

# The Woman in Chains

By Sarah B. Smith

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## The First Bell

She quickly set the little child down from her arms, with one hand she tenderly covered the child, and in the other hand she held high the thick envelope which the postman had just given her.

The four-year-old boy forcefully reached for the envelope in her hand, and she held her hand higher. He cried, "Give me, give me the stamps!"

And Freda Gilbert, whose rough hands were now shaking noticeably, and whose heart was pounding, her face was pale from the curiosity, but she had to control it. And with the patience of a mother, she started to carefully remove the stamps and give them to the child.

Finally the child was happy, and she quickly opened the envelope.

From among the big packet's papers covered with dense handwriting, a bundle of gray paper fell into her lap:

"My dear Frieda Sherman-Gilbert!

"It took me quite a while until I remembered who Frieda Gilbert was. You see, I still think of you as the very dear Ms. Sherman!

"But as soon as I remembered, I quickly read your manuscript. This time I was not negligent, and shoved it into a drawer of my desk like I do with the others who have to wait for months for my answer (I am ashamed of myself).

"I am very sorry, but I am forced to send your short stories back to you. The ideas, the material are very, very good, but it lacks life! It lacks the true, raucous movement of life.

"And I don't understand you, my very dear Frieda. What have you done in the five years since I last saw you? She who was so sharp-minded, with such a clear vision of life, she whose conversation was so interesting, who wrote about important matters, full of dead people, and whose writing pulled us in.

"Listen girl, I am very disappointed. In those years when I used to talk often with you, I was certain that when you, with your clear view of life, would write something it would be very good. Where is that clear vision now? Has the great joy of your married life extinguished that vision?

"I know nothing about you now, but if you have time and the energy, rewrite your stories. Do it multiple times, and I am certain that your previous sharp vision will show itself.

"However, if you are very much in need of the money, send them back to me. I will try to improve them and see if my magazine will buy them from you, and pay you well.

"Stay in contact and send me a detailed letter about yourself and about your current situation.

"Your old friend, Herold L. Wilman"

With a sober expression, Frieda looked at the thick packet of densely covered pages which she now

took out of the envelope. Her own handwriting, and her lips sputtered, "I knew it."

And when she read the letter again, this time she gave a short, bitter laugh, for example where he wrote: "What have you done in the five years since I last saw you?"

"My G-d, what have I done?!" thought Frieda with great bitterness. "I cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner, washed dishes, mended socks, washed sheets, sewed clothes, bathed the children, nursed them through serious illnesses, cleaned the house, occasionally made a puffed-up man happy, controlled my nerves until they became hardened steel, until I forgot everything! Oh, dear friend! If I were to write you everything that *I* have done in the last five years, then you would see life, raucous life, the way it is in reality!"

The little child on the divan cried, with a choking sound. When a frightened Frieda ran to the child she found that the baby had a big piece of the blanket in its mouth.

She sat the little girl up, and glanced at her son while he played with the postage stamps. She picked up the gray letter again and sank deeply back into her thoughts.

Unwillingly, she started to compare what the last five years had done for her life, and for other friends and acquaintances.

For example her old friend Wilman: When Frieda was the secretary for the director N. \_\_\_\_, Wilman was a very unappreciated writer. No one understood him. People laughed at his curious ideas at his worn clothes, and at his stories. Frieda thought well of him and felt sorry for him. Between the older man and the young woman a warm friendship grew. Later Wilman wrote a certain thing, that was greatly enjoyed by a certain publisher. He gained fame, and now is the director of a fine magazine.

Who else? Helen Relnick, once Frieda's best friend, and now a very popular writer. And the illustrator, M., everyone laughed at him. Frieda had to loan him a dollar every week until payday, and sometimes buy him a coffee. She felt sorry for him, and now his illustrations are published in the best magazines!

And one after another Frieda's successful friends passed before her eyes. They seemed to taunt her, "What have you done, what, clever girl?"

Frieda frightened herself, this rebellious feeling was unknown to her, which, she had for a long, long time suppressed. It seemed to her that she heard the call of a bell, and a chill ran through her.

## The Truth and the Mask

Later that night, after Frieda had gotten her manuscript back, she was again sitting at her kitchen table holding her head with both hands and thinking.

She was very tired. It seemed she heard the pitiful crying from her little daughter who was 'making' another little tooth, and who had been restless all day.

Both of the children and her husband were asleep and she could hear the heavy breathing of her husband all the way in the kitchen.

On the clean tablecloth before Frieda's eyes lay a freshly written letter on which the ink was still wet. And now, with a cold and studied expression she looked at the letter. Cold and studied was her mood now. In the past years of hard work – day in and day out, the same work – Frieda had learned to forget her nerves, forget moods, she had learned to be punctual like a clock, and always “on the job.”

And the naked truth was written in the letter which lay before her:

“My dear friend!

“You want to know why my writings lacked life? I will tell you why: It is because I lack life, because my golden outlook on married life did not materialize, and everything in me which was once alive is now dead. If hard work and a lot, a lot of worries are what one calls life, then I have lived, but to describe such a life in a story would not make for a good theme, and I couldn't hold my reader's attention, since such things are not pleasant to read about.

“And it now appears that I am not capable of writing about other things, for example about love; – love for me is now, after five years of married life, so foreign, that often it seems to me that love lives exclusively in the illusions of dreamy young girls.

“Please forgive me, but I remember well your sympathy for the downtrodden, and therefor I will be very open with you and speak of very ordinary things:

“You want to know what I have done during the last five years? Then listen:

“I have not done a single thing that would distinguish me from the average wife. I got married, lost myself a little in that fervor which we usually call love, and in a very short time my son was born.

“I can't say that these times included a lot of happy hours, just hours... I have lived in a tenement house in three rooms, I made the fire in the oven. I smeared my white hands with the neglected nails, with ash and coal. I am frequently ill, do the washing, do the ironing, clean the house and cook.

“But then I am full of hope that when the child gets a little older, I will be able to leave him with my mother and I will begin to change and be able to pursue the career that my heart has always longed for – and that my husband will become my best friend, my dearest friend, together we have dreamed and planned.

“But since then, everything has changed, for example: Now I no longer live in the tenement house

where I smear my hands with ash and coal, no, now I live in an apartment house where everything is foolishly fancy and outside – outside one freezes next to the cold steam pipes, most of the wives buy their husband's meals in the delicatessen store, smear their faces with phony powders, tell a lot of lies, and are often divorced by their husbands. I, I cook good meals every day, and all I get for it a belch, seldom a good, friendly word from my husband. He has changed as much as our housing. Now he is a businessman with very large responsibilities. My two children and I have become a heavy weight on his shoulders, and if something doesn't go well in the business then I always suffer for it. I work very hard, the children are rarely healthy, doctors cost a lot of money, and, naturally, that embitters my husband a great deal. I have no money, only what he gives me, and he gives me very little, because the business doesn't go well. I don't think thoughts, because my thoughts scare me. And sometimes in the evening when I am exhausted from washing the diapers, and I can't straighten my back, and in such hours when I remind myself what I *wanted* to be, and *what* has become of me, I want, I want...

“And in such desperate hours, I wrote the stories, and I wrote them with the aim of earning some money. I wanted to have my *own* money, a few dollars a month that I could do with as I wanted! Do you understand, dear friend? If so, then help me. I am sending the stories back to you.

With hopeful greetings,

Frieda Gilbert”

She read the letter over for the fourth time and laughed bitterly. Slowly, while biting her lips, she began to tear the letter into tiny pieces, and wearily laid her hands to rest in her lap.

Somewhere in the distance a clock struck two, and that brought her back to reality; before she would have time to sleep a little bit, the child would be demanding to eat and crying with the sickly cry that Frieda still could not get used to.

Quickly, in a business-like manner she began to write:

“My dear friend!

“I am very sorry that I bothered you with reading my foolish stories. I wrote them on impulse in an overzealous moment, when I wanted to be a writer rather than a happy wife and mother.

“I assure that I am very happy, and I thank you for your interest.

“Frieda Gilbert”

She did mail that last letter.

## Is It Worth It?

The last few days since Frieda had written the naked truth about her married life on paper, she began to look at people with other eyes. In truth, she did not mail the letter. She tore it up and sent instead a pretty lie, but she had still thought a lot about it.

For example, when she washed the diapers and the sharp soap had eaten the skin on her hands, making them red and painful, she asked herself, "Is it worth it?"

And when the baby did not let her sleep for a whole night, and the morning found her with red eyes, and weary arms, she asked herself again, "Is it worth it?" The phrase sounded in a hidden compartment of her mind.

When it concerned the children and she asked herself the question, she was always ashamed. The children were so dear to her, and a touch from one warm little hand repaid her for all the suffering, and for a while quieted the stormy thoughts.

But very often the question, "Is it worth it?" tormented her when it concerned her husband.

The slightest word got her upset. Things and actions, which earlier she had paid no attention to, or were not noticeable, now annoyed her and got her agitated.

Her husband came home late nearly every evening because of the business. Often it was after ten o'clock that she had to cover the table and set dinner, and an hour later wash the dishes.

This night she was very annoyed with him. His work was in an office and not very demanding, physically. He knew quite well how hard she worked all day long, and yet he made demands on her so late at night.

Internally, she began to protest; she imagined herself declaring a strike, refusing to be at his beck and call at night, and above all refusing to carry the heavy weight, and she saw the surprise on his face; she heard his voice, "Don't I give you everything? Don't you have a washer woman? Is it my fault that now it is hard to find house servants? You don't have a system, that's why you are working so hard!"

Oh, that answer was well known to her! What does he know about the unending, long and hard day with the children? What does he know about their thousands of demands that she has to fulfill? What does he know about the washerwoman who comes once a week, and doesn't even want to hear about the diapers that one has to wash every day – What does he know about it? What?

While washing the dishes she thought back on the first months of their marriage; then he helped her wash the dishes; how comical he looked in her blue apron and how he joked! In those days the work was not hard.

In those days he came home early; on the Sabbath he brought home his salary; together they would decide how much money pay here, how much there; together they would go to the theater once a week, and once a month to the opera.

How happy they were then! How she would wait for him in those days! She would dress nicely and

listen to his compliments about her eyes, hair, pretty hats, and in his pockets he always had some sugar candy, only a few, but good, the ones she liked.

And now when she comes back into the dining room he is deep in his calculations.

Frieda tried to read a newspaper, but the words ran together before her weary eyes.

She became very uneasy; she quietly arose, went to her husband, tenderly laid a hand on his bowed back and calmly, quietly asked:

“What are you calculating?”

He didn't answer.

“Can I help you, perhaps?” she asked a few moments later.

“Yes, you can help me; help me groan; if you want to make merchandise out of nothing!” – He snapped angrily at her, brushing her hand from his back and began pacing impatiently around the room.

She sat back down.

“The competition is so great, that one can't make a cent this season,” he said excitedly, “The price of material is climbing into the heavens, workers are hard to find, and we can't earn a cent on the finished merchandise. At least at home when I would like to be comfortable, when I arrive, you turn away, complain, become sleepy, as though the whole world was my fault; G-d knows I do enough!”

Frieda didn't answer. A while later she asked:

“Where did you eat lunch today?!”

“In R.'s Casino. I tell you, they can really cook! You can get a fine lunch there. I went there with a buyer.”

And Frieda was so jealous of him. She remembered, before she married, when she was working and earning a good salary, how she would sometimes go out to eat. She looked at her husband: Even though he has a lot of business worries, his life is so much more interesting than hers. On his worst day at work he still can have a little distraction.

A half hour later when they were lying in bed, he, with his face to the wall, snoring loudly, she thought to herself:

“Was the 'buyer' a man, or a woman? My G-d, is it worth it? Is it worth it?”



## A Gray Early Morning

Frieda's whole body trembled. With tired movements she put on the long overcoat over her nightgown, and a warm blanket over her stiff feet, and sank down in the deeply upholstered chair next to the window.

She put her feet up on another chair, closed her eyes and sat like that for a while.

She tried to sleep, but sleep did not come to her. The good, temporary release of her cares, Mr. Sleep, usually beckoned to her forcefully, but sometimes he totally refused to come when he was the most needed.

Unwillingly, Frieda began to ponder the events of the last few hours, and in spite of the fact that her body was now warm, a shudder ran through her.

Very early in the morning her husband's sister came. She was still in high school, and was wearing her third new hat of the season. Frieda reproached her for it, and she laughed and lightly replied:

“Andy gave me the money for the hat. If you have a brother with checks, you can have a new hat.”

Frieda was a little annoyed by that last remark, not because her husband had given his sister the money for a hat, no, she knew full well that he was very good to his parents and sister, sometimes too good. She was annoyed for her own part. She had done a hat for herself a few months ago. Others had been wearing straw hats for quite a while, and she was still wearing a fur cap that she had reworked from last year's hat. Her husband didn't even notice! She didn't want to talk to him about a new hat, because he was always talking about how bad business was, and to her, to his family, he was being so free with the money.

Two hours later, still thinking about her sister-in-law's hat, she boldly said to her husband:

“Andy, tomorrow is Willy's birthday, I noticed that he has not had any gloves all winter, give me two dollars and I will give him a pair of gloves.”

Her husband didn't even look up from his newspaper. A little later when she mentioned it again, he angrily asked:

“And your older brother, he can't buy a pair of gloves for him?!”

“He does what he can for him.”

“Who is he? A boy of sixteen could already be working, is someone going to make a doctor out of him?”

And when Frieda bit her lip and remained silent, he asked:

“Why do you come to me with such foolishness? It seems like you are trying to attend to everybody.”

“Before life became so expensive, there was a little left...”

“Aha, now you want to talk about high prices?” he rudely interrupted her, “That's all we hear about nowadays, you can learn about it yourself in the newspapers. When they have nothing else to write about they write about the high prices. Don't you read a book once in a while? Your whole intellectual talk lately is about the price of potatoes, of eggs, of onions, and the sugar shortage. The chickens are bony and they cost *so much* and the meat is all fat. Believe me, Frieda, I am getting tired of such talk!”

