

The Grandmother

BY LAJOS BIRO

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CHARACTERS

THE GRANDMOTHER.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY.

THE BRIDE.

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL.

THE MELANCHOLY GIRL.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN.

[There is only this notable thing to be said about Grandmother--her hair is snow white, her cheeks rosy and her eyes violet blue. She is the most youthful and enthusiastic, best and most cordial grandmother ever beloved by her grandchildren.]

The scene opens on a broad, sunny terrace furnished with garden furniture, chairs, small tables and chaises longues. Back of the terrace is the beautiful summer residence of Grandpa. Behind it is a large English garden in its lenten blossoms. The Disagreeable Young Man enters; yawns; stretches discontentedly; slouches here and there; picks up a volume from the table, then falls into a couch at right and, lighting a cigarette, begins to read. The other grandchildren enter in groups of two and three and seat themselves.]

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. My word, children, I am too full for utterance. What a spread! Now for a good cigar and a soft chair and I am as rich as a king.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. We are having such charming weather. Is not this park like a paradise?

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. How did you like the after-dinner speeches?

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Uncle Heinrich was splendid. [*There is great laughter.*]

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Uncle Heinrich was never strong in speechmaking, but in the beginning even Demosthenes stuttered.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. The trouble is that Uncle Heinrich stopped where Demosthenes began. Besides a manufacturer has no time to parade on the sea shore with pebbles under his tongue.

[*There is more laughter.*]

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Children, who wants a cigarette?

THE BLOND AND BRUNETTE YOUNG LADIES. I!

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN [*handing them cigarettes and lighting a match for them. He speaks to the Bride*]. Aren't you going to smoke?

BRIDE. No, I thank you.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. Lord, no! She must not! The noble bride must not permit tobacco smoke to contaminate her rosy lips. [*They all laugh.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. May I have a cigarette, too?

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. You be careful or the same misfortune may happen to you at any minute that happened to Lucy [*pointing to the Bride, he hands the Vivacious Girl a cigarette.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. If my bridegroom shall object to tobacco smoke, he can pack his things and--off.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Well, young people, what are we going to do next?

THE MELANCHOLY YOUNG LADY. Let's remain here. The park looks so beautiful.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Oh, I object. We'll remain here until the sun goes down a little and then we'll play tennis. [*They agree.*]

THE MELANCHOLY YOUNG LADY. Can't we remain here? Let us enjoy the spring in the garden.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. Let's play tennis. A little exercise is the best cure for romance. And you can enjoy your spring out there as well--you dreamer. [*They laugh.*]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. You are as loud as the besiegers of Jericho in your planning.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. Behold! He speaketh. [*They laugh.*]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. You are so overbearing in your jollifications that it is positively disgusting. For the past hour you have been giggling away without the slightest reason. You have so much leisure you do not know what to do with yourselves.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Curt, must you always be the killjoy in a party!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you would at least take yourselves off from here.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. But admit that to-day there is reason enough for every kind of jollity.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Is there, indeed? You have finished a costly banquet and now are enjoying a good digestion. You are young and have a healthy animal appetite; but why deck sentimentalism on your horns?

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Your pardon! Do you suppose that all a person gets out of this remarkable occasion is a good dinner? Have you no appreciation? Do you realize what this day means to all of us?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well, my boy. Now tell me why you are so over-filled with joy?

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, I will. I am glad that I can celebrate the golden wedding of my grandfather. I am glad that just thirty years ago to-day grandfather founded his factory. I am glad because of our large and happy family and that so many lovely and good and happy people have come here to celebrate this remarkable event; all of them good and prosperous.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Prosperous!

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, I rejoice at their prosperity.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. The laborers down there in the foundry, however, are not as over-joyed at this prosperity as you are. For this prosperity of yours they have been starving these past thirty years.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Grandfather was always good to his employees.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Indeed! Our grandfather has managed by hook or by crook to amass an enormous fortune and you are glad that his fortune is now made and you do not have to resort to questionable means.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN [*hurt*]. Questionable means? You do not intend to assert that our grandpapa....

