

Katharina Adler

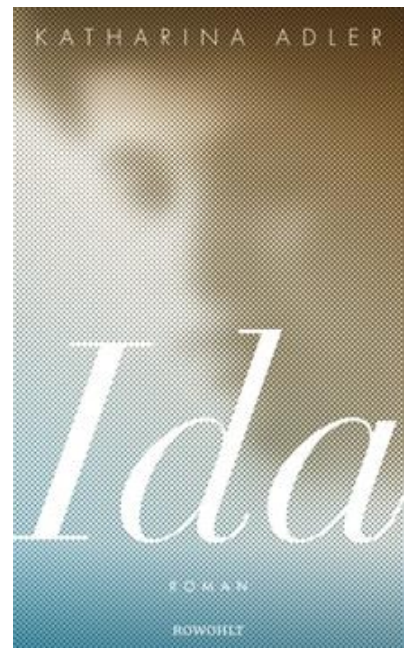
Ida

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Suffering from a *petite hystérie* and growing up within a darkly complex family situation, Dora became one of the twentieth century's most famous patients when she found the strength to break off treatment with Sigmund Freud. Aged barely eighteen, the young Jewish girl robbed the great analyst, as he later complained, "of the satisfaction of more thoroughly freeing her of her ailment".

For a long time author Katharina Adler regarded this rebellious patient as just another family anecdote: Her great-grandmother, who – hidden behind a pseudonym - had gained anonymous fame through no particular achievement, and, who had been portrayed by some as a victim, and idealized by others as a heroine. „Slowly, however, my wish grew to complete this picture of her, yet also to counter it. I wanted to show a woman who could neither be dismissed as a life-long hysteric, nor superficially celebrated as a heroine. A woman with strengths and a couple of weaknesses, who, despite all adversities, struggled to the last to lead a self-determined life.



Ida is a forceful plea both for the veracity of human perceptions and their captivatingly diverse nature, telling the story of a woman whose life only just started once she had finally decided to turn her back on Freud's private practice.

Born in Munich in 1980, **Katharina Adler** lived in Leipzig and Berlin before returning to the city of her birth, where she currently lives. She was awarded the state of Bavaria's literary stipend and was nominated for the 2015 Döblin Prize.

"The story of Freud's "Dora" has been told many times: the stories are seldom the same. In her novel, "Ida," the real Dora's great granddaughter, after years of family and archival research, tells the story in the voice of the real woman, Ida Adler."

Donna Leon

Sample translation from **Ida** by Katharina Adler
pp. 9-66
Translated by Jamie Lee Searle

New York City, 1941

Arrival

Ida saw nothing but backs, hats, hair and sky as, shortly before Ellis Island, hundreds of passengers crowded onto the deck of the *Serpa Pinto*. Rather than seek a better view, she lit an arrival cigarette.

At Hudson Pier the doctors came on board. Name? Ida Adler. Age? 58, skin color, *medium*, hair color, *grey*. They stuck a thermometer in Ida's mouth and checked if her eyes were clear. Then, under the section "physical and mental state of health", they wrote *good*, which made Ida laugh. These doctors, they have no idea.

An official inquired after her place of birth, *Vienna*, last place of residence, *Montauban*, which languages she spoke, *German/English/French/Italian*, whether she was a polygamist, really, no, an anarchist, not exactly. Social Democrat, she stated proudly; the official merely looked at her indifferently. He classified her as *Hebrew* and sent her on to a colleague from the immigration authority. He asked if she had ever been to the United States, no. Her nationality? Stateless, she had renounced her citizenship in France, she explained, it had become too dangerous. Entry permit?

Ida handed it to him, he signed her visa and with a bored "Welcome to America", turned to the next in line.

At the exit everyone jostled and shoved. Ida held on to her suitcase tightly, hurried down the gangway and lit up another cigarette, her first on dry land in thirteen days. Things swayed before her eyes, as though the ocean was still beneath her feet. With every drag on her cigarette she hoped the dizziness would vanish.

Several photographers had gathered nearby. They observed the arriving passengers, probably trying to discover someone famous among the refugees on the steamship. No one took note of Ida.

She flicked her cigarette to the floor. The vertigo hadn't passed, but what could she do? Kurt had cabled that he wouldn't be able to pick her up, that he had to work in the opera every night, but would send someone to take her to the train to Chicago.

Ida searched the crowd for a familiar face – she expected a comrade from the Social Democratic group – when her eyes fell upon a man of Kurt's age. He was holding a bouquet of carnations and a piece of paper with her name on it. No comrade would bring flowers, she thought to herself. That would be a waste of Party funds.

"You look as if you're waiting for a loved one," she said in German. "Unfortunately, you have the wrong name on your sign."

"Frau Adler!" The man lifted his hat. "It's a pleasure, gnädige Frau. Magner is my name, Martin Magner. Kurt sent me."

He handed her the flowers, then bent forward to take her suitcase. She released it hesitantly.

"And you are... Kurt's assistant?"

"No," said Magner, placing the suitcase on the ground in order to tuck away the piece of paper bearing Ida's name. "A former colleague from our Reichenberg days, and I hope I can now consider myself a friend."

Ida studied the lanky man more closely. "A friend?"

"Your son is a very noble man." Martin looked her straight in the eyes. "Kurt made it possible for me to come here. He rescued me."

Ida now picked up her suitcase. "Well, you were lucky, my dear Herr Magner. When it came to his mother he surely took his time." She took a deep breath, felt her throat narrow. "One more hour and it would have been too late."

Martin smiled away her words. "But now you're here, and I'll make sure you set off safely to Chicago."

He offered his arm. She hesitated, didn't understand his gesture. Then she did. She really had been cut off from civil manners for too long, she realised.

She linked arms and let Magner lead her out of the harbor. Another cigarette, to relax, as they walked. Magner looked at his watch.

"We have three hours. Would you like something to eat?"

"What do you suggest?"

"There's a Chinese diner nearby."

"Chinese!" Ida laughed with disbelief. "Well, as long as there are no lentils. I had enough of them in Africa."

"You must excuse me for mistaking you for Kurt's assistant," said Ida, after gazing into her soup bowl. "The two of you met at the Reichenberg Theatre, you say? Why have I never heard of you? Although," she picked up her spoon, "it shouldn't surprise me. With my son I can count myself lucky if he introduces me to his wife *before* their wedding." She resolutely manoeuvred a pallid dumpling into her mouth.

"In my case you can't blame Kurt. We were only vaguely acquainted at the time."

Ida looked up. "And what did you do at the theatre? You don't look much like a musician to me."

"I was there as a director."

Ida nodded, content. Not bad, these Chinese ravioli, and the chicken broth was hearty too.

"And what are you doing now? Have you found a theatre to work in here?"

"Not exactly. I've landed in radio."

"Is your English good enough for that?"

"Not in the slightest." Magner smiled in amusement. "My English is actually miserable."

Ida scrutinised Magner once again. He had bright, intelligent eyes, a likeable face, she stopped at his exceptionally big ears.

"I guess they didn't take you for your looks."

Magner laughed. "No, no, I'm still directing. A radio series."

Ida gave him a questioning look.

"You must imagine it as a short theatre play which is continued on a daily basis," he explained, "just not on stage, but on radio."

"But what do they need a director for, if you can't see anything?"

"There's still a fair amount to do," Magner replied. "Should you return here some day, you're very welcome to visit me in the studio."

Ida folded her hands in front of her stomach. She felt pleasantly warm. How long had it been since she'd been able to chat away like this unburdened by worries?

"You might find I'll turn up in your studio sooner than you would like," she replied.

Magner raised his hand asking for the bill. "I would be delighted. But now, I'm afraid we have to make our way to your train."