In her state of agitation, now Frieda wanted very much to laugh at him, laugh with loud, bitter laughter, pound the table with her fists, and scream, scream loud enough to be heard in heaven; scream: “You fool! You are so distant from me! I hate you, I hate you!”

To tell him about her scorn, how hard it has been for her these last months with the allowance he gives her for the household which has not gone up even though prices have. She lives like a border here! This was all on her lips, when she thought better of it and decided to keep quiet.

Frieda was very proud, and because of it she kept a lot from her husband. She hated scenes, and he interpreted her silence to mean that he was right. So, not understanding one another caused them to drift apart more and more each day.

A little while later he wrote a check for two dollars and brought it to her. She had raised the price of the little items to double the real cost. And with the words: “You can on one hand...” with the other she tucked the check away.

He gave her a pat on the cheek, and with a smile he asked: “Nu, why are you angry? Your husband is not a millionaire.”

With that, for him, the entire question was closed. But in Frieda's heart it was quite otherwise. In there was a collection of a lot, a lot of the same and similar affronts. And later, lying in bed, she thought about all of them, and about a way out of all of them crept into her mind.

Right at that moment he embraced her and forced her head to his chest.

Frieda's heart began to pound, she was very frightened at his embrace. In the past few years when the burdens upon her shoulders had become so great, she always feared his “loving tenderness's... Often at night she would curl herself up into a ball so as not to disturb him. G-d forbid she should wake him. She tried to find ways to withdraw from his embraces. Many times in the evening she would pick a fight with him to make him mad at her.

His love, his favors only announced to her more hard work, more unending slavery, more ties to married life, and another child!...

And Frieda frightened herself. Every night she was frightened and and just then her ten-month old little girl began to cry, and Frieda gladly sprung from the bed. She put a dry diaper on the baby, went to the kitchen and prepared a bottle of warm milk, gave it to the baby and covered her with a blanket. The whole time she shivered from the cold, but in her heart she was content, content that the child's crying had rescued her from her husband's unwelcome embrace.

Lately, Frieda shuddered violently at the thought of the duties of married life... In her heart she thought of her marriage, and others like hers, to be an immoral breach of law.

And now sitting by the window she was pleased, especially fifteen minutes later when she came to bed and found her husband peacefully snoring. But she was afraid that she might awaken him, and that is why she went back to sit by the window.

The street was very still, much more still than her heart. The desire to free herself from everything, once again to be a person, was so strong in her, but the path was shut tight, and by the lock stood her two children.

The big, heavy wagon, loaded with milk cans, drove slowly over the street, and the clanking of the milk cans made an odd sound in the stillness of the night.

Frieda felt uneasy and lonely. All of the store windows with their lights turned off looked like so many strange people with closed eyes.

With the dawning of the gray morning, she felt very tired, but in spite of the weariness, new, far-seeing, energetic thoughts had begun to formulate in her tired head.

## The Mother

Despair and terrible reproaches for all of her rebellious thoughts now ripped Frieda's heart apart.

Standing on tip-toes with her mouth to the telephone mouthpiece waiting for the number, and the whole time thinking: G-d will punish me for my thoughts about the children. I called them a burden.

Impatiently, she rang and called out:

“Central, central!” Finally, she heard the pleasant, full baritone voice of her doctor: “Hello, hello!”

Quickly she said: Doctor this is Mrs. Gilbert, yes, Mrs. Gilbert, the baby is not well, all night he was breathing heavily. Now I took his temperature, it is one hundred and three! Come quickly, Doctor! – What did you say? In your place? No, I can't come to you, he is in too much discomfort. It is better if you come here! Goodbye, come quickly, goodbye!”

A half hour later she wrung her hands in despair, as she followed every movement of the doctor.

From the very earnest expression on his good face she quickly knew that her child was in danger. The doctor gently stroked her hand, bid her to sit down and quietly said:

“Mrs. Gilbert, you must be strong, the baby is sick. I fear it may be diphtheria...”

“G-d!” Frieda interrupted him, and her eyes filled with tears.

“I don't know yet how it will develop, but I think it best that you send him to...”

“Don't talk to me about a hospital! I will never allow it!” – a frantic Frieda interrupted him.

“Good, do what you want, but don't forget the other child, diphtheria is contagious.”

Frieda remained silent and the doctor asked:

“Will your mother take the child for a while?”

“Mama? I am afraid she has forgotten how to deal with a little child!” Frieda answered in despair.

“Forgot? Not your mother. Mrs. Sherman was always a very capable mother. I still remember that very well.”

Shortly after that the doctor parted. He had given her various instructions, promised to come after mid-day and he left.

Frieda cried bitterly, but she was awakened from her despair by the groaning from Bobby. Her four-year-old girl, and that groaning now became for her a call to battle. In a few minutes she became very business-like and ready to act in the battle for her child's life.

First, she telephoned the druggist and told him to send someone with the prescriptions. Next, she

washed her hands thoroughly, sterilizing them, put on a clean apron and like that went to the bedside of her sleeping little daughter. Gently picked her up and carried her to the divan in the back room.

Then, she called her mother on the telephone and gave her the good news. The good mother wanted to come right away and get the child, but Frieda asked her not to come to her at the house, a promised to send the child to her with her husband.

Finally, she called her husband. After she had told him everything, he became very concerned. Bobby was very dear to him. He began throwing various questions at her: "Had she started making the medicine? Was the child delirious from the fever? Would the doctor soon be coming back?" and similar questions.

He promised to come home soon and take the little girl. At first he said that he was too overloaded with work, but when Frieda could not hold back a sob, he assured her that he would be right there, and said "Goodbye."

Her hands had become ice cold. After the conversation with her husband she just sat there with a kind of empty feeling.

"He didn't even mention a nurse," the thought came to her.

And that thought came back to her late at night.

Up to that time she was so busy that she was not thinking, just doing.

Now her husband was asleep, it's true, still fully dressed in his clothes, but peacefully asleep.

She had just squeezed out the sponge with the alcohol-water with which she was trying to still the child's fever. The child was also asleep, luxurious unsettled sleep.

Frieda looked at his white, chubby hands. Every once in a while he gave a jerk. Her own hands had become weary. With her right hand she poured alcohol and began rubbing the left. Years ago she had broken the hand and now she could feel it in the bones.

The clock showed that it was near three. She cast a glance at her husband, and decided to talk to him about a nurse, first thing in the morning.

# The Light

She was stretched out flat on her back – a luxury that Frieda had not enjoyed for more than ten days – she lay there now and looked at the ceiling beams.

It was half dark in the room. In the next room she could hear the heavy steps of the nurse, soon they stopped, and everything was quiet.

Frieda felt herself physically at rest, her limbs were extended, tired, but her brain was working fast.

She had won the battle. The crisis was over, and the child would live!

What the life of her little son had cost her, thought Frieda, only *she alone* could understand.

She forgot about the countless, huge masses of mothers, who dealt with similar battles, whose heroics would never be sung, or written about, and their daily sacrifices. Just like Frieda, they placed the best of themselves on the alter of Motherhood.

A bitter smile came to her lips when she thought back on that early morning nine days ago. It was after the first sleepless night, her husband made ready to go back to work. For a while he stood next to the child.

The child's fever was burning at its highest point. Frieda looked at her husband. His necktie was knotted as usual, his hair combed flat, his face cleanly shaved, his coat and walking stick in his hand: – “Ach,” she thought, “How can he do it? How can he do it?!”

She had forgotten that he is not a *mother*. Nature had bestowed on him stronger nerves, and that his sense of order, men's innate sense of order, drove him to carry on with his usual business, even now when Death was hovering over his child.

Before he walked out she asked him with pretended calm: “Will you see about ordering a nurse?”

“A nurse,” he asked in surprise, and suddenly he became upset, “I don't see what a nurse can do here, it seems like you can deal with *your* child. Now that Millie is with her mother aren't you free to devote all your time to Bobby?! Right away you come out with your spendthrift ideas, you get yourself so frightened that you forget who you are, today a nurse costs a fortune, food costs, and besides you would not have to work more around a nurse, so you would have nothing to do. *I will eat at the restaurant.*”

With that he left. “Nothing to do, and I will eat at the restaurant.”

Those words rang in Frieda's ears during the following miserable days.

In her most busy period, when her hands shook from the tense, constant work, be it when she had to forcibly hold the child's head back while she spritzed medicine down his little neck, or be it when, with tired hands, she shook the mercury down in the thermometer which mercilessly continued to show his high temperature, – she would unwillingly give a thought back to what he said: “...and so you will have nothing to do.”

As for the problem of providing meals for her, he did go so far as to telephone in an order to the grocery man and the butcher, and telling her that she should, "...eat and not be foolish," then he was gone.

He didn't bother himself when her terrible fear about the child, the long sleepless nights made her too nauseous to eat. He forgot that she did not get out to get any fresh air.

One night, the sixth night when he went to the icebox and saw there all of the food that he had ordered during the last several days, he got very angry:

"So, do you think a person can live without eating? If you get sick, that will cause me fresh problems. Do you think, for that matter, that sickness doesn't cost money?!"

Then he broke two eggs, warmed a glass of milk, and made her eat. However, by the second bite Frieda began to choke, because she was crying.

She cried for a long time. The tears eased the bitterness in her heart, and the whole time she thought:

"He doesn't care about me, only about the money it will cost if I get sick too! G-d, how does one get free of this burden?!"

So, instead of their child's illness bringing them closer together, they continued to drift apart more and more every hour.

At night when Frieda was so tired that she was afraid she would fall off her feet, she very much wanted to wake her husband up from his peaceful sleep, in fact he had asked her to wake him if she became too tired to continue on.

Become tired! When was she not tired? But she was afraid to trust him with the child alone, she was afraid that his hesitation would, G-d forbid, negate all of her hard work.

And so she continued on until early in the morning. The last night was a really hard one. It was the crisis. The doctor stayed with her the whole night, and when he left he said to Frieda with great sympathy: "The child is out of danger, you can relax now, but you are very weak, you *must* have some rest," and turning to her husband, he said to him in a very serious voice, "Mr. Gilbert, I will telephone for a nurse. Now the child *must* have attention, and Mrs. Gilbert is falling off her feet!"

And now a nurse came to Frieda's house. And Frieda was laying flat stretched out on her back, looking at the ceiling beams. It was dark in the room, but Frieda saw a light...

During the long, unending days and nights where she had fought so hard and was isolated from other people, the idea of freeing herself began to take root even stronger.

She was sure that she had to do something. The burden of the children was not so heavy. The illness of her small son had bound her closer to the children. But it had estranged her more from her husband, from her one-time lover. She had come to the conclusion that this marriage with more children (that is inevitable) would be a moral crime. There in the darkness of the room she saw the light of freedom, economic freedom.

## The Chains

These last days Frieda felt as though she were dragging heavy chains behind her with every step.

Even her thoughts were so heavy, so strange, as though wrapped in iron.

She was not upset, she did not fight the chains; her behavior toward Edward was the same, which was to be to him, distant, indifferent.

At times she truly wanted to know if he was acting, or if he really was annoyed.

“And me?” she asked herself. One minute she was annoyed at herself, and at her cold distance from her one-time lover. Soon she laughed at the thought. She wanted he should come to her, fall on his knees and beg her, promise her to be more helpful, be her true friend, as she had once hoped he would remain; then she just wanted to run away, away from him!

But the chains, they were so strong! Earlier, she had not realized that even the thought of them would be so heavy on her. “Coward,” she called every woman who wasted years with worthless men.

“And what makes him so worthless?” they want to defend him.

Then they put forth a hundred examples of how he neglects her, and from his countless egotistical demands.

“And me? Am I all good?” she asked herself. Since she didn't want to be one-sided, she didn't want to defend herself. In truth she was nervous, she was sentimental, she used to have imagination, but... She wanted more, she wanted him to be her friend. Didn't I always try to make him happy?

Today she was more nervous than ever. She was going to go away for a number of hours. It would soon be night. She was going to Riverside Drive to watch the lights of the passing ships. Sometimes she hoped to accompany the ships, she remembered. But then in her hand was Eddie's warm, comforting hand...

And she wrote him a letter:

“I must go away. You mustn't worry. I won't get lost and I won't flirt. I am too tired. I just want to be alone.

Frieda”

“When will Mrs. Gilbert return?” Edward asked the nurse as he read the letter.

Something about it scared Edward. She didn't mention coming back!

Soon he concluded: “One must take it a little easy on Frieda, she can do foolish things.”

Deep in his heart he knew, that he did not treat Frieda the way he should. But he was so certain that she was in the wrong, that he didn't bother to look into the question. He only knew that she was



always talking about money, that she wanted all sorts of things that were difficult for him to get, that he was impatient above all to strive for all that.

“Women can come up with all sorts of foolishness, thinking about love and tenderness, when one should be occupied with day-to-day matters,” he thought to himself.

He was a little bit ashamed before the doctor, and a little for himself, when the doctor said that Frieda was on the verge of collapse from caring for the child. “And now I must take on a nurse!” he thought angrily, and started calculating how much the nurse would cost him for two weeks.

When Edward saw Frieda's red, rough hands it did give his heart a jolt. He used to, it seemed not so long ago, he used to love Frieda's white, soft hands with the shiny nails!

Frieda returned home late.

Edward had been reading and spread out on the rug were *four* newspapers. Frieda simply greeted him with an angry look. All of his resolutions about tenderness had already been forgotten.

“There you are, must not say too much,” he thought the way men do.

Frieda began collecting the newspapers: she would not have time in the morning. And she remembered how many times before she had to bend down for the papers that he threw around every evening. And of begging him yet again to collect the papers. Sometimes he obeyed, and other times he gave no sign that he heard her and what she said to him.

How it made her angry, these little rude behaviors! And little by little she and *he* became used to her doing it all by herself.

In the kitchen she washed the dishes from his dinner, and with every step that she took it seemed that she dragged with her yet another iron link in the chain.