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I assert nothing. But mark you this. There is only one honest way to gain a large fortune: inheriting it. You cannot earn it without resorting to questionable means.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Shame! to say a thing like that!

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Shame to say that of grandfather.

[*All of them are upset and disturbed. Grandmother appears on the balcony.*]

GRANDMOTHER. Why, children, what is it? What's wrong?

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Why, grandma, just think of it! Curt said that grandpa made his fortune by questionable means.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I did not say exactly that--

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Yes, you did.

THE OTHERS [*chiming in*]. You said that. Yes, you said that.

GRANDMOTHER [*as energetically as possible for her*]. I think you are in error, Curt. In the entire fortune of your grandpa there is not a single copper that was not earned by him in the most honest way.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But look, grandma,--what I said was--generally in those cases no one--

GRANDMOTHER [*hurt*]. When I tell you this, boy, it *is so*. When I tell you anything, my child, you should never doubt it.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes, grandma, you are quite right. But I maintain that human learning and experience have proved--
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THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Why don't you stop? Do you perhaps want to insult grandma? You are taking too great an advantage of our good nature--I'll tell you that!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you folks had any sense--

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Don't you know enough....

THE OTHER GRANDCHILDREN. ... to shut up. [*Attacks him.*]
Indeed. He's right. Stop--shut up!

[*The Disagreeable Young Man, in spite of this scene, wants to continue, but the protests of the others drown his voice. He casts a contemptuous look at them, shrugs his shoulders, throws himself on the sofa and begins to read.*]

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Now don't trouble yourself about him any longer, grandma dear. Here, rest yourself nicely in this chair among us.

THE JOVIAL YOUNG MAN. There, grandma! The old folks are there at table. We young people are here in the fresh air. We lacked only the youngest one of us all. And here you are.

[*There is a glad assent as the Grandmother sits down.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Are you quite comfortable, grandma dear? Would you like something to rest your feet on?

GRANDMOTHER. Thanks, my child, I am quite all right, and I am very happy.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Yes, grandma, you ought to feel happy.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. How young you look, and how lovely and rosy!

THE BRIDE. Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER. What is it, my angel?

THE BRIDE. Tell me, how does a woman manage so that she is admired by her husband for full fifty years, as you are by grandfather?

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. Yes, how did you manage that?

GRANDMOTHER. You will all be loved and admired after fifty years as I have been. A person must be good. We must love each other.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. But, grandmother, is it not wonderful at seventy and seventy-five to love so beautifully and purely as you and grandfather have loved?

GRANDMOTHER. You must always be good and patient with each other, and brave. Never lose courage.

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. But look, grandma, not even I could be as brave as you have been. And no one can ever say that I lose courage. [*They all laugh.*] I still shudder when I think how in those days in March of Forty-eight you had to run away! Or in the Sixties when the city was bombarded, you with my mamma and Aunt Olga escaped from the burning house....

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. How interesting that was! Tell us another story, grandma. [*There is loud assent.*] Yes, yes, grandma shall tell us another story!

GRANDMOTHER. But I have already told you so much. You heard all our history.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Not I, grandma; I have not heard the story of when you got lost in the *Friedrichsrode* forest.

GRANDMOTHER. That story I have told you so often, children. Ask your mother about it; she'll tell you.

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma, I haven't heard it, either. Just tell us that one and we'll go to play tennis.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. If you'll pardon me, grandma, I believe you ought to tell us a different incident to-day. I've heard that history so often. Tell us something contemporaneous. Tell us about the first sewing machine, or the first railroad, or about crinolines or contemporary theater or art.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. No. Tell us about the woods.

THE OTHERS. Yes, yes, that's right,--the story of how you got lost.

[The Disagreeable Young Man shrugs his shoulder and buries his head in his book. Grandmother begins to narrate, and the circle of her admiring and attentive audience grows narrower.]

