

**Michael Kumpfmüller**  
*Die Herrlichkeit des Lebens* (KiWi, 2011)  
**‘The Glory of Life‘**

Chapters 1-4  
Translated by Anthea Bell

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**1**

The doctor arrives late on a Friday evening in July. The last part of the journey, in an open car from the railway station, seemed never-ending, it is still very hot and he is exhausted, but now he is here. Elli and the children are waiting for him in the front hall. He hardly has time to put his luggage down before Felix and Gerti fall on him, talking nineteen to the dozen. They have been beside the sea since early morning, they'd like to go straight back there and show him the enormous sand castle they have built. Oh, do leave him alone for now, Elli tells them, holding Hanna half-asleep in her arms, but they keep chattering on about their day. How was the journey, asks Elli, would you like something to eat? Would he like something to eat? the doctor wonders, because he has no appetite. All the same, he briefly goes upstairs to their holiday apartment, and the children show him where they are sleeping. They are eleven and twelve, and think up all kinds of reasons why they can't go to bed just yet. The governess has prepared a plate of nuts and fruit, there is a carafe of water ready, he drinks some and tells his sister how grateful he is to her. Over the next three weeks he will be eating here with the family, they will spend plenty of time together, and those weeks will surely show the long-term prospects for his health.

In fact the doctor has no great hopes of this visit to the seaside. He has some bad months behind him, he didn't want to stay at home with his parents any longer, so the invitation to go and stay on the Baltic coast was very timely. His sister found the accommodation in a newspaper advertisement promising excellent beds and reasonable prices, along with balconies, verandas and loggias, on the outskirts of woodland and with a wonderful sea view.

His room is at the far end of the corridor. It is not very large, but there is a desk, the mattress is firm, and on the woodland side of the house it also has a narrow balcony that promises peace and quiet, although children's voices can be heard coming from a nearby building. He unpacks his things: a couple of suits, underwear, books, writing paper. He could write to tell Max how the conversation in his new publisher's offices went, but he can do that some other time during his stay here. It was strange to be in Berlin again after so many years, and twenty-four hours later here he is in Müritz, in a house that calls itself "Good Luck". Elli has already made a joke of that, saying she hopes it means that the doctor really will put on a little weight in the sea air, although they both know how unlikely that is. Everything repeats itself, he thinks, his summers have been spent in some hotel or sanatorium for years now, followed by long winters in the city, where he is sometimes confined to his bed for weeks on end. He is glad to be alone, for a little while he sits on the balcony, where he can still hear the voices, and then he goes to bed and effortlessly falls asleep.

When he wakes next morning, he has slept for over eight hours. He knows where he is at once; he is at the seaside, in this room, far from all that he knows only too well. The children's voices that lulled him to sleep yesterday are back again, singing a song in Hebrew, it's not difficult to work that out. They're from the east, he thinks, there are holiday homes for such children. Two days ago in Berlin, Pua, who is teaching him Hebrew, mentioned that there is a home like that in Müritz, and here it is next door. He goes out on the balcony and looks across at the children. They have stopped singing now, they are sitting at a long table outside the house having breakfast, sounding very noisy and cheerful. A year ago, in Planá, such noises disturbed him badly, but now he is almost glad of their chattering. He asks his sister whether she knows anything about them, but Elli says no, and seems surprised to find him suddenly showing such lively interest. She asks about last night, whether he likes the room; yes, he does indeed like it, he's looking forward to going down to the beach.

It's a longer way than he thought; you have to walk for almost quarter of an hour. Gerti and Felix carry the bags with the bathing things and the picnic, they run ahead and then come back to him as he follows more slowly. The sea is silvery and calm in the sunlight, there are children in colourful beach clothes everywhere, paddling in the shallow water or playing ball. Luckily Elli has hired a wickerwork beach chair specially

for him to the right of the landing stage, so he has a good view of everything. Sand castles up to knee height have been built all around the striped wicker chairs, and at least every other castle is decorated with a Star of David picked out in seashells.

Gerti and Felix want to go in the water, and are glad that he will come too. The sea is comfortably warm near the shore, but then he swims out with the two of them, until they meet colder currents. Gerti wants him to show her how to float and play dead, which isn't difficult, and so they drift for a while in the glittering water, until Elli calls to them from the beach. He mustn't overdo things, she warns him. Wasn't his temperature slightly raised yesterday evening? Yes, the doctor agrees, it was, but it's gone down again this morning. All the same, it does him good to sit quietly in the beach chair now; the temperature must be well over thirty degrees, and it is almost unbearable out of the shade. Gerti and Felix shouldn't spend too long in the sun either. Just now they are busy laying pine-cones out in the sand to form the initials of his name. He simply sits there for a long time, watching the children from the holiday home, now and then hearing a scrap of Yiddish or an admonishing voice from one of the carers, who themselves are only in their mid-twenties. Gerti has made friends with a group of girls, and when asked about them she says yes, they've come from Berlin, they're on holiday here like us, in a holiday home not far from our apartment.

