



KRISTIEN HEMMERECHTS

Christmas

GRABOIS

Translated by Margie Franzen & Sandra Boersma
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He had waited too long; every place in the neighborhood had sold out of Christmas trees. Half past five. The Turkish and Moroccan shops in the south of the city stayed open till long past eight o'clock, but Kathy got restless if she wasn't fed at exactly six o'clock. Crazy, he thought, Turks and Moroccans also selling Christmas trees. He went into a small grocery and took a package of disposable diapers, a big can of cassoulet and a bottle of lemonade off the shelves. He was the only customer. The lady at the meat counter looked up hopefully as he passed by with his cart, and then went back to painting her nails. Only when he ran into a display of dog food and two cans clattered to the ground, did he realize how quiet it was in the grocery. No music was playing. He heard his footsteps on the tiles and the cart's wheels

squeaking; he even heard his own breathing. He cleared his throat, grabbed a bottle of wine that was right there at eye level, took a look at the price, and put it back. He picked up a wooden corkscrew, held it in his hand a moment, but put that back too. At the checkout, there was a white plastic Christmas tree on top of a stack of shiny red boxes, all of them with identical, as-yet-unassembled Christmas trees inside.

‘They’re selling like hotcakes.’

‘Excuse me?’

‘Those trees. We’ve sold a whole lot of them.’

She bent over and rummaged around under the register. He heard a click and, immediately afterwards, Christmas music.

‘A hundred and twenty five francs. We were charging double for them until just an hour ago.’

Part of her disappeared again under the checkout counter. The music played louder. She glanced at his cart and –probably inspired by the diapers –said: ‘Kids are crazy for ’em. They can’t tell the difference. You pay a hundred and twenty five francs just once, then enjoy it for years. Some people buy two of them, one for the living room and one for the drawing room. She reached over the counter for the white Christmas tree, lifted it up, and took two boxes off the pile.

‘One is enough,’ he said, startled.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Absolutely sure.’

‘Well, all right then.’

It had started to rain. The Christmas lights hanging over the street swayed gently in the wind. Each time he went by side street, he heard strains of *A White Christmas*. He turned up his collar and quickened his pace.

He didn’t see her at first. She was sitting in her pink nightgown, huddled up against the radiator that was between the television and the sofa. The room was oppressively hot, but he immediately sensed the wood stove was out. It was a dry, stifling central-heating heat.

‘Kathy?’

He knelt down beside her, but she didn’t let him touch her. He had been away for too long.

‘Kathy is afraid of the stove. The stove hurts Kathy.’

The fire in the stove was smothered with napkins; he pulled out three, four, five, six, eight. Their plastic undersides were melted and shriveled; they smelled awful. Twenty two francs each. He could have cried. If this was how it was going to be, he would have to tie her up when he left the house. Put two diapers on her, one over the other, and then tie her to the bed with leather straps.

‘The stove won’t do anything to you, Kathy; it’s the central heating that’s important. That runs on oil, and oil comes from very far away. Leopold pays a pretty penny for that oil to get to him and Kathy.’

He had calculated that the stove would pay for itself after a couple of years. At least it would if Kathy stayed away from the central heating. He had paid 19,640 francs for it, but he didn’t have any costs above and beyond that. He knew lots of people who wanted to get some wood off their hands. One cut down a tree, another wanted away with a shaky old cupboard, and yet someone else was putting in new windows. They telephoned him and he picked it up with his carrier bike. Usually it lay readied in neat little piles, but at some addresses he had to saw the wood into pieces himself. In two weeks, they would all be tying up his telephone. Could he come by and pick up their Christmas trees? He would have the oil tank emptied. That would probably cost him some money, stupid enough, but he didn’t see any other solution. Kathy couldn’t be trusted. Should he punish her?

‘Kathy, come here.’

She didn’t budge.

‘Kathy.’

‘Kathy is not wet. Kathy has been to the bathroom four times. Down the cold hall.’

Indeed, he didn't smell anything, but he wanted to feel for himself. Again he knelt down beside her, again she pushed him away.

'Kathy is dry!'