GRANDMOTHER. Well, my children, it happened in the year eighteen hundred and forty, a year after grandfather was almost shot by error. In those days the happenings took us quite far away from here to *Friedrichsrode*, my dears, where you have never been. Your grandfather had a small estate there, and that's how we made our livelihood. We always wished and prayed to get the management of the large estate of the Count of Schwanhausen. But we lived there humbly in the little house.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Was my mamma home then?

GRANDMOTHER. No, she was not in this world yet. But a year later she was born. So your grandfather and I lived then in this little red-roofed house. Your grandfather used to be busy with the land the entire day. Those days I was taking on weight, and to reduce I would take long walks through the country. One day in October--in the afternoon--it was beautiful sunny autumn weather--as usual I went again on my long walk. The country there is very beautiful--all hills--covered with dense forests. This afternoon my way led into the famous forest of *Friedrichsrode*. When there I kept on walking--here and there I would stop to pick a flower.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. Don't forget, grandma, that it was quite late when you left your house.

GRANDMOTHER. You are correct, my dear. After our dinner I had some things to attend to in the house and that is why I started that day later than usual. I was walking through the forest, going in deeper and deeper and suddenly I began to realize that it was getting dark. It was in the autumn and the days were getting short. When I saw how dark it was I turned homeward. But in the meanwhile evening came sooner

than I counted, and suddenly it got dark altogether. Now, thought I, I must hustle. I hurried, as well as I could, but as much as I hurried I did not get home. Had I gone home the right way I would have reached it then, and so it dawned on me that I had lost my way.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Great Heavens....

GRANDMOTHER. Indeed, my child, I was really lost in the woods and in the *Friedrichsrode* forest, besides. What that meant you cannot now realize. Since that time these woods have been considerably cleared. Then also we live in a different world to-day. But in those days *Friedrichsrode* forest was a very, very dismal place. It spread away into the outskirts of the Harz Mountains and was a wild, primæval, godforsaken forest where highway robbers were hiding. And in the winter it was full of the wolves from the mountains.

[*There is a short pause.*]

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. And what did you do, grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER. Really, my child, a great anxiety came upon me. I stood still and tried to fix my direction. Then I turned to a path which I figured ought to lead me home. After I walked a half hour, however, I found that the forest instead of getting lighter was getting thicker and thicker. Three or four times I changed the direction, but no matter what I did I was walking deeper and deeper into the dark woods. Although the moon was shining then, the branches of the trees were so thick that I could see but little. And that which I saw only frightened me all the more. Every tree stump, every overhanging bough excited my fear. My feet were continuously caught in the roots of big trees and the undergrowth tore my bleeding face and feet; and it was getting cold. I felt frozen. And dismally quiet, terribly dark was the night in the forest.

[*There is a pause and suspense.*]

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Good heavens, how perfectly terrible!

GRANDMOTHER. Then I collected all my wits. I said to myself, if I keep on walking I will lose my way all the more. I ought to remain where I am and wait. When grandfather arrives at home and misses me he will start a search with all the help and people. They will go into the woods with torchlights--and then I will see the lights from the distance and hear them call--and in that way I can get home.

THE MELANCHOLY GIRL. How clever of our grandma!

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. And how brave!

GRANDMOTHER. After I figured it out that way I looked about for a sheltered nook. In between two great big tree trunks there was a cave, like a little house, a place all filled with soft moss. A pleasant camping place. I fell into this and prepared myself for a long wait. I waited and waited. The night peopled the woods with every kind of sound. There was whistling, whispering, humming, blowing, screeching and once from a distance a long-drawn deep howling. This, undoubtedly, was the wolves.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*frightened*]. Merciful God!

GRANDMOTHER. Then even I lost my courage. I wanted to run, run as long as my legs would carry me. But I realized that the wiser thing was to be brave and to remain. So I set my teeth and kept on waiting. And then gradually the howling ceased. So, I sat there on this moss bank gazing before me and thought of many things. Suddenly I heard a noise. I straightened up and listened. It was a breaking sound and a rustle as though some one were brushing aside the underbrush.... The noise was getting nearer and nearer.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Oh!

