

Andreas Maier

# Klausen

A novel

Translated by Kenneth Northcott

The innkeeper in Feldthurns was later unable to tell anyone with complete certainty whether the guest in question was Josef Gasser or not. He said that the young man had ordered a pickled calf's head and a glass of rosé; he, the innkeeper, had noticed this because the guest had only drunk a single glass of wine, but had not touched the calf's head, merely peered at it in a very ostentatious and peculiar manner so that he, the innkeeper, had asked him whether there was something wrong with the calf's head. However, the man had not paid the slightest attention to his questions but had ordered a schnapps and had on his part begun to ask questions about all sorts of different things. According to the innkeeper he gave the impression, as he did this, of being, on the one hand, quite cheerful and on the other strangely involved. The innkeeper told him that he was a member of the Feldthurns Cultural Society, that he was president of it, that Castle Velthurns was a unique place of interest, that, in addition to this, Feldthurns also possessed a swimming pool and that he had only been telling him all this because the guest was growing more and more enthusiastic as he listened to him. The guest also asked, once again without any apparent reason, whether the innkeeper was Catholic. The innkeeper said that of course he was Catholic, that all the people in the area were Catholic and he, the guest, was presumably also Catholic, since he was evidently also from the Eiszacktal. On hearing this the young man's mood became waxed downright enthusiastic. He even clapped his hands. Things had gone on like this for a while, when two tourists came in, a German married couple. The guest's face had darkened. The tourists ordered bacon and wine,

talked about the route they were taking on their vacation, praised the province of South Tyrol and put a guide book down on the table. They immediately started up a conversation with the innkeeper, the sole purpose of which was to demonstrate how well acquainted they were with and what an intimate knowledge of the country they had. Above all they told him—in very great detail— some things about Venosta. However the innkeeper did not know Venosta at all. *You don't know Venosta?*, asked the two German tourists in astonishment. The innkeeper said that he came from the Eisacktal, not from Venosta. Whereupon the two tourists began to lecture the innkeeper about Venosta and the collective beauties of South Tyrol. The aforementioned guest said nothing for while, and sat staring at the table-top with a more and more sullen expression. But then he suddenly started talking himself, but of quite unrelated matters, and as he talked he once more waxed strangely enthusiastic... He said, in his view, the country had a healthy mentality, especially as far as *development was concerned*, that it was not ruined to the same extent by the government and by environmental protection measures as, for instance, Germany and Austria were; at least you were able to build in South Tyrol, for that was the way things were. The world was there for people, after all, and that was how had it to be developed. He was an engineer. He worked at the Cross of Latzfons. Oh! at the Cros of Latzfons, said the tourist with a knowing look, although he plainly had no knowledge whatever of the Cross of Latzfons. The innkeeper looked at the guest in amazement, because, naturally, there was nothing being built up at the Cross of Latzfons; all that was up there were meadows with a cross placed at the summit... The tourist said that, in his

opinion, the beauty of South Tyrol was also its capital asset and this asset should not be liquidated; they came down from Münster by car twice a year and every time they were here they breathed more easily, to them South Tyrol was like a second home. The countrysides had to be protected: develop but protect, interjected the tourist's wife. Exactly, said her husband, there must be a happy medium. The countryside must be developed but it must also be protected. If there was too much industrial construction the tourists would cease coming. So, what was being built up there at the cross? The young guest: A power station was being built. He himself was the engineer of the Latzfons power station. (The innkeeper told a journalist from the Eisacktaler Tagblatt three weeks later, that the strange guest had said this in the following words 'Engineer of the power station at the Cross of Latzfons.')

