

## *The Bread (Das Brot)*

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### **THE BREAD**

Suddenly she woke up. It was 2.30. She thought about why she had woken up. Oh yes! In the kitchen someone had bumped against a chair. She listened in the direction of the kitchen. It was quiet. It was too quiet and as she ran her hand over the bed beside her, she found it empty. That's what it was, that's what had made it so especially quiet: his breathing was missing. She got up and groped her way through the dark apartment to the kitchen. In the kitchen they met. The time was 2.30. She saw something white standing by the kitchen cabinet. She turned on the light. They stood facing each other in their shirts. At night. At 2.30. In the kitchen.

The bread plate lay on the kitchen table. She saw that he had cut himself some bread. The knife was still lying beside the plate. And on the tablecloth there were bread crumbs. When they went to bed at night she always cleaned the tablecloth. Every night. But now there were crumbs on the cloth. And the knife lay there. She felt how the cold of the tiles slowly crept up her body. And she looked away from the plate.

"I thought there was something here," he said and looked around in the kitchen.

"I heard something, too," she answered and at the same time she thought that he really looked pretty old already, at night in his shirt. As old as he was. Sixty three. During the day he sometimes looked younger. She really looks old, he thought, in her shirt she looks pretty old already. But maybe that's because of the hair. With women it's always because of the hair at night. It makes them so old all of a sudden.

"You should have put on some shoes. Barefoot like that on the cold tiles. You are going to catch a cold."

She did not look at him, because she could not bear that he lied. That he lied after they had been married for thirty nine years.

"I thought there was something here," he said once again and again looked from one corner to the other so senselessly, "I heard something here. That's why I thought there was something here."

"I heard something, too. But it was probably nothing." She took the plate off the table and flicked the crumbs off the cloth.

"No, it was probably nothing," he echoed uncertainly.

She came to his aid: "Come on. It must have been outside. Come on to bed. You are going to catch a cold. On the cold tiles."

He looked towards the window. "Yes, it must have been outside then. I thought it was here."

She lifted her hand to the light switch. I have to turn off the light now or else I will have to look at the plate, she thought. I cannot allow myself to look at the plate.

"Come on now," she said and turned off the light, "it must have been outside. The rain gutter always bangs against the wall when it's windy. I'm sure it was the rain gutter. When it's windy it always rattles."

They both felt their way across the dark hallway to the bedroom. Their naked feet splashed on the floor.

“Yes, it's windy,” he said. “It's been windy all night.”

As they lay in bed she said, “Yes, it's been windy all night. It was probably the rain gutter.”

“Yes, I thought it was in the kitchen. It was probably the rain gutter.” He said that as if he were already half asleep.

But she noticed how false his voice sounded when he lied. “It is cold”, she said and yawned softly, “I’m crawling under the blanket. Good night.”

“Night,” he answered and added, “yes, it is really pretty cold.”

Then it was quiet. After many minutes she heard that he was chewing quietly and carefully. She breathed deeply and evenly, on purpose, so that he would not notice that she was still awake. But his chewing was so regular that she slowly fell asleep because of it.

When he came home the next evening she pushed four slices of bread over to him. Before he had only been able to eat three.

“You can go ahead and eat four,” she said and moved away from the lamp. ‘I cannot take this bread all that well. Go ahead and eat one more. I can’t take it all that well.’”

She saw how he bent deeply over the plate. He didn't look up. At that moment she felt sorry for him.

“You can’t eat just two slices,” he said to his plate.

“Sure. In the evening the bread doesn’t agree with me. Go ahead and eat! Eat!”

It was only a while later that she sat down at the table under the lamp.