Bobby and the nurse had gone to sleep.

Frieda looked at her weakened son for a long time.

“Ach, how hard it is to break a chain which is held together with living souls!” she thought bitterly.

## Differences

Frieda was so happy that her child was doing better, that for the moment she forgot all her grievances against her husband and her excited fingers grasped his tightly as they leaned over the child in bed.

The nurse, an older woman, with a lot of disappointments written on her scrubbed face, smiled happily. She was pleased to see “loving couples.” Frieda noted her smile and returned it with a bitter, ironic laugh.

The nurse quickly left the room and Edward, hardly waiting for the door to close, yelled:

“What kind of a performance is that? Don't you know that the whole world will know about your craziness?!”

Frieda didn't answer. Bobby's drawn face distorted as though to begin crying, and perhaps that softened his father's voice. In a second he had changed his demeanor. Tenderly he leaned toward Frieda and said:

“I understand, your nerves are raw, you need rest. In these past days you have overworked yourself, but now you can relax. You should sleep more.”

Frieda thought about the sleepless nights, how frightfully long they were and about her husband's strong nerves, how he could go to sleep in a second and start snoring, without knowing that she was talking out loud to him about her thoughts. With a nervous shudder she said:

“G-d, how different we are in this respect!”

He came closer to her and looked at her for a long time. And reading his face, Frieda realized that for the first time she had actually said the words out loud.

“Lately you have talked about the two of us a little too much, watch out!”

So threatening, so calm was his voice now, that Frieda became a little frightened.

“Mother,” Bobby called in a weak voice, and both instinctively forgot the storm within, and tenderly leaned back over the child.

And now, in this exact second Frieda began to busy herself with her thoughts of freedom, but how could she have the heart to rip her little son from his father? They both love each other so much!

Later, laying in bed, Frieda tossed from one side to another and thought about Bobby and his father.

The girl was still so young that she would not remember her father, but Bobby... Bobby and his father were the best of friends. Bobby would ask, “Where is Father?” and that would frighten Frieda.

And now as her thoughts took on a positive form, it also frightened her. She was afraid of the emptiness which was now in her heart, and of the foreign, un-rooted feeling toward Eddie. She was not afraid of her own desires, she only thought about the children.

“And me? My desires?” she asked herself, and tried to convince herself that she would not yearn...

“Does that mean that I have decided? And the children? Do I have the right to take them from their father? What will they say when they grow up? And what would they say if I stay with him: Let them suffer, sink lower each day?”

These and similar thoughts ran through her head. Restlessly, she tossed and turned in bed.

Early in the morning she went to her mother. How wonderfully she handled the little child. And Freida began to imagine that she could go away to work, leave the children with her mother – and she frightened herself again.

“Can it be that Eddie doesn't care what I feel? Doesn't he understand? Is he pretending not to know?”

It occurred to her, perhaps he wasn't sleeping either, perhaps he was thinking of her!

She quickly jumped out of bed, excited, on tip-toes she went to his door. In that moment she forgot. In that moment she was sure that he was not asleep. He, too, tossed and turned and lay there thinking of her. She would place a warm kiss on his sleepless eyes, and he, he would joyfully press her to him...

With her heart pounding, she opened the door to his room. From the bed she heard Edward's monotone snoring...

Shamefully, she closed the door behind her...

## A Rebuff

In the home everything was once again normal. Bobby was almost completely healthy. The nurse left several days before.

When Frieda thought about the nurse, she was uneasy. She feared for her plans to live a free life. The nurse was also free, and her freedom was written in every wrinkle on her face. And Freida had cold shivers. She was afraid of such freedom...

Bobby's weak voice woke her from these thoughts. Bobby's trumpet would not blow. Frieda gave it a twist. Bobby filled his cheeks and blew hard. It made such a loud sound that it scared him and he started crying bitterly.

For the next several minutes Frieda was busy with the children, and when she regained the thread of her thoughts, she laughed at herself.

“As free, as lonely as the nurse, I will never be. I am a mother!” she thought with pride and covered the children with such warm kisses that it brought complements from Bobby:

“You are so funny Mama!”

Then he asked:

“Why aren't you always so funny?” And when Frieda didn't answer he said:

“You are too busy, poor Mother!”

That evening a friend came over.

Esther Field went to school with Frieda. She was a lovable, intelligent, pretty and sharp-minded, full of jokes and always laughed at how busy Frieda was:

“Did you have to get married?” she asked teasing her.

This evening she did not talk a lot, she was a graphic artist for fashions, and always had something interesting to tell, but this evening she was more quiet:

Edward asked:

“Esther, did you lose something?”

“Yes. Six or seven years of happiness.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I am a fool, that I did not get married. I simply pushed happiness away. Those are years I won't get back. What have I done in those years? Traveled around, satisfying my ego and called that “Freedom.” I have been fooling myself, my friend!”

Frieda asked:

“Are you sure?”

“Certain. Look at what you have in these years, the greatest joy that a woman could wish for, you are a mother and a loving wife!”

Frieda cast her eyes down and looked at the design on the tablecloth.

“It is not too late,” Edward said with a smile.

“I'm afraid it is,” came Esther's semi-sad reply, “Now I look very differently at life. What used to please me, I don't even think about now. My tastes have changed too much, and changed tastes scare the men away.”

“Not all,” Edward answered and tenderly held his hand out to Frieda. Frieda saw that Esther was watching and she accepted the caress and thought how dissembling he could be.

Later, when she accompanied Esther to the door they stopped in Frieda's bedroom and Esther said softly:

“You see! The warm intimacy of this room makes me jealous. My room is more richly furnished, with more luxuries, but something is missing. The half-smoked cigars, and the baby-bottles with nipples! Let's see, can you suck on it?” and laughing, she stuck it in Frieda's mouth.

Both laughed, but both felt very differently, and understood very differently the seriousness of the words. Frieda tried to be lighthearted that evening, today she did not look so tired (because of the guest she had left a lot of her work for the next morning), and later, by the shine of the rose lamp, she looked like the old Frieda, and forgetting herself for a second she stroked her husband's neck and said:

“After all, I am not such an ugly girl, right?”

“Leave me alone!” he roughly brushed her hand away from his neck, “Don't you see what you have done, you have pressed on my pimple!”

Frieda turned red. Tears came to her eyes. She felt so hurt, and belittled. “And even if I did hurt him,” it has been such a long time since I put my arms around him, couldn't he forget the pimple and be happy with me? He doesn't love me!

That gesture of reconciliation did not help. That evening she began searching for a way to shed the chains.

## A Break

Since Edward was away, and this was the ninth day, Frieda had hardly cooked two meals for herself. When she was finished with the children, she was so tired, that she thanked G-d that she did not have to deal with her husband. She wanted to think. And she thought, thought all the time. She wanted to think about the same thing, and awoke with the same problem unresolved:

“What can I do?!” She examined the question from every side.

She knew that it would not be easy. She knew, that leaving Eddie would mean a complete break. She knew that if she allowed him to see any weakness, he would start trying to persuade her.

“Persuade?” she wondered. “Would he try to persuade her? He is so proud, he wouldn't even say, “Come back.” He would smile ironically and act strong, even if it pained him. And Frieda was a little ashamed. Why am I bothering so much with him and what he might think? If I am sure of myself, sure of my own decision, I would do better to think of my own future.”

And in that moment she made the hard and fast decision, that she must leave him, once and for all put an end to living with a person who has long been estranged, a person who doesn't share with her any part of his joys and takes no part in her disappointments.

She is certain that he thinks about it, what she, Frieda, was and has now become. He thinks about her ambitions, her hopes about what she could make of herself. And doesn't he see the terrible contrast as to what reality has made of her?

“Not at all a wife, only a washerwoman, a laundress of diapers, a provider of his comforts.” she thought.

“It is true. I am a mother, I love the children, but I can't work so hard, I must not!” she protested. “If he were just a little sympathetic to me! If he would only understand, if he would only be a friend. But he is a stranger, a complete stranger!”

She pressed her cold, white hands to her temples and searched for a good word to say in his defense.

But the good words failed her. On the table lay two letters which he sent to her in the nine days he had been away.

In them there was not even a feigned word of warmth, or love. “One can easily see that he was writing to a wife, who he was very sure of,” and she smiled bitterly.

She re-read the last letter and stopped at the final line: “Does Bobby miss me? I really wish to see him again. Tomorrow, around seven, I will be back home. Make me a good dinner, Frieda. No one can cook as well as you. Do you want to know if I miss you also? Yes, I miss you. Your Eddie.”

Frieda looked at the clock. It is already five. It was as though the movement of the clock hands helped her to a decision, and with feverish speed she went to work.

Into a large trunk she quickly threw her clothes without putting them in order. With her children's stiff,

ironed clothes she was more gentle, almost caressing. Her hands worked quickly and her cheeks took on a feverish red color.

She tried to stuff all of the necessities into her handbag. The throat spray for the children, Bobby's teddy bear, Millie's white sweater, another pair of shoes for Bobby that she nearly forgot. She had to struggle to get the handbag closed. Near the lock, some of the leather split. That spot colored the side, and made it nearly black. Frieda's eyes got big when she looked at the rip. She had torn it when opening the bag in Atlantic City when she was a bride and first got to the hotel for her honeymoon.

Exhausted, she sat down and looked at the tear in the handbag. Like flying pictures, various scenes of her married life flashed before her eyes. And though she did not have to strain to see the sweetness, and love, it was the crassness of her husband that was the predominant memory.

With a feverish hate, she dressed the children, not wanting to think about enormous significance of the step she was about to take.

On the trunk she wrote the address of her mother and in her head hammered only one thought: "I don't want him to meet me here, I don't want to renew the tragicomedy, I won't do it!"

When she telephoned for a taxi, she thought about how Edward would criticize her for such an expense.

On a slip of white paper she wrote the following:

"It has been a long struggle, and since I have not tried to defend you, you have always lost. I can't point my finger at the ways you have been responsible, but if you know yourself, you will know. You should not come calling for me, I will not go. I want to be something more than just your wife.

Stay healthy,  
Frieda"

When she laid the slip of paper on the table, it looked so cold on the polished, black wood. Frieda sobbed hysterically.

Below, the taxi driver blew his horn.

Bobby was so happy about an automobile ride, that he didn't notice that Mama cried the whole time.

## Burning Hours

When Frieda suddenly found her hands empty, she wearily settled into a chair.

Bobby went running after the cat, and Millie smiled happily into her surprised Bubbie's arms.

Frieda's Mother was of the silent type. She seldom asked questions. Frieda had never complained in front of her, but between them there was a sort of silent understanding. The Mother knew that her daughter was not happy, but she never said a word about it.

And now, too, she did not ask any questions. Frieda said softly:

“Mama, I can't help myself any other way.”

And when the Mother did not say anything, the daughter moved closer to her and laying her weary head on her Mother's shoulder, she cried softly.

A little later, haltingly, she said:

“It is not Eddie's fault. He is just like other men, but me, I am not like other women. Within me there is a kind of storm that won't let me rest. My life has become too ordinary, and I hate the ordinary.”

“So, you seek something new, something interesting?” the Mother now asked, with a trace of reproach in her half-smile. Frieda instantly noted the reproach and immediately became business-like:

“I will not be a big burden, certainly it will be a little difficult with the children, but you are my Mama, and Mamas, according to the law, must pay a heavy price.”

“Friedele, you know of course that nothing is difficult for me, I am not thinking of myself. There is something much more important, the children. Do you have the right to take them from their father? When Bobby gets older, a youngster is hard to raise without a father. He will ask you about his father. And you yourself, you do not know, you do not comprehend in your haste, the life of a miserable woman.”

“I will not be miserable, I have children and I have you, Mamele, and I have something else, I have something wonderful which G-d doesn't give everybody. I have the power, the understanding, the ambition to create something that will fulfill my life, make it so complete, that a husband will not be important.”

“No, I am afraid that you don't understand anything about this at all. Regardless of how changed and busy a woman may be, her husband remains the center of her life.”

Frieda didn't answer.

Her Mother looked at her for a while, shook her white head and made a gesture of resignation with her thin hands.

Mrs. Sherman, a quiet woman, a little sickly, was an outstanding student of life. Life had lifted her



high and pushed her down and the years had become so heavy, so hard, that she, too, had become hardened. In the first years of her married life, she suffered under her husband's iron will, then his children came in his image, with mountain-strong wills. She was the weaker. The good woman was a plaything in their hands. Little by little she became harder, but only on herself. With them she could not be strict.

And when she finally began to get some courage, that is when her husband died. In a few hours she had forgotten all of her weaknesses, how enslaved she was by him. The death erased all of her memories, and in spite of the fact that she was still young, she did not think of herself, rather she gave away her best years in raising her children and longing for the dead husband.

From experience she knew that her life was empty and had little joy. The children grew up with their own interests.

Her oldest son, was a traveler, a worldly man who worried a great deal about his Mother's physical comforts, but very little about her spirit.

And also Frieda, when she was still at home, Frieda loved the whole world. She wanted to support and lift up all oppressed people, but to her own Mother she remained a stranger. Later, when Frieda used to sit late at night and wait for her husband, she would regret her earlier behavior toward her Mother. That is when she first understood that they were nearly strangers, and at that moment she resolved to be warmer, to become a friend to her Mama, but the next day she became so busy that she forgot all about it.

And now, when in her desperation, she has come to her Mother, she noted how blue her mother's eyes were and how young they were in comparison to her face!

And she wondered: why did her Mother never speak of her youth?

A second later she wondered why wasn't she thinking about more important matters?

She was awoken from those thoughts by the ringing of the telephone, and to her "hello" answered the excited voice of her husband on the other end of the line.

"What kind of a notion is this?" asked Edward in a very agitated tone.

Frieda did not answer.

"Are you coming home?" came his voice questioning, pressing, ordering over the telephone.

"No," was Frieda's short answer, surprising herself.

"I always knew you were a fool, but I never reckoned on this!"

"I know," she answered, "If you had done some reckoning once in a while it would not have come to this."