He grabbed her by the hips, she bit him on the wrist, he let her go, then caught her by the shoulders. She clawed at his face and chest, he clamped his hands around her wrists. Together they rolled over on the carpet, bumped against the coffee table, and then against the radiator. She sank her teeth into his neck, he doubled over in pain, but didn't let her go. I am stronger, he thought, I am stronger, I am stronger. Now he tried to reason with her.

'If Kathy runs around with a wet diaper for too long, her skin will get infected. Her rosy soft skin will turn red and raw. That isn't something Kathy would want, would she? And Leopold wouldn't want it either. Leopold wants to be able to caress and kiss the skin of his little Kathy.'

His head banged against the sofa; he had to let her go.

'Kathy doesn't have any diapers on!'

She went to stand before him with her legs slightly parted and lifted her pink nightgown up over her white thighs and over the copper curls of her pubic hair. No

diaper! On his knees, he crawled closer to her and felt her with his fingertips. She was dry! She had wanted to surprise him and he hadn't trusted her. He pushed his face into her soft pubic hair, tasted between her lips with his tongue and made her wet. But she took a step backwards and he fell over. She laughed out loud, so loud, that he saw it before he heard it. Drops running down her legs, onto her feet and the carpet. Then hissing, splattering. He scrambled to his feet.

'Kathy, quickly!'

He dragged her barefoot to the cold hall, shoved her into the bathroom. Unbelievable how much water was in that woman, it just kept splattering out of her, she must have held it the whole day long. Kathy laughed, and peed, and shook with pleasure. Defenseless, she let herself be pushed onto the toilet bowl. The bathroom was like a sauna; sweat sprang from Leopold's pores. He'd had it! He gripped her by the shoulders and shook her hard.

'Kathy lied,' he screamed. 'Kathy never went to the bathroom, Kathy only came to turn on the electric heater. To vex Leopold!'

The bars of the electric heater were glowing red, and the radiator was so hot that it burnt his hand. For a while now, he had been planning to regulate the space heater with a timer so it wouldn't run for more than a cou-

ple of minutes. As soon as the Christmas rush was over, he would work on it. The doctor had said: 'It's partially just a question of laziness. Oftentimes they don't go because they simply can't be bothered. Make the bathroom as inviting and comfortable as possible. That sometimes helps.' He had painted the walls an apricot orange and had hung a flowered curtain over the window. There were fashion magazines, a vase of flowers and a poster of a picturesque seascape. Now he felt like throwing it all in the trash. So much for understanding! He tore off two sheets of the apricot orange toilet paper.

'Here!'

She obediently wiped herself dry. Now and then, a bit of a laugh bubbled up out of her.

'Do you know what people do with kittens that aren't house trained?'

But she threw her arms around his neck.

'Kiss,' she said.

'No, no kiss. Leopold is angry. Kathy has been very naughty. And why do you have a nightgown on?'

He had dressed her in an extra sweater before he left. He had stoked the fire in the stove and seen to it that she was dressed warmly. What more could he do? She slid off the toilet seat and onto the floor; she sat there like a rag doll. Her lower lip was trembling.

'Hungry,' she said.

'We'll eat in a minute. Go get dressed.'

At the table, she ate her portion of cassoulet without spilling or making a mess of herself. She had thrown a woolen shawl over her shoulders.

'Tomorrow we'll eat turkey breast with mushroom sauce.'

She smiled weakly, then looked at her plate. Suddenly he saw tears roll down her cheeks. She cried without sound or movement.

'Kathy, please, it's Christmas Eve.'

'Leopold promised he would buy a Christmas tree for Kathy. A nice, big Christmas tree. Kathy was going to decorate it for Leopold.'

He thought about the little white plastic tree that he'd put on top of the hat rack in the hall. Then he thought about her thighs and copper curls. He closed his eyes; he couldn't endure the sight of her any longer.

'Is Leopold still angry?'

'No, I'm not angry.'

'May Kathy come to Leopold now?'

'Yes.'

She pressed his hand to her face, licked his palm and fingers. Then she rubbed her head against his hand as though he were the one who was caressing her.

‘Now may Kathy get a Christmas tree from Leopold?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘Kathy gets a pretty Christmas tree from Leopold.’