Of course we cannot do without electricity said the tourist

The wife: What would the world be without electricity? Unimaginable. Klaus, supposing we had no electricity. The conversation went back and forth like this for a while and it became clear to the innkeeper that the alleged engineer was only saying such absurd things in order to inveigle the tourists into making the most embarrassing possible statements and revelations about themselves. It all ended up with the alleged engineer's almost forcing both of the tourists to eat the calf's head, he praised the calf's head as the particular specialty of the house, saying that everyone here ate the calf's head, that you couldn't have been at the innkeeper's in Feldthurns without having eaten the calf's head *etcetera*. At the same time the young man himself had never been seen at the innkeeper's or even anywhere in Feldthurns at all and could not therefore possibly have tasted the calf's head from

the innkeeper's kitchen. The couple did in fact order two portions of pickled calf's head to go with their bacon. The innkeeper had nothing to say about all this.

While the supposed Gasser was still sitting in front of his plate without touching it, the Germans were eating up the calf's head, an embarrassing situation. Then, according to the innkeeper, the young man from the Eisacktal had left. The innkeeper's mother later insisted that the guest in question was certainly Gasser, she had recognized him immediately three weeks later among the pictures in the Eisacktaler Tagblatt and on the TV news, and from the moment he had come to the innkeeper's she had had a funny feeling. There was something not quite right about him from the beginning, she had said. True, she didn't tell the public all this until after the accident had already happened. She was asked why, if she knew everything so precisely, she had not said something about it before; to this she simply replied that she had said *everything*, but no one had listened to her. She was summoned two or three times to the police in Bozen in order to put her statement in writing. A number of people from Feldthurns gathered round her for a while in order to find out some snippet or other about Gasser (or the person in question), she even said that shortly after the scene with the innkeeper she had attached a petition to the altar of Our lady of Perpetual Help in the church of St Laurentius for the purpose of averting the fate that awaited them. On the other hand, others said that that this petition had actually only been there for a few days before the innkeeper's mother had started talking about it, that is, not until after the whole affair had taken place, and she had attached a false and backdated date to it, and furthermore it only contained information that she had subsequently

taken from the newspaper. Later on the innkeeper's mother kept on telling some story or other about Gasser, about his origins, his family, his character and his history, though she had never seen Gasser before in her life. It all either came out of the newspaper or from the television; there was nothing else to it. In the same way she depicted Gasser's alleged arrival at the innkeeper's completely differently from the way her son did. According to her, Gasser had talked to her son in an *underhanded* way, had tried to win him over for his *undertakings* (this was what she called them) in that he had first tried to find out about his position and then tried to form an overall picture of him. Furthermore he had asked her son detailed questions about circumstances in the locality and as a way of camouflaging himself had said that he was an engineer. Meanwhile, having a big appetite, he had eaten a large portion of calf's head. Then, fortunately, two other guests had appeared, a married couple from Münster, and they had protected her son from even worse, for Gasser had immediately stopped talking about his undertakings and had left... The innkeeper's daughter, Julia, said on her part that the guest was certainly not Josef Gasser, he did not even resemble him or, as the case may be, the photographs of him that had been published. Whether the strange and suspicious guest had eaten his calf's head himself or not was something that no one could any longer say, and this question—so long discussed and treated at length in the local pages of the *Eisacktaler Tagblatt*—was, for some reason or other, found to be of great importance and it was later even transformed into a political one. In retrospect these happenings were later portrayed in Klausen as a sort of prologue to the main drama or, at least, played up as such. Possibly, some

said, Gasser had been walking up on the mountain, had entered the aforementioned inn and had become outraged at the tourists, but perhaps, others said, everything had simply been fabricated by the innkeeper to make himself look important... Some could not imagine that what was being said in a lot of places— namely that Auer had been up in Feldthurns— could be right, for Auer only seldom left Klausen until the day of his sudden death. After he have given up consorting with the people at Ploderburg, he never once left Klausen again. It was generally known that on one occasion, in an inn in Klausen, Auer and Gasser had in fact actually said—in the presence of a touring group of German senior citizens to whom they spent hours telling a whole string of lies—that they were *engineers at the Cross of Latzfons*, but as that had all been in the newspaper everyone imagined that the innkeeper had confused what he had experienced with what he had read or had like everyone else mixed up what came before and what came later and raveled it all into an inextricable tangle. Finally a few people even thought that the prelude in Feldthurns was nothing but an invention, a mere combination of motifs hovering in space. At the time, opinions were very diverse about Gasser and his origins. A lot was said about him and a lot more was said later on, and people's views about him and his family were radicalized in the process. Gasser was the son of a Klausen shoemaker who for almost two decades had no longer practiced his craft, but had just sold shoes. All he had left was a small work bench tucked away in a corner where, from time to time, he would glue on soles or insert rubber discs into leather heels. Gasser's father was a quiet man with a marked squint who sat around in his shop—which consisted of a

