, the idea never occurred to me.

GIL. It's wonderful to hark back to it now.

MARG. To what?

GIL. Why shouldn't I say it? To the small room in Steinsdorf street, with its balcony abutting over the Isar. Do you remember, Margaret?

MARG. Suppose we drop the familiar.

GIL. As you please--as you please. [*Pause, then suddenly.*] You acted shamefully, Margaret.

MARG. What do you mean?

GIL. Would you much rather that I beat around the bush? I can find no other word, to my regret. And it was so uncalled for, too. Straightforwardness would have done just as nicely. It was quite unnecessary to run away from Munich under cover of a foggy night.

MARG. It wasn't night and it wasn't foggy. I left in the morning on the eight-thirty train, in open daylight.

GIL. At all events, you might have said good-bye to me before leaving, eh? [*Sits.*]

MARG. I expect the Baron back any minute.

GIL. What difference does that make? Of course, you didn't tell him that you lay in my arms once and worshiped me. I'm just an old acquaintance from Munich. And there's no harm in an old acquaintance calling to see you?

MARG. Anybody but you.

GIL. Why? Why do you persist in misunderstanding me? I assure you, I come *only* as an old acquaintance. Everything else is dead and buried, long dead and buried. Here. See for yourself. [*Indicates the book.*]

MARG. What's that?

GIL. My latest novel.

MARG. Have you taken to writing novels?

GIL. Certainly.

MARG. Since when have you learned the trick?

GIL. What do you mean?

MARG. Heavens, can't I remember? Thumb-nail sketches were your specialty, observation of daily events.

GIL. [*excitedly*]. My specialty? My specialty is life itself. I write what suits me. I do not allow myself to be circumscribed. I don't see who's to prevent my writing a novel.

MARG. But the opinion of an authority was--

GIL. Pray, who's an authority?

MARG. I call to mind, for instance, an article by Neumann in the "Algemeine"--

GIL. [*angrily*]. Neumann's a blamed idiot! I boxed his ears for him once.

MARG. You--

GIL. In effigy-- But you were quite as much wrought up about the business as I at that time. We were perfectly agreed that Neumann was a blamed idiot. "How can such a numbskull dare"--these were your very words--"to set bounds to your genius? How can he dare to stifle your next work still, so to speak, in the womb?" You said that! And to-day you quote that literary hawker.

MARG. Please do not shout. My housekeeper--

GIL. I don't propose to bother myself about the widows of defunct generals when every nerve in my body is a-tingle.

MARG. What did I say? I can't account for your touchiness.

GIL. Touchiness! You call me touchy? You! Who used to be seized with a violent fit of trembling every time some insignificant booby or some trumpery sheet happened to utter an unfavorable word of criticism.

MARG. I don't remember one word of unfavorable criticism against me.

GIL. H'm! I dare say you may be right. Critics are always chivalrous toward beautiful women.

MARG. Chivalrous? Do you think my poems were praised out of chivalry? What about your own estimate--

GIL. Mine? I'm not going to retract so much as one little word. I simply want to remind you that you composed your sheaf of lovely poems while we were living together.

MARG. And you actually consider yourself worthy of them?

GIL. Would you have written them if it weren't for me? They are addressed to me.

MARG. Never!

GIL. What! Do you mean to deny that they are addressed to me? This is monstrous!

MARG. No. They are not addressed to you.

GIL. I am dumbfounded. I shall remind you of the situations in which some of your loveliest verses had birth?

MARG. They were inscribed to an Ideal--[*Gilbert points to himself*]--whose representative on earth you happened to be.

GIL. Ha! This is precious. Where did you get that? Do you know what the French would say in a case like that? "C'est de la littérature!"

MARG. [*mimicking him*]. Ce n'est pas de la littérature! Now, that's the truth, the honest truth! Or do you really fancy that by the "slim boy" I meant you? Or that the curls I hymned belonged to you? At that time you were fat and your hair was never curly. [*Runs her fingers through his hair. Gilbert seizes the opportunity to capture her hand and kiss it.*] What an idea!