Kurt had reserved a sleeper. Once they had found the right carriage, Magner boosted her suitcase into the rack above the plank bed. Ida had stepped over to the washbasin. She stuffed the plug in the drain and turned on the tap, but the water just flowed away. Tucking up her sleeves, she pushed the plug even deeper into the basin. But it was no use, the water continued to drain out.

"I'm afraid I can't take the flowers with me."

"Oh, but you must, I insist," said Magner. He pulled a handkerchief out of his trouser pocket, dampened it, wrapped it around the flower stems and laid the bouquet back into the empty basin. "Now then, I should slowly ... is there anything else I can do for you?"

Ida gave him her hand. "It was a pleasure," she said. "Good-bye, Herr Magner". But then she held his hand for a long moment. It was so soft, it calmed her. She could still feel his hand in hers even after the train had departed, and seeing the flower heads bob up and down over the edge of the basin, she was happy that she had them with her. How extraordinary, flowers could calm her. A new era had really begun.

For a long while, she just stared. She didn't want to look out of the window, out at America, which was ultimately just another landscape, as the ocean had been. More than two years ago she had left Vienna, for the last three months she had been on the road. She was so tired... When the last hours before an arrival are suddenly more tormenting than all the years, weeks, days before. When a train compartment becomes a cage, but you don't even have the strength to stand up. When you try to remember New York, but nothing is there except the delicate smile of a man named Martin Magner, and the taste of Chinese food. When this strange food was actually very nourishing, but the body not only sways but actually vibrates behind your eyes, and no cigarette can remedy it, nor another one, nor yet another. When you fall asleep and awake with a start and there are still hours to go. When you want to pass the time and think of your own son, but all that appears is his face as a child, not that of the grown man, and hands too, that are searching for a rhythm but don't find one, swirling wildly. When the son's swirling thickens the air in the compartment so much that it hardly makes it into your mouth and nose.

"Mama!" cried Kurt. "Mama, would you care for breakfast before our arrival?"

That was the attendant: Ma'am, he had said, not Mama. A short while later, a veritable cage meal stood before her. Toast with rancid butter, and watery coffee.

"Mama!" Kurt called. Ida's foot searched for the platform. Over her shoulder she could see his face. Joy coursed through her like a bright flare of light. Soon she would be able to embrace him. Her toes touched firm ground. When she stood with both feet securely on the platform, she turned to him.

But standing in Kurt's place was a young woman. Ida looked up at her, at her endlessly long neck, topped by a doll's head with tied-back hair, and only next to her, somewhat shorter, was Kurt.

"Allow me to introduce you, Mama. This is Diantha," he said in German, and then switched to English. "*This is my mother, dear.*"

He put his arm around the young woman's back, and held her hip.

The ray of light inside Ida faded. She had hoped he wouldn't bring her, at least not to their first reunion. She ignored the hand that Diantha extended to her and took a step to the side.

"Which way leads to the exit, we need the exit, or is there only an entrance, an entrance where we have go out?"

She hurried off. Kurt and Diantha followed her.

"Is this the right way?" asked Ida. "Help me, won't you, Kurt! You live here, you should lead the way."

Kurt overtook her; Diantha remained at the back.

"I mean, sending some complete stranger to meet me in New York! I had assumed you would inform one of the comrades about my arrival."

"I figured there was no need to further impose upon them." Kurt looked back over his shoulder. "And besides, Martin telegraphed me to say that the two of you spent enjoyable hours together." He turned the back of his head to her again.

Ida shouted over the din on the platform, "Of course we did. I wouldn't snub a friend of my son's. He said you rescued him."

"Oh that was nothing, just a few telephone calls."

"Well, you certainly seemed more burdened when it came to your own mother ..."

This time Kurt didn't turn around. "Mama, please, that was a completely different situation!" he cried. "And now you're here, and as far as I can see, very lively too."

Ida held up the wilting bouquet. "Flowers in the middle of a journey. Quite an impractical idea."

She could feel the tall woman behind her, and Kurt in front of her with a spring in his step and an ease completely unsuited to the situation. Passengers were still stepping out of the train.

Diantha called over Ida's head: "*Her suitcase, Kurt. Don't let her schlep that thing by herself!*"

Kurt reached impatiently for the suitcase. "I'll get the two of you a taxi. Diantha will show you our apartment, and you can rest. I have to go back to the theatre."

Ida grasped his wrist and looked him sternly in the eyes. "I'm coming with you."

"But you must be exhausted!"

"I slept enough on the train."

"It's only a stage and orchestra rehearsal."

"*Did she say she wants to go to the theater?*" Diantha had caught up with them. Ida raised her hands toward the sky.

"I can't think of anything more wonderful than being welcomed to a city by music." At least give me that, since you spoiled our reunion with this new wife of yours. But she only thought the last part.

"You can hardly call a rehearsal a musical greeting, we're constantly stopping and repeating."

Ida's lower jaw began to tremble. "You don't want your mother there. Admit it!"

Kurt took a deep breath. "But don't complain when I put you in the uppermost row at the back. I can't just bring family along as and when it suits me."

"Believe me," Ida put her hand in front of her face, "if I've learned anything over the last few years, it's how to make myself invisible."

In the taxi, between Kurt and Diantha on the rear seat, Ida lit herself a cigarette and laid her hand on Diantha's knee, motherlike, the burning cigarette between her index and middle fingers.

"So you're my son's new wife."

Diantha rolled down the window of the taxi and nodded.

"The second." Ida raised her voice. "You have told her, haven't you, that you were married once before?"

And to Diantha: "A wonderful person, Trudi. A singer."

Unmoved, Kurt replied: "Diantha writes. She has published short stories. She also plays exceptional viola, and fences."

Ida let the cigarette, which clearly couldn't be smoked amidst the family, burn out over Diantha's upper thigh.

"Feather, viola and foil, three elegant weapons."

Diantha looked down at the cigarette and began to jerk her thigh. She preferred to see them as instruments, she replied.

With a shake of her head, Ida bent forward and wiped the cigarette ash on the window's edge. To Kurt, she said in German: "I don't understand your new wife. Do you understand what she's saying?"

Kurt only pointed through the window in front of them. "The opera house."

Ida forgot what she had been about to say. She swallowed. A theatre again, at last.

The auditorium lay in darkness. A male chorus stood on the illuminated stage in everyday clothing. In front of them a row of soloists was seated on chairs. Kurt moved between the singers, giving instructions. A short passage, Kurt interrupting throughout. Then he nodded to the conductor in the orchestra pit, indicating that he could now rehearse the section together with the instrumentalists.

Three thousand seats away, her son's voice in her ears. Ida closed her eyes. The singing and the resonant sound of the orchestra. It was a blessing she had had to do without out for far too long. Soon, discord mingled into the harmonious music. Memories, images that didn't belong there. She tried to chase them away, but they stayed: loudspeaker announcements, the blood of slaughtered goats, men's hands washing and nursing her... A tap on her shoulder. She gave a start. There she was again, the new wife. She claimed that Ida had fallen asleep. That she hadn't wanted to wake her. But then Ida had started snoring loudly.

The Store

The avenue was unending in both directions. Ida looked around in confusion. How was it possible to get lost here, on a street straighter than any in the whole of Europe? She gasped for air. And wasn't it far too warm for a November day?

Searching for the nearest available thing to hold onto, she leaned against the handle of a shop door. The door gave way, and Ida stumbled into the store. A salesman clad in a white smock came over, greeted her. She didn't greet him back, still holding onto the door handle and trying to orientate herself. She saw belts hanging over a counter, and suitcases, piled up on shelves. She hadn't wanted to come into a shop like this, but she did want to escape the unending avenue.