He remained silent for a few seconds, then in a much weaker voice he asked:

“Will you come home?”

“No.”

“But I don't understand any of this, how have I sinned?”

“If you don't know, I can't explain it to you.”

“Shall I come over so we can talk it out?” he asked.

“No, no, no!” she screamed, frightened at the thought, then she felt so weak...

He became very upset. He did not understand her weakness. He was certain that it was that which pushed them apart. Had he understood the despair in her voice then everything would have been resolved, but fate demanded otherwise.

“So be it as you want! I am sure that today you don't know what you are saying! What right do you have to take the children from me? They are mine after all? I'm giving you *twenty-four hours* to come home, then I will take legal steps against you. I want my children!”

The last words could hardly get past his clinched teeth.

Exhausted, Frieda hung up the receiver. She knew her husband well. She knew that he meant every word he said.

A cold shiver ran through her body: “Legal steps,” would he make a public scandal?

In her internal struggles she did not think much about being in public view, she assumed that no one would know, and did not think it through any farther.

She did not know that people would know about such things so quickly. That her 'best' friend would weigh the secret and would search for 'living causes' for her action. Or, that her children, when they got older, would suffer for it, because the world never forgave such actions.

Now in her despair, she came to love her Mother very much. She did not stand there and simply look her in the eye and ask questions. Mama understood.

The littlest child was already asleep and Bubbie was telling a story to the boy. With every other word she shoved a spoonful of kashe in his mouth.

Soon everything got quiet, and in the neighboring room one could hear the calm breathing of both children.

“Wash up and we will go eat,” the Mother said.

Frieda shuddered slightly and with a stranger's eyes she looked at her Mother. “You talk about eating, my G-d, how can you talk about such ordinary things?!” she thought, but she answered:

“I can't eat.”

The Mother sat down and took both of Frieda's hands in hers.

“I have been amazed at your strength. I don't know if you are right or wrong. I won't talk about that now. I only know that a woman must have a great deal of courage to do what you have done. Perhaps half the women in the world would want to, but don't have the strength to carry the plan through. You are an exception. So, now will you start with hysterics and refusing to eat? Do you realize how strong you will have to be now?”

And since Frieda remained silent, the Mother went on:

“Are you certain in your decision and that you no longer love him? Then today should be a day of celebration for you. And if you do love him, then you should go back to him.”

At first Frieda wanted to scream at her Mother, “Silence! Silence!” But she was ashamed, there was one thing she did not understand, and in a somewhat commanding tone she said:

“Mama, I don't want to be analyzed right now.”

“Perhaps you are right,” her Mother answered.

That night she did not eat dinner.

In Frieda's memory, that night would be the longest and the most frightful of her life.

Her chest was so tight, it was like trying to open iron doors... she wanted to run, some sort of force had pushed her into the unknown.

And when she saw the peaceful faces of her children by the gray light of the coming day, she was jealous of them: “They don't even dream that their fate is in the balance!”

## An Arrangement

During the night a snow fell and it became very cold.

Frieda was busy all morning with the children. She talked with her Mother about the weather, and her Mother looked at Frieda's pale face, at the dark rings below her eyes which told of a sleepless night, and they also spoke of snow, cold radiators and a stingy landlord.

Both thought about the same burning question and talked about ordinary things...

Around mid-day when the children were down for their naps, Frieda wrote the following note:

“Edward!

I beg you very much to not take any action in the heat of the moment, because our children could suffer from it later. My actions are the result of a very long struggle, it can not be otherwise. As the children grow up they will belong to both of us. In the meantime they need the tenderness of a mother. I beg you to remain my friend.

Frieda”

After she had sent the letter, she wanted to call it back, she was certain that she had not written a single word that was appropriate to the magnitude of the situation, but the messenger boy was already gone and all she could do was wait for an answer.

She tried to imagine what Edward would think when he saw the messenger boy. The extravagance, he had become stingy and petty about every single cent. He was very serious about it and normally made do with slow methods to keep the cost down.

That always got Frieda annoyed. For a long time she had worked among men who were always in a hurry, who grew with the times and never bothered with small change. So it was very difficult for her to get used to her husband's economical methods, and therefore, even now in the first hours of her freedom she decided to begin her life in another manner, and lead it the way important people do, and to become an important person.

She was not an extravagant person, but she hated trivialities, she was motivated by the drive toward something higher.

Looking at the hands of the clock, she asked herself: “What will he answer?!”

She was very much afraid of his answer. Would he try to take the children from her? Perhaps yes. Perhaps he would hold the children over her like a whip. He knew very well how much she loved the children. He knew that she would never separate from them, that she would have to come back.

No, that she would *never* do.

She started to list all of her husband's weaknesses, and how could she punish him, how could she cause him fear in return?

His set habits, his rest and sleep which are so important to him, his incredible self-love.

Yes, she will tell him about sleepless nights, about children's illnesses! Even if his mother takes the children, he will have to help her more than he helped Frieda. In the first place because his mother is elderly, and in the second place because she is like her son, she is also in love with herself.

And when the messenger boy brought the reply: "You are a fool! I am coming right now for the children," she smiled, pleased with herself, because she was ready, if need be, to fight for her children, and the whip will be self-love:

In order to avoid a scene, she asked her mother to take the children out for a little air.

Outside the snow was so wonderfully white. The clear winter sun gave it charm, like a bride's veil.

And Frieda said:

"Mama, go to the park, it is beautiful there," and she thought to herself, "Edward will not see her there. Bobby would yearn for him."

When she opened the door a half-hour later, and saw her husband's agitated face it struck a cord in her heart, but as soon as the rude word "idiot" fell from his lips, Frieda went stone cold. Her body went stiff and it appeared as though she couldn't even bend any of her limbs. In her head was hammering: "Throw him out, throw him out!"

And since she did not answer him, he asked again:

"Where are the children?"

When she still remained silent, he drew himself up to his full height, towering over her and Frieda thought he was about to bite her.

"How ugly he is! She had never seen him in such a wild state," she thought and wondered at herself at how she was able to stay so calm.

"I just want to strangle you now!" he said with fury through clenched teeth.

In that moment all of her ambitions were erased, her whole life was a gray blob, she was seized by hate, the children, him, everything! With determination she stretched out her white neck and said:

"Strangle!"

When she felt his fingers on her neck, she went ice-cold. She was frightened, but the fingers did not press down. Gently they encircled her and pulled her to him.

Now, Frieda was even more frightened...

"Edward, let me go!"

"I love you!"

“You're a liar!”

Now he let go of her neck, and shamefully pressed both hands to his face.

From between his manly finger flowed tears, and his body shook from stifled crying.

It was only the second time in their married life that she had seen him cry. Even when their child was so horribly sick, he controlled himself. Only when she gave birth to Bobby, when she was more in the next world than this one, just after they gave her the sleep drugs, she saw him standing by the wall and it seemed as though the wall was shaking from his crying. After that, whenever he did something that offended her, she would think back on how he cried that day...

Now she felt the steel in her body relax, and she became warmer...

“Eddie, it is not all your fault,” she said in a softer tone.

When he sat down she said quietly:

“I have not made a success of my married life. It would have been a success if I made a slave of you, and I remained the master. That is what success means in a marriage! With us it is the opposite: I'm not saying that you are wholly to blame, no, it is life. Life made a slave of *me*, a diaper washer, a machine that did the work for three others, and I got tired.”

“I am, indeed, to blame. I will see to it that it will be easier on you,” he said.

Frieda laughed bitterly.

“A true man! Everything is forgotten, if I come home? And the last twenty-four hours? For me a bitter memory, and for you nothing happened! The misfortune is, however, that I am not just a wife, I am a person with a temperament, a person who has a little individuality, and that drives me. I want to develop. I want to be a little more than just a wife.”

“I will help you, Frieda!”

“That's foolishness, the two things don't go together. Be your wife, and evolve? The past has taught me otherwise! You are too possessive! And the children, the children need special attention. I have become a machine, my personality has been forgotten, and you and your crude ways have helped push me down. If you were a little more refined, a little more friendly, then, perhaps, I would never have awoken, but now it is too late, now I would become a criminal, if I returned, because I would have to tell lies. My whole life would become an ugly lie.”

Both remained silent for a long time. He finally understood that she was earnest in her decision, and that she was certain that she would not take back her bitter words, and he could no longer ask her to do so. She knew how proud he was, and she was certain of the impression her words had made on him, and little by little she armed herself with the whip.

“What will happen?” he finally asked in a dull voice.

“If you want the children, I will give them to you!” she said.

He was surprised by her words. He looked at her like some wild stranger, then he slowly said:

“I am afraid, afraid, that... it doesn't matter to you.”

He spoke those words with uncertainty, looking at her with a penetrating look, but the expression in her blue eyes reassured him and, shamefully, he said:

“Pardon me.”

A few moments later she said:

“I don't see why you argue with me about the children. You know of course that it will be difficult, and if your Mama takes them, she is not strong, you will have to help her. They seldom sleep through the night. Bobby is still weak, and Millie is teething, and if one of them get sick — — —“

“Won't they disrupt your struggle for self-development?” he asked with irony in his voice.

Frieda smiled inwardly. Her whip had worked.

“No, not much, a woman is naturally inclined to such things. And you know of course how competent my Mother is. But I will not fight with you over them, and I won't let it come to a public scandal. I want us to part as good friends.”

She wanted to say: “Good friends because of the few good months those years ago.” She wanted to say a lot more things, but she was pleased with the effect of her words so far, and she stopped talking.

Now he said:

“Perhaps you are right. Children must have a mother.”

Since he just remained sitting there, she softly said:

“I think, that now it is best if you go. Bobby is still weak, I don't want him to get excited.”

She noted how pale he turned, and she was glad. Why? She wasn't sure herself at the moment...

“What about money?” he asked.

“I...” she eagerly wanted to say something, but he interrupted her.

“You, undoubtedly, want to be a hero. I will feed *my* children! You can be free, independent, but for them, I will send a check every week,” he said and began to quickly button his coat.

Again a long pause.

“Good-bye!” he said, finally, holding out his hand.

Frieda noticed that his hand trembled, and it caused a tightness around her heart. When she gave him her hand, she held them loosely so that he wouldn't feel how terribly cold they were.

“Good-bye!” she said quickly, and as soon as the door closed behind him, she leaned against the wall and cried hysterically and bitterly. Her strong hands grew warmer, her fingers were feverish, hot. She wanted to press them to the wall, but the cold wall frightened her.



## The Strongest Link in the Chain

Something now demonstrated to Frieda that her life was a lie.

The days were long, and exhausting. Her Mother gave so much time to the children that Frieda, who was used to constant work, was getting bored and was thinking too much.

The nights were completely unbearable. Too little sleep and bad dreams.

Frieda herself didn't understand, what she was longing for? Did she still love him, or was it years of habit?

In spite of everything she was beginning to feel stronger physically. Her mother with her experienced hands helped. The table was ready and the food was good. Frieda thought about the thousands of unlucky wives who did not have a mama to run to...

Now she was feeling like she wanted to run away again, run away from herself... Something was causing her to be frightened...

When Edward called her to come over to the apartment and work out details for the furniture like she requested, she backed out. She was very much afraid of the atmosphere...

Edward sent over the children's beds and other conveniences, which reminded Frieda of many sweet hours. For example, the three-sided mirror from her bedroom. How many times had Eddie bent over and given her a kiss on the neck, or ear while she was looking in that mirror? But that was so long ago!

It seemed to Frieda that those times belonged to another, earlier world.

The rest of the furniture was sent to storage. He sent her the key. When Frieda asked him over the telephone: "What's it for?" for the first time since that day when he threatened to strangle her, he got angry and said: "You can hang yourself on it!"

Frieda laughed to herself, something about it now gave her pleasure to see him angry.

In the evening when Bobby saw his own bed there, he asked:

"Do we live here now?"

"Yes, my child," Bubbie answered. He asked Frieda, as though he wanted to understand:

"And Papa will not sleep here?"

"No."

"Where will Papa sleep?"

"At his Mama's," Frieda answered.

“And you will sleep at your Mama's?”

“Yes.”

He thought for a while, and as though he finally understood everything, he let out a heavy sigh.

After that Frieda noticed that he did not smile again for quite some time. During the time Frieda felt like her heart was being torn into pieces.

“They loved each other so much, and now you have split them apart!” the thought hammered in her head. “They were friends. It is so nice when a father and a son love each other like friends.” her thought continued. In that moment she felt a bitter hate for her husband: “Him with his crudeness, with his behavior toward me, he drove me away! And if I stayed?” she now asked herself, “If I stayed, Bobby would come to hate *me* and him when he grew up and realized the kind of relationship we had.”

A little later Bobby asked:

“Will Papa come here to eat?”

“No.”

“Why? Because he will be a good boy and eat what his Mama cooks?” the child asked. “Yes, darling,” Frieda answered, and went into the next room to wash away her tears.

When she came back, she saw right away that he was not playing with his toys. He sat and thought. Obviously, about the same question, and when he saw her, he asked:

“Mama, he is not going to be your sweetheart?”

“Who?”

“Papa.”

As he asked that question he came into her arms. Frieda's face flushed dark red. She felt ashamed before her four-year-old son. Softly, she answered:

“Yes, darling,” and thought, what was making the child so sad?

That night when she was putting him to bed, he asked if she would lie there with him. When she lay down, he leaned his head to her and quietly asked:

“When will Papa come?”

“You will go to him.”

“When?”

“Sunday.”

“You, too, Mother?”

“No, darling.”

“Why?”

“Because I must stay with *my* Mother,” she stammered and then bid the child, “Go to sleep, Bobby.”

“I can't, Mother. Mother, when will it be Sunday?”

“After Sabbath.”

“I mean, how many days? I want to count for myself, what is today, Mother?”

“Tuesday, we will count tomorrow. Go to sleep now, Bobby.”

When Frieda knew that he had been asleep for a while, she heard him softly counting:

“Friday, Sunday, no, Saturday, Sunday.”