GIL. At that time you pictured it so; or, at all events, that is what you called it. To be sure, a poet is forced to take every sort of license for the sake of the rhythm. Didn't I once apostrophise you in a sonnet as "my canny lass"? In point of fact, you were neither--no, I don't want to be unfair--you were canny, shamefully canny, perversely canny. And it suited you perfectly. Well, I suppose I really oughtn't to wonder at you. You were at all times a snob. And, by Jove! you've attained your end. You have decoyed your blue-blooded boy with his well-manicured hands and his unmanicured brain, your matchless horseman, fencer, marksman, tennis player, heart-trifler--Marlitt could not have invented him more revolting than he actually is. Yes, what more can you wish? Whether he will satisfy you--who are acquainted with something nobler--is, of course, another question. I can only say that, in my view, you are degenerate in love.

MARG. That must have struck you on the train.

GIL. Not at all. It struck me this very moment.

MARG. Make a note of it then; it's an apt phrase.

GIL. I've another quite as apt. Formerly you were a woman; now you're a "sweet thing." Yes, that's it. What attracted you to a man of that type? Passion--frank and filthy passion--

MARG. Stop! You have a motive--

GIL. My dear, I still lay claim to the possession of a soul.

MARG. Except now and then.

GIL. Please don't try to disparage our former relations. It's no use. They are the noblest experiences you've ever had.

MARG. Heavens, when I think that I endured this twaddle for one whole year I--

GIL. Endure? You were intoxicated with joy. Don't try to be ungrateful. I'm not. Admitting that you behaved never so execrably at

the end, yet I can't bring myself to look upon it with bitterness. It had to come just that way.

MARG. Indeed!

GIL. I owe you an explanation. This: at the moment when you were beginning to drift away from me, when homesickness for the stables gripped you--*la nostalgie de l'écurie*--at that moment I was done with you.

MARG. Impossible.

GIL. You failed to notice the least sign in your characteristic way. I was done with you. To be plain, I didn't need you any longer. What you had to give you gave me. Your uses were fulfilled. In the depths of your soul you knew, unconsciously you knew--

MARG. Please don't get so hot.

GIL. [*unruffled*]. That our day was over. Our relations had served their purpose. I don't regret having loved you.

MARG. I do!

GIL. Capital! This measly outburst must reveal to a person of any insight just one thing: the essential line of difference between the artist and the dilettante. To you, Margaret, our *liaison* means nothing more than the memory of a few abandoned nights, a few heart-to-heart talks in the winding ways of the English gardens. But *I* have made it over into a work of art.

MARG. So have I!

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. I have done what you have done. I, too, have written a novel in which our relations are depicted. I, too, have embalmed our love--or what we thought was our love--for all time.

GIL. If I were you, I wouldn't talk of "for all time" before the appearance of the second edition.

MARG. Your writing a novel and my writing a novel are two different things.

GIL. Maybe.

MARG. You are a free man. You don't have to steal your hours devoted to artistic labor. And your future doesn't depend on the throw.

GIL. And you?

MARG. That's what I've done. Only a half hour ago Clement left me because I confessed to him that I had written a novel.

GIL. Left you--for good?

MARG. I don't know. But it isn't unlikely. He went away in a fit of anger. What he'll decide to do I can't say.

GIL. So he objects to your writing, does he? He can't bear to see his mistress put her intelligence to some use. Capital! And he represents the blood of the country! H'm! And you, you're not ashamed to give yourself up to the arms of an idiot of this sort, whom you once--

MARG. Don't you speak of him like that. You don't know him.

GIL. Ah!

MARG. You don't know why he objects to my writing. Purely out of love. He feels that if I go on I will be living in a world entirely apart from him. He blushes at the thought that I should make copy of the most sacred feelings of my soul for unknown people to read. It is his wish that I belong to him only, and that is why he dashed out--no, not dashed out--for Clement doesn't belong to the class that dashes out.

