

**Malina**  
*Ingeborg Bachmann*

*translated by Philip Boehm*

1971

□ 4.

Today I'm waiting for Malina in the Blue Bar of the Sacher Hotel. He doesn't come for a long time and then shows up after all. We enter the large dining hall and Malina confers with the waiter, but then I can hear myself suddenly saying: No, I can't, please not here, I can't sit at this table! Malina thinks the table is quite pleasant, the small one in the corner. I've often preferred to the larger tables, since I sit with my back to the protruding bit of wall, and the waiter agrees, he does know me after all, and he knows that I like this protected place. I say breathlessly: No, no! Don't you see! Malina asks: What is there to see, especially? I turn around and walk out slowly, so as not to cause a scene, I greet the Jordans and Alda who is sitting at the large table with some American guests, and then a few other people whom I also know but whose names escape me. Malina walks quietly behind me, I feel he is simply following me and greeting in turn. At the coat check I let him drape my coat over my shoulders, I look at him in despair. Doesn't he understand? Malina asks quietly: What did you see?

I still don't know what I saw, and I reentered the restaurant, thinking that Malina is bound to be hungry and that it's already getting late, I explain hastily: I'm sorry, let's go back inside, I can eat something now, it was only for a minute that I couldn't stand it! I actually do sit down at the that table, and now I realize it's the table where Ivan will sit with someone else, Ivan will sit in Malina's place and order, and someone else will be sitting at his right hand, just as I am sitting to the right of Malina. They will sit on the right hand, and one day the seating shall be rightful. It's the table where today I'm eating my last meal before the execution. Once again it's tafelspitz with horseradish and a chive sauce. Then I can drink one more espresso, no, no dessert, today I want to forgo dessert. This is the table where it happens and where it will happen, and this is the way it is before they chop off your head. Beforehand your permitted one last meal. My head rolls onto the plate in the restaurant of the Sacher Hotel, spraying the lily-white damask tablecloth with blood, my head has fallen and is exhibited to the guests.

Today I stop at the corner of Beatrixgasse and Ungargasse, unable to continue. I look down at my feet which I can no longer move, then over to the sidewalk and the street crossing, where everything has become discolored. I know for a fact that it will be this

□ 5.

important place, the brown discoloration is already wet and oozing, I'm standing in a puddle of blood, it is very distinctly blood, I can't go on standing here forever, gripping my neck, I can't stand the sight of what I see. I cry out, now softly, now loudly: Hallo! Please! Hallo! Would you please stop! A woman toting a shopping bag who has already passed by turns around and stares at me, questioningly. I ask in desperation: Could you please, please be so kind, please stay with me for just a moment, I must have lost my way, I can't figure out where to go, I don't know my way around here, can you please tell me where I can find the Ungargasse?

And perhaps the woman does know where the Ungargasse is, she says: You're already on the Ungargasse, what number did you want? I point around the corner, down the street toward the Beethoven house, I cross to the other side, with Beethoven I feel safe, and there from number 5 I look over at an entryway which now has become strange to me, marked with the number 6, I see Frau Breitner standing in front, I'd rather not run into Frau Breitner now, but Frau Breitner is a human being, I am surrounded by human beings, nothing can happen to me, and I look over at the other shore, I must descend from the sidewalk and attain the other shore, the O-streetcar runs ringing by, it's the O-car of today, everything is as always, I wait for it to pass, and quivering with the strain I take the key from my purse and set off, donning a smile for Frau Breitner, I've reached the other shore, I saunter past Frau Breitner for whom my beautiful book is also supposed to be written, Frau Breitner doesn't smile back, but she does greet me, and once again I have made it to my house. I didn't see a thing. I am home.

In the apartment I lie down on the floor, thinking about my book, it's gotten lost, there is no beautiful book, I can no longer write the beautiful book, I've stopped thinking about the book long ago, there's no foundation, nothing more comes to me, not a single sentence. But I was so sure the beautiful book existed and that I would find it for Ivan. No day will come, people will never, poetry will never and they will never, people will have black, dark eyes, their hands will wreak destruction, the plague will come, this plague which everyone is carrying, this plague which has infected all, this plague will snatch them up and carry them away, soon. It will be the end.

Beauty is no longer flowing from me, it could have flowed from me, it came in waves to me from Ivan, Ivan who is beautiful, I have known one single beautiful human being, nonetheless I have seen beauty, in the end I, too, became beautiful one single time, through Ivan.

Get up! says Malina, who finds me on the floor, and he means it. What are you saying about beauty? What's beautiful? But I can't get up, I've propped my head on THE GREAT PHILOSOPHERS, who are quite hard. Malina takes away the book and lifts me up.

Me: (*con affetto*) I really have to tell you. No you have to explain it to me. If someone is consummately beautiful and ordinary, why is he the only one capable of inspiring fantasy? I've never told you, I was never happy, never ever, only in a few moments, but in the end I did see beauty. You'll ask what that's good for. It doesn't need to accomplish anything, its enough in itself. I've seen so many other things, but they were never enough. The mind doesn't move any other mind, only ones of the same mind, I'm sorry, I know you consider beauty to be the lesser of the two, but it does move the mind and the spirit. Je suis tombée mal, je suis tombée bien.

Malina: Stop falling down all the time. Get up. Go out, have fun, ignore me, do something, anything!

Me: (*dolcissimo*) Me? Do something? Abandon you? Leave you?

Malina: Did I say something about me?

Me: No you didn't, but I'm talking about you, I'm thinking about you. I'm getting up for your sake, I'll eat one more time, but I'm only eating to please you.