It hadn’t yet stopped raining. He waited for a couple of minutes at the tramstop, but then decided to walk. The metal frame was the only thing left standing at the tram stop; the rest was broken up and had been taken away. He hastened across the street, stepped in a puddle, and realized he had forgotten his glasses. If only he hadn’t left them in the bathroom; Kathy was liable to throw them in the toilet. From behind he heard the shrill sound of a tram. He turned around, waved with his arms, and stepped in the puddle again. But the tram driver had seen him and waited.

‘What weather,’ the driver said. ‘If you didn’t have a calendar, you’d never know it was Christmas. Have a piece of candy?’

‘Thanks,’ he said.

They were little red gummy bears.

‘Don’t be shy,’ the driver said. ‘Go ahead, take a handful.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Of course I’m sure. Oh, no, don’t worry about it,’

he said when Leopold took out his card to get stamped, ‘tonight’s free.’

‘You won’t get in trouble later?’

‘Trouble? Who drives the tram, the boss or me? You just give me a sign when you want to get off, because, if there’s no one at the stop, I don’t stop.’

‘I’m going all way to the South station’

‘South station!? Hey, well, sorry, none of my business. To each his own, that’s my motto.’

Leopold picked a seat in the middle of the tram, by the doors and the window. He was the only passenger. Warm air blew from under the bench and onto his legs; his socks would be dry pretty quickly. The driver sped up considerably. At each intersection, he rang the tram bell loudly and whizzed on through. Suddenly the tram shuddered to a halt. The doors swung open.

‘Here you are.’

But here he was also too late. At the third shop he went into, the man offered him the mistletoe and holly branches decorating the display window and the counter.

‘No,’ Leopold said, ‘it has to be a Christmas tree.’

All the shop’s merchandise was lying in cardboard boxes on the stone floor. Two children were sitting on the ground, so close to him that, if they had want-

ed to, they could've grabbed his ankles. They each had an orange in their hands, ready to play marbles or catch with it, but his arrival had interrupted their game. They stared at him with open mouths and big eyes. Should he give them a little nudge with the tip of his shoes? So that it wasn't clear whether he kicked or patted them? He crouched down and pinched their flushed cheeks in passing. He quickly stuck out his tongue at them and stood back up.

'It's for my daughter,' he said. 'She's sick.'

He thought about Kathy's nice, perfect breasts, so nice and perfect that they seemed to be made of plastic or foam rubber. The man came out from behind the small table where the cash register was, took the oranges away from the children, and put them back in one of the boxes. 'Bah,' he said, and gave them a little whack on the back of the head. The kids' heads jerked forward, but they kept staring at Leopold.

'Here,' the man said. 'For your daughter.'

He took Leopold by the arm, and, before he knew it, he was standing in the street. He heard bolts sliding closed behind him. Then a curtain was also drawn shut. He took one of the candies the man had given him, popped it in his mouth, but spit it right back out. Sickly sweet! Those were for Kathy. He pushed the bag deep down

in his jacket pocket. Kathy gets a piece of candy when Leopold gets a kiss. She had said once: 'Kathy doesn't want candy, Kathy wants a baby.' 'No, no, Kathy may not have a baby. If Kathy has a baby, then she won't be pretty anymore and she would also be very, very frightened.' But, that same day, he had immediately made an appointment to be sterilized. Imagine if she set her mind to it and didn't take the pill anymore. She was so awfully devious. He couldn't trust her. My God! A child with child! Because that could happen, the doctor had assured him. She had the body of a normal adult woman. There was not a single physical indication for her incontinence.

Ten past eight. He wanted to try one more shop; later it truly would be too late. What would she be doing now? After what had just happened, she would be trying to do her best, and he would reward her, if need be, with the plastic Christmas tree. He would explain to her that pine trees didn't belong in living rooms, that you hurt them if you cut them down. Kathy certainly didn't want that, did she?

The man smiled, baring a row of bared white teeth from under his mustache. The two upper canines were gold.

'Yes, of course,' he said. 'Of course I have a Christ-

mas tree for you.'

His hair-covered hands rested on the counter. He wore a big signet ring on his little finger, and on the finger next to it was a ring with a sparkling red stone. Here too, cardboard boxes were everywhere all over the ground. "All that glitters is not gold," thought Leopold, "and shit doesn't usually shine."

