

ON THE 20TH OF JANUARY, LENZ went across the mountains. The summits and the high slopes covered with snow, grey stones all the way down to the valleys, green plains, rocks and pine trees.

It was damp and cold; water trickled down the rocks and gushed over the path. The branches of the pine trees drooped heavily in the moist air. Grey clouds travelled in the sky, but all was so dense – and then the mist rose like steam, slow and clammy, climbed through the shrubs, so lazy, so awkward. Indifferently he moved on; the way did not matter to him, up or down. He felt no tiredness, only sometimes it struck him as unpleasant that he could not walk on his head.

At first there was an urge, a movement inside him, when the stones and rocks bounded away, when the grey forest shook itself beneath him and the mist now blurred its outlines, now half unveiled the trees' gigantic limbs; there was an urge, a movement inside him, he looked for something, as though for lost dreams, but

he found nothing. All seemed so small to him, so near, so wet. He would have liked to put the whole earth to dry behind the stove, he could not understand why so much time was needed to descend a steep slope, to reach a distant point; he thought that a few paces should be enough to cover any distance. Only from time to time, when the storm thrust clouds into the valley, and the mist rose in the forest, when the voices near the rocks awoke, now like thunder subsiding far away, now rushing back towards him, as if in their wild rejoicing they desired to sing the praise of earth, and the clouds like wild neighing horses galloped towards him, and the sunshine pierced in between and came to draw a flashing sword against the snow-covered plains, so that a bright, dazzling light cut across the summits into the valleys; or when the gale drove the clouds downwards and hurled them into a pale-blue lake, and then the wind died down and from the depths of the ravines, from the crests of the pine trees drifted upwards, with a humming like that of lullabies and pealing bells, and a soft red hue mingled with the deep azure, and little clouds on silver wings passed across, and everywhere the mountain tops, sharp and solid, shone and glittered

for miles – then he felt a strain in his chest, he stood struggling for breath, heaving, his body bent forwards, his eyes and mouth wide open; he thought that he must draw the storm into himself, contain it all within him, he stretched himself out and lay on the earth, dug his way into the All, it was an ecstasy that hurt him – he rested and laid his head into the moss and half-closed his eyes, and then it withdrew, away, far away from him, the earth receded from him, became small as a wandering star and dipped down into a roaring stream which moved its clear waters beneath him. But these were only moments; then, soberly, he would rise, resolute, calm, as though a shadow play had passed before his eyes – he remembered nothing.

Towards evening he came to the highest point of the mountain range, to the snow field from which one descended again into the flat country in the west; he sat down on the top. It had grown calmer towards evening; the cloud formations, constant and motionless, hung in the sky; as far as the eyes could reach, nothing but summits from which broad stretches of land descended, and everything so still, so grey, lost in twilight. He experienced a feeling of terrible loneliness; he was



alone, quite alone. He wanted to talk to himself, but he could not, he hardly dared to breathe; the bending of his feet sounded like thunder beneath him, he had to sit down. He was seized with a nameless terror in this nothingness: he was in the void! He leapt to his feet and rushed down the slope.

It had grown dark, heaven and earth were melting into one. It seemed as though something were following him, as though something horrible must catch up with him, something that men cannot bear, as though madness on horseback were chasing him.

At last he heard voices; he was relieved, his heart grew lighter. He was told that another half-hour would see him to Waldbach.

He passed through the village. Lights shone in the windows, he looked inside as he went by: children at table, old women, girls, all with quiet, composed faces. It seemed to him that it was these faces that radiated light; he began to feel quite cheerful, and soon he was at the vicarage in Waldbach.

They were at table when he came in; his blond hair hung in locks about his pale face, his eyes and the corners of his mouth were twitching, his clothes were torn.

Oberlin welcomed him, thinking he was a workman: "You're welcome, although you're a stranger to me."

"I'm a friend of —'s, and convey his regards to you."

"Your name, if you please?"

"Lenz."

"Ha, ha, ha, has it not appeared in print? Haven't I read several dramas ascribed to a gentleman of that name?"

"Yes, but be kind enough not to judge me by them."

The conversation continued, he groped for words and told his story quickly, but in torment; gradually he was calmed by the homely room and the quiet faces that stood out from the shadows; the bright child's face on which the light seemed to rest and which looked up inquisitively and trustingly, and the mother who sat further back in the shadow, motionless as an angel. He began to tell them about his home; he drew a number of costumes; they surrounded him closely, sympathetically, soon he felt at home. His pale childish face, now smiling, his lively manner when telling his story! He became calm; it seemed to him as though familiar figures, forgotten faces stepped again from the darkness, old songs awoke, he was away, far away.

At last it was time to go. He was escorted across the street, the vicarage was too small, he was given a room in the schoolhouse. He went upstairs. It was cold up there, a large room, empty, a high bedstead in the background. He put down the light on the table and walked about. He recalled what day it was, how he had come, where he was. The room in the vicarage with its lights, its dear faces; it was like a shadow to him, a dream, and he felt the emptiness again, as he had felt it on the mountain; but now he could not fill it in with anything, the light had gone out, darkness swallowed everything. An unspeakable terror possessed him. He leapt to his feet, ran out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house; but in vain, all was dark, a nothing – even to himself he was a dream. Single, isolated thoughts flickered up, he held them fast; he felt constrained to say “Our Father” again and again. He could no longer find himself. An obscure instinct urged him to save himself; he ran into stones, tore himself with his nails. The pain began to recall him to consciousness; he hurled himself into the well but the water was not deep, he splashed about.

Then people came; they had heard him, they called out to him. Oberlin came running out. Lenz

had come to his senses, the full consciousness of his situation returned to him, he felt more at ease. Now he was ashamed of himself and regretted that he had frightened the good people; he told them it was his habit to take a cold bath, and went back to his room. At last exhaustion gave him rest.