The doctor could sit like this for hours. Elli keeps asking how he is feeling, always in the tone of maternal concern that he has noticed in her before. He has never been able to talk to Elli as he can talk to Ottla, yet now he mentions Hugo and Else Bergmann, who have invited him to go to Palestine with them. To Tel Aviv, where there is also a beach with laughing children, as there is here. Elli doesn't have to say much, the doctor knows what she thinks of such plans, and at heart he doesn't believe in them himself. However, these children are delightful, and he is happy and grateful to be here among them. He even manages to sleep for more than an hour in the mid-day heat, amidst all the activity, before Gerti and Felix come back to get him to go into the water again.

On the second day he begins to distinguish faces for the first time. His eyes no longer wander at random, he develops preferences, sees a pair of long girlish legs, a mouth, hair, a brush passing through that hair, now and then a glance, over there the tall, dark girl who sometimes glances his way and then acts as if she hadn't. He knows two or three of the girls by their voices now, he watches them jumping into the water, quite far out, running

through the hot sand, hand in hand, and giggling all the time. He has difficulty in guessing their age. Sometimes he would put it at seventeen, then they seem to be still children after all, and this changeability is part of the pleasure of watching them.

He has taken a particular liking to the tall, dark girl. He could ask Gerti her name, because Gerti has already talked to her, but he doesn't want to show his interest like that. He would like to make her laugh which, sad to say, she never does. She has a defiant look about her, as if something has been weighing on her mind for a long time. Late in the afternoon, he sees her from his balcony as she sets the table in the garden of the holiday home, and then he sees her again in the evening, acting as the female lead in a play performed by the children. He can't hear her words, but he sees the way she moves, the ardour with which she plays her part, obviously the role of a bride who is to be married off against her will, or so at least he concludes from watching the action. He hears the children's laughter and the applause, which the dark girl acknowledges by bowing several times.

Even as he is telling Elli and the children about it, he is overcome by melancholy. He knew theatrical people before the war, that wild man Löwy, whom his father despised so much, the young actresses who had barely memorized the Yiddish text of their parts – but how forcefully they played them, he had thought at the time.

When Gerti brings the girl over to his beach chair next morning, he sees her smile for the first time. She is shy at first, but when he tells her that he saw her acting in the play she is soon ready to trust him. He learns that her name is Tile, he pays her compliments. She looked like a real actress, he tells her, to which she replies that she hopes she looked like a bride, because she wasn't playing the part of an actress. The doctor likes her answer, they laugh, and begin to get better acquainted. Yes, she says, she's from Berlin, and she also knows who the doctor is, because weeks ago she put one of his books in the window display of the bookshop where she works. She doesn't seem to want to say any more about herself, or not as long as Gerti is there with them, so the doctor suggests a walk along the landing-stage together. It turns out that she would like to be a dancer, which also explains why she is troubled; she is at odds with her parents, who won't entertain the idea at any price. The doctor doesn't really know how to console her; dancing is a profession as beautiful as it is demanding, he says, and if she really believes in herself, then she will be a dancer some day. He thinks he can see her flying over the stage,

bending, her arms and legs pleading with an audience. Ever since she was eight, she says, she has known with her whole body that she wants to dance. For a long time the doctor says nothing, as she looks expectantly at him, half child, half woman.

They go walking again the next day, and the day after that. The girl has spent a long time thinking about the doctor's remarks, but she is not sure if she really understood what he meant. In retrospect, he is not satisfied with his reply to her. Perhaps he is wrong to encourage her dream, perhaps he has no right to do so. He talks about his work at the insurance institute, and what it is like at night when he is writing, although he is not writing anything at the moment. He isn't working for the insurance institute any more either, he retired from it a year ago, and that is how he comes to be sitting here on the landing stage, with a pretty girl from Berlin who will be a dancer in a few years' time. Now she is smiling again, and she invites the doctor to come for a meal at the holiday home tomorrow, there is always a little celebration there on Friday evening, she has already asked the carers if she may ask him. He says yes at once, for one thing because it is a Friday, so now, at the age of forty he will be celebrating the Sabbath eve for the first time.

He can see preparations for it from his balcony that afternoon. He has retreated to his room, where he is writing postcards about the sea, and the ghosts from which he seems to have escaped for now. He writes to Robert and the Bergmanns, using the same phrasing some of the time, he writes at length about the children. He knows from Tile that the holiday home goes by the name of "Luck for Children", so he writes: With the idea of testing my mobility, after many years of ill-health spent bedridden and with headaches, I have risen from my bed to pay a little visit to the Baltic. And I for one have been in luck, he writes, fifty yards from my balcony there is a holiday home run by the Jewish People's Home in Berlin. If I look through the trees, I can see the children playing. Happy, healthy, passionate children. Jews from the east, saved by Jews of the west from the dangers of Berlin. The holiday home, the woods and the beach are full of singing half the day and half the night. When I am with them I am not exactly happy, but on the verge of happiness.