Was she planning to travel, the words made their way to her ears. Was the suitcase asking, or had it come from the white smock? Ida shook her head firmly. To travel, to never fully arrive anywhere. No. She really didn't want to think about travelling again. Wouldn't she like to sit down for a moment? She grasped onto the arm that was offered her, and allowed herself be led to a round sofa in the middle of the shop. It was warm, even warmer than out on the street. The girl who was sorting through gloves behind the counter had rolled up the sleeves of her blouse. The smock helped Ida to sit down. His face was glistening. Could he offer her a coffee, he asked.

Ida nodded. A strong coffee was surely the right thing to revitalize her. She watched the girl disappear from behind the counter into a back room. She would have preferred not to be left alone with the man; instinctively, she checked to see whether the shop had roller shutters that he could let down.

Then the smock showed her a small purse: could she see what was special about this piece? He stroked his hand over the leather. Ida looked at him uncomprehendingly. The girl came back with a tray and smiled at her.

Ida gratefully took the cup and saucer and drank a sip. The coffee stimulated her, but also brought perspiration to her brow.

The girl offered to take her coat. But the smock wanted to help her take it off himself. As he did so, he smuggled the purse into her free hand.

This one, he said as he gestured towards the purse, was for day-to-day use, very practical, but nonetheless elegant. He said this in a tone which implied that, with the right purse, one could influence the course of the world.

Ida tried to hand it back to him. "Thank you very much, but I'm not interested."

"Oh, I see, not elegant enough? Perhaps I can entice you to the crocodile leather selection?"

"I beg your pardon?" Ida asked. "Don't you realize -"

"This purse here," said the smock, enunciating each word slowly, "is made from the leather of a crocodile."

Ida shook her head again. "You've misunderstood. What I mean is: you seem to have no idea of the times we're living in."

"Precisely in times like these, madam, one has to treat oneself to fine things," replied the salesman.

Because he showed no sign of taking it back, Ida put the purse on her knee.

"You know," she cleared her throat. The smock had bent over her, coming even closer and bringing with him the smell of mints and tanned leather. She cleared her throat again.

"You should know," she continued in a louder voice, in order to put the man at a distance again and no longer have this smell in her nose. "It must be, let me count, a good twenty-five years since the last time I even carried a purse."

"I beg your pardon, what are you saying? *Unbelievable*," cried the smock, and sat down next to her.

The cup and saucer began to clink in her hands. The salesman edged even closer and said something about a Summer Sale on this particularly warm November day,

"You haven't even taken a proper look at this item." He pointed at the purse in her lap. "May I?" Without waiting for her approval, he opened the clasp. A pink lining came into view. The smock praised the material, wild silk, superior quality, but hardwearing.

And then she had to watch how he began to busy his fingers in the lining. Ida recoiled. Wild silk, pink wild silk and these fingers; repulsive, simply grotesque. She wanted to stand up, get out of this shop at once, she tried get up. But she couldn't, the sofa was too soft, she couldn't get onto her feet.

The bag slid from her lap, she fell back, and as she did the cup slipped out of her hand, fell to the floor and broke.

The smock stared down at the coffee-stained bag in horror.

"Forgive me," Ida apologized. "I..." She tried once more to stand up. "I'm so..."

The girl pulled her to her feet and pushed her coat into her arms.

"Leave her alone," barked the smock. "See to the shards instead."

She didn't listen to him, brought Ida to the door, shoved her out onto the street, and made sure that she wouldn't even think of coming back in.

Ida wouldn't.

"Not as long as I live, never!" She hurried away. "It's a good thing the girl got me out, otherwise he would have... There's no way I would have paid for the damage." Trembling, she tried to put her coat back on, got tangled, stepped on the hem. Passers-by watched as she grappled with the coat. A Summer Sale in winter! What utter nonsense.

Kurt was waiting impatiently as she unlocked the apartment door. The dining table in the living room was already set for dinner, a bottle of champagne stood amongst the plates.

"We wanted to have eaten by now, Mama. I have to go to a performance."

"Why didn't you start without me?"

"Because today is a day of celebration." He squeezed her hand.

She pulled away. "I hadn't noticed."

In the kitchen, Diantha was heaving a turkey out of the oven onto a tray. "The meat is probably dry by now," she called out unhappily.

"That doesn't matter," replied Kurt good-humoredly. "We'll wash it down with champagne."

"Did you get a raise from the theatre?" asked Ida, with a glance at the expensive bottle.

"No, Mama. There are other things to celebrate. The first piece of news will make some things easier, the second not necessarily. But both are entirely wonderful." He went over to the dresser and picked up a piece of paper. "From this day on," he announced, "I am an American!"

"You never told me..." Ida trailed off and stretched out her hand. "Give me that." She examined the Certificate of Citizenship, then laid it aside again. "I presume that this is a good thing," she said, as impassively as possible.

Kurt pulled the cork out of the champagne bottle. "It certainly is. Very good, in fact. Americans love freshly-baked Americans."

He poured two glasses, put them down in front of Diantha and Ida, then, still standing, picked up a piece of meat and dunked it in the saucière. "I have to go."

"Kurt, the citizenship was only one thing. What's the second?"

He popped the piece of turkey in his mouth. "Diantha can tell you." With those words, he disappeared into the hallway. They heard the apartment door fall into the lock.

Ida said nothing.

Diantha also said nothing.

Ida turned her attention to the meat and sweet potatoes. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Diantha gulp down her champagne. Then she took a deep breath, mustering her courage.

"Well," said Diantha and faltered. In the silence she poured herself another glass and offered the bottle to Ida too.

Ida refused.

"I'm sure it's not easy for you that Kurt is no longer an Austrian," said Diantha, after the second glass.

"Excuse me?" Ida looked up from her plate. "Oh, I don't care about that. As far as I'm concerned he can become a Turkey."

"Turkish," Diantha corrected her absentmindedly.

Ida picked up her fork. "You and Kurt," she said, "you seem to be very excited about your news." She waved the fork wildly in Diantha's direction. "Out with it. I can't abide secretiveness!"

"Kurt and I," Diantha rubbed at her wedding ring. "Our family's getting bigger."

She laid a hand on her stomach. Ida followed the hand with her eyes. She nodded, slowly laid her fork back on her plate, remained silent. Diantha looked at her expectantly.

"You should know," said Ida eventually, "that I consider chicken to be the better choice among poultry, and prefer it to turkey on any occasion." She picked up her napkin, folded it carefully and stood up. "I have to lie down. My heart isn't right today. Perhaps it was the champagne."

Diantha nodded.

In the doorway, Ida turned around. "Of course, I'll tell Kurt that I'm pleased."

The Belly

When you wish that your new daughter-in-law were only imagining the pregnancy, yet believe you can hear two hearts beating through the walls, a big one and a tiny one, unrhythmic and far too loud. When you are so tired and yet so awake, so painfully awake. When you can still see the eyes of the girl behind the shop doors and can't help but remember the gendarmes and the overfilled trains. When everything overlaps: eyes, purses, fingers. When every night is like a journey that goes on far too long, where you know where you came from, but fear where you are going. When you constantly have to tell yourself that you have been rescued, are safe, and still you feel scared. When you wish, again and again, that your new daughter-in-law were only imagining the pregnancy.

But wishing did not help; the belly soon started to arch outwards. Ida didn't even want to look at it. If it had been Trudi's, Kurt's first wife's belly, she would have been moved. Moved because that child would have been born in a different place, in a completely different time. This was the wrong time. But here on Leland Avenue, spring believed that despite all it could create buds, and the daughter-in-law despite all was letting new life grow inside her.

