# At the Grange

I can only tell you of some of the individual incidents, and only what happened, not how it happened. I don't know how it came to an end, and whether that ending was the result of an action, or simply an accident. But I'll narrate the story to you as my memory yields it up to me, drop by drop.

*After this curious introduction, the narrator, Marx, talks about his childhood. His father was business advisor to Frau van der Roden, the widow of a District Councillor, who lived at a grand property in the country called the grange with her granddaughter, Anna Lene: the last survivors of what had once been a very rich and powerful aristocratic family.*

They were said to have possessed ninety estates, and harboured the arrogant ambition to make it a round hundred. But times changed. People said that some of their property had been acquired illegally, and so God had intervened: one estate after another passed into other hands. At the time my tale begins, the grange was the only possession that the family had left.

*The widow and Anne Lene are looked after by a maidservant, Wieb, whose husband Marten attends to what remains of the estate's farming business. Marx recalls a visit to the grange with his mother and father, on a day when there were other guests there. Wieb takes the four year-olds Marx and Anne Lene through the extensive gardens of the grange.*

Finally we get as far as the moat, which has a straight path running along beside it. This path leads us to a summer-house, by the open doors of which the company is now sitting, taking their afternoon coffee. We are called in, and when I hesitate, my mother takes a sugared biscuit out of the silver cake-basket and shows it to me. But I am apprehensive; I have observed that the wooden house is only supported by slender stakes in the water of the moat, and it takes a while before the bait my mother is holding out, together with the colourful pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses which are painted on the walls of the summer-house, lure me to step inside. Later on the men probably went off together round the estate to inspect the cattle, as is the custom in those parts; for I have a memory of everything going quiet round me, of hearing only the gentle voice of my mother, and other women's voices. Anne Lene and I played at their feet under the table; we put our heads down on the floor of the summer-house and tried to hear the water underneath us.

*Some years later, because of old age, the councillor's widow leaves the grange to be looked after by Marten and Wieb and moves into town with her granddaughter, living near Marx's parents, who regularly invite the old woman and the young girl to coffee on Sundays. Marx recalls one Sunday when has to be fetched into the house by Anna Lene.*

I did not move at first; my eyes were still fixed on the white summer dress she was wearing, on the sky-blue sash round her waist and finally on the antique fan she was holding. 'Aren't you going to come in, Marx?' she asked at length. 'Granny says we are to practise the minuet together again.' I was content with this idea. A few weeks before, at the dancing class we both attended, we had devoted a great deal of care to mastering these old-fangled skills, in fulfilment of a wish jointly expressed by the councillor's widow and my father. So we went indoors. Later, when my father had come into the room and was engrossed in business matters with his old friend, my mother took us across the hall to the room opposite and sat down at the open piano. She had decided we should lead off with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. When the tune struck up: 'I feel such strong attraction – Zerlina, dance with me!', the little

feet in their light boots of cordovan leather twinkled across the floor as though they were dancing over a surface of glass. With one hand she held the open fan pressed to her chest, while the fingertips of her other hand lifted her dress up from the floor. She smiled; pride and grace shone in her delicate little face. As we chasseed to and fro, approached one another and bowed, my mother had long since ceased to look at the keys; like her son, she seemed unable to take her eyes off the little floating figure in front of her, executing the patterns of the old dance with graceful composure.

We must have proceeded like this as far as the trio when the door of the room slowly opened and a thickset boy who lived down the road came in. He was the son of a cobbler, and on ordinary workdays of the week he had proved himself a most excellent lieutenant to me when I was playing at robbers or soldiers. 'What is he doing here?' asked Anne Lene, as my mother paused in her playing for a moment. 'I wanted to play with Marx', said the lad, looking down self-consciously at his clumsy hob-nailed boots.

'Why don't you sit down, Simon', my mother suggested, 'until the dance is over; then you can all go out into the garden together.' With that she nodded to the two of us and began to play the trio. I advanced, but Anne Lene did not come towards me; she let her arms hang down by her sides and eyed the tousled head of my playmate with unmistakable irritation.

'Come now', said my mother, 'aren't you going to let Simon see what you have been learning?'

But the young patrician clearly found that her elevated mood had been all too severely interrupted by the presence of this workaday figure. She put her fan down on the table and said: 'Marx can go off and play with the lad if he wants to.'

I can still feel, with shame, how I discarded my plebeian favourite in order to indulge the beautiful girl - though I did have a presentiment of remorse even as I did so. 'Off you go, Simon', I said, with some embarrassment, 'I don't feel like playing today.' And the poor boy slipped down from his chair and crept silently out of the house.

