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On my way home I had a spring in my step. But when I got there I immediately felt the tiredness creeping up on me again, just as if the air in our flat, even in the hallway, had been spiked with chloroform, even though I flung open the windows and put on a CD of fast, repetitive beats, then I turned the music up louder and louder, but I didn't feel a thing, my hearing was detached from any sensation. At some point I became aware that there was a horrendous racket in the room. So I turned it off and went to my study, because that's where the translation was that I was working on. It was supposed to be finished in two weeks' time, but I kept getting bogged down in detail, turning individual words this way and that, weighing up the way they sound, without being able to come to a decision, and then, out of contrariness, as if to assert an opinion I didn't actually have, I would pick the most unrelated word (out) of all these tenuous terms, and the sound of the whole thing was coming to resemble the source text less and less. I was probably just storing up trouble for myself. But today I just rummaged around a bit in some papers without sitting down, watered the plant with the stale apple juice which was sitting on the floor, walked out again and began to make dinner. I thought about Carina while I made dinner. In my mind I gave her a running commentary on this evening, what I was cooking, and the fact that Clemens would ring the doorbell any second, and then Clemens rang the doorbell and the sound set off my familiar sprint from the kitchen to the door again, because even though Clemens was too lazy to get his key out, he still hated being kept waiting at the door. He smelled slightly of cigarettes and tree bark, because of his aftershave. He kissed me and dashed past me into the kitchen, "I could murder dinner", and I laughed, like I always laughed at this sentence. He looked so happy which made me feel wretched, and I swore I would never do anything to hurt him. At dinner he turned the spirelli pasta round and round in the sauce, just like I had expected, and every forkful had a tricolour morsel of pasta and meat and peas. Everything was the same as it always was. Afterwards, while Clemens scanned the newspaper and smoked his two cigarettes, I went back to my study again to try to make up the hours I had missed, but suddenly he appeared in the doorway, "you look so happy today, did you have a nice day", he said, his silhouette loomed spookily large against the dark hallway, and I realised that he wanted to sleep with me, so I turned the desk lamp that I had only just switched on, off again and followed him across the way.

8

Clemens can't help my misery, that much is clear. You can't fault him, he's never absent, never impatient, he hasn't lost his sex drive, nor is it excessive either of course, no, everything is just as it should be. The only thing that surprises me time and again is the fact that he is really bad at surprises. Even when he does turn up unannounced with flowers or a book or an invitation to dinner, it always happens without fail at precisely the point where I'm thinking: it's about time for

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another surprise now. But can you hold that against someone? No, the blame doesn't lie with him. He even helps with the housework, at the weekend, and listens attentively when I tell him something. On his days off he doesn't bury himself in his work, like many men do, although he would certainly have work to do, because he is an excellent lawyer, instead he will do something with me. When I tell my friends and acquaintances about his wonderful attributes they envy me.

9

"Let's go for a drive, somewhere, anywhere, out into the great blue yonder", Clemens likes to suggest at the weekend, and so nearly every Sunday we go for a drive, out into the great blue yonder, meaning we take the A66 out of the city and eventually we end up in the Rheingau. We listen to quiet classical music in the car. When I was a child we also used to set out into the blue all the time. Back then I slowly worked out that the rivers and the mountains sticking up into the sky might look bright blue in the distance, but once we got up close they turned out to be yellowy-green and brown and grey, and I developed an aversion to the colour's vagueness and unreliability, an aversion that I haven't got over to this day.

10

I've just come back from meeting up with Carina again, and as usual on the way home I felt refreshed and alive, but it only lasted as far as the front door. I say to myself that everything's really easy, the only thing I've got to do now is prepare dinner, chop the vegetables, marinade the meat, chill the cream, and if I don't even fancy doing that, I can always order something in by phone or suggest to Clemens that we go out to eat, everything's possible, everything. And then I decide to make something particularly complicated and even while I'm cooking I'm wondering how I can tell Carina about it. I know she will listen with such concentration that I'll be able to think my evening was special.

11

Yesterday I went to the cinema with Carina, we watched a French drama, a destructive love triangle which I got completely caught up in, even though it was very dark. Afterwards Carina made some intelligent and at the same time life-affirming points in order to explain why she hadn't really enjoyed the film, she criticised the characters' self-destructive tendencies, and I said, funny, that's exactly what Clemens would have said, you two would go well together. Obviously I said it as a joke, without thinking, but then our eyes met and something, I can't yet say what, irritated me.

12

We have slowly begun to do all the things that female friends do together, that is, we go shopping, swimming and to the hairdresser. Strangely, I accepted the fact that I suddenly had a friend as if it

were perfectly natural, a friend who had suddenly turned up out of the blue, as if there was some reasoning behind it, some deeper meaning.

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Recently I was sitting with her in a café, we were watching the people outside, and, inspired by some little scene, I ended up talking about my first encounter with Clemens (we walked bumped into each other on a dark street corner, by the Old Opera House, it was, I said, an accident of sorts), and there, all at once, I saw that spark of longing in her eyes – and the idea came to me.

14

I am going to hold my life out to her like a coat which I find rather shabby now but which she really likes. It would be silly if she didn't accept a gift like that.

15

From this thought on everything has changed for me. It's as if sunlight had fallen through a small crack into a dark room, and where previously there had been only formless shells, I can now start to make out contours.

All at once I'm always in a hurry. This morning I went to meet Carina almost an hour too early. I had taken work with me, various papers which I spread out across the little table in a rustling fan. The café was completely empty again apart from my reflection and Giovanni's reflection, he was cleaning glasses and mugs behind the counter. But it was better than being at home, where the walls were closing in on me like they were going to crush me. Giovanni's shoes squeaked quietly again as he came over to take my order after leaving a decent amount of time, , and I ordered an espresso as always. He had only just brought it over when Carina also turned up, also too early, and we greeted each other like old friends or co-conspirators. She hung her shoulder bag on the back of the chair and leant over my papers, "er, may I, aha", she fluently translated the lines, "*estas señores*, hmmm, these men are having nightmares... sudden apparitions, sexless angels or blind mice, which herald the imminent destruction of their sorrowful cities... hm, nice, Juan Goytisolo isn't it?" I said "yes, and you're just as good at it as me, that deserves a grappa". When we ordered it Giovanni, who had automatically only brought us coffees up till now, looked irritated for a second, he nodded, and for a moment his face turned hard and waxen, locked into a mask of concentration in order to make a note of our order for the future, like a computer saving something, so that from now on, as soon as we enter the ice-cream parlour he will come running up to us in his squeaking shoes and ask, espresso? And a grappa on the side? Because these meetings with Carina would also become a habit; it was as if I was adding another piece to the big, dusty puzzle of my life, which was haphazard but showed no joins. It was the friendship piece, the Carina piece. I wondered whether to say something to that effect, but I was quite sure that her reaction would be no different to Clemens',

which, depending on his mood, would either be dismay at my negative attitude, ignorance, pity or, at best, an attempt to cheer me up with a joke.