single room— day in day out, who shut the shop at noon, rode his bicycle the nine hundred meters to his home, ate, lay down on the couch, rode back to his shop around three, locked his bicycle up, opened up his business again and then sat around until six or half-past, a fate that he shared with all the hairdressers and tobacconists and other independent shopkeepers in Klausen who all sat around in their shops in the same way. When he was at home in the parlor with his family, old Gasser said almost nothing, he usually reduced to nothing all impulses to conversation, by making sounds like *ach* or *oi* , because everything else was too exhausting for him, it overtaxed him. But when he sat in his shoe store his greatest pleasure was when one of his self-employed neighbors came to him wearing his blue apron and they would both take a moment to go out together and drink a glass of red wine in the nearest bar. The non-conversations that they then carried on at the *Poodle*, the snarling back and forth of some sounds or other was what made him feel good. Or else old Gasser would go to one of his neighbors himself, the hairdresser or the tobacconist, having put on his blue apron specially for the purpose and suggest on his part that they go to the bar. The life his father led had made Josef Gasser nervous from the beginning. When, as a child, he would sit around in his father's shop for a couple of hours helping him do something or other, he had to rush out immediately afterwards and run straight up the nearest hill. Later on, as a schoolboy, he is said to have developed—for some reason or another—theories about capitalism and to have immediately started taking an interest in the *Italian economy*. This is what the people of Klausen said after the events. His former classmates, and especially his teachers, suddenly



started talking about it all the time, using such general turns of phrase as: Gasser's son always used to talk a lot about the Italian economy even before graduating from high school, or: from the beginning Gasser was always very interested in anything concerning the Italian economy; or from the beginning Gasser always looked at the state from the economic point of view, and he knew no area as well as the Italian. Others said that he didn't have the faintest idea about economics and only went on about forms of the economy because, true to the fashion of the day, he wanted to play the communist and so had used the words *Italian economy* simply as a linguistic ideological weapon. They were nothing but empty words of the sort that such students always give voice to. As a pupil, Gasser was always regarded as rebellious and he later tried to resolve the rebelliousness he was exhibiting at that time by reading, for example, books by certain developmental psychologists. For a time he regurgitated general theories (among others Erikson's life-cycle theories) and, for example, talked a lot about *universal statements* and the way in which a young person who does not yet have command of his language develops a feeling of omnipotence by using such universal statements something which then leads to rebelliousness, since older people whom he plagues with them, know that there is nothing backing up the statements beyond a purely grammatical— that is formal— potential, nothing really experienced and really lived. He regurgitated all this for a time and then he threw the books away again and was disgusted with his own theories which he suddenly regarded as a total pollution of his own self. After leaving school, which he finished at sixteen, he went away and he was not seen in Klausen for years. He

studied at first in Innsbruck, and then later in Berlin. In Berlin, he almost completely lost his dialect; in fact, on his return, hardly a trace of the original could be heard. Journalists maintained that Gasser had never talked much about his time in Berlin, that more was to be learned about Sonja Maretsch, who lived with him for a while in Neu-Kölln. Gasser is said to have lived for a time within the orbit of some left-, or radical left, -wing groups and taken part in some activities, all of which were organized by very young people. In retrospect, he is always reported to have called this *the experiment* and always to have spoken very mysteriously about anything to do with it. Soon, it was said, he grew disgusted with the folksy ingratiation of these people or, at least, of certain parts of the factions, who spent all their time talking about the importance of social elements, about a just society *etcetera*. Gasser by then was thought to have gone so far in the dissolution of his concepts that he could no longer envisage what on earth could be meant by the words *just society*. Rumor had it that he increasingly considered such concepts to be mere linguistic inventions. He is supposed to have said on one occasion: politicians look for problems to struggle against solely because they are looking for voters and the best way to appeal to a voter was by way of the problem that he has, or thinks he has (or that the politician persuades him he has), and that this was a repulsive process that had never led to anything but great falsity among people. This and other things were stored up for use by all classes of people in Klausen as they speculated about Gasser. At the time Gasser was studying philosophy and sociology and was trying to learn Chinese. He also took acting lessons for a time. When he returned to Eisacktal he did not go to his