There is still time for a little walk, and then he slowly begins getting ready for the evening. He takes his dark suit out of the wardrobe, checks his tie in front of the mirror.

He is curious to find out what awaits him at the holiday home, and how exactly the evening party will go – the songs, the children’s faces – but that is all, he hopes for nothing for himself.

## 2

Dora sits at the kitchen table, gutting fish for supper. She has been thinking of him for days, and suddenly here he is. Tile, of all people, has brought him, and he's alone, without the woman from the beach. He stands in the doorway, looking first at the fish, then at her hands, a little censoriously, she thinks, but there is no doubt about it, this is the man from the beach. She is so surprised that she doesn't hear exactly what he is saying, but it something about her hands, such delicate hands, he says, doing such bloody work. At the same time he is looking at her full of curiosity, amazed to see her busy with what, as a cook, it is her job to do. Unfortunately he doesn't stay for long. Tile wants to show him the rest of the holiday home. He lingers beside the table for a moment, and then he is gone.

Briefly, she feels stunned, hears the voices outside, Tile's laughter, footsteps retreating. She wonders what is going on, imagines him standing in Tile's room, unaware that Dora shares it with her. Does Tile tell him so? She suspects not. She thinks of the first time she saw him on the beach, with that woman and the three children. She didn't take much notice of the woman, she had eyes only for the young man and the way he swam, the way he moved, the way he sat in his wicker beach chair reading. At first she thought he might be part-Indian because of his dark complexion. He's married, she has told herself, what are you hoping for, but all the same she goes on hoping. Once she followed him and his family into the little town, she dreamed of him, she also dreamed of Hans, but she prefers not to think of Hans now, or only with a vague sense that she ought to be thinking of him.

Two hours later, at supper, she meets the doctor again. He is sitting a long way off, at the end of the table beside Tile, who is almost bursting with pride, because but for Tile he wouldn't be here. She has been talking about the doctor at every opportunity for two days, the doctor is a writer, you'll all meet him on Friday, and now the doctor also turns out to be the man from the beach. Tile introduced him at once, then came the words of blessing, the wine, the sharing of bread. The doctor looks as if most of this were entirely new to him, and glances at her again and again all through the meal, with that wistful expression that she feels she already knows. Later, before he leaves, he comes over to her and asks her name. She knows his already, she has to help him get the hang of hers. He stands there, blue-eyed, nods, and thinks about her name, he obviously likes it.

She tells him in far too much of a rush: I saw you on the beach with your wife – although she knows it can't have been his wife, or why has she felt so light at heart since he came to stand close to her in the kitchen? The doctor laughs and confirms it: no, not his wife, his sister. And the children are also his sister's. He has another sister here at the resort as well, Valli with her husband Josef, she may have noticed them already. He asks when he can see her again. I'd like to see you again, he says, or maybe it was: I hope we'll meet again. She feels like shouting out loud: as soon as you wake up, whenever you like. He suggests the beach, after breakfast, although she would rather have had his company alone with her in the kitchen. He invites Tile to go for the walk with them. She hadn't realized that Tile was still around, but unfortunately there she is; anyone can see that she is enamoured of the doctor, although she is only seventeen and has as good as no experience at all of men.

Dora liked the girl from the first, for they are rather similar. Tile too always has to say whatever comes into her head. Tile is not really as pretty as all that, but anyone can see how full of life she is, at ease in her body with its long, slim legs and the figure of a dancer. Dora has seen her dance, and knows how she can shed tears and then laugh next moment, sun and showers like April weather.

Tile talked to her until well after midnight, recapitulating all the details of the doctor's visit, spelling out exactly what he said about the house, the food, the solemnity of the occasion, and the way they were all so happy. Dora does not comment. She has made her own observations, going over them, indulging in them this way and that, as if this man and the brief moments she has spent close to him were something to which she must abandon herself. Tile has been asleep for some time when a sensation begins to spread through her, something like a musical note or a perfume, almost imperceptible at first, then taking possession of her as if with a mighty roar.

Next morning on the beach he offers her his hand in greeting. He has been waiting for her and thinks she looks tired. What's the matter? he seems to be saying. And since Tile is there and his niece Gerti, she just manages to smile at him, says something about the sea, about the light surrounding them; now, in this light and although they have spoken only a few sentences to each other, she must live with those sentences, those glances. He obviously doesn't want to go into the water, Tile does, and so they have a

few minutes to themselves. Over there, his sister has already seen them. How could she have thought the woman was his wife?

And now they talk, and forget that they are talking, for as soon as one of them has said something the words are gone, they are sitting on the beach as if beneath a dome swallowing up all sounds at once. The doctor asks her question after question, where she comes from, how she lives, looking at her mouth, looking at it all the time, whispering something about her hair, her figure, what he has seen, what he sees now – all without a single word. Now she is talking about her father, how she ran away, first to Krakow, then to Breslau, as if she had left home only to be here with this man one day. She talks about her first weeks in Berlin, so she remembers later, and then she suddenly stops talking when Tile comes back. It is only because Tile arrives and startles her by putting wet hands around her from behind that she remembers she has to go back to the kitchen. The doctor stands up at once and asks if he may go with her. Unfortunately Tile wants to come too, but never mind, she invites him to supper again.