My mother gave me a penetrating look, and later on, when Anne Lene came to be more closely associated with our household, both she and I had to undergo many a brief sermon from my mother which took its text from that incident. But at that moment those little dancing feet had totally captivated my boyish heart.

*After Anne Lene's granny dies, the now teenage girl comes to live with Marx and his parents; his father had told him:* 'From now on you are going to be brother and sister to each other. Anne Lene is coming to live in our house, as my ward.'

Anne Lene was now living in the same house as I was, but the time we spent together was even less than our Sunday playtimes of yesteryear. My grammar-school homework was supervised by my father still more rigorously than before, and Anna Lene, when she was not at school, was generally busy under my mother's direction. In my leisure hours boyish games took up more and more of my time, and I could never persuade my little friend to join in our games of robbers, nor even to take a seat in the Turkish tent which I had rigged up out of old carpets in the top branches of a pear tree.

*The two only share one pleasure for almost their whole growing-up period: visits to Wieb and Marten at the grange.*

The estate belonging to the grange had been leased out to a neighbouring landowner since the death of the councillor's widow, but the farmhouse itself, and the embankment on which it stood, had been left in charge of old Wieb and her husband.

Although no loving hands had tended the garden for years, everything continued to grow in the greatest profusion and disorder, and in the middle of the sultry days of summer, when jasmine and honeysuckle were in flower, the old grange seemed to be quite engulfed in scents. Anne Lene and I liked pushing our way at a venture into this jungle of blossoms; quite often, we managed, quite unexpectedly, to find ourselves standing in front of the old summer-house, which was now being used for the occasional storing of summer fruits. Then we would peep in through the grimy window-panes, trying to catch sight of the pastoral couple on the middle of the opposite wall; they were still there, that dainty shepherd and shepherdess, kneeling in the grass, as they had been all those years ago. In vain we rattled at the doors, for Wieb kept them carefully locked; the floor inside had become unsafe and in places it was possible to see down to the water below through holes in the boards.

And so the years passed. Without my being fully aware of it, Anne Lene had grown up; and I too was no longer one of the young lads. I really only noticed this for the first time when Anne Lene came into the room one day with her hair done differently. She dressed if anything even more simply than before; she was especially fond of white, and that is the colour almost inseparably associated with her whenever I summon up her presence in my memory. She only indulged in one luxury: she always wore the finest English gloves, and since she paid no heed to what she touched while she was wearing them, they needed to be replaced very regularly. My mother, with her solid middle-class sense of economy, would shake her head over this extravagance, but to no purpose. On the day of her confirmation Anne Lene took a small diamond cross out of her dead grandmother's jewellery box, and from then on she wore it on a black ribbon round her neck. Apart from that I never saw her wearing any jewellery.

The time was rapidly approaching for me to set off to university, where I was to begin my studies in medicine. Together with Anne Lene I went to pay my farewells to our old friends at the grange.

When we reached the embankment on which the grange stood, we found old Wieb by the front door, arguing with a beggarwoman and unsuccessfully trying to persuade her to leave the premises. I was quite familiar with the passionate gestures the – still relatively young – beggarwoman was making, for every Saturday she used to make her way from door to door in the town. She cherished the fond belief that she had been cheated out of her maternal inheritance by old Councillor Van der Roden, one of whose areas of responsibility had been all matters relating to official wardships. For expressing her views on this score she had several times been punished by the law; and now, to judge by the demeanour of the two, it looked as though she were intent on regaling the old maidservant of the Van der Roden family with this odious tale as well.

Even when we drew close the couple were too involved in their dispute to move aside, and since we had to pass between them to reach the hallway, Anne Lene pulled her skirts tightly about her so as to avoid contact with the beggar.

But the woman barred her way. 'Come now, my beautiful lady', she said, curtseying low to her and swishing her tattered skirts to and fro with repulsive coquetry, 'never fear, my rags have all been washed! I know the silk ribbons have long since vanished from them, and as for my stockings, your late grandfather pulled those off for me; but perhaps you would care to take my shoes?'

And with these words she tugged the battered items from her naked feet and struck them together, making a clapping sound. 'Help yourself, my golden darling', she cried, 'help yourself! These are beggar's shoes, you'll be needing them yourself soon!'