GRANDMOTHER. I was all ears. I could clearly distinguish now that the sound was the footstep of a human being. Frightened, I started through the darkness and in the dull moonlight I saw that actually a man was wading through the thick underbrush. What was I to do? I pressed against the tree trunk and my fast and loud-beating heart seemed to be in my throat. The man was coming directly toward me.

When he was about three paces away from me and I could distinguish his features, I felt like fainting. It was "Red Mike," a very dangerous fellow from our neighborhood; every one knew that he was a robber. Later on he was imprisoned for murder, but he escaped from the prison. Now he was there.... What should I do?

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL [*breathlessly*]. What did you do, grandma?

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. Great heavens!

GRANDMOTHER. Frenzied, I pressed against the tree trunk. I wanted to hide, but the robber came directly toward me. It was as though he could see me even in this darkness and behind the tree trunk. Later on when he was caught, I found out, that he had prepared this very place for his night's resting place. He had brought all this soft moss there. Of course, I did not know that he just came there to rest himself. All I saw was that he was making directly for me. Then such a great fear seized me that instead of pressing against the tree and letting him go past me I shrieked just as he came within reaching distance and began to run away.

[*There is a pause and feverish suspense.*]

THE MELANCHOLY YOUNG LADY. And what did the robber do?

GRANDMOTHER. My sudden outcry and quick dash and flight scared him for the moment, but as soon as I appeared in the moonlight, he saw that it was only a woman who had frightened him. He hesitated about a half a minute and then started to pursue me. I flew. I was young then and I could run fast. But it was dark and I did not know my way. As I pressed forward I ran into a low branch and tore my cheek so that it bled. My skirt was torn into shreds. Suddenly I stumbled and fell to the ground. I hurt myself quite painfully, but in spite of that I rose quickly again and commenced to run. And the robber after me all the time. I could always hear his footsteps in my wake. My legs were about to give up under me when I got an idea to hide behind a stout tree trunk. But the robber began to look through the underbrush in the spot where he last saw me and he finally found me. He came near me.

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. How terrible!

GRANDMOTHER. With one single leap I jumped aside and started to run again. Once more I fell down and again I rose. Aimlessly I ran wildly over roots and stones and the robber kept right on after me.... And the distance between me and my pursuer was getting smaller and smaller. Then all of a sudden I heard the sound of his footsteps close to me--to escape him I tried to dash away to the side of him but with a sudden leap he was by my side. Grabbing me by my shoulder he threw me on the ground and I fell upon my back. He had run so fast that he dashed a couple of paces past me. He turned about.... And then I saw that he had a long knife in his hand.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*horrified*]. Merciful heaven!

GRANDMOTHER. I could not budge.... And unspeakable fear seized me.... Then I uttered a piercing shriek.... The robber approached me.... I cried out....

[*There is a pause.*]

THE MELANCHOLY GIRL. Then, then--

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Well, what then? What?

GRANDMOTHER. I cried out like an insane person.... Now the robber was near me.... He bent over me.... Suddenly a voice sounded,-- "*who is crying here?*" the voice seemed to be near--the footsteps were audible--"*who's crying here?*" it asked the second time.... The branches parted and a man in a hunting habit with a gun in his hand appeared. The robber took to his heels and flew into the woods. The hunter now came near me and called to a second man who followed. They helped me to rise and they carried me over to a small clearing. There I saw a light buggy into which they lifted me. Soon they fetched the horses and in a half hour I was in the Schwanhausen castle sipping hot brandy which they had prepared for me. The man in the hunting habit was the Count of Schwanhausen, who had been hunting in the woods.

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL. How interesting!

GRANDMOTHER. In the castle I quite recovered. Then the Count ordered another carriage to drive me home and at six in the morning I landed safely in our house. Your grandpa was sick with worry.... He and his people had searched for me in the woods for hours. And that's how I was almost lost. A few days later grandpa went to thank the Count for my rescue. The Count took a liking to him.