There's no fish today, this time she is sitting in front of a bowl of beans. She hoped he would come. Oh, lovely, so early, do sit down, I'm really glad to see you, she says. The doctor watches her at work preparing the beans, he says he likes to look at her, has she noticed that? He is sure, he adds, that a great many people look at her in Berlin, and for some rather vague reason she finds that she can say: yes, all the time, in the street, on the tram, in a restaurant if she goes to one, not that she means that's the same as when the doctor looks at her. And that brings them to the subject of Berlin. The doctor loves Berlin, he even knows the Jewish People's Home, and asks how she came to be a cook there. Later he wants her to say something in Hebrew, which he has been trying to learn these last few years from a woman called Puah, unfortunately not very successfully. She has to think for a moment, and then says that she would like to sit next to him at supper, and he replies, also in Hebrew although not entirely fluently, that he has been thinking of that half the night. Then he bends down, takes her hand and kisses it, half-joking, so as not to alarm her. All the same, she does take fright. Later, too, while she is peeling potatoes, she jumps when he happens to touch her hand, alarmed less by him than by herself and her wild feelings, as helpless as if her commitment were entirely unconditional.

After supper that Sunday they go for a walk. They arranged it in a moment when they were on their own on the beach again, not wishing to hurt the feelings of Tile, who still acts as if the doctor were her property. In the afternoon, when they all go into the water, Dora catches herself in the act of comparing herself with Tile. Tile runs into the shallow water on her long legs, splashing it up, but the doctor, who looks to Dora even thinner and more delicate than before, isn't really looking at her. He glances only briefly at Dora herself, but she thinks she senses him examining her, arms, legs, hips, breasts, and she is perfectly happy to think that he sees everything about her and brings it together to form an image, confirming rather than questioning that image as if he had known most of it long ago. The water is warm and shallow, for a while they hesitate to go in, and Tile is already getting impatient, it's to be hoped that she didn't observe the little scene.

His sister is civil rather than friendly when the doctor introduces them that afternoon. They already know about one another from what he has told them. Elli knows that Dora is a cook, preparing the best food in Müritz over there in the holiday home, and Dora knows that but for Elli she wouldn't have met the doctor. She likes the way she talks about him; sad to say, she tells Dora, he has a poor appetite, and it takes a lot of love and patience to get him to eat something now and then.

Dora has put on her dark green beach dress for the walk. It is after nine in the evening, and still quite light, and it is a pleasure to walk beside him and know that he is enjoying it as well. They could sit down on one of the benches on the first landing stage and watch people strolling about, but the doctor wants the two of them to go on. Dora has taken off her shoes, because she likes walking in the sand, the doctor offers her his arm, and soon they are talking about Berlin again. The doctor knows the city from the pre-war years, she is surprised how much he knows; he mentions a couple of places that were important to him, and the Askanischer Hof Hotel, where he once spent a terrible afternoon, but all the same he would like to go back to Berlin all these years later. Would he really? she asks, having arrived in the city more or less by chance herself three years ago. He asks her where she lives in Berlin, what it is like there, he wants to know the strangest things, the price of bread and milk and fuel for heating, the mood in the streets five years after the end of the war. The streets are rough and busy, she tells him, and full of refugees from the east, the place where she lives is crammed with them, ragged families singing all the time who come from the terrible east.

By now their walk along the beach is over, and they are sitting on a narrow bench at the front of the second landing stage, beneath the dim light of a lantern. They are still talking about Berlin, the doctor tells her about his friend Max who has a lover called Emmy there. Now, unfortunately, she must say something about Hans, a couple of remarks anyway, she must at least mention him, particularly as the doctor says something about a fiancée, but that was all a hundred years ago. The doctor begins to dream of what it would be like if he went to Berlin, to which she replies that it would be lovely, because then she could show him everything, the theatres, the music-halls, the crowds milling around on Alexanderplatz, although there are quiet corners as well, she adds, further from the centre, in Steglitz or by the Müggelsee, where the city comes close to the countryside. Who'd would have thought it, says the doctor, I travel to the Baltic and find myself in Berlin! He is very happy to be sitting here with her, he says. She is happy as well.

The others out late have gradually left the landing stage, it must be nearly midnight, they see only an occasional couple here and there, the seagulls sleeping on the bollards, and further off the lights of the hotels. A slight breeze has risen, the doctor asks if she is cold, would she like to go, but she prefers to stay here, she asks him to tell her about the girl in his life, or about that afternoon, assuming that isn't the same thing, and the doctor says yes, it does indeed practically amount to the same thing.