'Come,' the man said, and held a curtain aside for Leopold. The space behind the store was lit by a dim bulb. If only he hadn't forgotten his glasses! 'Come, come,' the mustache said, and pulled him farther along by his sleeve. Leopold stumbled. He heard a giggle, a snigger; he'd tripped on a carpet. Now he made out figures on the orange crates low against the wall. Of course he hadn't seen anyone at first, they sat so low down. 'Come, come!' What haste! He was pulled along towards a Lilliputian kitchen crammed full with pots and pans and sacks, and, amongst it all, were two women shrouded from top to bottom in black robes.

'Turkish women are fearful little birds,' the man laughed.

Yet another door, and they stood outside. A little courtyard, Leopold assumed, although he couldn't see his hand in front of his face.

'Wait,' the man said, and disappeared.

Suddenly, a faint glimmer fell on the yard. Leopold looked up and saw the man's laughing smirk behind the kitchen window. He had pulled the curtains open. And then Leopold realized what the man was up to. There it stood, in the middle of the yard: the tree! Three meters tall, Leopold guessed, but he wasn't sure because, with his short-sightedness, the crest melted into the black nothingness of the night. Now the man was standing next to him with an axe in each hand. 'Come.' Leopold hesitated, but the man kept cackling 'come, come' such that he had no other choice but to take the axe in his hand, to raise it high, and, when it was his turn, to land it with a crash on the tree trunk. Did he do it well? Clang! Their axes clashed. Where was the light? Five unveiled women's faces plastered themselves against the kitchen window. In one step the Turk was at the window. The faces ducked out of sight.

'Wait!'

Axe still in hand, he went inside and came back with a woman. He brought her close to the kitchen window, turned her towards the light, and pulled her veil away.

'You don't have that!'

'I've forgotten my glasses,' said Leopold.

'Come closer.'

The girl shyly covered her face with her veil, but the

mustache pulled it away again. Leopold brought his face in close, right in front of hers, and sighed deeply. Her eyes were cast down.

‘No,’ said Leopold, ‘we don’t have that.’

The man let the girl go and laughed.

‘But you wanted a Christmas tree,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Leopold, ‘for my sick little girl.’

‘Just a few blows more.’

They were alone in the yard, the Turk, Leopold and the tree.

‘Stop!’

The man drew him aside, gave the trunk a little push, and it was over, the tree was felled. The Turk lay his arm over Leopold’s shoulder. ‘Friend,’ he said. Together they looked at the tree.

‘What do I owe you?’ asked Leopold after an appropriate moment of silence.

‘Nothing!’ the man bellowed, ‘The tree is a gift, from a Turkish man to a Belgian man, a token of friendship between my people and your people.’

‘But I want to pay you. I have money with me.’

‘No, no, it is a gift, for you and your daughter, from me and my daughter.’

What a nice man! But how was he going to get the tree home? And how would he get it out to the street?

Through the kitchen, the living room and the store? As though the man could read his thoughts, he opened a small door in one of the yard’s surrounding walls. It opened onto an alley that, in turn, opened onto one of the store’s side streets. The two men hugged each other, and the small door closed behind Leopold. There he stood with his tree. He should come back, tomorrow or the day after. Bring the Turk something for his trouble. A small gift for him, or for his pretty-as-a-picture daughter. But they didn’t stay that pretty for long, those Turkish girls, they had too many children, much too young. Where in God’s name was he? Was it a trap? Were they waiting for him with bats, the Turk and his comrades? Burdened as he was with the Christmas tree, he was a powerless victim. Where would they strike? In this alley? Out on the street? I’m afraid, Leopold thought, and began to snicker nervously. How long had it been since he had felt afraid? One foot after another, he shuffled in the direction the Turk had indicated. The tree dragged on the ground. Sing, he thought, I should sing. When you’re afraid in the dark, you must sing. ‘While the shepherds watched their flo...’ Footsteps behind him! Hurried footsteps, either chasing him or wanting to overtake him. He broke into a run, dropped the tree. The light at the end of the alley became larger and larger, come on