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. That was the old Count?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes, it was the old Count. The benefactor of all of us. Grandfather thanked him courteously for my rescue. The Count took a liking to him and soon after that grandfather got the management of the entire Schwanhausen estate, which proved the cornerstone of his good fortune. And that, my dears, is the story of my night wander in the forest of *Friedrichsrode*.

[Amid general approval, Grandma is surrounded. Everybody is indebted to her. They all speak at once, except the The Disagreeable Young Man.]

"We thank you cordially."

"It was wonderful, grandma, dear."

"Interesting."

"Beautiful."

THE VIVACIOUS GIRL. Grandma is a story-telling genius!

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. A most wonderful one!

GRANDMOTHER. Very well, my dears, but now run along to your tennis game. I'll come over later to watch on. *[They all agree.]*

THE POLITE YOUNG MAN. Three cheers for our very dear beloved charming grandma.

[They all cheer three times, then they surround her, kiss her cheeks and head and stroke her hair.]

THE BLOND YOUNG LADY. *Adieu*--old sweetheart.

THE BRUNETTE YOUNG LADY. *Auf wiedersehen*--precious grandma!

THE SENTIMENTAL HIGH SCHOOL GIRL [*inspired*]. Grandma...!
[She rushes over to her and covers her with kisses.]

[Grandma bears all these amiabilities with pleasurable tolerance. She strokes and pats the grandchildren and as they retire, she fondly gazes after them, nodding to them with laughter.]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt--are not you going with the others?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. No.

GRANDMOTHER. Why not, Curt? Why don't you follow the others?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. They think that I am bad, and I know that they are stupid.

[Grandmother seats herself in silence. The Disagreeable Young Man continues to read. He lights a new cigarette. While lighting the cigarette--]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Grandma!

GRANDMOTHER. What is it, my child?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Whatever you say might, of course, never be questioned....

GRANDMOTHER. No, my child.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But do tell me, grandma, did that story really happen in that way?

GRANDMOTHER. What story?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. The night wander through the *Friedrichsrode* forest.

GRANDMOTHER. Certainly it happened.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Exactly as you told it? Are you quite sure that you remember all those details.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes. Why?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, just so. I merely wanted to inquire, grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. But why did you want to?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I was just interested. Thank you very much. Do not let me disturb you further, grandma.

[He takes up his book and continues to read. The Grandmother remains seated, but is greatly embarrassed. She would like to keep on gazing into the park and enjoying her quiet, but she is unable to concentrate her thoughts. She is getting more and more disturbed. There is a pause.]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes--grandma, dear.

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, why have you asked me if the forest incident happened that way?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I merely wanted to find out, grandma.

GRANDMOTHER. You just wanted to find out. But one does not ask such things without some good reason.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. I was interested.

GRANDMOTHER. Interested, but why are you interested?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Just in general. But do not get disturbed on account of that, grandma.

[The Grandmother is silent.]

[The Disagreeable Young Man picks up his book. The Grandmother wants to drop the subject at this point. She does not succeed, but continues to look over toward the young man. He reads on.]

GRANDMOTHER. Curt!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes, grandma, dear.

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, you shall tell me this instant the reason you asked if the incident really happened that way!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma ... I have already told you that....

GRANDMOTHER. Don't you tell me again that you asked because the matter interested you. You would have never asked such a question if you did not have some special reason for it.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma--

GRANDMOTHER. Curt, if you do not this moment tell me why you said that, then I will never--*[her voice becomes unusually strong and shakes]* I never in my life will speak to you again.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. But, grandma, I do not want to insult you.

GRANDMOTHER. You will not insult me if you will be sincere and open. Be sincere always.... And you will not insult me. But when your trying to hide something from me, that's when you insult me. This *cannot* remain in this way. I must know what you are thinking of. I must know that.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Grandma, I was afraid you would be angry with me.

GRANDMOTHER. If you keep on concealing things I shall be angry. No matter what you have to say I will not hold it against you.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Are you not angry now?

GRANDMOTHER. No. I promise you I will not be angry. Say whatever you please.

[The Disagreeable Young Man hesitates.]

GRANDMOTHER. Well, then--out with it--speak up, my child--be it what it may as long as it is frank and sincere. Speak up, now. Come!