She lies awake for a long time that night. He saw her home about one-thirty, and soon afterwards a storm broke; it gives the impression of being directly above the house, for there are only seconds between the lightning and the following roll of thunder. Half the people staying in the holiday home seem to be awake, including Tile, who is lying in bed and immediately asks where she has been. Did you meet him? Dora says yes, we went for a little walk, and now just listen to all this noise. They wait until the storm passes over. It is noticeably cooler outside. Dora has opened the window to look across at his balcony, but all is dark there.

It rains until next morning, and then on until evening. The doctor does not come until afternoon, but by now it is almost a habit for him to sit there asking her questions, as if he would never run out of them. She likes the civil formality of their conversation, only a façade, as she knows, a disguise for the time being, and they will take it off one day. She says, using the formal *Sie* pronoun to him: I was thinking of you, we talked about you at breakfast today, are you still thinking of Berlin? She thinks of it all the time.

Sometimes she has to reprove herself, because these are only dreams, in her mind she has already taken him to her room in Münzstrasse, although she does not like the room, it has no running water, basically it is just four walls surrounding a wardrobe and a bed, with a dark back yard outside.

She puts his age in the mid-thirties, which would make him about ten years older than her. He is not well, he has told her, his lungs caught a chill, hence the sea and the hotel in the woods; it is only because he hasn't been well for years that he has met her.

It's his mouth, his voice as he pours it out for her to bathe in it. No man has ever looked at her like that before, he sees the flesh under the skin, sees it quivering and trembling, and she is happy with that.

She is very happy one day when he tells her about a dream. In this dream he is going to Berlin, he has been sitting in the train for hours, but for some reason or other it isn't making any progress, to his despair they keep stopping, he won't arrive in time although he is expected at the station, expected to arrive at eight in the evening, and now it is seven and he hasn't even crossed the border. That is the dream. Dora herself has had a dream of that kind now and then, and thinks the most important part is that someone is waiting for him. She wouldn't mind the waiting, she says, she would just sit on a bench for half the night. The doctor says: do you think so? Until yesterday he was addressing her as Fräulein, she liked that, but now he simply calls her Dora, for Dora means "a gift", he only has to take it, she will wait for that.

## 3

What surprises the doctor most is that he is sleeping well. He is about to plunge into a new life, he ought to be afraid, he ought to have doubts, but he sleeps well, the ghosts stay out of sight, although he is always expecting them, expecting to fight the old battles in his mind. This time, however, there does not seem to be a battle, there's a miracle, and the plan that is its result. He does not so much think about her as breathe her in and out, on the afternoons in the kitchen, as they walk through Berlin in their thoughts, during meals, when her fragrance drifts his way. In bed in the evening, he concentrates now and then on something she has said, a certain area of her skin, the hem of her skirt, the way she holds her fork as she eats, or he thinks of yesterday, when he asked her about her father, who is a strictly observant Jew, and with whom she has been at odds for a long time. She does not so far appear in his dreams. But he does not lose her when he is asleep, he knows at once in the morning that she is there somewhere, as if there were a rope between him and her, and they are slowly working their way along it towards each other. As yet he has hardly touched her, but he knows, not just as a matter of marginal importance, that a time is coming when he will touch her, although he does not hate himself for that, it is almost as if it were his right, and the fears of a superstition have been overcome.

For a week they have met every day. He sees his sisters and the children mainly at breakfast, and only yesterday they accused him of having too little time for them. It was Elli who said that, but as if she were really in perfect agreement with him and that girl Dora, with the fact that it gives him something to do in sleepy little Müritz, and he isn't spending his nights writing his strange stories. The doctor has never liked talking about his work. If she were to ask, he would say that he isn't even writing letters, not even to Max, to whom he could always write and say that he is thinking of going to Berlin. But that possibility is too slight, no more than a fleeting idea, something that can hardly be expressed in words, and he fears it would be put to flight by a single misplaced comment.

Max would like the fact that she comes from the east. Since the cities have been full of refugees, everyone is talking about the east, including Max, who hopes for salvation for all Jews from those quarters, but there is no salvation coming, not from the east or anywhere else.

People from the east have left their lives behind them overnight, so Dora is at much greater liberty than the doctor himself, torn further from the east and thus at the same time more bound to it, she knows where his roots are, all the more so because he has pruned them. To the doctor she does not look like a dark character, as Max would probably claim, a figure out of a novel by Dostoyevsky. Emmy too is anything but a dark character. Max's lover is a typical Berlin girl, blonde and blue-eyed, and the only mystery about her is her relationship with Max, who says that Emmy first showed him what physical fulfilment means. He has several times said something of that nature to the doctor, fortunately not going into detail, but Max is his friend, he is married, and it seems that the enchanting Emmy has just tempted him a little way off the beaten track. Fortunately they don't live in the same city, which is also, of course, bad luck, at least for Emmy, who complains that they don't meet nearly often enough. She has complained to the doctor, among others; he visited her in her room near the Zoological Garden on the way here, and he asked her to put herself into Max's position.

Dora laughs at such stories. They are sitting on the beach, telling each other stories about waiting. The doctor himself has spent half his life waiting, or at least that is how he feels in retrospect: you wait, you don't think someone will ever come, and suddenly that very thing has happened.