Diantha. Diantha. Every time she tried to say the name Ida almost twisted her tongue. No wonder their conversations often went awry. Misunderstandings, constantly. At least they didn't have to talk when playing cards. Bridge would'nt work, unfortunately, with just the two of them. Canasta was possible. A compromise that Ida had made purely for the joy of holding cards in her hand again.

The daughter-in-law didn't want to play for money. Ida hadn't suggested anything even remotely near a large sum, but Diantha would only permit buttons as stakes. Ida considered playing for buttons to be highly unproductive, downright cowardly. At some point she at least convinced Diantha to play for cigarettes, even if only Ida ended up smoking them.

"Kurt's father must have been a very kind man," said Diantha, opening the window.

"If that's what Kurt says."

"Does he resemble him?"

"Kurt resemble Ernst? Oh dear!"

"In a photo he showed me, the two of them looked quite similar."

"I would say that Kurt resembles his uncle at most, apart from that he's entirely his own man. Except for his thumbs."

"His thumbs?"

"Yes, the Adler thumbs. Let's be honest. They're not pretty. Diantha, please close that window. I can't bear open windows."

Day in, day out, Kurt was at the theatre. Ida barely saw him. She would have loved to accompany him, regardless of what was being performed. After a performance she felt alive, and could even temporarily forget the never-ending war reports. But no, she was only allowed to go to the opera house with him once in a blue moon. For some reason, Kurt seemed to begrudge her any pleasure.

"Mama, did you call New York last month? The telephone bill is horrendous."

"Elsa's there. I confer with her now and again."

"With Elsa? I thought the two of you had fallen out."

“That was a long time ago. We ran into one another in Paris, in the Socialists’ office, and it was such a happy occasion, she realized her past anger and been totally exaggerated.”

“That’s nice to hear, but –”

“But what? I can’t just hang up on her. Otherwise she’ll get all sensitive again. And you know how extensively she likes to talk.”

“Then she should call you.”

“Her call me? Impossible. We’re not on that good terms yet.”

Kurt’s meager income worried her. Another mouth to feed, how would they manage? He couldn’t even afford good furniture. Although it had to be said, Diantha had picked out especially ugly pieces.

“Your new wife has rather limited taste, don’t you think?”

“What makes you say that?”

“Your furniture. I mean, that’s not your style.”

“Of course not, Mama. Not Diantha’s either. We rented the apartment furnished.”

“Excuse me? The furniture is not even yours?”

Ida tried to convince herself, well, what doesn’t belong to you, can’t be taken from you, but she couldn’t help yearning for a bed of her own. All the camps over the last years, she could still feel them in her bones: the cot in Marseille, the straw sacks on the freighter to North Africa, the hospital beds in Casablanca. When she woke in the middle of the night, she believed feverishly that just a bed of her own would end her nightmarish memories. But a cradle presumably has to have priority.

The Grandchild

How she just waltzed through everything carelessly, it was incomprehensible! Wielding a chopstick Kurt beat out a figure from Manon Lescaut. He had spent the entire week rehearsing the role with a singer, and was outraged how few of his corrections she had put into practice.

Ida nodded.

He beat another measure and hummed, as though he could conduct the corrections to everything he had been forced to endure throughout the last hours. Then he changed from baton back to chopstick, and fished noodles out of his bowl.

"Tomorrow Diantha and the little one will be coming home."

Ida dunked a dim sum into the sauce.

"She's so alert, Mama. And pretty. Wonderfully pretty."

Ida put her fork with the dumpling back down.

"Why aren't you eating, Mama?" Kurt took her hand. "Soon there will be a few parties, fundraisers to collect money for the next opera season."

Ida looked at both her hands, as though none of that had anything to do with her.

"Then you'll have a lot to do," she said trying to sound indifferent.

"And given that Diantha won't be able to come with me, I wanted to ask you whether perhaps you could... I mean, I'll need a companion."

Ida pulled her hand away.

Kurt sighed. "Would you do me the favor?"

Without looking up, Ida replied very formally: "If you really need me then, of course, I'll be by your side."

But when they brought the grandchild home, she didn't immediately help out, but remained seated on the bed, wringing her hands in her lap. She heard the front door unlock and waited until there was a knock at her door. She wanted to say, "Come in", but all she managed was a throaty murmur. The bedroom door opened. Kurt came over to her with the newborn baby in his arms.

At first she saw only the hat and little vest, then the tiny face, the pouting lips, the fluffy down above closed eyes. Well, she's not all that pretty and alert, she said to herself.

Kurt laid the newborn in her arms.

First, she checked the girl's fingers and established that she had well-formed nails, and had been spared the Adler thumbs. She adjusted the little body on her lower arm. The child opened her eyes. She stared at her directly, and suddenly Ida could think nothing but: How pretty she is! How alert she is! And what a delicate rhythm her little heart is hopefully beating!

She was still hoping in front of the cradle which had been set up in the living room. Ida felt the silk crêpe of the black evening dress against her calves, stroked her fingers across the stitching on the shoulders.

"Look how elegant your grandmama is at last." She pulled the blanket up more snugly around the child. "Where's the jewelry, you ask? I'm afraid I can't be of any help with that. It's been a long time since I wore any."

The infant yawned.

"You're right, it doesn't really matter," Ida continued. "It's just a shame about my wristwatch. I left it in the pawnshop, in Montauban. Why did your Grandmama do that?"

So that she could make it here to you! Otherwise you might not have had a Grandmama."

"Mama, please."

Kurt had entered the room. Ida straightened up. He stretched his neck so that she could tie his bowtie.

"She doesn't understand a thing I'm saying." Ida took hold of the two wide ends of the strip of fabric. "I could tell her about concentration camps, and all she would get is how much I love her."

"I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't bring up anything of that sort tonight."

"Why not? It's what's happening at home right now."

Ida plucked out the tips of the bowtie and released her son.

"Yes, but not here, and we must not give the impression that we have anything to do with all that. Talk about how much you enjoy taking the little one for a walk by the lake."

"I've never even been there, Kurt. Lakes aren't my thing, you know that all too well."

"Then forget the lake, just tell them about the walks."

"Do you want me to be the evening's most boring person?"

Ida watched as Kurt lifted the child from the cradle and tickled a laugh out of her.

"*Mother*," Diantha had stepped into the room, a purse under her arm; she held it out towards Ida. "For your cigarettes, I thought."

Ida recoiled back involuntarily. "I don't need one."

Diantha set down the purse. "I'll leave it here, just in case you change your mind."

"I won't."

Kurt handed the child to Diantha. "We have to go," he said, offering Ida his arm with a shake of his head.

"And please don't start on about the Marxists or Socialism," Kurt cautioned her in the taxi.

Ida pulled her sleeves straight. "Why would I?"

"Didn't you recently try to explain Uncle Otto's politics to Diantha?"

"Yes, because she's interested."

"No one at the party will be interested, believe me."

"You don't seem to think the Americans capable of anything."

"I think them capable of a great deal, and that's why I'm telling you not to start in about it. Communism doesn't have a good reputation here."

"I couldn't give two figs about the Communists. And neither could your uncle."

"Mama, I know. But here they don't necessarily differentiate between the two."

"Well, that's all quite extraordinary. And the fact that you have to fundraise for the opera here." Ida paused. "Philistines."

Kurt rubbed his eyes.

"I can see that, with you at my side, the donations will come pouring in."

Swift & Company, a married couple worth millions, he one of the biggest meat manufacturers in America, she a former singer from Germany, were hosting the party at their residence, which looked like an imitation of a French baroque castle. Marble and gold in the entrance hall, the garden a vast park, the guests draped with jewelry and

expensive watches. A liveried waiter refilled wine glasses and proffered house delicacies on silver trays in every corner.