GIL. Your observation is well taken. In any case, he went away. We will not undertake to discuss the *tempo* of his going forth. And he

went away because he could not bear to see you surrender yourself to the creative impulse.

MARG. Ah, if he could only understand that! But, of course, that can never be! I could be the best, the faithfulest, the noblest woman in the world if the right man only existed.

GIL. At all events, you admit he is not the right man.

MARG. I never said that!

GIL. But you ought to realize that he's fettering you, undoing you utterly, seeking through egotism, to destroy your inalienable self. Look back for a moment at the Margaret you were; at the freedom that was yours while you loved me. Think of the younger set who gathered about me and who belonged no whit less to you? Do you never long for those days? Do you never call to mind the small room with its balcony--Beneath us plunged the Isar--[*He seizes her hand and presses her near.*]

MARG. Ah!

GIL. All's not beyond recall. It need not be the Isar, need it? I have something to propose to you, Margaret. Tell him, when he returns, that you still have some important matters to arrange at Munich, and spend the time with me. Margaret, you are so lovely! We shall be happy again as then. Do you remember [*very near her*] "Abandoned on thy breast and--"

MARG. [*retreating brusquely from him*]. Go, go away. No, no. Please go away. I don't love you any more.

GIL. Oh, h'm--indeed! Oh, in that case I beg your pardon. [*Pause.*] Adieu, Margaret.

MARG. Adieu.

GIL. Won't you present me with a copy of your novel as a parting gift, as I have done?

MARG. It hasn't come out yet. It won't be on sale before next week.

GIL. Pardon my inquisitiveness, what kind of a story is it?

MARG. The story of my life. So veiled, to be sure, that I am in no danger of being recognized.

GIL. I see. How did you manage to do it?

MARG. Very simple. For one thing, the heroine is not a writer but a painter.

GIL. Very clever.

MARG. Her first husband is not a cotton manufacturer, but a big financier, and, of course, it wouldn't do to deceive him with a tenor--

GIL. Ha! Ha!

MARG. What strikes you so funny?

GIL. So you deceived him with a tenor? I didn't know that.

MARG. Whoever said so?

GIL. Why, you yourself, just now.

MARG. How so? I say the heroine of the book deceives her husband with a baritone.

GIL. Bass would have been more sublime, mezzo-soprano more piquant.

MARG. Then she doesn't go to Munich, but to Dresden; and there, has an affair with a sculptor.

GIL. That's me--veiled.

MARG. Very much veiled, I rather fear. The sculptor, as it happens, is young, handsome and a genius. In spite of that she leaves him.

GIL. For--

MARG. Guess?

GIL. A jockey, I fancy.

MARG. Wretch!

GIL. A count, a prince of the empire?

MARG. Wrong. An archduke.

GIL. I must say you have spared no costs.

MARG. Yes, an archduke, who gave up the court for her sake, married her and emigrated with her to the Canary Islands.

GIL. The Canary Islands! Splendid! And then--

MARG. With the disembarkation--

GIL. In Canaryland.

MARG. The story ends.

GIL. Good. I'm very much interested, especially in the veiling.

MARG. You yourself wouldn't recognize me were it not for--

GIL. What?

MARG. The third chapter from the end, where our correspondence is published entire.

GIL. What?

MARG. Yes, all the letters you sent me and those I sent you are included in the novel.

GIL. I see, but may I ask where you got those you sent me? I thought I had them.

MARG. I know. But, you see, I had the habit of always making a rough draft.

GIL. A rough draft?

MARG. Yes.

GIL. A rough draft? Those letters which seemed to have been dashed off in such tremendous haste. "Just one word, dearest, before I go to bed. My eyelids are heavy--" and when your eyelids were closed you wrote the whole thing over again.

MARG. Are you piqued about it?

GIL. I might have expected as much. I ought to be glad, however, that they weren't bought from a professional love-letter writer. Oh, how everything begins to crumble! The whole past is nothing but a heap of ruins. She made a rough draft of her letters!