Next morning it is pouring with rain. The doctor stands on the balcony, watching a great deal of coming and going in the holiday home, because half the children are travelling back to Berlin today. It is Sunday, Tile is one of those who are to leave, at nearly eleven o'clock she is standing in the front hall in her raincoat, fighting back tears. The doctor has given her a goodbye present, a ruby-red scarf that she saw days ago in a shop window. She has often mentioned that scarf, so she is beside herself with delight. We'll see each other in Berlin, promises the doctor, meaning only that he will visit her in her bookshop when he goes back. All the same, she is crying now. The doctor asks why, and she shakes her head and says because she is happy. Does he have the address? The doctor nods, he has written everything down, he will write to her as soon as he knows exactly when he is going to the city, because if it goes on raining like this his sisters will soon want to go home. Now the goodbyes take a long time. Tile strokes the red scarf, the doctor encourages her to get on better with her parents, recently she hasn't liked to imagine

living with them any longer, but the doctor says: you must, think of your dancing shoes, you promised.

He is almost relieved that she has gone. He wouldn't say so in front of Dora, but Dora too looks relieved, although they immediately notice the effect of Tile's absence. As long as the girl was there, they felt that they were being watched, they were not free, but they were less self-conscious.

They have agreed to go for a walk, in spite of the bad weather. Dora said she would come to fetch him at about ten, when the doctor is in his room, reading, and then she arrives half an hour early. She ran through the rain, her heavy hair and her face are all wet. For a moment the doctor hardly recognizes her, but that is because she is in his room. So this is where you're staying, she says, still in the doorway; she hopes she isn't disturbing him. She has no eyes for the room, she just stands there smiling, looking at him, the doctor would only have to get his coat, but instead, without any warning, he embraces her. Or rather he bends down, it is almost a gliding movement, he kisses her hair and forehead, whispering, even the kisses are more or less whispered, he is full of joy. Ever since first seeing her in the kitchen, he says, he has been full of joy. Yes, she says. She goes on leaning in the doorway as if still waiting for them to set off, his coat is hanging over there in the wardrobe, he would only have to fetch it, but he doesn't. He talks about Berlin; if she likes, he will come to Berlin again this summer. Did he really say that? She nods, she kisses his hand, beginning with his fingertips, but then she finally has to take off that silly coat of hers. She seems to be cold, the room isn't well heated, she is wearing a dress that he doesn't know and in which she is bound to be freezing. Don't go away, she says, when he begins to move back because of her coat, and then they stand there for a long time, at a slightly awkward angle, close together, pelvis to pelvis, like a couple. She longed for him at once, she says, back then on the beach, although she couldn't believe it. Now she does. Can one believe in kisses? She wants to know what he is thinking, now, at this very moment, if he ever thought of this. No, don't say it, she whispers, although it is not really clear why she is whispering. Dora has gone to the balcony and is shaking her head over the weather, she has terrible luck with the weather. Now she is sitting on the sofa near the balcony door, where the doctor sits to read now and then, the doctor says something about her dress, she brought it from Berlin, which reminds him that for Dora there was a time before this summer, and also reminds him

what he really wants to know about that time. He thinks how young she is, her life is still ahead of her, he thinks, what right has he, then, to put out his hand for it?

That night the doubts come. It is not a struggle of the kind he knows, yet he lies awake until early morning, the hours drag on, but sleep is out of the question. At the same time his thoughts pass slowly through his head, he can examine them at leisure, without much emotion, as he is surprised to realize, like a bookkeeper drawing up a balance sheet and never doubting the figures. The sequence is the same, he takes the questions as they come, goes through them one by one, and then goes over it all again. He is sick, he is fifteen years older than her, all the same he could try living with her in Berlin, since luckily she is from Berlin, for he has never been attracted to any other city. Those are the circumstances that he thinks are half in favour of the idea, not counting this morning's kisses. Everything else is against it: he has put on hardly any weight while staying here by the sea, he feels weak, he doesn't know how he is to tell his parents that there is someone in his life, a young woman, and from the east at that, the east that his father despises so much. Is he to face his father and say, I met her in Müritz, and I'm going to join her in Berlin? He devises various ways to broach the subject, first with his mother, then with his father. He wonders what's so difficult about it, and finally he is almost reassured, begins all over again from the beginning to see whether he has overlooked anything, the situation in Berlin, the question of a room, and then again: his failing strength, his lack of energy, for which he has reproached himself for over the years without coming to any conclusion.

He tells Robert about that night, not so much because he believes in it but because it is a habit of long standing for them to complain to one another about their nights. Two years ago in the sanatorium, when they met, they often spoke of going to another city. The doctor returns to that subject now, they should both get away quickly, next year at the latest, for instance to the dirty Berlin alleys where the Jews live, where Dora lives, although he doesn't say a word about Dora.