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well then, grandma. It is impossible that the story could happen in that manner.

GRANDMOTHER *[offended]*. You mean that I told an untruth?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, no. I did not say that the incident did not happen. I just maintain that it could not have happened in that fashion.

GRANDMOTHER. But why not?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. On account of the details. Let us take it for granted, grandma, that as you state you commenced your exercise walk in the afternoon....

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Let's say that you had household duties and started out quite late--about four o'clock.

GRANDMOTHER *[disturbed, but following the cross-examination intently]*. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Very well, you started at four o'clock. The walk was a good one and consumed--let us say one hour and a half.

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Yes? This brings us to half-past five o'clock. In October and in a dense forest besides at half-past five it gets fairly dark at that hour. It was then that you lost your way?

THE GRANDMOTHER [*nods her head in assent*].

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Another hour and a half spent in wandering--that brings us to seven o'clock. You now reached the night lodging of the robber--here you were resting?

GRANDMOTHER. Exactly.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Quite right. Here you were waiting and resting--now we want to allow a long time for it--three--let us say--three and a half hours.

GRANDMOTHER [*involuntarily*]. Not that long....

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Oh, yes ... let us ... we'll then have reached half-past ten o'clock. It could not have been later when this forest bandit came. These pirates never go to their bed earlier. They shun light and must get their sleep while the world is the darkest. He could not sleep during the day even in the darkest forests. In short, then, it was half-past ten?

GRANDMOTHER. Half-past ten.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. Now began the flight and the pursuit. You ran--let us say--full twenty minutes. That is a great deal. I was a track runner in college and I know what a twenty-minute stretch means. Shall we say twenty minutes?

GRANDMOTHER. Twenty minutes....

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. In any circumstances it was not even eleven when you were safely out of danger?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. And--and a half hour later you were sipping hot brandy in the Schwanhausen castle?

GRANDMOTHER. Yes.

[The Disagreeable Young Man is silent.]

GRANDMOTHER *[shaking with excitement]*. And--what else?

[The Disagreeable Young Man is silent.]

GRANDMOTHER *[she shakes with fear as to what will follow, but forces herself to face it]*. Well, say on ... what else?...

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. At six on the following morning you reached your home and.... *[He pauses.]*

GRANDMOTHER *[if her loud-speaking could be called an outcry, then she cries out]*. Yes ... what else?... What happened then?... Go on ... say it ... what else?

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN. *[He makes a new attempt to tell everything bravely at once, but hesitates.]* In the morning at six you arrived at home. The others had no idea as to the distance between *Schwanhausen* and *Friederichsrode*. But I wanted to see it myself, so last year with a friend I made a walking trip through that country. I tried this distance. In a half hour of slow walking I reached from one place to the other, and the horses in the Count's stables and the state roads were then in as good condition as to-day. Well, then you started from the castle at half-past five in the morning; but you reached there at half-past eleven the preceding night.... You spent six entire hours in the castle.... Then, another point--they all speak of the count, the "benefactor of us all," as the "old count."... When he died five years ago he was, of course, an old count--an old man of

seventy.... But thirty-five years ago he was a young count of thirty years of age.

[The Grandmother stares blindly at The Disagreeable Young Man. Alarmed over Grandma's fright, he rises. He would very much like to make up to her, but he lacks words. The Grandmother rises. She is trembling. With a shaking hand she is nervously setting her dress to rights. Twice she turns to the young man to speak to him, but is unable to utter a word. Then she turns; she is about to return into the house, but remains near the doorstep. Again she turns; then she is about to go in, but turns again and remains standing.]

THE DISAGREEABLE YOUNG MAN *[frightened]*. Grandma, you gave me your word that you would not be angry.

GRANDMOTHER *[she stumbles forward a few steps. She is disturbed, shivering, beside herself, complaining, almost sobbing]*. You are an evil child! You are a bad, bad and evil child! For fifty years I have told the same story ... always the same, same way ... and that it happened differently never, never even came into my mind.

[Curtain.]