Meat and drinks were still being served when the hostess requested all guests to gather in the music salon, where Kurt was already sitting at the grand piano. Wearing a top hat on her blonde locks, Claire Dux greeted the guests on this so *de-light-ful* evening. To get you all in the mood, she said, she would perform a Handel aria.

The guests applauded, and Dux nodded to Kurt. He struck the opening notes on the piano, and she sang, *Lascia ch'io pianga*, let me weep, weep for her cruel fate, let her sigh, sigh for freedom.

The guests listened, munching reverently.

May her pain burst the chains of her suffering, Dux sang, and she didn't sing badly at all, thought Ida. A good performance for a singer who had long ago ceased to be one.

When Dux finished, Ida applauded along with the others. And laughed with them when Dux removed the top hat and mingled amongst the audience like a varieté musician. The listeners flipped notes into the hat and signified with their eyes that a check would follow. In return, Dux fluttered her eyelashes coquettishly.

After the money had been collected, the liveried servants returned with their trays bearing meat salad in small crystal bowls. Ida took a bowl and looked around.

Kurt was still sitting at the piano. A man, no doubt a financier, stood there talking at him. She saw Kurt feign interest; she knew that facial expression well. The other guests were chatting, scattered in small groups. Except for the pompous house, the money and the excessive quantity of sausage products, then this event actually ran like the salons she used to hold, Ida thought to herself. Music opened them, and amusement followed. Our salons, Ida mused, had been a great source of pleasure. She poked fiercely at her meat salad. There was no point in dwelling on old times.

Once the guests had been provided with more drinks, Dux called for their attention one more time. She gesticulated, like a conférencier, for everyone to follow her. At that moment, two double doors opened behind her.

"Come along, *ladies and gentlemen!* Here's something to be seen which one wouldn't necessarily want to encounter on such a lighthearted evening. But I *ab-solute-ly* have to show it to you. Curtain up for *Melancholy!*"

Ida raised her eyebrows and followed the others into an oversized boudoir. One single portrait hung in the room. Dux positioned herself in front of it.

"A genuine Dalí with my countenance," she exclaimed. "The paint isn't even dry yet. Now I can just drop dead on the spot." She mimicked the pose of a dying swan, while her guests stepped closer and stared in amazement.

Ida knew the Spanish painter from hearsay. She had never seen a painting of his. This one was titled *Melancholy – Portrait of Singer Claire Dux*, and, indeed, it showed Dux, peeping out from behind a shrine, desert all around her, and a sky above filled with cloudlets.

Ida heard a woman behind her lavish praise on the picture. Doesn't Claire look magnificent?

No wonder, thought Ida. The painter had made the singer look a good twenty years younger.

Ida took another bite of salad, and pondered whether it wasn't terribly kitsch for there to be a lute-playing angel sitting up on one of the little clouds. The conversation behind her continued. Ida caught the word "dream" and then something else, thinking at first that she had misheard. She had expected many things at this fundraiser, but this in no way. Ida listened: Inspired by *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and then Dux herself joined in: She had just begun analysis herself, she said, and considered it to be just *fan-tas-tic*. Ida sensed

a whistling sound in her ears. And then: "Sure! No sure! Any person of education, of course, knows who Professor Freud is."

Once again, Ida poked around in her salad. She ate another forkful. Chicken, that would dampen the shock. She laughed out loud. This was really unexpected, she thought. That the Herr Doktor's shadow had grown even over another continent.

The salad must have gone bad in her hands; she was overcome by the urge to spit the last bite back into the crystal. Ida set her bowl down with a clatter and hurried back to the music salon. Kurt was still sitting at the piano, letting the man talk.

"Kurt, I'm not feeling well."

Kurt's conversation partner, a broad-hipped man in a tuxedo, looked at her questioningly.

"We have to go home."

"Wouldn't you like to sit down for a moment?"

Kurt had stood up and offered her his seat at the piano.

She shook her head and grabbed his arm. "I want to go home."

Kurt apologized to the man.

"I'll call you a taxi."

"You have to go with me."

Kurt looked around. "I can't just yet."

"You must!" Ida crossed her arms over her chest and began to breathe heavily.

Even in the taxi she continued to wheeze. Kurt looked at her from the side. "I can't imagine that the food was bad."

Ida avoided his gaze.

Kurt laughed softly. "Rancid meat at a meat manufacturer's residence, honestly..."

Ida shrugged her shoulders. "I've experienced more absurd things, not least tonight."

"I hope you didn't say anything inappropriate?"

She snorted. "Don't worry. I said nothing. Even less than nothing."

She turned away and stared out of the car window. Following the dark alley driveways the city grew denser, the flashing neon signs blinded her. When you had long since closed the door on something, and then it gets torn open again, suddenly and against your will. When you thought that so much life has passed, that you've endured so much, that something like that doesn't even matter any more, and then it does ... and again... When you had long since closed the door, she repeated, and repeated, and repeated it in rhythm with the sound of the car engine. When you had long since closed ... an *obsessive thought* he would have called it, the Herr Doktor. That his shadow could extend; after so many years, back to me.

The new century

Ida walked out of Berggasse 19 onto the pavement. The wooden door closed behind her. She lifted her chin. From now on, she, and only she, would determine her life. The pedestrians and the grey sky above took no interest in her decision, even if they saw her raised chin. She alone had the say now, not her Papa nor the Herr Doktor nor any other power. On 1/1/1901, with one year's delay, a new century would begin for her. 1/1/1901, she repeated solemnly, Berggasse 19.

Ones and nines in the date and in the address. One and nine. The alpha and omega of the natural numbers! She was completely herself again with her numbers, which had nothing in common with the Herr Doctor's way of calculating. What had he just been trying to enumerate to her? That she hadn't suffered from appendicitis, but had convinced herself of an imaginary pregnancy because she wished she'd experienced an indiscretion with Hanns nine months earlier? Subconsciously! Please, Herr Doktor, seriously? Oh, she didn't even want to think about it any more. It upset her too much. She wanted to rejoice over her ones and nines and her new century.

Ida made her way down the street, walking out of her old life, but not yet towards her new one. First she wanted to go home, settle herself during the next few hours. They were merely intermediary hours, she decided, hours with a fishtail and bird's head, hours that were feathered and scaled, and tonight at midnight she would fly and dive into her new century. At Berggasse 32, she took the key from her coat pocket and unlocked the door. 32, three and two, past the porter's lodge. The porter was absent, so she hiked up her skirts and took the steps two at a time, like she had seen once at the doctor's office. As she went, she asked herself how 32, the three and the two, could be brought into connection with the ones and the nines, three times three perhaps, she calculated, maybe one plus one.

She paused on the first floor, listened within, checked her pulse. It was beating with a delicately even rhythm. And her lungs weren't burning. Wonderful. It didn't even matter that she couldn't work out a meaningful link between 32 and her ones and nines. A chest that wasn't threatening to burst after climbing just a few steps, a head that didn't get dizzy by the very first floor, two legs that could be put in front of one another without trouble – taken together, these were clearer signs that she had made the right decision than when a number didn't fit. She took the stairs to the second floor slowly, step by step, in order not to attract any reprimand.

She was met in the entrance to the apartment by cold, as though snow lay in the air. Ida sat down on the wooden bench and unlaced her boots. As she looked along the hallway through the open doors of the dining room into Otto's den, he was sitting in front of the wide-open window, wearing a coat and a fur hat, bent over the desk with unassailable concentration. He didn't seem to have moved an inch since she had left. Cigarette smoke rose above his head. Mama was probably in the utility room with the maid or in the pantry along with the cook. Papa was surely still at the office.

Ida went as quietly as possible into the study, pulled the envelope with the doctor's monthly invoice out of her coat, laid it on the bureau. Papa had no idea that this was the last bill he would have to settle for her.