Without moving a muscle, Anne Lene stood there facing her, but old Wieb, who was watching her young mistress closely with every sign of anxiety, reached into her pocket and pressed a coin into the beggarwoman's hand. 'Off with you, Trin', she said, 'you can come back at bed-time; what more are you hoping to gain by all this?'

But the woman was not to be put off. She drew herself up to her full height, looking down at Wieb with an expression of scornful superiority. "Hoping to gain?" she exclaimed, twisting her mouth so that her brilliant white teeth showed between her lips. 'I'm hoping to get my mother's money, that you lot used to patch up the holes in your old roof!'

Wieb made as though to pull Anne Lene into the house.

'Stay where you are, Mamsell', said the woman as she pocketed the coin, 'I'm off now; I can see there's nothing more to be had here. But just let me tell you something', and here she nodded to Wieb and made a mysterious gesture, 'I'm never going to sleep in your hayloft again. This house of yours is haunted, there's something at work every night pulling the mortar out from between the joints. If only that vainglorious old woman was still under that roof as well, then you'd all get your deserts together in one fell swoop!'

A look of complete astonishment had come over Anne Lene's face, as though she had just been told something quite outrageous. 'Wieb!' she cried out. 'What does she mean? Who is she talking about, Wieb?'

Full of rage, I seized the woman by the arm and dragged her across the yard until we were down on the path below. But even after I had slammed the iron-barred gate shut behind her, I heard her uttering vehement curses. 'You go home, boy', she screamed after me, 'your father's an honest man. What are you doing running around with a common girl like that?'

Back in the house, in the servants' room, I found Anne Lene on her knees in front of her old housekeeper, her head buried in her lap. 'Wieb', she was saying quietly, 'tell me the truth, Wieb!'

The old woman seemed to be at a loss for words. She made derogatory remarks about the beggarwoman, and then went on to talk of general topics, all the while caressing her darling's hair with her rough hand. 'Who knows what she was going on about', she said. 'Your grandfather and his father before him were important people, and poor people always have it in for the rich behind their backs.'

Anne Lene, who up to now had been listening in silence, lifted up her head and looked at her doubtfully. 'I'm sure there's more to it than that, Wieb', she said in a sad voice. 'There's no need for you to tell me lies.'

I cannot say what else may have passed between them, for I left the room at this point; I thought the old woman would more easily find the right words to calm the girl's mood down if the two of them were on their own. But a few days after that the diamond cross had disappeared from around Anne Lene's neck, and from that moment on I never once saw her wearing that symbol of a vanished splendour.

I had spent about a year at university when I received a letter from my father, telling me of Anne Lene's betrothal to a young nobleman. He gave me the news simply, without adding any words of approval or disapproval on his own account. The fiancé was someone I knew well; his family had originally come from our town, and shortly before I left he himself had spent time there sorting out some inheritance or other. Since he had retained the services of my father as a legal adviser, he was a regular visitor to our house. His expressionless brown eyes had put me off from the first moment we met, and even now they seemed to me to bode no good for the future. Of course, I told myself that this judgement was far from being impartial. Conscious of my middle-class status, the young squire had from the start treated me in an offhand manner I found very wounding; in my company he generally acted as though I were simply not there. The worst thing was, I seemed to detect that my young friend did not dislike him as much as I did.

Although the affection for Anne Lene which from boyhood had burgeoned in me never came to fruition, since it evoked no response in her, I was now extremely upset and, I think I can say, alarmed by the news of her engagement to a man I disliked so much. I could not help recalling an incident, in itself without consequence, which had turned me totally against the character of this man.

On an afternoon in late summer our family was sitting outside in the privet-hedge arbour taking coffee, and they had been joined by the squire as well as the old legal adviser to the Town Council. Before I came along, the gentlemen had, I presume, been dispatching affairs of business, for my father's old china writing materials were standing on the table alongside the other crockery. Anne Lene went to and fro, quietly busy with various tasks - going into the house to refill the Bunzlau ware coffee pot, or lighting a taper for the lawyer's clay pipe, which kept going out as he chatted. The two older gentlemen's conversation had meanwhile turned to civic affairs, which were of little interest to the stranger. He had stretched his arms out in front of him on the table and appeared occupied with his own thoughts; but whenever Anne Lene's dress came into view between the sunlit flowerbeds of the garden, he raised his eyelids and watched her. There was something in this casual perusal which drove me to impotent fury, especially when I noticed how Anne Lene lowered her eyes and, as though seeking refuge, came to sit down beside my mother at the far end of the bench. The squire, without taking any further notice of her, caught a fly as it buzzed past him. I watched him carefully holding it between his hands by the wings, and then bowing his head down, apparently so as to study the creature's helpless movements in minute detail. After a while he picked up the pen lying beside him, dipped it in the inkpot and, with deliberate strokes, began to paint first the head and then the thorax of his tiny victim. But after a while he altered his approach: he pulled back the pen and lunged at the insect's breast several times, like a swordsman thrusting; in vain did the fly attempt to defend itself with its delicate legs against the invading nib. The squire's expressionless eyes were entirely focussed on the