parents' house, but for reasons that most people should not fathom, first took a room in the small village of Sankt Leonhard, above Brixen, fifteen kilometers from Klausen. He helped in a sawmill in the neighboring village of Karnol, drove the cattle up to pasture here and there, threw dung on to the hillsides and was always running up to the woods in the direction of the Plose from where he could look down on Klausen lying very small and peaceful in the valley. You could not hear the noise of the Autobahn from there; what was up there were masses of thyme, anemones and goldcrests. Gasser sat by the side of the road and whenever a BMW from Offenbach or a Mercedes from Munich or a party of German motorcyclists drove past him he would follow them with his eyes with a strange look on his face, chewing the corner of his mouth. A few people saw him sitting up there like this. Now and again he visited Auer in Klausen. Auer was in Sankt Leonhard once for a few days. Gasser only turned up at his parents after weeks had passed, He left Sankt Leonhard just as suddenly as he appeared there and moved into the upper part of Klausen. No one could answer the question as to what he had actually been doing in the Eisacktal during these weeks. For a time, it was said that he had been a teacher in Germany, or a social worker. No one knew where these rumors came from. Gasser had neither passed the second qualifying exam as a teacher, nor did he have a degree that would have qualified him to do any sort of social work; most people found the idea of the latter, in his case, totally unimaginable. After some time it turned out that, basically, he had been doing nothing. He worked for a while in an inn in Villanders, then he helped a farmer build a barn, but these were all short-term activities; nothing that the people of

Klausen would have counted as proper bread-winning. If one wished to find a word for what it seemed to the people of Klausen that Gasser was at that period, it would be an industrious no-good. Moreover, it was said that, at the time, he made a very overbearing impression, he involved people in conversations that no one wanted to engage in, he deduced that his interlocutors had motives for each and everything and used these motives to expose them. It was even said that he had the ability to put someone off the food that was placed before them, people said this especially about the calf's head that he is said to have left untouched at the innkeeper's, for, as we said, this abandonment was immediately interpreted politically and almost as an extremist act. Strangely enough, Gasser then actually began some so-called regular work, in fact with the tourist association. Many people asserted that the work in the tourist association contained from the outset a subversive component for Gasser. Moreover it was later maintained that the conversations he had in various inns had now grown more and more political and more aggressive. But as we have said: after what happened, the impression that Gasser left behind in Klausen grew daily more radical the more people gossiped. And what the people of Klausen meant by *subversive component* could mean a lot of things. There was also a whole number of people in Klausen upon whom Gasser—given his circumstances—made a normal impression, though he did seem to them to be somewhat more nervous and quieter than usual, almost reticent, but in no way aggressive. Thus everything that was ever said was immediately turned into its opposite with an almost legally imposed necessity. Round about the time when Gasser is supposed to have been in Feldthurns and the