And again that night, she did not sleep.

## A New Worry

As the days went on Frieda felt as though she were under a deep melancholia, she could not think about the future. It was already a week since she had broken the bonds of her marriage, and up to now she had not given a single thought to work, but today the thoughts were coming to her like a slap in the face.

“Hundreds of stenographers lose their jobs,” she read in the newspaper, and she felt cold. She remembered her boss's words: “If a poor man wants to dance, the violin strings break.”

And now this was the luck of the stenographers. She had heard that they were making thirty dollars, and some even forty dollars a week, and now they were making nothing.

But when she remembered the cause, that all of the stenographers were let go from the government because the war had ended, and with it ended the need for the large numbers of various war workers, she was happy because compared to the war her problems were not so great.

One thing was for sure, that the market would be bulging with stenographers and it would be hard to find a position.

But she did not turn back to that old friend. Tell him about her failure? No, she would as much as possible avoid people's gossip.

And she got right down to work. In a closet in the exact same place she left it was her old typewriter machine. With her littlest child on her lap she began to practice and see if her stiff, housewife fingers could still fly over the keys like before.

It was difficult in the beginning, and it scared the baby a little bit, but soon the little girl began to laugh. She liked the monotone clicking of the machine and Frieda found the work easier.

More difficult was the shorthand. She needed someone to dictate to her, and when her younger brother began to dictate for her in the evenings, Frieda was very nervous. He dictated as he read from a book, one minute fast like racing water, then slow and mechanical like in school.

She had written several letters, answered ads for jobs, and that evening spoke to her Mother for the first time about the future.

“Mama, I must go to work. Will you be able to manage with the children?”

“That is nothing, but I am sure that when Henry gets back from the 'road' he is not going to want that you have to work.”

“That's foolish, I will not become a burden to my brother! Today, a household needs to have an income, I want, and I must work, but how will you manage?”

“Don't worry about me.”

“But the children need air, and it will be difficult. Perhaps, you should write to Aunt Becky?”

“I will not.”

“Are you ashamed to write to her about me?”

“N-no,” her Mother stammered.

A while later Frieda asked:

“Shall I write? I am not ashamed to.”

“She will not understand you. She will say that you have *no* right to act the way you did, that a wife must stay with her husband under all circumstances.”

“Like, for example, Aunt Becky's daughter, whose husband has more lovers than fingers.”

“True,” she said, “but since he is rich, and gives her every luxury, it is much better for her than if she broke up her home and moved away from him.”

“Indeed, *that* is what the difference is between she and I! I am sure that she hates him, and yet, she is his wife when *he* wants, and *she* calls herself a respectable woman. You tell me, Mama, isn't she worse than a woman of the streets?”

Mrs. Gilbert did not answer. A little later she said:

“I will write to Becky. It will be more difficult than with her rich daughter, but she loves the children.”

After their talk, Frieda felt more open, half free. She had begun to get down to work. Late into the night her fingers flew over the keys of the typewriter.

And the answer to all of her inquiries was that all of the positions were already filled.

# Sunday

For Frieda, Sunday was a very unpleasant day.

In the first days, when the plan to leave him was just being formulated in her thoughts, the greatest fear was that the children would have to be able to see their father. She feared the feelings that such a meeting would call up for Bobby, who already understood a little, and her day without the children.

One thing was certain, that she did not want to separate him from the children. Therefore, early Sunday she got to work.

She polished Bobby's white shoes, got both of the children dressed like dolls, gave Willie a quarter (when her Mama wasn't looking), and called Eddie to get the children.

She looked down on them from her window with moist eyes.

The little one was happily sitting the carriage, and Bobby was so happy that today was Sunday that he shouted with joy: "Mother, today is Sunday."

The children met their father on the street. He stood there thoughtfully off to the side. Bobby saw him first and threw himself upon him so hard that it nearly knocked him over.

The greeting was a warm one. A little while later when they were sitting in the park, Bobby first saw that on the black felt collar of his coat were wet spots from a few drops of water. He looked up at the sky, and wondered if it was raining. Where did the drops on his collar come from? When he saw how red his father's eyes were, with the openness of a child he asked: "Papa, have you been crying?"

The sixteen-year-old Willie, who really liked sad romances, smiled with contentment.

Edward noticed it and, controlling his emotion said through his clenched teeth:

"Willie, you can go home. Here is a dollar, go to an afternoon show, in the evening you can come for the children!"

Willie took the dollar and thought to herself:

"This is a very good day."

The two of them, the father and the little son, played in the park, and were so very happy one with the other, that they had forgotten to eat until little Millie, who did not understand the situation, began to cry.

Then Edward took the children home to his Mother.

Not far from home a neighbor asked:

"The children are not in the country?"

“No, they are with my Mother-in-law, my wife needs rest. She is weak,” he answered. Then he saw the reproach in Bobby's eyes. The boy understood that his father had told a lie. Edward bit deep into his bottom lip: “Th' devil with woman's questions, I've got to have my Mother find other rooms!” he said to himself.

But in his Mother's rooms there was great joy, everyone was kissing the children and Edward called out: “Kiss their hands not their faces!” And everyone thought of Frieda, because that is what she always said.

After mid-day his Mother and sister went down with the little girl, and Edward was alone with his son. First he taught him how to write his numbers, then they both counted up to a hundred. Suddenly, they both fell silent. Edward, himself, didn't understand why he was feeling something of a tenderness toward Frieda? He wanted to talk with the child about her. He was sure that she did not deserve his thoughts about her. “Why did she need all of this?” He was always asking himself, not understanding her pains. “She is searching for novelty, for the theatrical! And because of that the children and I must suffer!”

Bobby asked:

“Papa, do you have to sleep at your Mother's?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Why didn't you sleep at your Mother's before?”

For a second Edward did not know what to answer, then he said:

“Because before, my Mother was not afraid to sleep alone.”

“Why can't I, with Millie and Mama, come here?”

“Because, because the other Bubbie would be afraid,” Edward said, and in his son's eyes he could see that his son didn't believe him.

That evening his Mother wanted to take the children back, but Edward knew his Mama well, and he was certain that she would unwillingly make a womanly mess of things, and he did not let her do it.

When Willie came for the children their Father went with them almost to the house. There he straighten Bobby's collar, and felt under the baby's cover to make sure the baby's bottle of milk was still there.

Parting from the children was so hard, that in the first moments he wished to never have to relive a Sunday like this. A while later he decided to leave New York.

Frieda kissed the children's hands and arms. Bobby told her about Papa and when he noticed that she was crying, he said quietly as though he were telling her a secret:

“Mother, Papa cried also.”

## Work

The experiences of the last few weeks were not as interesting as Frieda had imagined.

There was one unending concern: Aunt Becky had not come yet. Her Mama worked hard handling the children, and because of that Frieda had to work hard in the evenings.

Bathing the children, washing diapers, helping Mama make breakfast in the morning, and after all of that, practice her work skills. Her hands were not yet skilled enough working with the typewriter.

It was impossible to hire help. Every day she telephoned to agents to get a girl, but the agents did not give her much hope.

In the meantime they had to watch the children, make sure they got fresh air. It pained Frieda when she noticed the children's red cheeks grow more pale.

Basically, her situation had gotten worse since she left her husband, but Frieda was not in despair, she trusted herself that this way of living was temporary. When the Aunt comes it will be easier on everyone.

Above all, she did not expect a great deal of pleasure from the future, her desires were modest. She wanted to be free to create. To create that which she felt lived in her very being.

And in order to create, she needed much more freedom than she had just being her husband's wife.

His domineering character, his indifferent behavior during the last several years, made her angry and drove her to liberate herself. To make of herself more than just an obedient slave of a slave. She knew that her husband was also a slave to their circumstances, to a poor business, to the competition, and to a thirst for success.

All of these circumstances had made him miserable, hardened to everything, even to her. She understood that now better than ever, and very often had sympathy for him in his daily struggle.

But in spite of that, she was not sorry for what she had done. She was certain that if he made just a little effort, he could behave differently with her, and remain her friend like they were before.

When Frieda thought back on their hopes back then, she grew stronger, she would work things out herself, the Frieda of those days would not die.

After her marriage, and later when she watched the premier of a new play, she was very pleased to hear Edward's criticism of the play, and in the morning when they read the critique in the newspapers, his critique would often match that of the critic who made several thousand dollars a year for his work.

They would work together, learning how to work for the stage. She had an outstanding speaking voice (She was born, and had a fine upbringing in New York), he also knew English, the language of his adopted land, but not as well as Frieda. But he had a good understanding of the techniques of the stage, and creating character types came naturally to him.



Frieda became an expert at it, because she had lived for years in close company with writers and other artists of the stage.

But after the birth of their son, they put the work aside for later. The 'later' little by little vanished, and with it, Frieda's hopes.

It happened that the months flew by, and they did not mention even a single word about that which had been so important to them. Gradually, Frieda came to understand that her husband had totally forgotten about it all, and she had become for him just an ordinary wife.

In spite of all of her great hopes she was now forced to work in the office of an importer, far, far away from the work her heart desired.

She was not able to find a position working for theater people, and she did not feel competent yet to do that kind of work. For that reason she practiced a lot. She hoped in a short period of time to get a position working as a secretary for an important manager, and thus to come nearer to her hopes.

Meantime, all day long she wrote letters and bills about wool socks and tried to get used to the dry voice of her boss.

The man with the dry voice was a old boy, and Freida was so preoccupied that she did not notice, how every day he was more and more helpful to her.

## A Surprise

Frieda was so hungry to be with her children, that she decided on the coming Sunday not to send them to their father.

In the evenings when she comes home, they are already sleepy. Bobby hardly understands what he is saying, and the little girl loses her head.

Ten minutes after their bath, both children are asleep. She longed to talk with Bobby. The child was growing older, it was time to teach him certain things, things that her Mother did not understand, and Frieda was not pleased with the way he talked, he was picking up words he heard in the street.

She needed to have the child for a few hours a week, and above all she was jealous: Bobby was asking about Sunday. He seldom spoke about his Father, but Frieda was sure that Bobby thought often of him. And every day he was becoming more distant from Frieda.

Therefore, she decided that on Saturday she would write a letter to her husband.

But when she came home she found a letter from him that greatly shocked her:

“I am going to go away. I don't know if you are interested in knowing where. The business is not where it needs to be, so why bother? You will not take from me more than ten dollars a week for the children and because of that I am not bound to New York.

“I have never been so close to being able to realize my dream: My thirst to travel, as I am now, thanks to your “thoughts of freedom,” or better yet: deeds.

“The last three months have been very difficult. The meetings with my son have not been as pleasant as you think. His accusing look bothers me greatly, even though I am sure that I am not the guilty party. When he grows older I hope he understands that it was not *I* who broke up our home!

“And it seems, meanwhile, that things are not as lively as you had imagined. Woolen socks are a very dry food for the “soul,” and for you the “soul” is so important that you have made your children fatherless because of it.

“But, perhaps your boss, the bachelor, will help you feed your “soul”?

“Things are very unpleasant for me, no, I am not longing for you, our life together these last several years were not very enchanting. But, also in me, there awoke a thirst for something more interesting, and now that you have made a free man of me, I will also go in search of something. One thing I am sure of, wool socks will not make *my* soul happy.

“Enclosed you will find a check for a hundred dollars. I don't know if I can or will write in the future. I hope the children will be healthy, and if you need to contact me about them, let my Mother know.

“Meanwhile, stay healthy and don't forget that you are Bobby's and Millie's Mother...

Edward”

“G-d how dare he?!” was Frieda's first thought when she read her husband's letter.

At that moment she was not bothered by the hurtful words, the irony, the bitterness. At that moment she was only bothered by the fact that he was going away.

But then she tried to defend for herself that feeling, and the emptiness that suddenly took over her: “It doesn't bother me that he is leaving, it doesn't bother me what he does. I'm not interested in that! It bothers me that he is so free. *He* can travel wherever he wants and still be a father!”

“I hope the children will be healthy!” with those words he separates himself from his children! He hopes! Should I do that? Can I do that? Can a mother act like that?

“He suffers, he suffers!” she began to shake, if he were not suffering would he act like that? Would his letter be so biting? So bitter? Would he throw away the business for which he had neglected me so? Throw all away and go wandering?

And now she began to pity him. She was certain that she had destroyed his life. She wanted to run to him, but the thought that he might say that she came back because of her own disappointments, stopped her.

She cried a lot that night. But later she began trade the bitter words, the place of suffering, for an energetic determination to “show” him that he would soon be proved wrong. Gradually, the longing died away and he would see that she was very serious about doing greater work!

## Public Opinion

Earlier, Frieda was very embittered. Normally, Freida was very busy, that had robbed her of the opportunity to come into contact with friends, and people in general.

That was one the the reasons that pushed her to change her life. "I'm getting rusty," she would often say to her husband, who wouldn't even lift his head from his newspaper.

Her environment as such was not stimulating. With the passing years her neighbors drew back from her. Her friends and her earlier atmosphere. She was forced to spend a lot of time in the home with the children. She could not even go to the park, because it was too far. And there, sitting at home, she was forced to be polite to people who bored her immensely. Ignorant people for whom the main thing was jewelry. They had it and talked about it constantly. She had to listen unwillingly to how Mrs. L washed her daughter's silk underwear, how much Mrs. D's fur cost, what Mrs. B's washerwoman liked to eat for dinner. She was forced to listen to every lie Mrs. H told, and to smile and give the impression that she was interested. G-d, how she hated those women! Only when she lived in a different house several years ago did she learn to be tolerant, to be a Roman in Rome.

And so, little by little, she became estranged from all of her earlier friends. Only a few who were sympathetic to her situation came from time to time to give her a little of the air of her previous world.

And now she is quite happy that she does not have any close ties with anyone.

"It will save me now from telling lies, and giving various reasons," she thought, because even though her earlier circle of friends were more or less progressive, Frieda knew how much people talked about a woman who left her husband.