business in hand, but at last he seemed to get bored with his game; he skewered the creature and then dropped it on the table in front of him, at the same time replying to some question of my father's which may possibly have aroused his interest. I had watched this proceeding with fascinated horror, and Anne Lene seemed to have done so too, for I now heard her breathe out deeply like someone abruptly released from some nightmare that has been weighing them down.

A few days later Anne Lene was absent from table at lunch-time - something which otherwise never happened - and when I stepped out into the garden to look for her, I met the squire, who as usual passed me with a barely perceptible nod of the head. Not seeing Anne Lene, I went down into the lower part of the garden, where my father had established a small orchard. She was there, standing with her back against a young apple tree. It seemed that she was totally engrossed in her inner thoughts, for her eyes were staring in front of her without moving, and her delicate hands were clasped tightly together over her breast. I asked her: 'What has happened to you, Anne Lene?' But she did not look up. She dropped her arms and replied: 'Nothing, Marx. Whatever do you suppose could happen to me?' By some chance I had noticed that the crown of the little tree was shaking at regular intervals as though a pulse were beating through it, and I had some inkling of what might have occurred here. But at the same time I felt a strong temptation to convey to Anne Lene that she was not able to deceive me. So I pointed up into the tree and said: 'Just look how your heart is beating!'

These events, which I forgot about soon afterwards when the squire left town, came back to me again when I heard the news of the engagement and continually made me uneasy, until in the end they were banished to the back of my mind once more by the pains and joys of student life.

This story is not about me.

Some two years later I returned to my home town at Easter as a newly qualified doctor. Some time before that someone had written to me to say that the continuing fall in land values was going to make the selling-off of the grange inevitable, and that Anne Lene, who had once been quite a wealthy heiress, had probably now become quite a poor young woman. Then I had further news, that her engagement seemed to be on the point of breaking up as well: letters from her fiancé had gradually been getting more and more seldom, and now for some time none had arrived at all. Anne Lene had borne that without complaint, but her health had suffered and for some weeks she had been convalescing out at the grange, where one of the small rooms on the first floor had been restored for her use.

Although I had not written to her since her engagement, I could not resist going out to visit her on the day I returned to town. It was already late afternoon when I reached the grange. I found old Wieb standing outside by a gate from which a path led across the fens towards the sea-dyke. She could not have seen me coming, for she had her back to the path and when without warning I seized her rough hand she was unable to recognise me at first. But a moment after an expression of pleasure came over her old face and she said: "Thank Heavens you're back, Marx! We could do with a trustworthy friend like you around."

'Where is Anne Lene?' I asked. The old woman pointed out over the countryside and said with concern in her voice: 'There she is, walking in the evening air again!'

Over to the north of the grange, about half-way between us and the dyke, which at this point protects the reclaimed land from the sea, I saw a female figure crossing the fens. 'Just you go and put your kettle on the stove, Wieb'. I said. 'I'll fetch her, and we'll be back in a moment.' After a time I caught up with Anne Lene. When I called her name she stopped and turned back towards me. I suddenly realised how much her picture had faded from my memory. I did not remember her being so attractive, and yet she was still the same person, apart from the fact that her eyes seemed to have grown darker and the lines of her delicate profile were somewhat more sharply etched than they had been years before. I took both her hands in mine. 'Dear Anne Lene!' I said, 'I've just got back; I wanted to see you straight away!'

'Thank you for that, Marx', she replied. 'I knew you would be coming back sometime about now.' But her thoughts seemed to be on other things than welcoming me, for she looked away from me at once and began continuing her walk along the path. 'Come with me a little way', she went on, 'and then we can go back to the grange together.'

'But it's getting cold, Anne Lene.'