In her room she lit a cigarette. Now, finally, she would have time to find a society for women's education. First tidy her desk, then she would be able to pursue her studies. Hunching her back, she imitated Otto's posture. That was how her concentration would look like. From sunrise through midnight she would decipher the world. Soon there would be not one but two burgeoning scholars at Berggasse 32.

Unlike her brother she would not tolerate an open window. She stood up and closed it. She alone made the decisions here. Mama, with her delusions, had nothing more to say. Ida took off her scarf, threw it over the books on the desk and sank onto her bed.

Behind her closed eyes filaments of light against a background of black. But it was a different black, not the coal black of the last months. Her coat pressed warmly against her. And behind her back she could still distinctly feel the wooden door of Berggasse 19. Hanns, Pepina, Papa. Had the Herr Doktor Panderer been veritably trying to tell her that the best solution would be to marry Hanns, so that Pepina could be with Papa? All you had to do was say it plainly and bluntly, and you immediately saw how ludicrous it was. She was right in no longer listening. This was no medical treatment! Now she would demonstrate to what really true healing yields: education, an appreciation of art.

Suddenly she felt dreadfully tired. She felt warm, but was too slumberous to take off her coat. She wished it would simply peel itself off of her. She wished that someone remove the Berggasse 19 door from her back. She wished for a cigarette, to concentrate, a meter-long cigarette.

Someone was shaking her. Mama. "Ida, child, everyone is waiting. Just look at the girl, she has fallen asleep."

In the carriage she sat next to Papa. Otto and Mama had taken their seats opposite. Mama stared past her into the dark roof of the carriage, which smelt of damp mold. The evening was bright from winter's first snowfall. The mottled redness climbing up Mama's cheeks was clearly visible. Mama found it embarrassing that her daughter looked so sleepy. And on top of that they were in a dreadful rush because of her. Papa twisted his cufflinks into the correct position and spoke soothingly: they would make it in time.

Even if they did manage to arrive at the theatre with seconds to spare, Mama replied, Ida had still made everyone rush unnecessarily. And once again she hadn't eaten anything either. Even though Mama had had chicken soup made on her special request. And now they would need to give the driver an excessive tip.

Otto lent over and laid Mama's glove, which had fallen out of her hand while she was wildly gesticulating, carefully back in her lap.

"The driver has earned a few extra ten-pfennig pieces anyway, for his loyal service on New Year's Eve," he remarked.

"Of course he has," Mama replied. But now the tip wouldn't seem like an act of generosity, she added, but rather like an apology for the fact he had needed to hurry on their account.

Ida raised her arm and reached above her into the carriage roof. She grappled around for what she had smelt, scratched mold from the ceiling, rubbed it between her thumb and index finger. Then she lent forward and held her finger beneath her mother's nose. She recoiled in horror.

"Ida!"

"Now you've got something else to be outraged about," said Ida. "You clearly get such pleasure out of it."

Mama grabbed her hand and roughly wiped her fingers clean with the glove. Ida pulled out of her grip.

His wife had to take into account that the treatment with Herr Doktor Freud was a strain on their daughter, said Papa.

"Yes, yes," said Mama. "My husband has defend her, of course." Then she stared fixedly out into the falling snow, until the carriage came to a halt in front of the theatre.

The last members of the audience were making their way up the steps into the foyer. Otto opened the door and extended his arm to Mama. She climbed out, with an expression that suggested she was being led to the scaffold. Papa reached for Ida's

shoulder to help him out of the carriage, while Otto paid the cabman, who, delighted with the generous tip, sent them off with a cry of "Mazel tov for the New Year!" The foyer had already emptied. Otto took their coats; a box attendant waved them over. In the auditorium, the lights were going down. Uncle Ludwig with his wife, Uncle Karl and cousins Elsa and Frieda had already taken their seats. Ida had to squeeze passed them.

"There you all are at last," whispered Elsa. "I thought you wouldn't make it. Did something happen?"

The conductor had appeared and, after bowing to the audience, launched into the overture. Otto slipped into his seat at the last moment. Elsa was still looking at her curiously.

Ida spared herself an answer. But she could barely concentrate on what was happening on stage. She had to tell Papa that she wouldn't go back to the talking cure. She wanted to do it tonight. Hopefully he would take it better amidst the New Year's spirit.

But other things were disturbing her concentration too. Oh, how irritated she felt yet again with him and Mama! The two of them were enjoying themselves far too much as the wife of Eisenstein received her insistent admirer up there on the stage. She couldn't find any of it funny. And the smell of mold was still in her nose. It made her want to vomit. Why had she let herself be provoked like that by Mama? She should have stayed calm – like Otto. He always managed to get his way, and everyone always felt as though he was doing it for their sake. It was a delicate art he had mastered. Although, it wouldn't hurt him to side with her more often, like he used to. But now the only thing he wanted to side with was his party.

With all these thoughts, the first act flew by. In the interval, Ida went to the refreshment room.

"Hey, don't you have your purse with you?" Elsa had squeezed in behind her.

"Oh, that." She tried to sound casual. "I don't like it as much as I thought I did."

"But it's brand new, and you thought it was beautiful," insisted Elsa.

Ida rolled her eyes and put her index finger beneath Elsa's nose. "Here. Do you smell that?" Elsa pushed her finger away. "Don't be so vulgar."

Laughing, they went back to the foyer. Mama was complaining in detail about her unreliable daughter. Falling asleep, just like that. They almost missed the beginning because of her.

"It's better than suddenly starting to snore here in the theatre, isn't it?" replied Ida. Uncle Ludwig, at least, couldn't hold back a smile of amusement.

Even as the bell had just begun to ring, Mama was already making her way back into the auditorium, to be on time at all costs. Ida liked the second half better; the lies were uncovered at the end, and everyone was reconciled with one another. In this respect, life was very different. She would forgive no one. Neither Papa nor Mama, and certainly not Hanns and Pepina.

When the curtain fell after the final applause, there was only an hour to go until midnight. A salon orchestra played dancing songs in a foyer hall. All Ida could think of was the buffet. She would never admit it in front of Mama, but she was incredibly hungry.

Elsa handed her a glass.

"So where's your fiancé?" asked Ida, taking a sip.

"With his family, of course," replied Elsa. "We'll celebrate together once we're married."

"So never, then," remarked Ida dryly.

Elsa gave a mock frown and laughed. "What's gotten into my dear cousin this time? Couldn't you finish your nap before the theatre?"

The buffet would only be opened shortly before midnight. Here and there, complaints were expressed that people were starting to feel hungry. Ida craned her neck, thinking she had just seen someone with a plate.

Elsa nodded towards her sister, who was in conversation with a young gentleman in uniform.

"Look," said Elsa, "Frieda has her sights set on finding a husband."

Ida shrugged. "Whatever. But I for one won't ever get engaged."

"Sure, Ida. You're too smart for them all anyway." Ida nodded, flattered.

"But the gentleman with Frieda looks very dashing. Don't you think?" Elsa persisted.

"I'm more interested in finding something decent to eat," replied Ida, setting off towards the buffet. In order not to be bothered with a plate in her hand at midnight, Ida ate up quickly. And then the year was being counted out already. Outside the foyer windows, the first fireworks were exploding into the chime of the church bells. Ida's heart began to hammer. So here it was, her new century. All around her, embraces and good wishes, some couples were already spinning around in a waltz. She saw Otto bow in front of Mama, who was smiling. A rare sight. Papa, meanwhile, was shaking his brother's hands. Just as she was about to bound over to him, to unload her news in the euphoria of the new year, Elsa's arms grabbed her from behind.

Ida turned and returned the embrace. Elsa wished her a wonderful year, and for the first time in a long while, Ida wanted to believe in it. She gave her cousin a resounding kiss on the cheek. Now to Papa, quickly! But some business friends had joined him in the meantime.