She remembered now how once before people had talked about a certain couple: The husband traveled to another city and someone remarked: "They must have had a fight, and that is why he left!" And the man who said that was an very intelligent, radical person!

Frieda knew that people would gossip about her separation, and that is why she very much wanted to be alone now.

But she had a problem, bad news flies like it has wings.

She was very tired. All day long she went around trying to find a position. Around four she came home and met her Mother who was lost in work. The little girl had cried all day long, they could only get her to sleep outside, and outside today there was a heavy snowfall. Bobby was also unruly, he wanted his Mama. Frieda immediately jumped in to help her Mother.

It wasn't until after eight that they were finished bathing the children, got them to sleep, and began washing the diapers. The washerwoman refused to wash diapers. – Then Esther Field arrived.

Frieda was a little confused when Esther took her secretly aside.

"Not all that glitters is gold, huh?" Esther asked with sympathy.

Frieda's big eyes filled with tears. She hated herself for the tears, she wanted very much to defend her husband, but it was difficult for her to speak.

"I am the guilty one, I want to be free, I am very restless," she finally stammered.

Esther gave her an ambiguous smile:

"Nu ya, no matter how bad a man is, we always have a good word for them."

"But Eddie is good!"

"Like I believe you!" Esther laughed. Then becoming serious she said: "I don't envy you, it is very lonely to be free."

A little later Esther studied Frieda's face and then said:

"Tell the truth, Friedele, is the new one smarter than your husband, or richer?"

When Frieda comprehended those words, she broke out in hysterical crying, so much that it frightened Esther. Thinking that Frieda was about to confess something, she said:

"Nu, have I reopened a wound? Tell me, child, I will understand."

An hour later she shook her head in disbelief.

"Your husband must be having an affair! Don't be offended, you know me, I talk straight, other will just think it, I say it!"

Yes, now Frieda knew that she must deal with public opinion, and that few people will understand what she did.

It pained her to the bone. But only at that moment. Later, after she had turned the pillow a few times, and sought a cool spot for her feverish face, she decided to stand higher than the people who wanted to judge her.

# Spring

Frieda's sole pleasure now was Sundays. On Sunday she would spend the whole day with the children in the park. And many times in playing with them she would forget and start home with them on the route to her old apartment.

It was Spring. In the park the trees were already sprouting little leaves, and when Millie slept and Bobby played with the other children, Frieda accorded herself the luxury of dreaming.

Though she wanted to dream about her ambitions, instead, they were filled with daydreams about her husband:

“Where is he now? Who is he talking to? Does he think of me sometimes?”

When she felt ashamed of herself for these thoughts, she was certain that the thoughts were of him because she was jealous of his freedom, of the great experiences and spiritual pleasures that freedom afforded him.

Sometimes she would laugh at herself:

“Perhaps, I feel like this, because it is Spring, because my slave nature is too strongly used to the company of a man?”

Now she had just switched it for the children, her Mother and her boss.

She often laughed about that last one.

Her path had been so long, so sure! Her whole identity was ringed by order, that her Bohemian nature laughed at.

She always maintained a friendly exterior, but she never allowed her conversations to become personal. Whenever her boss tried to find out something about her, she never talked about anything but business and the weather.

When she left the office, she even forgot that he existed. But he was very curious about her, and one Sunday he ran into to her in the park with the children.

When he began to explain that the encounter was by accident, Frieda was sure that it was not chance, and she decided right away to leave the job that very week.

The next day he was a little bit too sympathetic, and when Frieda told him that she was leaving, he asked her with a broad smile:

“Why? I prefer wives to single girls.”

Those words gave Frieda a jolt, like a slap in the face. That is when she first understood what her husband meant by “Bachelor Boss,” in his last letter. Only then did she comprehend that the dry little man, with his sure, slow movements was a man – a man who looked at her as a woman and did not see

her as just a worker in his office.

And Frieda became very scared, not of the dry little man, no, even physically she felt stronger than him, if he tried to get too free! She could easily give him a good shove – She feared for the future, for the freedoms that a particular sort men take with married women.

How does one avoid that sort of man? She was going to have to work with and for men. Be it because of her economic situation, or be it because her future required it. How does one avoid them?

In that second she resolved to study the character of the men with whom she must work with or for, and then she laughed at herself:

“Study them? And until then, how many times will I be affronted so?”

As though her boss wanted to demonstrate to her in the last hours of their acquaintanceship how hard her struggle was going to be, he tried to put his arms around her and kiss her.

With disgust she swatted away his clammy hands from her neck, and leaving behind her earnings from the last week, she quickly left the building.

It wasn't until long after that that her cheeks ceased to burn with shame, when her agitation was a little diminished, late every night, when she was standing by the mirror and brushed her long hair, she wiped her white neck, as though she could still feel the touch of those clammy hands.

That feeling reminded her of her husband's strong hands and his deep gaze that was always searching... But she was not afraid of his searching “Let him look into my soul and he will see how pure I am,” she thought, then laughed bitterly. “Let him look! Didn't I, myself, send him away? Who knows where he is now?”

## Self-Analysis

More than anything, Frieda frightened herself when she fell into those moods of longing.

She, herself, did not understand why, now, she thought so often about her husband, whose indifferent, almost crude behavior had driven her away just a few months prior?

When she started to analyze herself, her mood grew worse.

For example, why was she so troubled since she received the postcard from him saying that he had climbed an even higher mountain?

“He can fall down again. Perhaps get lost. Even there, in spite of the cold, he is surely not wearing warm enough clothes!”

Those and similar worries she had about him.

About them she would either laugh or cry: “Why does he bother about me, once in six weeks he sends a postcard!”

Then she asks herself, why she bothers about him.

“He is a stranger to me now, even worse than a stranger,” she tries to tell herself.

And all of her moods, she was sure, were because she was no longer seeking out the company of interesting people.

Now she was working in an office that handled the theatrical business, but the man she worked for was not a very likable person, and above all she was still a little shaken by her last experience.

But with the warm summer days came more interesting times.

The manager of the department where Frieda was now working, went on vacation, and in his place came a more interesting individual.

A man with a soft voice, very courteous, with very sharp eyes, which quickly discovered that Frieda was no ordinary stenographer, who only took a mechanical interest in her work. In just a few days they got well enough acquainted that Frieda forgot herself a bit and began talking about her ambitions.

Soon he asked her to bring in anything she might have written for the theater.

That night it was warm, and Frieda was tired from a day's work. She wanted a little fresh air, but she did not go out. She sat at her typewriter and wrote. She rewrote a certain piece that she had written several years ago.

Then, Edward sat by her and helped her. It was a one-act, and when it was done, they did not like it, but Frieda kept it anyway.



Now it looked a lot better in her eyes. She looked differently at life now, and certain scenes had to be changed.

She also threw out whole scenes that belonged to Edward: He shouldn't be able to say that she used his ideas, that I can't be independent.

For several nights she worked very hard, but as soon as she gave it to her new acquaintance, their acquaintanceship ended.

He invited her to have lunch with him.

As a young single woman, Frieda had never accepted any sort of invitation from her co-workers. Due to her principles she was against any mixing between her work and her social life, and in the acts of the play which she had just reworked, she treated the same topic.

From his soft voice she understood that he, too, had other hopes about the future... Frieda very much wanted to avoid adding to his hopes and above all she thought that an early break in the relationship would be for the best.

After that his behavior was much cooler. He didn't even mention the manuscript that he had her bring him. His behavior easily convinced her that his interest in her was all personal and not work-related.

She sort of felt as though a sort of mountain had been placed in her path. Perhaps, she was being too stringent? Perhaps she should have accepted his invitation?

When she thought of that and similar invitations that she might receive and, perhaps, might have to accept in order to carry through with her ambitions, she shuddered.

One thing she was sure of, that she would remain strict. She did not want to think about other men's arms around her waist like her husband's.

And his, did she want them around her? She still did not understand herself, and did not want to think about it.

She was once again determined to seek out interesting people, who would make her forget.

## An Encounter

Now, the days had become unbearably long. The work, in spite of the fact that it was the kind of work she had sought out, was not very interesting. It was another person's work and she had always thought about work that she wanted to do and to write.

In the meantime she wrote very little. The evenings were very hot, and she couldn't even go to the park, because the children were asleep and her Mother was tired from a full day of hard work.

She would look at the two sleeping children and her heart would clench from sorrow.

It was Bobby's first summer in the city, and the dear little child was really feeling the heat. His appetite was nearly gone, and even his breathing was heavy.

Frieda's older brother, Henry, who had just come back home, offered to lend her money to take the children on vacation out of the city, but she refused. She did not want to give up her position at work. She was sure that in time there would be opportunities for her there.

When she looked at the children, she hated their Father: "As free as he is, he can't be bothered about how the children are suffering from the heat. He doesn't even make a move to take them to the seashore!"

Just as things had become unbearable, in a warm August evening, Frieda ran into her old best-girlfriend, the now very successful writer, Helen Relnick.

Reluctantly, Frieda telephoned home, and she could tell from her Mother's voice that she was not very enthused.

She was not sure if her Mother was not pleased because people had said that Miss Relnick palled around with a lot of gentiles, or because she was always afraid that Frieda's husband would not approve of the people she socialized with and sue for a divorce:

"You divorce him," her Mother would say, "It is better for you to divorce him, I don't want him to shame you!" – How far Frieda's thoughts were from divorce!...

But in Relnick's company you couldn't think about what Mama said. She was so cheerful, so dear, and just like her stories and plays, which sparkled with humor and extraordinary wit, her personality did too.

At the dimly lit table at the restaurant where the ocean waves seemed to rattle the dishes, Relnick asked:

"You are in love?"

Instead of answering, Frieda turned red.

"Well, I can see that you are in love, I only hope that this time it's not your husband?"

Frieda felt like her tongue was extremely heavy, like it was filled with lead, she couldn't move it! She knew that she looked foolish in the famous woman's eyes, and after a pause she began to talk about the children.

Relnick was very interested, but a little later she asked:

“And your husband, is he off with an interesting woman or a beautiful one?”

Now Frieda laughed. When she talked about how she had left her husband, Miss Relnick became angry.

“A good, respectable husband thrown away, huh?! Child, you know nothing about men! *I* know them. The best of them only look to use women for their own purposes. You remember Tony, right? Do you remember how much in love with him I was? I was ready to throw away home and family and marry Tony the Italian, and him? What did he do to me? When he achieved his goal, I had introduced him to everyone, his success was assured. People were seeking out his paintings. Then he turns around and marries a sixteen-year-old Italian girl who had two eyes bigger than my fists! For nearly two years I complained about Tony and I met someone who it appeared would comfort me. This one was just looking to have an easy life from my earnings. Oh, I know them. More than one has made a fool of me!”

Later Frieda asked:

“Are you in love now?”

“No, marriage is not for a free bird like I am. I need to live, to live big in order to be able to create!”

“I won't be able to create like that,” Frieda was feared.

“No, I know, your sort of writing, your nature is quieter. In you there is a wellspring of poetry, you can do that better, beautifully,” Relnick said, and for a second her beautiful eyes became cloudy.

When late that night she drove Frieda home in her automobile, she promised to help her become famous.

## Her First Party

As they had hoped, Aunt Becky arrived Friday evening.

The good woman with her warm and loving temperament soon became best friends with Bobby. And Millie, after knowing Becky for an hour, was climbing up on her bowed back.

Her experienced eye quickly saw in Frieda's face what Frieda's Mother with her daily contact with Frieda couldn't see: That Frieda was very tired, almost sick.

The last several weeks of hard work had left signs on Frieda's face, and also on her nerves. She was in such an agitated state that every little thing caused her to break out in tears. Her face was now pale, and there were a lot of wrinkles around her eyes.

When Becky found out about Frieda's work at night for the last few weeks, she immediately decided that Frieda needed to rest before she really got sick.

Frieda would not hear of going anywhere if it meant leaving the children.

But after a lot of discussion, she finally agreed to go away for a few days. She would go to Helen's. She would take advantage of her invitation, and she would take with her the several items that she had written and ask Helen for her opinion.

Frieda knew that Helen had a very nice summer home in a wealthy colony by the ocean, and she was sure that Helen would want her as a guest, because Helen had asked her to come on many occasions.

She was tired, not the short trip, but the long weeks of hard work, and the difficult parting from the children had exhausted her. Because of all that, she was happy when she saw Helen waiting for her with her automobile.

Her room was simple, but with furnished with exquisite taste. Everything was so quiet there, as though Miss Relnick understood the state of her raw nerves and wanted to place every stick of furniture and even the color of the walls in order to help calm them.

Through the three wide windows one could hear the sound of the ocean. The distant horizon was bright red, and Frieda was worried that tomorrow it would be very hot in the city.

From the veranda one could hear the yelling of Helen's Mother. Her voice was very high-pitched and not at all in accord with the surroundings. She spoke broken English, and in spite of the great wealth that her daughter's pen now earned, she remained the same Jewish lady she was on Henry Street.

Coming through the window, Frieda wanted very much to be rich, be rich from her own work. She was certain that her friend would never again have to go to a man to get a dollar, or have to give account to anyone.

Frieda had forgotten that, before, one had to give account for other things, excluding money, and Helen Relnick, the successful woman, unfortunately, had little reckoned on that...

She noticed that on the second day of her visit.

There were a lot of guests in the house, writers, artists, actors. Helen was being very friendly with two men at the same time. Within the same hour Frieda saw her looking longingly into the eyes of a very young poet, and a little later she ardently kissed the lips of the famous actor K. And when Frieda reproached her for it, Helen laughed heartily.

“The first one, I am helping out, he calls me his muse, and behind my back, he says, he can not create, he is still too much of a boy!”

“And the second?” Frieda asked.

“The second helps me out, Friedele, I love him so much!”

“And he?”

“He has a wife.”

They were silent for a long time.

They sat on the sofa in Frieda's room. Helen's head lay in Frieda's lap. The pale light of the moon seemed to draw the coquettish from her, the laughter from the cheerful Helen. She had become a weary, sorrowful woman.