'Oh, it's not so cold as all that', she said, pulling her big shawl more closely around her as she spoke. So we went on together. I tried all manner of conversational openings, but none was successful. Evening was already drawing on, a damp north-westerly was blowing up from the sea, and in front of us on the dyke a few solitary carts could be seen passing on their way, like silhouettes against the umber of the evening sky. After a while I noticed a man coming down the side of the dyke and walking along the path in our direction. It was the postman, who twice a week brought letters out from the town to the owners of the farmsteads round about. I sensed a quickening in Anne Lene's step as he came close to us. 'Have you anything for me, Carsten?' she asked, vainly trying to conceal an inner agitation in her voice as she spoke.

The postman rummaged around among the letters in his leather satchel. 'Not this time, dear lady', he said at length with an embarrassed show of friendliness. He had probably given her this answer many times. Anne Lene was silent for a moment, then she said: 'That's all right, Carsten, why don't you walk along with us and have some supper at the grange?' Apparently the whole purpose of the walk had been fulfilled, for as she spoke she turned back and we returned to the grange in the postman's company. Dusk was now far advanced. On the way back, as though by agreement, we exchanged not a single word; when we reached the embankment, and darkness had almost completely fallen, Anne Lene seized my hand. 'Goodnight, Marx', she said, 'forgive me, I am tired and I need to sleep. But you will come out to see us again very soon, won't you?' With these words she disappeared into the house, and then I heard her going up the stairs to her room.

I made my way to the servants' room. Marten and his wife were sitting by the warm stove having their evening cup of tea with the postman. Wieb went out to take a light up to Anne Lene, then she urged me to join them at their supper, and I had to tell them of my adventures and hear their news. As a result it grew so late that I was reluctant to go back to town. I asked my old friend if she could put some straw bedding down for me in their room, and while she did that I strolled out into the garden. When I reached the little clump of trees on the north side of the grange, I saw that there was a light still burning in Anne Lene's room. I leaned back against a tree and looked up. Everything seemed quiet in her room, but suddenly a bright glare flared up behind her windows, lighting up the bare bushes in the

garden for a while, and then gradually died away again. A vague anxiety came over me, and I slipped back into the house through the back door and climbed up the stairs to Anne Lene's room.

The door was ajar. Anne Lene was sitting at a small table with her feet propped against the stove, in which a bright fire was burning. From beneath the string which had been tied round a small bundle of paper on her lap, she drew out a letter; she unfolded it and appeared to be reading it attentively. After a time she moved hand just a little way, so that the paper was caught by the flare of the lamp on the table beside her. As she did so, her face bore such a disconsolate expression that without thinking I cried out: 'Anne Lene, what are you doing?'

Calmly and without looking round at me at all she went on with what she was doing, until the letter in her hand had turned to ashes.

'They are cold', she said. 'I am warming them up.'

I had meanwhile stepped into the room and was standing beside her chair. Suddenly, as if making a rapid decision, she got to her feet and clasped her hands firmly behind my neck. She tried to say something, but her tears came pouring out uncontrollably. Instead she pressed her head against my chest and wept for a long while; I could do nothing but hold her quietly in my arms. 'No, Marx', she said at length, trying to inject a tone of firmness into her voice, 'I promise you, I won't wait for him any longer.'

'Did you love him so very much, Anne Lene?'

She drew herself up and looked at me, as though this were a question she would have to give some thought to. Then slowly she replied: 'I don't know - but it doesn't matter one way or the other now.'

I stayed with her for a while, and little by little she grew calmer. She promised me to be brave, for my sake and our mother's. She would have to work now, and in Wieb's little household she was going to learn the rudiments of country housekeeping, so that one day she would be able to earn a living as a housekeeper. As she spoke, she looked down at her delicate hands almost as if pityingly, since she was proposing to sacrifice their beauty to the demands of living. But I was unable to persuade her to move back into town. 'No, not among people', she said, giving me a look of entreaty. 'Let me stay here, Marx, for as long as I am able to. But do come to see us as often as you can!'

At this point I took my leave of her; but from thenceforward I frequently took the path to the grange across the fens. Anne Lene seemed determined to keep her promise; several times I found her in the dairy making cream, or standing at the butter-tub, where she took it in turns with Wieb to wield the butter-mould; indeed she insisted on putting the butter into the trough for moulding, just as she had seen the old housekeeper doing it; she did not seem to notice that Wieb secretly came along afterwards to add the finishing touches to what she had done. But one readily sensed that her involvement in these things was no more than superficial; it was an exertion from which she would very quickly need to recover by spending time on her own again.

