

Tranquil Summer
along with something about Quail

As we came out of the woods it became still. Behind us in the woods the birds kept on singing, doubtless, but here, in the open field, it was still.

The woods held its songs together, so that they didn't fly out into the field. The trees hung their foliage out in front, like a cloak plaited of a thousand times a thousand leaves and there the songs were concealed, for safe keeping like something precious. Here in the field it was still.

Now there are of course birds here too. The woodland birds — oriole, woodpecker, finch, jay, wood warbler, cuckoo — don't always remain in the woods, they also fly over the field. But now they were sitting in the woods, in the trees and in the under-

growth. And the field birds — quail and lark — who were out here, kept still.

For it was very hot here, after the coolness in the woods.

We came driving along the road, which led a piece through the woods. Beautiful woods with very tall trees. And the trees so close together that they were only just able to spread out enough and yet give room for the undergrowth in between.

There the road lay wholly in the shade of the trees. You rode there in a deep ravine.

And the birds had sung.

We lay on the hay wagon, which was loaded up high, beside the decorticated, smooth tree trunk, the hay-pole, which bound at both ends of the wagon with rope, held the wagon load together. Lay right and left of the tree, sinking into the quickly dried hay, which smelled of meadow weeds and flowers and pungent sharp-leaved grass.

Then the cuckoo started to call, in the distance, but distinctly and quite evenly, and was already far ahead before it occurred to us to count the calls as they came. So we simply started with seventeen and went on from there: eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one.

That went on until sixty-seven. What were we supposed to wait sixty-seven years for? That's just what people say. Perhaps

until we were grown up? The grandfather, who was sitting up front and managing the horses, laughed and slapped his trouser pocket, though there was certainly no purse there. But that's also one of those customs: the money won't get all used up.

And to the right and left in the woods the other birds had sung. The wood warbler and the jay. And how did the oriole sing?

There we listened attentively. Already it was his farewell song. Now he would soon migrate, this yellow thrush, this cherry bird, Schulz von Bülow or Beer Donkey. As he's called in different districts.

But now the road led through open field, past oat fields and tall rye. The horses went slowly, the gelding Dimling snorted once and flapped his ears, you heard the wagon wheels turning.

The last wagon load. Now the meadow, where we had raked the hay together and loaded it up, now the meadow was empty. Now back to the village, where the coffee would be waiting at home.

But it was still hot over the fields. And so still that you heard the stillness: as a faint uninterrupted humming. But nevertheless inaudible.

And if you don't hear anything anymore, you still hear something. It's just that you can't say how it sounds. Only hear it.

I held a stalk of quaking grass in front of my face. Below the wheels rolled.

And now there was a voice, a pretty and graceful, not at all faint voice. But still as if having grown forth out of the buzzing of the stillness, as if having popped up like a seal's head out of the water, you're not astonished that it's suddenly there, unawares. Because it's part and parcel of the water. Like the quail's call is part and parcel of the stillness of the warm, end-of-June afternoon.

Pick Prick or Book the Rook, that's the way it sounds, over from the cornfield. A short call, which repeats itself.

I'm taking wing — it can mean that. But luckily the quail doesn't go traveling until autumn, we don't have to say to it: Stay here a while.

Its call, by the way, could also mean the same.

But perhaps even better: Many thanks. And best of all: Praise Be to God. Its table is set, it lives in the corn, it has yellow strokes underneath its eyes, and when it runs away it goes very quickly: it beats its long pointed wings, as if it were rowing, and the little ones like fat, round, tiny featherballs deftly after it, always one behind the other, in the narrow lanes between the stalks, which the mother — with head stretched far forward — has cleared and with industrious feet has trodden

down and widened with her whole weight.
All the time running.

But don't run away now, nobody's coming, sing a little while longer, quail, sing:
Praise Be to God.