old innkeeper's mother said she had hung up the famous petition in Sankt Laurentius, Gasser paid his mother one of his rare visits. Later on his sister, Katharina Gasser, also joined them and as a nervous mood prevailed they enumerated all the possible things that could give rise to a quarrel. Even before Kati's arrival Gasser was irritable. His mother was sitting on a chair on which, latterly, she had always sat; an especially old and shabby chair, which for some reason she had recently become dotty about. The chair had hardly any cushion left, it was the shabbiest chair in the whole apartment, but she sat on it, as though by doing so she wished to demonstrate something, something quite definite; Gasser was sure of this. He himself sat on the couch. He kept looking about, almost compulsively, for he was nervous, although he was not conscious of it. He felt constrained by the size of the room, and every object in it was too well-known to him. Anyway, everything here was too closely connected with him. When for example Gasser looked at his parents' lamp, a misshapen table lamp that had stood on the little table next to the couch for the last twenty-five years, it was as if someone were hitting him on the head with a hammer and this happened every time he looked at it. What he really wanted to do was to jump up and run out, but he simply sat there and drank tea with his mother. Later on, he drank red wine. One glass at first, then another and finally another, although he had eaten nothing that day (he had completely forgotten). Meanwhile, his mother took one magazine after another from the ones lying on the table and leafed through it. This Gasser found particularly irritating. At some point he jumped up, started walking round the room and shouted to her to stop leafing through the magazines, it was driving

him crazy. What on earth did she find of interest in them? He took the magazine out of her hand . The Princess of Monaco was on the title page! His mother looked at him in astonishment. He: it was none of her business what the Princess of Monaco was doing. Strictly speaking it was none of anybody's business! Gasser was almost shouting. All these magazines deserved to be banned, they were more disreputable than anything in the whole world, they appealed to the utter baseness in people, but people did not understand that, people, no they did not understand it. His mother looked at Gasser blankly. But I like to read magazines she said. For some time now every now and again I've been buying myself one or other of the magazines. What difference does it make? They're just magazines. Gasser said no, they were not just magazines. There was no such thing as *just*. Nothing was *just* and it was especially true of these magazines. She: I don't know what you suddenly have against these magazines. Your friend Paolucci works for a magazine like this. Gasser said Paolucci worked for a political magazine, that was something different, that was something quite different, and, incidentally, Paolucci was not his friend. He had nothing to do with him. What do you mean that you have nothing to do with him? Georg Paolucci was such nice boy and very helpful. The other day he had gone shopping for her, He had also bought this magazine for her. You don't go shopping for me. Gasser stood still. What did she mean, Paolucci went shopping for her? She didn't even know him. She: he was here recently looking for you for something or other. He also told me that lately you had often seen each in the *Keller* and then he offered to help me, I have so much trouble with my legs. He: what did he want from me?

And why was he looking for me here? I don't live with you, he knows that well enough. Perhaps he wanted to go to Kati... yes, that's a possibility; of course, he wanted to go to Kati... for the rest she was right. There was no difference between her magazines and Paolucci's periodical, they're all the same. They dull the brain. You immediately forget everything, and above all the truth, that's the law of the world. She: she didn't understand a word of what he was talking about. What law he was talking about? Oh dear, she understood him less and less. He had become such a stranger to her. Gasser rolled his eyes. She: she also liked to read the magazine because now she could find out something about Kati in them. He: that's what I thought. But can you explain why you read these reports about Kati? After all what's written there is just a lot of rubbish. Why did she read the reports? She: why did she read the reports? They were after all about her daughter. She wanted to find out what was being written about her daughter, that was her right. He: it's got nothing to do with right. What does it have to do with *right*? But how can you understand that?... So, it makes you happy, reading these articles about your daughter. But these articles have nothing whatever to do with your daughter, for they all function according to the same pattern. Kati only serves to illustrate the ideas, don't you understand? They are always the same ideas. They have nothing to do with Kati. Everything is interchangeable. Everything, interchangeable, but that is something you do not understand. She: she did not understand that, no. There was only one thing that she did understand. Recently all he wanted to do was to destroy everything. He destroyed whatever gave her pleasure. He really had developed a peculiar ability to do that. But she