It was during the hot days of summer that some of the young men of our town decided they would like to make an excursion to the grange, taking their sisters and their friends with them. They asked me to negotiate permission for this with Anne Lene, and I was able to secure her assent, if not without some effort. So it came about that one Sunday afternoon the overgrown walks of the garden were once again enlivened by young people in party clothes, and among the bushes could be seen the white dresses and brightly-coloured sashes of the girls. Old Wieb had to hunt out the biggest coffee-pot she could find, and then the hampers the revellers had brought were unpacked and food was served just ouside the door leading to the garden. When the meal was over, two of the most agile climbers among us hoisted themselves up to the tops of the two old linden trees which stood on either side of the gateway, each carrying the end of a huge rope. In no time a swing was made fast between the topmost branches and the girls were invited to climb on to it. 'Come on, Anne Lene', shouted a strapping young fellow, looking down almost pityingly at her elegant figure, 'climb aboard! I'll get you moving good and proper!'

Anne Lene declined, but there was a lively black-eyed maiden more ready to accept, and soon Claus Peters was pushing the swing to and fro until little Juliane was flying like a bird among the branches, and in the end earnestly imploring him to stop. Claus Peters was the son of a wealthy brewer, and there were rumours that his father was going to buy the grange for him as soon as it came up for auction, and set him up there as a farmer in splendid style. And indeed in his own mind the young man seemed already to be thinking of himself as the future proprietor, for when later on we made a tour of the buildings, accompanied by Marten, the farm-manager, he found things to criticise wherever we went, and kept talking of the improvements that would have to be put in hand in the place; old Marten walked grumpily alongside him, muttering to himself.

Time had been marching on meanwhile, and when we came back from our tour of inspection, we found the girls congregated by the front door, Anne Lene amongst them.

Two of the girls had taken her by the hand, as though she could only be kept here by delicate restraint. 'Oh, if only we had some music!' said one of them. 'Music!' cried Peters, pulling his watch from his pocket by its gold chain. 'You shall have music, just you see; I'll be back within the half-hour!'

He had come out on horseback, and now he put his head inside the house and shouted to the farm-manager. 'Marten, fetch me the bay, and look sharp about it!' The old man grumbled away to himself, but he did as he was told, and soon Peters was galloping off through the gateway. The rest of us went indoors and inspected the ballroom upstairs

*The young people decorate the ballroom with a makeshift chandelier and with flowers.*

Suddenly we heard a horse's hooves approaching and the loud crack of a whip. 'Here's our music!' someone cried; and we all crowded round the windows. Outside Peters was just reining in under the trees; behind him, clinging on for dear life, sat a short, spindly figure with a fiddle and bow in his hand.

As I looked more closely I could recognise him as old Drees the tailor, a talented little fellow who sometimes made his living with his fiddlestick and sometimes with his needle.

*Peters plays tricks on Drees and is rebuked by Anne Lene; but then the tailor settles down to playing in the ballroom and dancing begins.*

I looked for Anne Lene in the room, but she must have slipped out unnoticed; since there was no other girl left for me to dance with, I left the room as well, supposing that she must be with Marten and Wieb downstairs.

However, when I went into the servants' room, I only found old Wieb; she looked up at me and said: 'You're all mighty merry to-night, Marx! I reckon Claus Peters is already playing the part of master of the grange?'

'It's what he'll be soon enough', I replied. 'Nothing's going to stop that happening.'

The old woman was silent for a while, and her thoughts then seemed to turn from the question of the family's former property to its last surviving descendent. 'Marx', she said, 'why did you stay away so long?'

'But what could I have done to change things, Wieb?'

'And those two long years! If only that bird of ill omen hadn't turned up!' she went on, as though talking to herself. 'In those days she was still the wealthy heiress, or rather, that's what everyone took her for; but when the old lady passed away there was already nothing left but all those heavy mortgages. God have mercy on us all! And now even the farm is going to be sold up. I'm not worried for myself, Marx, not for myself at all; Marten and I will be able to manage right enough, for the few years that God spares us.'

'I dare say this is the best way, Wieb', I said. 'Maybe there'll be a little bit left over for Anne Lene, so that she's not completely impoverished.'

The old woman wiped her eyes with her apron. 'It's cruel hard', she said, shaking her head, 'a family like that!'

When I looked up, Anne Lene was standing in the doorway. She looked pale, but she gave us both a friendly nod and said: 'Don't you want to dance, Marx? I've just come down from upstairs - little Juliane's dark eyes are hunting for you all over the place.'

'You're mocking me, Anne Lene. Juliane is no concern of mine.'

'No, really Marx, you just look out! Claus Peters is dancing with her, and that's the second time.'