This afternoon they have arranged to make up for the walk they missed. This time she is waiting for him, in the same coat again, a little hesitant, as if she guessed at once that he had spent a poor night. She looks inquiringly at him, but he acts as if nothing were wrong, takes her hand for the first time. It is small and feels dry. As soon as they have

gone a little way they are back where they had been the day before in his room, still talking in that whispering tone, while the rain rustles down through pine and birch trees. The doctor mentions the confusion that he has felt since yesterday, everything is alarmingly new, it is all changing. He doesn't want her to be mistaken in him, he would like her to assess him as he is, and herself too, so that she won't regret anything later. She doesn't know what he means, she says. Regret? The doctor hardly knows how to put it. He's a sick man, he's been retired from work for the last year. He has odd habits. And to make sure that she knows about him, he speaks of his tuberculosis, only so that she'll be aware of what she is letting herself in for, because that is what he understood her to mean yesterday, that's how he understands it himself. He may be sick, but it doesn't matter to her. Or that's not exactly it, but I only want to be where you are, she says, the rest will settle itself. What he hears in her voice above all is the idea of the two of them together, *us, we*, it sounds gentle and firm, as if nothing much more could happen to them now. She has already thought about a room. She knows people whose advice she can ask, she will write to Berlin today if he would like that. Would you? She mentions a few names that mean nothing to him as they go down to the beach, on the last part of the path before they leave the woods, both of them shivering, although the rain has slackened noticeably. Wait, she says. Shall I? She means ask about the room, but perhaps something else as well, the doctor says yes, please write to them, and he wishes he knew what heaven had been kind enough to send her to him.

In his room that evening, the doctor tries to recapitulate exactly what they talked about, all of it, but he really recollects only her voice, the silence that does sometimes fall but is not uncomfortable when they are just walking, and then their conversation goes on. That is all he knows. He is partly reassured, everything will take its course as if he didn't have to do anything about it. But he must write, at last, to Else Bergmann about the journey to Palestine that she suggested, tell her that he will certainly not be going on any such journey. She will not be particularly surprised, but all the same he has to explain it to himself. It costs him an effort to write to her and pretend that, ultimately, he just did not like the idea, although that is exactly what he does say in his letter.

## 4

It takes her some time to realize what he wants from her. Why he hesitates to touch her, when there is nothing she wants more, when he calls for her to set out on a walk, because now they go walking almost every day. It is still quite cool, but the rain has stopped, the sun even comes out now and then. They have plenty of time, they can take really long walks, hand in hand, but on Dora's part still with trepidation, as if she might lose him any moment. There is much about him that she doesn't understand: when he asks her if she really means what she says, when he runs himself down in talking to her. For instance, he can ask, do you really want to know the truth, and adds that he can only try to deter her from involvement with him, and then she laughs at him and listens as if he were talking about some other man whom she doesn't know.

They are sitting on a bench in the middle of the woods, and he doesn't make it easy for himself. He imagines her with him in Berlin, always assuming they could find a room, and what that would be like. He wants her to be close to him as often as possible, but he also needs to be alone, for instance when he is writing. He walks a great deal, he tells her, he walks through the city for hours, because ideas come to him while he is walking, sentence by sentence, and then later he just has to write them down. He writes only at night. I'm unbearable when I'm writing. But then he laughs. She doesn't think the admission very terrifying. It sounds strange to her, but not threatening. So what is he afraid of, she wonders, of me? Are you afraid of me? Afraid I'll disturb you? If I do disturb you, she says, then I'll go away until you let me know that I can come back. She is half joking, but he appears to be relieved. He has hardly written anything for weeks, perhaps he has written himself out, but the way he says that shows that he doesn't seem to believe it. Do you understand? She is not sure that she does, but now he kisses her. He wishes he could live somewhere out in the country, and she says yes, and then yes again, on this bench in the middle of the woods. Sometimes I don't believe in you at all, he says.

He is wearing a new suit, dark blue, almost black, with fine white stripes, a white shirt, a waistcoat, a tie that she already knows.

She writes to her friend Georg, and then to Hans, who has sent her two postcards with scrawled messages that she can't answer. Reading between the lines, she sees that he was telling her he missed her, he didn't reproach her, and for that very reason she hesitates to

ask him any favours. Since meeting the doctor she has seen Hans in a new light, as if he had shrunk, someone whom she can't take entirely seriously as a man, because like Dora herself he is only in his mid-twenties. All the same, she must write to him; his father is an architect, he has contacts, she needs those contacts now. The doctor, as she describes him, is an acquaintance met on the beach who is doing her a kindness. She feels that her letter sounds a little formal. In September, she tells Hans, she will be back in Berlin, I hope you are well, which sounds almost as if she didn't have much to do with how he is. Strictly speaking, she owes him nothing. They have been to the cinema together two or three times, but otherwise there was nothing in it, at least not for her. She is glad that the doctor has never asked about him, it would have embarrassed her, as if she should be ashamed of knowing someone like Hans. Later, in the afternoon, they will go for a walk again, the doctor has promised to take the children into the little resort to buy them ice creams, so the walk may be later than usual.