MARG. Be content. Maybe my letters will be all that will remain immortal of your memory.

GIL. And along with them will remain the fatal story.

MARG. Why?

GIL. [*indicating his book*]. Because they also appear in my book.

MARG. In *where*?

GIL. In my novel.

MARG. What?

GIL. Our letters--yours and mine.

MARG. Where did you get your own? I've got them in my possession. Ah, so you, too, made a rough draft?

GIL. Nothing of the kind! I only copied them before mailing. I didn't want to lose them. There are some in my book which you didn't even get. They were, in my opinion, too beautiful for you. You wouldn't have understood them at all.

MARG. Merciful heavens! If this is so--[*turning the leaves of Gilbert's book*]. Yes, yes, it is so. Why, it's just like telling the world that we two--Merciful heavens! [*Feverishly turning the leaves.*] Is the letter you sent me the morning after the first night also--

GIL. Surely. That was brilliant.

MARG. This is horrible. Why, this is going to create a European sensation. And Clement--My God; I'm beginning to hope that he will not come back. I am ruined! And you along with me. Wherever you are, he'll be sure to find you and blow your brains out like a mad dog.

GIL. [*pocketing his book*]. Insipid comparison!

MARG. How did you hit upon such an insane idea? To publish the correspondence of a woman whom, in all sincerity, you professed to have loved! Oh, you're no gentleman.

GIL. Quite charming. Haven't you done the same?

MARG. I'm a woman.

GIL. Do you take refuge in that now?

MARG. Oh, it's true. I have nothing to reproach you with. We were made for one another. Yes, Clement was right. We're worse than those women who appear in flesh-colored tights. Our most sacred feelings, our pangs--everything--we make copy of everything. Pfui! #Pfui!# It's sickening. We two belong to one another. Clement would only be doing what is right if he drove me away. [*Suddenly.*] Come, Amandus.

GIL. What is it?

MARG. I accept your proposal.

GIL. What proposal?

MARG. I'm going to cut it with you. [*Looks for her hat and cloak.*]

GIL. Eh? What do you mean?

MARG. [*very much excited; puts her hat on tightly*]. Everything can be as it was. You've said it. It needn't be the Isar--well, I'm ready.

GIL. Sheer madness! Cut it--what's the meaning of this? Didn't you yourself say a minute ago that he'd find me anywhere. If you're with me, he'll have no difficulty in finding you, too. Wouldn't it be better if each--

MARG. Wretch! Now you want to leave me in a lurch! Why, only a few minutes ago you were on your knees before me. Have you no conscience?

GIL. What's the use? I am a sick, nervous man, suffering from hypochondria. [*Margaret at the window utters a cry.*]

GIL. What's up? What will the general's widow think?

MARG. It's he. He's coming back.

GIL. Well, then--

MARG. What? You intend to go?

GIL. I didn't come here to pay the baron a visit.

MARG. He'll encounter you on the stairs. That would be worse. Stay. I refuse to be sacrificed alone.

GIL. Now, don't lose your senses. Why do you tremble like that? It's quite absurd to believe that he's already gone through both novels.

Calm yourself. Remove your hat. Off with your cloak. [*Assists her.*] If he catches you in this frame of mind he can't help but suspect.

MARG. It's all the same to me. Better now than later. I can't bear waiting and waiting for the horrible event. I'm going to tell him everything right away.

GIL. Everything?

MARG. Yes. And while you are still here. If I make a clean breast of everything now maybe he'll forgive me.

GIL. And me--what about me? I have a higher mission in the world, I think, than to suffer myself to be shot down like a mad dog by a jealous baron. [*The bell rings.*]

MARG. It's he! It's he.

GIL. Understand, you're not to breathe a word.

MARG. I've made up my mind.

GIL. Indeed, have a care. For, if you do, I shall sell my hide at a good price. I shall hurl such naked truths at him that he'll swear no baron heard the like of them.

CLEM. [*entering, somewhat surprised, but quite cool and courteous*]. Oh, Mr. Gilbert! Am I right?