Papa lifted his glass, to good relationships, saying he only hoped they would be spared the long strikes this year. He gestured towards Uncle Karl. It was only thanks to him, he said, thanks to his negotiating skills, that they had been able to go back into production last season.

Proximity to the worker was all well and good, one of the business friends countered, but there were things being said about the son. That he wasn't at the textile institute, as planned, and there were murmurs about social democratic nonsense.

Looking pained, Papa glanced over Otto, who was still stood by Mama, and muttered something that Ida didn't catch. Uncle Karl hurriedly stood up for him. His nephew was a very intelligent young man, he was studying law and philosophy, and yes, he was involved in social democracy. But what about that could be bad for business, if he had his ear to the emerging workers' movement?

The business friend tilted his head skeptically, and Papa, or so it seemed to Ida, wasn't that convinced either. He made his apologies and went over to the buffet. Ida followed him. With a plate in his hand, Papa would be sure to take it better that she had ended her treatment with Doktor Freud. She picked up another glass of champagne from a tray, to help him swallow the good news more easily.

1901

January. On the morning after New Year's Eve, Ida could barely move. She lay in bed, a strident smell in her nose, along with the vague recollection of having dunked the mold-coated finger in a bottle of perfume before going to bed. Rose essence, musk, ambergris, jasmine. Even though she hated the fragrance of flowers and of perfume. And this fragrance, which had been given to her by Papa but certainly chosen by Pepina, she hated this one especially.

The time of day was imperceptible through the window. It had stopped snowing. The sky was silent. Then, suddenly, the space above her ear went dark and warm. "My little eye," whispered the warmth. "My darling, darling little eye, tell me I misheard. You haven't ended your treatment without permission, you haven't, you wouldn't. Not in your condition. I misheard, didn't I? Come, you're a sensible girl. The Herr Doktor will forgive you, he's no stranger to a little joke. You have to leave it to him to decide whether you're cured or not. Do you really want to be so ungrateful? Don't turn away from me, Ida! You will listen to me, is that clear?"

Are you looking at me? Look at me! I refuse to converse with the back of your head. Or have you gone mute again? I'll tell you one thing: this time you won't escape me."

Then it went cold by her ear again. The door slammed shut. So this is it, thought Ida, the beginning of my new century. All of a sudden she felt unbelievably old and fragile, and her heart fell out of rhythm once more.

February. The days in the shortest month were as long as a never-ending year. The desk she had wanted to sit down at daily seemed beyond her reach. And she was hoarse again; no tones would come from her throat. Only rattling and wheezing.

And then the news from Elsa. They had actually set a date for the wedding. They would marry as soon as April. A married Elsa, an Elsa setting up her own household. Even though she was just a few months older. And on top of it all she was marrying a man called Hans. All in all he was a friendly fellow, no comparison with Hanns Zelenka. But Ida didn't want to lose Elsa. Things were always fun with her there, and marriage meant that the fun would be over.

She could have talked to the Herr Doktor about it, she thought to herself, then corrected the thought. He would have seized it as an opportunity to prove to her all kinds of other things. She felt alone. Lonelier than she had in a very long time. But her throat was burning in such a manner, her coughing was so forceful, that even crying hurt too much.

March. It wasn't the first time she had gone out unaccompanied, yet after such a long interlude it seemed to her a tremendous step. The door fell shut behind her, as definitive as the final curtain at the theatre. Her echoing steps in the stairwell could have been taken from a crime story. But what happened next, outside the door, Ida had never read in any book nor seen performed on any stage. The facades of the houses leaned further forwards with every one of her steps and threatened to crash down on her, the lamppost wanted to impale her, her own scarf strangled her, and her hat cooked her brain.

It took Ida days to recover again afterwards. How she had made it back to her room, she could no longer remember. But now, as she sat by her window smoking and looking down at the street, the facades stayed on their houses, the streetlamps illuminated the path calmly, and even her scarf and hat hung peacefully on her dresser.

The following week, she ventured out again. Just a few steps up Berggasse. She couldn't go in the other different direction, because of the Turkish barracks with the impertinent

officers and the *Tandelmarkt* with its mean characters. But then, on the opposite side of the street, she was suddenly seized by the fear that she could run into the Herr Doktor, or even worse, that Hanns was following her.

Ida hurried back home. Stretched out on the bed, she stared into the darkness, feeling aggravated. Stupid Ida, stupid fool.

April. Elsa stood there in the temple. She looked pretty, Ida had to admit – although the bouffant tulle on her head would have been more in keeping with a beekeeper than a bride. Hans Foges, on the other hand, made a stately figure alongside her. Snot and water flowed out of Frieda when Elsa exchanged rings. The sister was crying not with happiness, but jealousy, Ida was sure of it.

May. She had really only intended to express her sympathy to Pepina and Hanns. Only that. It was important to her, because she too was grieving for little Klara, after all. For just a few hours, she had believed, everything else could be forgotten. Despite the fact that Papa was still meeting with Pepina, for how else could he have known about the death of their little daughter? And despite the fact that she had never again wanted to be alone with Hanns. But she wouldn't have to be for a condolence visit. And so she had ventured to Rathausstrasse, to where the Zellenkas had moved from Meran. The chambermaid led her into the salon.

"Ida!" cried Pepina. "What a surprise."

In the corner, Otto Zellenka was building a toy railway. When he saw Ida, he jumped up, threw his arms around her, and didn't want to let go again.

"Leave Ida alone." Hanns' tone was curt. He pulled a cigarette out of his case and lit it. Ida sat down hesitantly in the armchair opposite him. Pepina said nothing.

How should she begin? For a few moments, there was only silence. "I just wanted to express my sympathy..." she said eventually. "It's so sad, I knew of course that her heart wasn't good, but..." She lowered her head. "She was such a sweet girl."

Tears came to Pepina's eyes, she raised a handkerchief to her mouth. "Klara missed you," she said after a while, "when you stopped coming to see us."

Ida gripped the armrests of her chair. "What's that supposed to mean? Are you suggesting that it was because of me that Klara...?"

"No, no, not like that," said Pepina weakly.

"So how then?" Ida took a deep breath. "If her parents had known how to behave more appropriately, then Klara wouldn't have had to miss me. I would have visited her every day. But no, you had to... allow Papa to give you presents."

Pepina's shoulders began to convulse, she was sobbing. Hanns, pale with rage, lifted his hand.

Ida jumped up. "Oh I see, so now everything's to be denied again, is it, Hanns? Just like back then with what happened at the lake?" She crossed her arms and looked on as he stubbed out his cigarette and cracked his knuckles in embarrassment.

That day, her legs carried her home a rare agility, and she felt fresher than she had in a long time. Ida stormed into the apartment. Papa and Mama were sat, as always at around this hour at the weekend, in the salon.

"I was at the Zellenkas," she announced, without any preliminary greeting. "I only wanted to offer my condolences, to tell them how terribly sad it is about Klara. But then we ended up talking about everything after all." Ida lifted her hand triumphantly. "And Hanns didn't deny a thing." She waited for a reaction.

Papa cleared his throat and laid his newspaper aside. "I really would have expected more tactfulness from you," he said. Mama was looking at her with disgust.

"And how much tactfulness do you two have?" Tears shot into Ida's eyes. "Who would I have inherited it from? Who?" she spat out, and ran to her room.

June. Why not play Patience? Why not play it for nights on end, if she felt like it? After all, she didn't have anything else to do. And her concentration wouldn't stretch to much else anyway. So she might as well brood over the cards and lay out different constellations, she could spend as much of her time as she wanted doing that.

