

Young Gentleman at the Window

Adieu world, I am weary of thee.

One is not supposed to say that here.

The sentence will soon be two hundred years old. It was written down in Leipzig, probably in Tobias Michael's house. The writer of these words, Tobias Michael, was chased out of the town not much later, fellow colleagues and school children joining in. Later, to be sure, he whirled the baton in Italy and elsewhere, and for the last ten years in Wolfenbüttel.

Adieu world. One is not supposed to say that here, not here and not now, when every sentence turns into a lie before it comes to an end.

Why should I talk at all with you people, who pick my sentences apart, with assigned roles, instead of singing, in five or six parts?

Only because I cannot live without you, without your hands and your voices? Without the blood upon them, without the rust?

There the gable emerges. That is the left loft. It emerges from the fog. Because the fog tears asunder, but not on account of this land wind, which is trying to get up to the bay. And could easily run over and away from the fog, up above over the fog, which has gobbled up the town's midday vapors and now wants to swallow the fumes of the potato field fires which the wind carries along.

That is the left loft. This is the room from whose window one looks at the gable, past the slanting roofs. I shall not remain here. But so long as I shall be here, this will be my window. There is the gable.

I ran up the narrow stairs. To look at the bay. From the gable. Or to hear the bell behind the ponds. When the peal comes over here to the loft the weather breaks. Ran up. Stood still. There the light falls in an oblique strip from the dormer onto the planks. And to the side, where the shadow cuts off the strip of light, the man is hanging. A hanged man. Who hanged himself. Now ask me how the senator was clothed!

Father was clothed in black. White shirt front, white cuffs, watch chain with trinkets. Without shoes.

I have said all that. To the ladies. Who were running through the house and who are now occupied with trying not to understand. That he sneaked up in socks. That he didn't mention anything before. That he however closed the ledger, with full signature. That he left behind no testament. Only this widow, née Trosiener, and houses and properties and the gifted daughter, who at the age of eight is snipping a design out of black paper, for the lay-out of the burial ground. Border of little flowers and a solemn tree, a broken-off column with a wreath.

There the gable has emerged. Which one sees from this window. It is my window so long as I am still here.

When I look down on to the courtyard, where the carters manoeuvre themselves beneath the rope winches in front of the storehouse doors, where bookkeeper Bendix is standing, darkly dressed, and shakes his head, as always, drops the name Pitt, with the addition Junior, as an expensive tip which he can make a present of: means in other words the new coalition, of English and European import absolutely, that is to say, also in these parts of consequence, directed against this Mr. Parvenu, who has just clapped on another crown in Milan, when I look down, as though I wanted to represent more than this young Mr. Arthur

who I am, now when the scandal has blown around the town: she, née Trosiener, was not that guiltless in this incident, the suicide, one doesn't know whether to call it a tragedy or an embarrassment. They still have her never-ending chatter in their ears, chatter about *conflit*, conventions and these passions, these Trosienerian ones. Which in other words were at variance with the conventions — that was probably how she expressed it, when I look down and do not move away from the window, which remains shut, and do not even touch the curtains, when I look down, as though I were waiting: for someone to come, to walk across the yard, the right hand lifts up the skirt a little, the person turns slightly, the white silk ribbon in her hair by which one recognizes her as née Trosiener even in the dark, now replaced by a black one, what else am I waiting for? That the gable should bend forward, slowly, over the courtyard, cast its shadow, dispatch it, quickly, to capture the person down there, with one clutch, she stands still in the middle of a lively, graceful turn, lets her skirt fall over her shoes, her forefinger rests on her lower lip, a perplexed face, surely, but still very pleasing, even as a silhouette, now trembling, as in Adele's fingers, as if the scissors were just at work, on the dress and on the little hair ribbon — why don't I hear

the wood crashing, the beams crunching, grinding into one another, pegs cracking, sills and posts being wrenched out and bars and stays ousting the principal post and the storm beams sideways? Doesn't the gable bend forward? Am I waiting for that? Am I waiting for it to plunge, plunge down over that small picture down there?

I see the gable. No fog now. Beyond the slanting roofs the gable. Nothing has stirred, no one has gone across the courtyard, no one with lifted-up skirt.

And you will have to go, not across the courtyard, ladies, but down the stoop, you have become the talk of the town, I shall take you out, evict you, dispatch you, there the carriage is waiting, it will be easy for me. The *née* Trosiener woman and the smart child who will take her silhouette along.

Then you are gone. Then the chatter comes once again, from the tall houses in the Jopen Alley, and is a howl close behind me, I who cannot remain here, cannot fulfil expectations, cannot be this young gentleman, cannot open the ledger again, write the new name beneath the old one.

Only go away, follow after you, leave my sentences to you for picking apart, lend an ear to your idle chatter with assigned parts, not expecting you to sing them. Only because I cannot live without your voices? Because

I cannot live without your hands? Sooner
without this gable, which has not tumbled?
Above which the fog will again come.