couldn't allow herself to be tormented by everything like this. As she said this, Gasser once more rolled his eyes. After a while: a lot of people now are even collecting these articles about Kati; did you know, for example, that Anton Kerschbaumer who lives in the upper town possesses every article that has been written about her? Wherever there's a picture of her he cuts it out, Kati allows herself to be photographed at the Kälterer See. You know, the photograph with the bath towel, she was in one of the illustrated magazines... some rag or other... what's it called, and Kerschbaumer cuts it out. He even pinned it up over his wash-basin. Kati in a bath towel, I've seen it there myself. Look at it sometime. Like that! Can't you see what we are talking about? She: she did not know... they were only articles. Kati is a pretty girl. She is successful. That was so nice. Gasser was almost seized by a fit of rage. It made him mad when his mother used the expression *but that is nice* or even *but that is quite natural* or even *that is quite normal*. Meanwhile he had given up explaining to her that these expressions had no content, they signified absolutely nothing. Gasser thought that the words *nice*, *natural* and *normal* should never have been put into people's hands, since they, the people, justified everything with them, they justified the ultimate absurdity with expressions like *but that is nice*. Gasser bit his lips. His mother: and one day you will achieve something, I am absolutely certain of that. What am I going to achieve? asked Gasser, now completely dumbfounded. She: naturally, you will achieve something! You are still so young, you are clever, you have something in your future I know you have. Kati became an actor, you mustn't be jealous of that, because everyone becomes what they are and for what they have the



abilities, and your abilities merely lie elsewhere. Gasser looked at his mother. She suddenly appeared more and more strange to him. What do you mean by that, he asked. I'm not jealous of Kati, where do you get that idea? And what are the abilities anyway that I'm supposed to have? Yes... the abilities... just something that you are interested in, for instance you used to draw ever so nicely. I still have so many drawings that you did. You drew pine-trees and ships, sailing ships. He: you must be crazy. She: he shouldn't talk to his mother like that! His mother was not crazy. No he had a talent for drawing she knew that. By the way, she'd found out that he'd taken up drawing again in the meantime. That made her very happy. (As she said this Gasser's mother looked very happy, apparently simply because her son was drawing again). Gasser asked incredulously what this all meant, what was he drawing? He didn't do any drawing at all. She: but Perlmutter saw you recently. You were sitting down by the church and had a pad on your knees and you were drawing something that you had observed down there. You always were a sort of observer, you observe everything very precisely and exactly. Gasser laughed now, for he remembered the incident. He really had sat down there, however for quite other reasons than the ones his mother assumed. Admittedly he said nothing about the reasons... he would never have talked to his mother about the reasons, he spoke to practically nobody about the reasons, indeed he had not thought that anyone had paid any attention to his sitting down by the church and making a sketch, for he really had sat there and sketched, something, something very particular... And what did I draw, he asked gloomily, did Perlmutter see that too?. She: No. For when he spoke to you you immediately closed the pad. That's

what you always did when you were a child. You didn't want anyone to see what you were drawing. (Again, thought Gasser, she has this strange look of exaltation, whenever she speaks of my childhood. When I was younger I always shut my pad up if anyone watched me while I was drawing, aha, that makes her feel exalted, this nonsense gives her a warm feeling around the heart.) Gasser jumped up again and ran from one end of the room to the other at greater speed. Even when his sister came into the room, he kept on running up and down in the same way, he hardly greeted Kati, just a slight wave of the hand. Kati kissed her mother and sat down on the couch. She was talking about something, Gasser only heard everything fragmentarily. (He had noticed this recently, namely that he only perceived everything or, at least, most things, only fragmentarily, because his thoughts were always distracted by something else. Certainly whenever he perceived something it always confronted him with a nagging excess of clarity). She was saying that she had a few days break from shooting, she was living in the *Goldener Elefant*. Of course, she said, she had been constantly accosted on the street outside, she had been nothing short of pursued, they had run after her... right up to the front door. Gasser looked out into the street. It was true, there was a bunch of people standing there and pointing up at the windows of the Gassers' apartment, Kerschbaum was there, Moreth the alderman, the old Gruber woman—the lot of them all the inhabitants of Klausen who had pursued his sister through the streets chasing an autograph or a snippet of conversation with this inhabitant of Klausen who had recently become famous. There, look at Alderman Moreth with his red face, so he's one of them, Gasser said to himself. Some TV