Leopold, be brave, legs up high and powerfully down again, feet pumping high, chest out, come on, go, go, the finish is in sight. Keep it up! One big step and he stood on the street in the blue glow of the street light. But once more he heard the footsteps. He quickly jumped under a doorway's portico and saw a man emerge from the alley. He turned left, away from Leopold. Saved! He tiptoed back into the alley, but he couldn't see a thing. His eyes had to adjust again to the dim light. With each step he advanced gingerly, feeling for the tree with his foot. Tree, where are you? Leopold's here, Leopold's coming to get you. Now he felt the tree branches against his ankles and shins. Yes, little tree, were you afraid I had given up on you? Carefully, he felt for the trunk and closed his hand around it. Immediately, the tree leaked resin. 'Oh,' Leopold said, 'you want us to stick together! Crazy tree. Well, it's okay, Leopold won't ever let you go; whatever happens, we stay together. Were you scared, so alone on the ground in the alley?' Together, the man and the tree went, step by step, branch by branch, towards the dim light at the end of the alley. 'Did that man trample you, tree? Soon we'll be home, I'll set you on a wooden tree stand. Then you'll be able to stand up nice and tall. And Kathy will decorate you, she can do that like nobody else. We have little lights and ornaments and garlands, pretty

things. Don't underestimate Kathy, little tree. People are always underestimating Kathy; they assume that, since she's a bit childish, she can't do anything. You'll see how they're mistaken.'

At last they stood on the street. 'Now to experience something you've never even dreamed of. We're going to take the tram.' Leopold stood still. I'm talking to a tree, he thought. He opened his hand but, because of the resin, the trunk was stuck fast to it. Losing his patience, he shook the tree loose. What now? The tram stop wasn't much farther. 'Come on, not much longer.' He grabbed the trunk at another spot, but again the bark was sticky with resin. Leopold sighed and began to walk in the direction of the tram stop.

'Out of the question,' said the driver.

'But it's Christmas Eve,' said Leopold.

'Out of the question. You may, the tree may not.'

'May too,' said Leopold.

'May not. I say no, and that means no.'

'But there's nobody in the tram.'

'That tram, sir, is municipal property, and I have to see to it that it stays nice and clean. I can't let everyone with half a forest in.'

'One tree, a Christmas tree.'

'You getting in or not?'

It was half past nine. On foot with the tree, it would certainly take three quarters of an hour to get home and Kathy had to be in bed by ten o'clock. The driver sounded the tram bell.

'Can you wait just a moment?'

He put the tree between the tram stop shelter and the brick wall behind it.

'I'll fetch you tomorrow,' he whispered. He would come with his carrier bike. He would tie it on and then wheel it home. 'You're not to go anywhere with anyone.' Then he got into the tram.

'Just look at yourself,' the driver said. 'If it weren't Christmas Eve, I wouldn't even let you in.'

Leopold glanced down at himself. His shoes and trousers were covered with mud. He tried to brush his trousers off, but he only smeared resin all over.

'What do you think you're doing!,' said the driver. 'Get out and scrape your shoes on the pavement!'

The tram doors swung open again. Leopold did what the driver told him as fast as he could. 'May I come back in?'

'Let's see your shoes. Yes, alright.'

Leopold sat at the very back, as far away as possible from the grumpy driver. His whole body buzzed, throbbed and pounded. He urgently needed to pee; he

wondered if he could ask the driver whether he could get out for a moment, but pulled himself together. The tram came to his stop. He calmly stood up, rang the bell, even called out goodnight to the driver, and got off. Two hundred meters and he was home, but he couldn't wait and peed against the metal skeleton of the former tram stop shelter. Then he heard the squeal of brakes. The tram had stopped! Without buttoning up his trousers, he walked away from the shelter and from the driver, who was probably chasing him down now. 'This shelter is municipal property!' He didn't want to hear it. He held up his trousers with one hand, with the other he flailed through the air. One, two, one, two, one....He didn't look over his shoulder, didn't want to know if the driver was on his heels. Home! He carefully turned his head, the street was empty. Maybe the driver hadn't even gotten out! Should he ring the bell? No, Kathy wouldn't come to open the door. First, catch his breath, calmly button up his trousers, and fish the key out of his trouser pocket. Now he hoped that Kathy hadn't turned off the heating. It was as if the cold had seeped into his bones.

'Kathy, Kathy, Leopold's home!'