“Frieda, does he want to come back to you?” Helen finally asked.

Frieda did not answer.

“And you, do you want to go back to him?”

“No!” Frieda quickly answered, as though she wanted to run away from herself.

“So? And how do you like Mr. B? He could be quite a bit of help to you in your work. You could be a little friendlier to him.”

“I don't care for him.”

“So? He is a very interesting person, you could flirt with him a little.”

“I can't.”

“Then you are in love!”

“Possibly,” Frieda answered with a smile.

“Who is he?”

“I don't know,” she answered and thought about high mountains... and whether Bobby was too hot.

## Mr. B.

For the first time in a long time Frieda felt happy.

It was the fifth day of her visit and Helen, in spite of being so popular and so busy with her guests, still devoted time to Frieda and Frieda's works.

Frieda went to Helen's room, and in her hands she carried a pack of manuscripts. Helen was enchanted by Frieda's work. She was certain that a great future lay before Frieda, and perhaps for the first time did not lecture her about leaving her husband.

Frieda said, under her breath, "Traumerei," and ran down the steps. Not far from her door she ran into Mr. B.

"Do you love Traumerei that much?" he said, coming closer.

"Love?" Frieda was very confused. How did this stranger know that Edward used to play it with so much emotion?

"How lovely you look when your cheeks are blushing red! Would you like a smoke?" he asked, holding out a silver cigarette case in his hand.

Frieda looked at his short, thick fingers and quietly answered:

"Thank you, but I don't smoke."

"I'm afraid you are a very good person."

"Perhaps."

"I would like to get to know you a little better."

"With pleasure," Frieda answered and knew that she was telling a lie, that she didn't want to talk to him, because she did not like his piercing little eyes, which were always probing hers, and because she hated his remarks with their double meanings. She didn't like his self-assured smile either, but she had to remain courteous. In the first place because they were both guests in the same house and secondly because Helen had bid her: "He is a very influential person, he can help you a lot in your ambitions."

"Come, let's walk a little bit," he said, and took Frieda's hand.

Through the thin fabric of her dress she could feel his hot fingers. She really did not want to go, but the manuscript in her hand reminded her that she had to do something.

"Wait for me below, I'll be right there."

In her room she wanted very much not to go down, but then she laughed at herself: "Why should I be afraid, I want to know why he reminds me of ice, when his words become warm."

When she met him below and he again took her hand, she said softly:

“It is too warm to be holding hands.”

“When you say 'warm' do you mean my hands or the weather?” he asked, looking her right in the eye.

“Both,” Frieda laughed.

He withdrew his hand.

“You know, you seem different from the others,” he said after a while.

“In what respect?”

“Miss Relnick says that you want to write for the theater, you know of course, what my relationship with the theater is, and you don't toady up to me?”

“Why should I?”

“Don't you think it important that I should be your friend? I buy a great number of plays every year.”

“I would be very honored.”

“And by the first gesture you are already protesting! You know little woman, that I could show you a hundred women who would be ready any minute to toss away their homes, husbands and children and throw themselves at my feet.”

“But I don't belong to that sort!” Frieda assured him right away. What is 'that sort? It is simply a type of woman that only seeks out her own interests, believe *me, I know!* You can't make me be one of them!”

“But you tossed away your husband! You are a cunning gal, you knew very well that in order to become famous you could not remain a goody-goody. Why break your head over a husband, it is better not to have a master over you! Am I not right?”

From all of his words, Frieda only thought one thing, “To be famous, can't one remain a good person?”

“That is not true!”

“What? Concerning women, I am an authority, *I know* what I'm talking about!”

His words had become so threatening and his face so changed, that Frieda was a little scared.

After that the conversation became boring, at least for him.

Frieda had looked for the best in him, and therefor she recounted to him the reasons she left her husband. She took great care to keep to herself all of Edward's weaknesses, she talked about Bobby.

So? You wanted to be more than the hard-working wife of a man, huh? You did not like the ordinary?

I am afraid you will be sorry sometime,” he said, becoming serious.

“Perhaps so, if I truly believed that *your* way was the only path to success, but I believe otherwise.”

In Frieda's eyes there was a far-away look, full of hope.



## Friends Mozer

They talked about the faithfulness of women to men, and Helen laughed at Frieda.

“After you left him, you want to remain true to him?”

“Not to him, to me,” Frieda answered in all seriousness.

“That is foolishness. Are you telling me that if a man pleases you physically or emotionally and life comes knocking at the door, you will refuse because you want to remain true to your principles? *Which* principles, I must ask?”

“I don't say principles, I am very conservative, even in matters of love.”

“That's not true. I know what a hothead revolutionary you are. Do you think that I don't see how hard it is for you to remain silent when the people at the dinner table begin to talk about the situation in Europe, or even here at home? Why, then, do you keep quiet?”

“Because now I am a nothing. People will laugh at my opinions. Just wait until my name is known, until renowned actors strut out on the stage and in a studied tone lay out my revolutionary thoughts, then it will become important what I have to say, but now, now it is better to keep quiet.”

“I don't know, when I have ideals I want to shout them from the rooftops...”

“Yes, but you are a famous person!” Frieda interrupted her, “And besides, I keep quiet, not because I am afraid, but because they are, after all, your guests.”

“But we have talked about love, forget ideals for a while, how do you like “Friends Mozer?”

“Why do you all call him “Friends?”

“Because his beloved topic is friends, he writes about it, talks about it, and people say that several years ago he ran off with his best friend's wife, but I don't believe it. He is a very interesting person. Listen Frieda, it just occurred to me, that if he takes an interest in you, you will quickly forget your principles of faithfulness, will want to forget, that you are 'conservative' in matters of love.”

“*He* takes an interest? Didn't you notice that on the second evening he asked me to dance? He followed me like a shadow, *I*, deary, must be the one to take an interest!”

“He doesn't excite you either? He is a very famous person, and very amiable.”

“No, *he*, too, does not excite me.”

“Frieda, are you in love?”

Frieda remained silent.

That evening “Friends Mozer” turned on all of his grandeur, sweetness, charm, his whole 'stock,' but

Frieda remained the same.

During the last few days of her vacation, he called her 'icebergs,' and swore that before she left, she would, with tears in her eyes, beg him for a kiss, and Frieda laughed.

Once, while sitting on the sand, the white foam of the waves would wash over their feet, and Frieda let out a sigh.

“You know, your eyes are very much like the sea. Perhaps you have a relationship to the sea, did it consume your lover?” Friends Mozer asked.

“The sea of life consumed him,” Frieda answered, and she was not entirely sure who she meant...

“Bad sea! Perhaps the waves will wash me up onto your feet? Little feet, they are such tiny little feet!” he said and gently nudged her foot.

The expression on Frieda's face became very serious, she got up so quickly that the sand on her dress fell on his head.

As he shook himself and rubbed the sand out of his eyes, he also stood up, and, looking her directly in the eyes, for the first time he called her by name:

“Frieda, you are afraid of me!”

“You're getting ahead of yourself”

“Can it be, that my warm nature doesn't affect you at all?”

“Why not? Do you really think that you are so attractive?”

“For a lot of women.”

“There is where *I* am different. – I'm not like you at all!”

“Someone put you to sleep, I will wake you up. I swear to you I can wake you up, life is too sweet, you don't want to live? Let me teach you, I know life!”

He spoke quickly. He had leaned so close to Frieda that she could feel his hot breath. It seemed like her hair, which was being blown by the wind, was moving to his fast, hot breathing, and when she felt his fingers touch her arm, she wildly sprung back from him. He understood her recoil, and did not say a single word on the way back.

When they got back to the house he said:

“I wonder about you! It is easy to remain true, when life is not interesting, when one does not meet people who try to make us forget the loved one, but to remain true under the drive of an interesting life, to remain true when other men are seeking your love, is really an heroic deed!”

Frieda laughed at him.

But alone in her room, she began to ask herself questions: What am I doing? Denying myself love because I am true to Edward, or because I love him? Now I don't have the excuse that I don't meet better men than my husband, and nevertheless I long for him. It seems Friend Mozer is a very interesting person.

As she fell asleep she worried: For more than a half year she had heard nothing from Edward.

The eternal wife!

## A Disappointment

Frieda didn't even notice that Fall had arrived. The awful rainy days now only bothered her in as much as the children could not go out to get fresh air, and that made them pale and restless. It also made for sleepless nights for Frieda, but for all that, she was so very busy with her work, that nothing, even the changes in the sun bothered her. If her Mother did not remind her that she need to put on warmer clothes, she would still be going around in her summer dresses.

She worked until late in the night. Writing, changing whole scenes, rewriting and truly enjoying the creative process.

She was no longer despairing. Helen assured her that not all managers demanded such a price as fat Mr. B., and she was certain that in a short period of time she would meet such a man, one who wouldn't even look to see if she had eyes as long as she wrote well.

Above all, Helen became warmer toward Frieda. Since Frieda turned down Friends Mozer's declaration of love, Helen had gained more respect for her. She understood how serious Frieda was in her work and in her convictions.

Frieda now had very little time for the children. She was very pleased that children can forget so fast, so quickly get used to others. The children were happy, but Frieda, with her longing nature, often thought about how distant the children were from her, and how Bobby seldom asked about his Father.

“And why would he be better than his Father? Does Edward ask about him? He seems to be happy that I have lifted the burden from him!”

The same evening that she had that thought her Mother asked:

“Shouldn't he have sent a check?”

“Who?” Frieda asked, knowing quite well who her Mother was referring to.

“Your husband, it seems he has totally forgotten that he is a father.”

“And do we need his ten dollars a month?” Frieda asked.

“No, in truth, you are earning enough, more than you and the children need, but you are not dressing yourself. If you wanted to buy a new coat, you couldn't do it. How long can you wear your old clothes? Once every few months he could send a check.”

Her words got Frieda to thinking.

“It is really not normal, already several months and not *one* word, maybe something has happened to him?”

She thought back to earlier times when he traveled and did not write for several days, and how she suffered, how she worried. Once she was so certain that he was laying somewhere in a hospital, that she began telephoning hospitals. Then he had a good laugh at her fright. Now he would laugh even

more at her feelings of panic over him, if he knew.

Frieda was really ashamed, but she was so upset that evening, that she couldn't work.

In that moment she wanted to telephone his Mother, and ask if Edward had written her. She went to the telephone, and her heart was beating so hard, that she was afraid others could hear it, and she sat back down.

As hard as she tried to forget, it was impossible: "Something must have happened to him!" kept pounding in her weary head.

She was very tired, she had worked hard. In a few days she would have to meet a certain manager. Helen would introduce them. Helen was sure that he would be a connoisseur of Frieda's work.

One day before the agreed date, she received from Helen a sort of letter:

"Dearest!

I am leaving early tomorrow for Europe, will you come to see me at the ship? It was very unexpected. I am going to write about certain things. I tried to contact my friend about you, but he is not in New York today. We will have to delay that for several months. Meantime, work hard, child, that is the surest path to success.

Will you come tomorrow?

Your Helen"

Everything went dark before Frieda's eyes. The hand holding the letter was numb.

"Delay for several months!"

Did Helen, the successful Helen, have any idea of Frieda's struggles, of Frieda's hard work, at night when others were sleeping and her fingers were so tired they were like broken? Did she not understand how impossible the waiting was for her? How horrible the waiting was? How horrible the long boring days of uninspiring work in her office, while her head was occupied with other people's important work.

And regardless of all that, Frieda really needed the money.

She was so tired. She had counted on a real vacation with the children in the near future. That thought had helped her get through the hard times.

But now, now to have to wait several months, that was horrible!

She was very disappointed. She did not know that success was not far from her door.

## At the Door to Success

Then, just when everything looked empty, she ran into her old friend, Herold Wilman.

He had just returned from Europe, and at a banquet that was being given in his honor, he saw Frieda again.

And suddenly, everything was different. The good, old Wilman, who had once, sympathetically, sought her out in her bad times. He now, out of sympathy for her, started reading Frieda's "scribblings" as he called them. But when he reread the first act of a play, he became so absorbed that he forgot to eat lunch.

After that afternoon he introduced her to a manager and gave him the play along with such warm words, that Frieda thought it was all a dream.

The manager was an elderly man, and when Frieda first met him, she was afraid of him. He looked so serious, so business-like that she was afraid that he would be too severe with her work.

Very little came from that first meeting. He took the play, promised to read it, and didn't say another word.

Frieda did not know when she should return, what she should do. But her patience was so completely gone, that she had given up her job.

Now began long days of waiting.

She couldn't write. She was too agitated, and even though she had the time, she asked Aunt Becky not to tell the children she was in the house. She locked herself in her room and stared at the ceiling. Her thoughts were a confused dance.

When the telephone rang, her hands trembled so much that it scared her. When she was away with the children in the park, she would rush home in case there was a letter waiting for her there.

Meanwhile, the weeks passed. Frieda was beginning to run a little short of money, yet now she thought very little about money. The main thing was that she had something to say, something that she wanted others to know, and something that she hoped would help people a little to better themselves, and that that something would soon be given to the people.

It three weeks it would be a year that she had left Edward, and now in these stormy days she also thought about it and often imagined her earlier life when a dollar played such a big role.

Now she was much poorer than before, but it was not in her to think about money. Money was not important now.

It was early Friday when she received the letter asking her to come to the manager.

That Friday would always be a beloved day in her memory.

The serious old man was a new person. He was cheerful and talked to her like an equal, not like before, looking elsewhere.

“Mrs. Gilbert, I think we will do some business.”

“You liked it?” Frieda asked in such an excited, curious tone that the old fellow smiled. She did not understand that her excitement would cost her money. The more she showed her curiosity, the less he would pay her for her work.

But what did Frieda care now about money? He liked it, it was going to be performed! That was already enough!

She had forgotten that when she left her husband, she was so embittered against him, against their circumstances which makes the greater number of married women slaves day and night. She had hoped for money, money that would have made her life easier, money that would take away all of the rough work that she could never get used to. Money that would make her independent of any man!