GIL. The very same, Baron. I'm traveling south, and I couldn't repress the desire to pay my respects to madame.

CLEM. Ah, indeed. [*Pause.*] Pardon me, it seems I've interrupted your conversation. Pray, don't let me disturb you.

GIL. What were we talking about just now?

CLEM. Perhaps I can assist your memory. In Munich, if I recall correctly, you always talked about your books.

GIL. Quite so. As a matter of fact, I was speaking about my new novel.

CLEM. Pray, continue. Nowadays, I find that I, too, can talk literature. Eh, Margaret? Is it naturalistic? Symbolic? Autobiographical? Or--let me see--is it distilled?

GIL. Oh, in a certain sense we all write about our life-experiences.

CLEM. H'm. That's good to know.

GIL. Yes, if you're painting the character of Nero, in my opinion it's absolutely necessary that you should have set fire to Rome--

CLEM. Naturally.

GIL. From what source should a writer derive his inspiration if not from himself? Where should he go for his models if not to the life which is nearest to him? [*Margaret becomes more and more uneasy.*]

CLEM. Isn't it a pity, though, that the models are so rarely consulted? But I must say, if I were a woman, I'd think twice before I'd let such people know anything--[*Sharply.*] In decent society, sir, that's the same as compromising a woman!

GIL. I don't know whether I belong to decent society or not, but, in my humble opinion, it's the same as ennobling a woman.

CLEM. Indeed.

GIL. The essential thing is, does it really hit the mark! In a higher sense, what does it matter if the public does know that a woman was happy in this bed or that?

CLEM. Mr. Gilbert, allow me to remind you that you are speaking in the presence of a lady.

GIL. I'm speaking in the presence of a comrade, Baron, who, perhaps, shares my views in these matters.

CLEM. Oh!

MARG. Clement! [*Throws herself at his feet.*] Clement.

CLEM. [*staggered*]. But--Margaret.

MARG. Your forgiveness, Clement!

CLEM. But, Margaret. [*To Gilbert.*] It's very painful to me, Mr. Gilbert. Now, get up, Margaret. Get up, everything's all right; everything's arranged. Yes, yes. You have but to call up Künigel. I have already arranged everything with him. We are going to put it out for sale. Is that suitable to you?

GIL. What are you going to put out for sale, if I may be so bold as to ask? The novel madame has written?

CLEM. Ah, so you know already. At all events, Mr. Gilbert, it seems that your *camaraderie* is not required any further.

GIL. Yes. There's really nothing left for me but to beg to be excused. I'm sorry.

CLEM. I very much regret, Mr. Gilbert, that you had to witness a scene which might almost be called domestic.

GIL. Oh, I do not wish to intrude any further.

GIL. Madame--Baron, may I offer you a copy of my book as a token that all ill-feeling between us has vanished? As a feeble sign of my sympathy, Baron?

CLEM. You're very good, Mr. Gilbert. I must, however, tell you that this is going to be the last, or the one before the last, that I ever intend to read.

GIL. The one before the last?

CLEM. Yes.

MARG. And what's the last going to be?

CLEM. Yours, my love. [*Draws an advanced copy from his pocket.*] I wheedled an advance copy from Künigel to bring to you, or, rather, to both of us. [*Margaret and Gilbert exchange scared glances.*]

MARG. How good of you! [*Taking the book.*] Yes, it's mine.

CLEM. We will read it together.

MARG. No, Clement, no. I cannot accept so much kindness. [*She throws the book into the fireplace.*] I don't want to hear of this sort of thing any more.

GIL. [*very joyful*]. But, dear madame--

CLEM. [*going toward the fireplace*]. Margaret, what have you done?

MARG. [*in front of the fireplace, throwing her arms about Clement*]. Now, do you believe that I love you!

GIL. [*most gleeful*]. It appears that I'm entirely *de trop* here. Dear Madame--Baron--[*To himself.*] Pity, though, I can't stay for the last chapter. [*Goes out.*]

[*Curtain.*]