Yesterday, on the way back, he told her that he couldn't live alone in Berlin; he can entertain the idea of Berlin only because he has met Dora. For instance, he can't cook. Would she cook for him in Berlin? He put the question stupidly, like a schoolboy. He can't ask that of her, he says. She embraced him and kissed him, and said how happy he makes her, although in the last few days it has struck her that he hardly touches the food she cooks. He has lost weight since she met him, and now he wants her to cook for him in Berlin .

Elli too says that she is uneasy about her brother, not only is he losing weight, he also has a high temperature almost every morning, and she is afraid that the cold weather is doing him no good. They have met briefly in the front hall. Dora took his sister's words as a veiled accusation, as if for some time now it had been her, Dora's business to see that the doctor recovers his strength. At supper in the evening with the new children who have arrived at the holiday home, he leaves most of his helping, or says he has eaten something already in his room. Don't be angry, says his glance, but when she thinks about it, it is more like: you don't understand, there is so much that you don't understand, but all the same you are dear to me.

You're my salvation, he says. And I didn't believe there could be any salvation for me.

If one can die of happiness, then surely that's what I must do, and if happiness can keep one alive, then I will live.

When she thinks of him before going to sleep, she is particularly glad that he has taken to addressing her by the informal *du* pronoun, that he never tires of praising her, as if she herself knows less than anyone who she is. Have I said anything about your dress before, he may ask, and then a little later: come on, read something to me, because when they are not out walking he asks her to read to him in Hebrew. She has already read to him from the Book of Isaiah, he likes the prophets best. I could sit here for hours listening to you, he says. Or he says: I would like to lay my head in your lap, as soon as I pluck up the courage I'll ask you to let me.

The weather continues to be disastrous. As long as she can sit in the kitchen with him she doesn't mind that, but now, suddenly, there are plans for him and his sisters to leave Müritz. Elli's husband Karl has arrived. At his first breakfast after joining the family, there was much discussion about the doctor, he isn't eating and he weighs less than ever. He tells her about it that afternoon. Valli has suggested leaving, even the children didn't make much fuss about that, they are real little pests now that they can't bathe in the sea any more. He doesn't seem happy about this prospect, does not say that their departure is fixed, but sooner or later of course they will leave, which unfortunately means that he will go with them, for he can't stay here alone, without his sisters.

At first she can't believe it. But why not, she asks, and what does alone mean? Are you alone? She hasn't really even had a taste of him yet, she wants to say, they've never had more than a couple of hours together, and unfortunately she herself can't leave this place, because if she could she wouldn't hesitate to follow him. The doctor tries to soothe her, saying that nothing has been decided yet about the day of their departure, although he has to admit that his weight loss is quite serious, perhaps there is somewhere better to spend the next few weeks.

They are standing up there in his room, she can hardly look at him now that she knows there are only a few days left. It never occurred to her, she now realizes, that he would be leaving. She thought that when the holidays were over they would go straight to Berlin. Now it is up to her to question the plan. The doctor is standing behind her, she

feels his hands on her stomach, he runs his fingers through her hair, he breathes in the smell of her. This doesn't mean the slightest change to our plans, he says. I don't even have to promise you that, because if I promised you that would mean I had my doubts. The sooner I leave this place, the sooner I'll be in Berlin. She is not sure whether she believes that. Is it maybe something like Tile's red scarf, a present to take home, and then you don't know what on earth to do with it? Tomorrow Puah is coming, he says, I think you will like her. He hasn't let go of her all this time, his hands are warm, which is a certain comfort, but no more.

She does indeed like Puah at once. She isn't here just because of the doctor, but Dora can tell that they know each other well, he has been learning Hebrew from Puah, and in addition she has been living in Berlin for some time, so there is a kind of double connection. He doesn't say a word about their own Berlin plans in front of Puah. He praises the holiday home, the children, although if he were honest he doesn't like them quite as much as he did at first, when they sat in the garden singing and eating every evening; that makes it seem like years ago. This is Dora, he says, and Dora thinks it sounds as if he were saying, look, this is the miracle that has happened to me. Sad to say, he is going to leave Müritz very soon, he says that evening as they are all sitting together, and not everyone is happy with that decision, he adds, least of all himself. Puah says: then we'll meet in Berlin. After that they talk about Berlin for some time, not in the same way as she and the doctor talk about the city, but as if nothing there was good, as if anywhere would be better than Berlin, where potatoes have to be sold under police protection, and the Reichsbank is printing two million new banknotes every day. Do you hear about that in this remote place? The doctor laughs, and says that yes, believe it or not there are newspapers here, but Dora isn't listening, she is looking at the expression of the other woman, Puah. She likes the doctor, she runs her fingers through her hair as she talks to him, jokes about his Hebrew, saying he is far and away her quickest pupil. From a distance, you could take Puah for Tile's sister, and Dora is almost proud that the doctor likes Puah, she is not jealous, or only a little, at first she was jealous of Tile, too, but then there he was, standing near her in the kitchen, and she was the only one he wanted.