

Herr Dremmel continued writing. He was, to all appearances, absorbed; and his forehead, that hot afternoon, was covered with the drops of concentration.

"Robert," she said at last again, in a voice that shook however hard she tried to keep it steady, "here I am."

Herr Dremmel finished his sentence. Then he raised his head and looked at her.

Staring back at him in misery and fear, and yet beside the fear with a dreadful courage, she recognised the look. It was the look he had when he was collecting his attention, bringing it up from distant deep places to the surface, to herself. How strange that he should at this moment have to collect it, that it did not instantly spring at her, that she and the havoc she had brought into his life should not be soaked into every part of his consciousness!

"What did you say, Ingeborg?" he said, looking at her with that so recognisable look.

For all her study of him she felt she did not yet know Robert.

"I only said," she stammered, "that I—that here—that here I *was*."

He looked at her for a further space of silence. Then it flashed upon her that he was, dreadfully, pretending. He was acting. He was going to torment her before punishing her. He was going to be slowly cruel.

Herr Dremmel, as though he were gathering himself together—gathering himself, she thought watching him and growing cold at his uncanniness, for a horrible spring—inquired of her if she had walked.

"Yes," said Ingeborg even more faintly, her eyes full of watchful fear.

He continued to look at her, but his hand while he did so felt about on the table for the pen he had laid down.