July. While she was barely living, Otto had reason to celebrate. Victor Adler, his great hero, had ousted the Christian-Social opponent in the Favoriten district. This made him, the party founder, the first Social Democrat to sit in the Lower Austrian Parliament. The only one, for the time being, for there were no others. But Otto was already celebrating the great revolution.

The next goal was equally grand: voting rights for all men. The fact that Otto was on the go night and day, that he could completely forget he had a sister, yes, she understood it. She could force herself to understand it.

August. What a delight, whacking with a racket like this. My dear opponent wasn't expecting that, look, she's gone completely pale. Ha! Those roulade arms can't help you now, my dear, my dear... What's her name again? I can't win in such a manner and then forget her name... or maybe I can. No, to the right, you fool, to the right! You play even worse than Elsa. Or rather, Elsa in the old days. Now she can barely do anything, with that belly of hers getting incessantly bigger. They got married and then, bam! A child right away. I mean, it really is completely unnecessary. There was plenty of time for...ha, another one! What's her name, the silly fool? She was thinking of it just a moment ago... Marianne, Mathilde, Maria, no. Nameless opponent, or just, "opponent". Should I give her a point? Simply for the sake of the holiday mood? I mean, we have to be able to run into one another again at meal times. It's only a game, not war. And she should count herself lucky on that front. Because otherwise I would have totally annihilated her by now. What an amazing racket this is! A good hotel, excellent equipment, a tennis court with a mountain view. One could almost think one isn't at home. Although it isn't... not anymore. Lucky that we're in Vienna now, where we don't know every cobblestone, every storey of every building and all the dishes in all the inns. Not that there are that many in Meran. I wonder who's living in our apartment now? Worthy successors? Although, were we that worthy?

Stupid nostalgia. Papa and Pepina...Papa and Pepina...and Hanns? He had looked bad. Had Klara taken his health with her to the grave? Poor thing, one shouldn't pull her into it now too. Although the Herr Doktor always pulled everything in or out, or rather picked it out, and then interpreted it, and then tried to convince me of something. But I know what's in my head! And I won't let anyone convince me that there are secrets hidden in my dreams and in my purse... Out. Point given, serve more carefully next time, Ida, remember that the strings give the momentum. Temporary game interruption? Granted, one last reprieve. The brother hands her some lemonade. Maximiliane! No, it wasn't Maximiliane. But it would go well with her chubby cheeks. I don't have a brother who would stand on the sidelines and hand me lemonade. My brother has higher things on his mind. Go forth and conquer, Maximiliane! Don't delay your defeat with this eternal lemonade drinking. A question: am I ready. Me? Such cheek, and at the last minute too! I won't play even one more match with her. She will have to change and do her hair again, or perhaps her brother will do it for her, the way he's standing there at the ready. It's a long time since Otto and I put our heads together... Look how she comes trotting back onto the court, she's certainly caught her breath again.

Well I never! Where did that ball come from all of a sudden? Was there something in the lemonade, Maximiliane? I shouldn't have let her rest. The sun is so high, it knows no mercy now. Oh, but everything is okay. No, really. No! Under no circumstances will I take a glass from your brother. I have my own brother. He would... at any time, a-n-y time, if he had the time... How hot the sun is, how bright... No. So it's come to this, my opponent is starting to worry about me! No. That's what I have Mama for. Have you rested enough? Have you taken care of yourself? Washed yourself properly? A point for her... Another... Heavens, Ida! Don't let yourself be made to look a fool after all this. How my hand is trembling, why is it doing that? A cigarette, I need a refreshing cigarette. The brother. The way he looks at me. I know that look from Hanns and from the soldiers. That's not how you're supposed to look at people, brothers aren't allowed to do that. A ball into touch, and on your nose, brother! We'll see whether you duck down. We'll see.

September. The society she had wanted to join offered courses in state, societal and economic theory. The society she registered with, after the summer vacation, had a reading group and embroidery courses. The society she had wanted to join campaigned for higher education for women. The society she was in was fighting over the cost of printing a calendar of proverbs. The society she had wanted to join held a lecture series on topics like The Impact of Study and Working Life on the Female Personality. The society she was in asked for cake donations. The society she had wanted to join had founded a high school for girls. The society she was in asked for understanding regarding their small premises. The society she had wanted to join issued scholarships. The society she was in collected clothing for maidservants who had gotten themselves into unfortunate circumstances. The society she had wanted to join was located in a neighborhood of the city she wouldn't be able to reach on a regular basis. The society she was in was within walking distance.

October. One more time, very slowly and from the beginning. She had been on her way to the society, had been watching the fall come into being, the delightful coloring of the trees. Then she had paused in front of an antiques' store and noticed in the display window the leather binding of a book. She had briefly contemplated going into the shop, but then decided against it in order not to arrive at the society late. She had glanced briefly at the display of stockings in the window next to the antiques' shop, then turned her head towards the street and suddenly saw him, Hanns Zellenka! He too had immediately noticed her, making evasion impossible. Visibly confused, he had stopped abruptly in the middle of the street, and the car approaching from the side had no time to brake.

One more time, slowly and from the beginning. The binding of the book in the antiques' shop was made of a reddish leather, the title embossed in black letters. The stocking shop had only cheap yarn in the window display. There was always a blind spot in the traffic here, especially in the afternoons. An unfavorable location for an unexpected encounter. Now the very thing she had feared had occurred. They had coincidentally... and then the carriage had bumped him.

One more time and from the beginning. Shops with a certain layout, shops that were difficult to see into from the outside, these scared Ida, as did display windows whose roller blinds could be suddenly pulled down. Even the title of the book was repulsive to her: The Bride of the Nile. And then the stockings, the trinkets, the cheap yarn.

Ida hadn't been thinking about Hanns as she stood there. He hadn't entered her mind for a long while; the last time was probably in the summer. He had looked like a shocked little boy, before he was thrown down onto the cobblestones.

Another time from the beginning. Hanns was wearing an elegant coat. He had never looked that elegant in Meran. As he lay on the floor, the coat was ripped, from the shoulder to the sleeve.

One more time. Hanns had looked almost elegant, then, in his moment of shock, boyish, certainly much healthier than around the time of Klara's death. But on the cobblestones, after the collision, he was an old man. He knelt down and searched around for his hat. His hand was injured. Someone handed him a cloth to wipe himself clean.

One more time. Hanns could just have been a piece of livestock caught under the wheels.

One more time. They had seen one another, and that was even lonelier than if both of them had each gone their own way.

One very last time. It would have been better if the car hadn't braked, if instead it had run over Hanns, laying him down to die beneath its wheels. That would have been two deaths for the Zellenkas, two deaths in one year. The family had earned that much fate, Ida thought.

November. Just one more time, really. She and Hanns, the car and Hanns, a collision that had left scars in its wake. Ida would have preferred the scars Hanns had. Those she could have disinfected, covered with salve, and she could have dealt with the throbbing pain.

It wasn't the onset of fall which had stolen her voice; Hanns had torn it from her throat with one single glance. It wasn't the onset of fall which had given her the cough, the shock had forced its way down into her chest. The 1st of November was Ida's birthday, on the 11/1/1901 she turned 19. She had wanted to continue with her numerical conjuring from the beginning of the year, but now, eleven months later, all its meaning had withered. On the 11/1/1901, Ida stayed in bed until the afternoon. She wrote a note saying that she wanted chicken soup for dinner, that swallowing was particularly difficult today. Mama folded up the note and declared that this wasn't a suitable meal. They weren't poor. For her birthday there would be roasted meat with dumplings.

Ida sipped the gravey.

December. She had wanted to fly and dive into the new century, and now, a year later, she was drowning in illness and sorrow. 1902 lay darkly before her. Devoid of promise. She didn't want to cast even a little light into this darkness.