'Oh, come now, Anne Lene!' I walked over to her. 'Will *you* dance with me?'

'Well, why not?'

'And a minuet, Anne Lene?'

'A minuet, Marx! - Oh, and this time' she added with a smile, 'our friend Simon can watch, can't he?'

As we were going out, Wieb took Anne Lene by the hand. 'My child', she said anxiously, 'the doctor said you weren't to!'

But Anne Lene answered: 'Oh, dear Wieb, it will do me no harm, I know myself better than the doctor does.' And my own desire to dance with her was so strong that I was satisfied by this assurance.

When we came into the room upstairs I went straight across to the corner where little Drees was sitting and ordered a minuet. He leafed through the music he had with him, but our old-fashioned dance wasn't among the pieces he had any more; we had to make do with a waltz. Claus Peters came over to the table, refilled the fiddler's glass and clinked it with his own. 'On with the music, Drees!' he cried, 'but no more of that scratching, mind! Now the really elegant folk have come to join the dance!'

It was a long time since I had danced with Anne Lene, but I had not forgotten the experience, and I very quickly sensed that she was still as good a dancer as she had always been. We slipped so smoothly between the other couples; her eyes were alight; she was smiling and her mouth was open, showing her white teeth between the fine line of her red lips; I imagined I could feel warm life pulsing through all her young limbs. After a time I could no longer see any of the people moving around us, I was alone with her.

Then we took a rest. By the open window where we stood the moonbeams mingled with the glow from the candles to create an uncertain twilight. Anne Lene stood beside me; her breathing was very rapid and I thought she looked unusually pale. 'Shall we stop now?' I asked her.

'But why, Marx? The dancing is going so well today.'

'But I don't think it's very good for you.'

'Oh yes, it is. And anyway, what does it matter?'

By the time she spoke these last words, we were already dancing again. We danced for a long time. But when Anne Lene clutched at her heart and, trembling all over, began fighting for breath, I asked her to go downstairs with me and take a walk in the garden. She replied with a friendly nod and we went from the ballroom to her bedroom to fetch a shawl for her. I think that even then I was aware that it was not concern over Anne Lene's health that had prompted my suggestion, for as we went down the staircase into the unlit hall I felt as though I were fleeing into the wide world with a successfully stolen treasure.

As we stepped out of the house we heard old Wieb locking up the cupboard in her room, the one in which she kept stored the bridal linen for her darling pet. It was a warm night; the air was completely spiced with that sweet scent given off on hot days by the woolly seedpods of the raspberries. Anne Lene knotted a handkerchief around her head; then we set off walking. We said nothing; I wanted Anne Lene to turn her gaze away from the shadows of the past and look out on the world; but the unsettling awareness of an even more selfish request, which I kept stored up in my heart for more favourable times, robbed me of breath and prevented any word from passing my lips. My heart was beating so loudly that I kept fearing it would declare my most intimate thoughts even without words. Anne Lene walked beside me, silent and lost in her own thoughts – thoughts which I presume were inhabiting

that country from which I so earnestly wanted to recall her. So we came to the moat, which formed the frontier of the actual farmstead in this corner of the garden too.

Between the trees on the other side of the water you could see out, as though through a dark frame, into the broad moonlit countryside. All was so quiet that only the rustling of the reeds in the ditches could be heard. 'Look, Anne Lene!' I said. 'The earth is asleep; how beautiful it is!'

'Yes, Marx', she replied quietly, 'and you are still so young!'

'Aren't you young any more, then?'

Slowly she shook her head. 'Let's walk on', she said, 'it's damp here.' We went down the broad walk along the moat, which flowed by beside us, looking broad and black in the shadow of the trees. You could hear the soft noise of the cattle pulling at the grass as they grazed in the moonlight on the fen across the moat, and from the reedbed on the far side came the twittering of the reed bunting, that wakeful little night-bird.

Suddenly all these familiar sounds of the night were interrupted by the raucous cry of a seabird, travelling high in the air above the distant dyke. Once my ear had been sharpened by this noise, I could also make out the sound of the waves in the distance, as they rolled in over the wild mysterious depths of the ocean and were flung on to the shore by the rising tide. A feeling of bleakness and desolation overcame me; I called Anne Lene's name and stretched out both arms towards her.

'Marx, what's the matter?' she cried, turning round. 'I'm here, as you can see.'

'Nothing, Anne Lene', I said, 'but give me your hand. I had forgotten all about the sea and then suddenly I heard it.'