personality only has to come into the town and these townspeople immediately regress several stages in their evolution. He stood looking at the group of people for a good while: now they were breaking up, a few minutes later the street was empty again. Gasser kept on laughing, as he still stood staring out of the window murmuring something to himself, that his mother and his sister could not catch. He seemed to be completely absent-minded as he stood staring at the empty street. What is there to laugh about, asked his mother. He: What do you mean, laughing? Was I laughing? Oh yes, now I remember, I did just laugh, I was laughing at Alderman Moreth. His sister from the couch: What brought Alderman Moreth to mind? And why was he so terribly nervous all the time? Gasser: I was laughing about Alderman Moreth because he was quoted in the *Tagblatt* today. Everything Moreth said in it sounded so sensible; incidentally, he was talking about Taschner's proposal, but I'm sure you know nothing about that, you've not been here in Klausen for quite a while... What Moreth says at least sounds very sensible when it appears in the newspaper, but when you see him in front of you, as a person, with his red head, and with such strange desires— people as a whole have such strange desires when they are in private, and presumably he was in private down there. What desires was he talking about?, asked Kati. It must have been some sort of desires said Gasser otherwise he would not have followed you through half the upper town. Kati said that she did not know Moreth at all, what had he been talking about all this time? Gasser laughed and clapped his hands enthusiastically... for a while all three of them said nothing, for Gasser looked very thoughtful again. He was still standing in front of the narrow window and

was looking at the now empty street as though something still held his attention there. Our mother said very recently that I am jealous of you. Oh, yes! I am jealous of you, I admit it. But do you also know what I am jealous of? She: No. My God he's got to stop thinking all these things, it does no good. He just makes himself unhappy. Why on earth does he always torment himself about everything? He: I envy you because everything is so egregiously easy for you. You do what you do. You didn't even make an effort to enter your profession, I know that, even if today everyone says it was different and maintains that the movies were always your one goal in life (because that's what you yourself have maintained in all the magazines in most recent times). And although you didn't make any effort to enter your profession and everything happened more or less easily—because you never had any sort of goal in view—you, apparently, felt no sense of necessity in the process, you simply accept it and are satisfied with it. She: but yes, why should she not be satisfied? Gasser started walking restlessly up and down again. He knew that what he said could not be understood... Then he stopped and stared at this mother and sister. He lapsed deeper and deeper into strange thoughts, I'm a completely normal person, he said. I work with the tourist association, I'm just like everyone else. I would like you both to be aware of that. Gasser clapped his hands, looked quite euphoric and shouted: Yes, exactly, now you have it! I'm like everyone else! It was actually a mistake to go to the university and leave here, you were right, from the beginning. There is nothing to say about me, mark my words. That is what is most important, that there is nothing to say about one. In some nauseating sort of way it is all in the

imagination. I can't stand it. And that is the truth, the only truth, do you understand? Everything is the same and the differences are based on vanity. His mother said that she did not understand a word. She did not even know what he was talking about all the time. Of course he was the same as everybody else, why should he be any different? What sort of a strange idea was that? Why was he talking about the truth, how did he suddenly get on to the subject of truth? He had grown so strange. Gasser clenched his fists and distorted his face in an ugly fashion, for he thought he could stand it no longer and he simply had to leave. He was now standing in the doorway looking at his mother and considering the following. Why does she sit on that chair all the time; for a little while now she had started sitting on this particular chair, quite demonstratively. Look here, that's what she's saying, here is this shabby old chair, it is really very shabby, it is already in tatters and I am sitting down on it. I not you. The oldest and shabbiest chair and it is just right for me, for I am sitting down on it and that's exactly where I belong, that's my place in the world and my one real act viv-à-vis the world, is namely to sit down on this chair, otherwise there's nothing in which I have the slightest interest... Gasser now suddenly felt like pulling his mother off the chair and screaming in her face that she should finally stop demeaning herself in this demonstrative and, above all, vain manner, he'd seen through her, she was just doing it all out of vanity, this whole demonstrative pettiness, she was making him almost boil over with anger... but he didn't say a word, just took his coat and left...