Now she only thought of success, and as the old man spoke it seemed to her that her heart had stopped beating.

“When will it be performed?”

“You are different from the average writer. You are not asking about the money?”

Frieda could not spend much time with the business negotiations. She was too excited. And when she came home with a signed contract, her brother was very upset that she did not take a lawyer with her. She could have gotten more money.

But Frieda simply laughed at him. If the play would be a success, it would be like she got more money, more than she ever dreamed of having.

## A Terrible Discovery

After a short time they called Frieda to the theater. The preparations for the first rehearsals were starting.

The older fellow sent for her to talk about certain characters and which actors would be appropriate to play them, and about the staging of some of the scenes.

Sometimes she would have to go to his office and a lot of times she would have to look for him in the wings of the other theaters under his direction.

That is how she got closer to knowing the theaters and the theater workers.

The days for her were carefree, because in her pocket was a checkbook and the children were at the park with a nurse.

It often happened that she would clash with the old fellow. He wanted to change so many things in her work that once she got so angry that she asked for the play back.

Nothing came of all that. When she yelled, he backed off a little.

Though she did not want to think about Edward, she had to anyway.

Can it be that he has forgotten the children? His Mother telephoned her and with a broken heart complained that she did not know anything about him. Frieda knew full well how much he loved his Mother and the children.

“This can not be a good thing, it is as though he were at the bottom of the ocean!” cried his Mother, and Frieda could feel the deep accusation in her tone.

In her dealings with the manager she often had the occasion to watch the rehearsals of other plays, and Frieda was greatly interested. She learned so much from them. It was not the polished, exceptional plays that were performed so perfectly before the eyes of the spectators, it was the raw material, full of mistakes, that one could learn a lot from, especially technique.

Once while watching such a rehearsal, Frieda was struck by a certain half-crazy, half-comic type.

The personage was well-known to her, she almost knew his sayings by heart!

He was an interesting tramp who she had met in the mountains the first summer after her marriage.

He had a tent next to hers, and Edward liked him so much, that he spent a lot of time with him.

Together they climbed the mountain, caught fish together, and laughed at the world together.

He was a very unusual individual, his sayings were original and he had a unique philosophy.

When Edward tried from time to time to talk about writing, he would always say that the philosophical



poet would one day be an important personage in his first drama.

And now Frieda saw that personage tread the boards on a New York stage!

This fellow dragged one foot a bit, had the same crooked smile, the same successful sayings!

Frieda sat as though hypnotized in the half-dark theater and followed every tiny detail of the play.

The main heroine was a woman, a very noble, very idealistic woman. Her deeds were so good, it was as though the author wanted to make a goddess out of her.

Frieda laughed at the first thought that struck her: "Perhaps Edward wrote this!" No, she was sure he would not write like that for a woman. Sometimes he would behave with her like some sort of superman, but later – Frieda did not want to think about the later. One thing was certain, that his thoughts toward women were very bitter.

But later after the second curtain fell, she could not hold herself back any longer. Is it possible that someone else met their old acquaintance and so cleverly reproduced him?

In the wings she asked:

"Where is the author? I would like to meet him."

The director's face fell sad, and he quietly answered as though in the presence of a cadaver:

"No, you can't see him."

"Why?!" Frieda asked and felt like something in her was about to break.

"Because he is very sick. He is near death, perhaps he is already gone."

"What is his name?"

"Wait, it just occurred to me, perhaps you are related to him? His name is also Gilbert, Edward Gilbert!"

Red, fiery figures began to dance before Frieda's eyes.

In that second she did not think about the words in the play, nor of the actress who was very similar to her, and not of her husband's wrongs. She forgot all of that, forgot about the director who was looking questioning at her and asked:

"Are you not feeling well?"

Frieda quickly answered:

"Yes, very well!" and with a trembling hand she wiped the cold sweat from her brow. She now realized that soon they would both become famous individuals, and the world must not know about their own personal drama. Suddenly, she laughed out loud: "Why do I care about the world now?!"

“Give me his address, where is he?”

When she took the little slip of paper with the address on it and ran off, the puzzled director shrugged his shoulders.

“Strange people, these authors,” he quietly said to himself.

## Her Awakening

In spite of the fact that the train ran fast, she had the impression that Death was running even faster.

Before she started on the long trip, she telephoned the hospital where Edward lay.

“Yes, he is still alive, but it is only a question of days, perhaps hours,” came the answer from a distant voice.

Without any other considerations, she went to him.

During the few minutes she spent at the house, she didn't even look at the children. In this moment nothing else was important. Edward was dying and she wanted to see him!

Only after she collapsed onto a seat in the corner of the rail car did she feel how her every limb was exhausted.

But she only thought about her husband. The words: “He is near death,” had erased all of his failings.

He was dying somewhere in a middle-western state, among strangers, alone, and she, Frieda, his one-time lover was living peacefully in New York unknowing!

However, she was the mother of his children, had he forgotten that? Would he feel so much bitterness toward her even now in his last hours that he could not forgive her?

Now she was judging herself very severely. She was the one who upset his life. If she did not have in her such rebellious blood, they would still be living together and raising their children.

But when Frieda remembered their life together especially the last few years, she was glad that she separated from him.

“If I had stayed with him much longer, it could have happened that we would have come to blows!” she thought, and was happy that they were separated. She had made something from that which nature had given her. In a short time she would be famous, and he, however, had written such a wonderful thing that it would have enslaved him in “making a living” for her and the children, and his talent would have been put to sleep for ever! It is better this way.

Lost in thought she forgot where she was, and suddenly remembered: He is near death! Perhaps, he is already dead.

It seemed to her as though someone screamed the words through the darkness, screamed them right in her face from the passing darkness outside.

She should be jumping up and tearing at her hair, she couldn't comprehend how she was able to stay so calm.

“Am I not in love with him?” she asked herself now, and began to search her heart. Can it be that it is simply pity, and the memories that were driving her to him?

No, Frieda was sure that she did love him, that she was flying to his side because she loved him. A thousand little details had convinced her of it.

Hasn't he been, against her will, the center of all her thoughts? How could she now be silent? Why wasn't she crying out at the top of her voice?! She asked herself these questions as the big tears ran down her face. She discretely wiped them away. She did not want the others on the train to see her sorrow.

Around midnight the train stopped for a long time at the station of a small town. Frieda made use of the occasion to telephone the hospital. Until the answer came, it seemed to her that every hair on her head was on edge, and that all of the people who were quickly eating their sandwiches in the little restaurant in the station were looking at her.

“He is still alive,” was the answer.

It seemed to Frieda as though the train took years before it pulled out of the station.

It was a foggy, gray early morning when she arrived at the hospital.

At first the people in the office did not want to let her in. But now her tightly controlled nerves exploded and she began pounding her fists against the glass door until it worked.

Once inside they told her that he had been sick for weeks – typhus!

His heart was strong and had withstood the horrible battle with fever, but it was difficult to say how long he could hold out, because he was very weak and often it was a question of minutes.

He was brought to the hospital from his camp in the mountains. Apparently, the waters there were full of typhus bacillus.

They did not want to let Frieda go to him. He was resting.

## A Letter

It was already the fourth week that Frieda was at the hospital, and Edward had seen nothing of her. She saw him every day, and lived with him. The nurses forced her to eat something, but she didn't know what it was. Like a guilty dog, she laid by his door from the beginning until late at night.

And there was no hope. Many days the fever was lower, but then his pulse would be so rapid that the nurse's face grew long, and Frieda could tell that they thought it was his last moment.

Then the nurses let Frieda come closer, but Edward did not know her, he gave no sign of life. When he spoke his voice was so weak, child-like, it reminded her of Bobby's little voice, and her heart was torn to pieces.

She did not allow herself to analyze her feelings. Had she forgiven him? Was it all a mistake? Is it the shadow of Death that made her forget the past?

Right now she did not want to know. Even in her Mother's letter she only read the first line: "The children are, thank G-d, healthy." She did not want to know any more.

In her room lay a mountain of newspapers. They reached nearly to the attic. She kept them "for better times." And when a young doctor showed her her own picture in a magazine, she shrugged her shoulders as though she were looking at a stranger.

She was famous – he said. – See what the critics said about your play.

And Frieda asked:

"What is his pulse now, Doctor? Does he seem a little better today?"

"Perhaps," said the Doctor hopefully, and then he changed the subject.

One afternoon he was feeling very bad. Frieda, by the door, saw how the nurses ran about and how serious the chief doctor's face was. "Already thirty-six hours that we can not feel his pulse," she heard the Doctor say to the Professor.

"Let me in!" she begged.

"No!" the Professor said sternly, "Perhaps a miracle will happen. The slightest excitement could kill him."

Like a wild-woman she ran into the room. On an envelope in Edward's handwriting was written: "Only on my death, send this to my wife, Frieda Gilbert."

And Frieda Gilbert read:

"Dearest,

"How different this letter will be from my last one. Now the bitterness will be absent, the ironic,

because now I understand you more, now I would fall at your feet and beg you for forgiveness, but it is too late. When you read these lines, I will already be dead.

“No, I did not do it myself. Even in the darkest moments of my life, when I longed for you so, when I had forgotten everything (only my stubbornness prevented me from running to you), even then I never thought of killing myself. I may be a lot of things, but I am not a coward.

“Death came to me in the form of a typhus bacillus there on the mountain, where I had so longed for you, where I learned to understand you better.

“It is difficult for me to write. The nurse says that I have a 102 degree fever. I also know that Death is looking me in the face. The good nurse says, no. She didn't want me to write, but I forced her. I want to live, and make you the heroine of my next play.

“What have I done? Learned, tried to correct the big mistake, that my past life had become. I can't comprehend how I could have behaved like that toward you. But believe me, it was the circumstances, the daily struggle to live that made me into what I was then.

“If I should live, I will go to you and beg forgiveness. If not, I want you to go see my play, and there you will find the assurance of how ardently I have loved you.

“I also want that the children – – –“

The letter ended there, and in another handwriting in the corner of the letter was written:

“Mr. Gilbert now has a temperature of one hundred and five degrees: I have taken the pen from him.

The nurse. January 8<sup>th</sup>.”

## Resurrection of the Dead

Through the keyhole she could see how they had Edward sitting up for the first time.

Her joy was so great that she didn't notice that someone was opening the door, until she got a sharp smack on the nose that nearly knocked her over.

It was the young doctor, a generally debonair person, who now laughed out loud:

“When one stands behind the wall, Mrs. Gilbert...”

“It doesn't bother me,” Frieda tried to reassure him, but from her eyes ran tears, and from her nose, blood.

Now, since she had to change her bloody blouse, it was another fifteen minutes before she could go to her husband.

During that time Edward asked:

“Miss Sheri, no more fever?”

“No more fever.”

“I can sit up now?”

“Fifteen minutes every day.”

“And write?”

“In a few months, or so.”

“I mean a letter, Miss Sheri.”

“Not that either.”

“How can you be so mean? Here, write for me.”

“Not now.”

“May I see my letters?”

She read to him a few letters from his manager.

“I don't have any other letters?”

“No.”

“And Mrs. Gilbert...,” he wanted to ask something, but he was so pale that the nurse laid him back

down.

“You know, Miss Sheri, it seems to me that my room is covered with a thick net, and the net will not let me out of here.”

“Forget about such things. Would you like to see Mrs. Gilbert?” she asked, not understanding why Frieda was so late.

“She won't want to see me,” he answered, sadly.

“What if you find out that you are mistaken?”

“The only thing that would convince me, would be if she suddenly sprung up out of the floor by my bed, right there next to the flowers. Who sent me those flowers?”

“Mrs. Gilbert.”

“Where is she?” she asked in such an excited tone, that the nurse took his pulse.

“If you will be calm, I will allow you to see her. She has been her for two months.”

Edward did not utter a single word in reply, but the sheet across his chest was heaving quickly.

“Nu, you are not happy?” the nurse asked.

“I am afraid that you will soon say that I am too excited and give me new orders,” he answered with a smile.

Just then, Frieda entered the room.

Frieda's nose had taken a beating, and it was good that she could now talk about it.

“A pretty nose I bring to you.”

“Mrs. Gilbert got into a fight with someone,” the nurse laughed, and left the room.

Frieda came closer.

Edward stretched out his hand to her.

“Welcome to our world!” Frieda said.

“Should I be happy that I came back from the other world?”

“Certainly!”

“Will you let me into *your* world?”

As an answer, Frieda laid her head on his bed.



His thin hands tenderly stroked her hair.

Later, she showed him letters about his and her successes, but they were more cheered by a small photo where Bobby was wearing his sister's dress.

“She can already walk on her own?” he asked.

“Quite a distance.”

“And Bobby misses me?”

“Very much,” Frieda answered, thinking about the frivolous nature of a child's memory.

“And you, Frieda, did you miss me?” he said, and searched for something in her eyes. Frieda avoided his look, not wanting her thoughts to fly back to those first days of their marriage when she had totally, with her heart and soul, given herself over to him, and how he had misunderstood and misused that gift... No, now she would be more careful. Regardless of how her heart was beating for him, she would try to restrain it, or keep it from him...

Feeling his gaze upon her, she slowly answered:

“Yes, I have also missed you, but my own feelings have only played a small role. I have worked very hard, and not bothered much about my heart.”

“And now, Frieda, can you find a small place for me in your heart?”

“Yes, I can,” was her short answer, but she took great pleasure in the thought: “He loves me, he begs me! He loves me,” but she did not want to show him her great joy... She did not want to renew her chains...

“You “can?” and you want?” he asked and looked so deeply in her eyes that Frieda was ashamed of her practically, her heart grew warm, and on their own her ears began a cheerful ringing, and all the coldness which she had drawn in to herself melted away. From her eyes thick tears began to flow onto his wasted hands, and her dry lips feverishly kissed his.

He was happy. Through the window could be seen a new half-moon, and the clear, blue background of the sky brought both of them joy. And as thanks for everything, his weak fingers tried to press hers.

The End