We were standing on an open area of grass in front of the old summer-house, the doors of which were hanging open from their broken hinges. The moonlight caught Anne Lene's hand as it lay peacefully in mine. I had never seen moonlight on a girl's hand before, and I felt that shiver which is so curiously compounded of a desire for earthly pleasures and a painful awareness of their transitoriness. Involuntarily I squeezed the girl's hand tightly in my own, but with the shyness of youth I looked down at the ground as I did so. However, when Anne Lene silently allowed her hand to stay resting in mine, I finally found the courage to look at her. She had turned her face towards me and was looking at me with a sad expression; she seemed full of pity, but to this day I don't know whether that pity was for me or for herself. Then she gently released her hand and stepped on to the threshold of the summer-house.

I could see the water, lit up by the moon, sparkling through the holes in the flooring, and I grasped at Anne Lene's dress to pull her back. 'Don't be anxious, Marx', she said as she walked inside, balancing her light figure on the loose boards, 'I'm not going to bring wood and stones collapsing down.' She went across to the window at the far side and looked out into the brightness of the night. Then with one hand she lifted up a piece of the old wallpaper which had come loose and was hanging down against the wall beside her. 'It has had its day', she said, 'the beautiful shepherds and shepherdesses want to take their leave of us too. Now

everything is falling apart. I can’t hold it together, Marx; you see, they’ve all gone and left me quite on my own.'

I felt I should not let her continue in this vein. 'Let’s go back to the house', I said, 'the others will soon be wanting to get back to town.'

She was not listening to me; she let her arms fall down by her side and then she said slowly: 'He wasn’t so mistaken after all - who could think of looking for a bride in a house like mine!'

I felt the tears starting to my eyes. 'Oh, Anne Lene', I cried out as I walked up the steps leading into the summer-house, 'I - I would! Give me your hand, I know the way back into the world!'

But Anne Lene leaned forward and with her arms made an abrupt movement as though to keep me away. 'No!' she exclaimed, and there was mortal terror in her voice, 'not you, Marx; stay where you are. It can’t support us both.'

For just one more instant I saw the delicate outlines of her dear face, lit up by a shaft of gentle moonlight; then something happened and was over so quickly that my memory has not been able to retain it. One of the floorboards catapulted up into the air; I saw the gleam of her white dress, then I heard a splashing sound in the water below. I opened my eyes wide; the moon was shining on an empty room. I looked for Anne Lene, but I could not see her. I felt as though something in my head was running away from me, something that I had to catch up with at any cost if I were not to lose my sanity. But while my thoughts chased after this chimera, I suddenly heard dance music coming from the house. That brought me to my senses; I uttered a piercing scream and jumped down into the water beside the summer-house. The moat was deep, but I was quite a practised swimmer; I dived down under water and felt around with my hands in between the slippery weeds that grew so profusely on the bottom. I opened my eyes and tried to see something, but all I was aware of was a dim glow somewhere, so it seemed, above me. I had flung off none of my clothes, and they forced me back to the surface. Here I tried to get my breath back again, and then repeated my search. It was no use. Soon I was standing on the steep bank, looking helplessly along the moat. Then I felt someone laying a heavy hand on my shoulder, and heard a voice crying: 'Marx, Marx, what are you doing here? Where is the child?' I realised it was Wieb. 'Down there! Down there!' I shrieked, stretching my hands out towards the water. The old woman seized me by the arm and dragged me forcibly down to the edge of the moat. Finally I was able to get across to her what had happened, and we ran along the water until we came to the arbour at the corner of the garden where the tall old alder trees droop their boughs into the moat. And there at last we found her; her eyes were closed and her little hands tightly clenched.

I gave Wieb some instructions as to what she should now do, then I fetched the bay from the stable and galloped into town to fetch a doctor; for in this case I did not trust my unpractised skills. We were soon back; but the shadows of mortality, which had fallen at so early a stage across this young life, were not to release her again.

When we made our way back to town a few hours later the reclaimed land lay in solemn silence and the cries of the birds which fly along the sea-shore at night came down to us from such an immeasurable distance that my inexperienced heart despaired of ever finding again a trace of her who had now vanished into that vast space.

The present owner of the grange is Claus Peters. He has had the old Friesian-style farmhouse pulled down and a modern residence erected on the same site. The farm-buildings stand to one side of it, quite separate. He is both healthy and prosperous: he rears the biggest fattened oxen for shipping over to England, his rooms are full of the most expensive furniture, and he and his Juliane are bursting with rude health and contentment. But I have never gone back to the grange.