He cautiously opened the living room door. There she lay, curled up on the carpet by the radiator. In his stocking feet, he went up to her. She was dry! No dia-

per and dry! 'Kathy, Kathy!' The one eye he could see opened. 'I'm back. I have a marvelous tree, but I can't pick it up 'til tomorrow.' She turned over onto her back, her nightgown open all the way, she had been playing with herself again.

'Shame on you, Kathy!'

'Kathy is dry.'

'Good girl, Leopold is very happy, but...' How could he get her to understand? He swallowed. He yanked her nightgown open, lay his hands on her breasts. 'For Leopold, not for Kathy,' he tried, and he leaned in towards her to kiss her nipples, but she pushed him away.

'For Kathy!'

Maybe she was angry because he hadn't brought a Christmas tree back with him.

'Kathy, I've an idea. If Kathy goes to the bathroom now, then Leopold brings her her presents. She gets them now because she's been so good.'

'Kathy's just been!'

'Kathy was sleeping.'

'Not the whole time.'

Was she telling the truth? It was Christmas Eve, he should believe her. He went to button up her nightgown, but she growled at him.

'Kathy do it,' she said. She lifted one of her breasts up

as high as she could, stuck out her long, pointy tongue and licked her rosy nipple.

'Kathy!'

She laughed.

'Tasty,' she said. 'Leopold does it too.'

How could he teach her the difference? He should be stricter with her. He stood up.

'Kathy, either you behave or it's straight off to bed with you!'

'Presents,' she said and buttoned up her nightgown.

'Tomorrow.'

'Now.'

'Then first go pee.'

'Leopold is dirty,' she said, and she pointed at his trousers.

'Of course I'm dirty! If you only knew what I had to do to find you a Christmas tree, and still you don't behave yourself! I can't leave you alone for a single minute.'

'Kathy has been very good.'

'Has been, has been, but not anymore. If Kathy goes to the bathroom, Leopold will put on some other clothes and get her presents.'

The resin had crystallized into black marks on his palms, it would just have to wear off because he couldn't get his hands clean with soap. Leopold is dirty! Damn it,

she'd have to wait. He got in the shower. For a long time he stood under the warm spray, until finally the cold was banished. He lay his robe on the heater and, in the meanwhile, wrapped himself in a soft pink towel. Heavenly! It was not setting a good example, but it was too late to put clothes on. But what had happened to his robe? His arms and legs stuck way out. It wasn't his bathrobe at all, it was Kathy's! But this one was nice and warm, it would do just this once. He had three packages for her: a stuffed animal, a little coral necklace and a beige woolen dress. Don't be too strict, the doctor had said, give in once in a while. Well, the stuffed animal was in order not to be too strict, the dress was to not indulge her too much. To get her to realize that she couldn't, forever and endlessly, run around in her nightgown. Of course, she was particularly pleased with the stuffed animal, but she did put the necklace on and tried on the woolen dress. Exactly her size! If she were to wear heels now and elegant black stockings, she could be in one of the chic lady's magazines lying around in her doctor's waiting room.

'You know how gorgeous you are?'

He crawled over to her on his hands and knees, threw his arms around her legs, hoisted up her dress. She beat on his hands.

'Kathy must learn to dress herself,' she said. 'Kathy

must learn to keep clothes on.'

'Then Kathy must also begin to wear panties.'

'Kathy doesn't have any panties. Kathy only gets diapers from Leopold.'

She was right! Tomorrow, no, the day after tomorrow, when the stores were open again, he would buy what she needed.

'Tell me what sort of panties you want, Kathy, pink, or with lace, or high cut, or...'

She burst out laughing, slapped her hands over her mouth, then pointed at his penis that was sticking out between the flaps of his bathrobe, her bathrobe. It looked ridiculous. And now she didn't push him away and he hoisted her dress up even higher, up over her belly and her breasts, up over arms and herhead, and he promised her that he would get panties for her and maybe she was cured, maybe indeed it had just been a phase and the diapers could....She lay a finger on his lips, pushed him, but she didn't push him away, she pushed him onto his back. Like a proud Amazon, she mounted him. 'Kathy is big,' she said. 'Yes, Kathy's a big girl, big and beautiful, especially beautiful.' Faster she rode, high above him, faster and faster, such that, for a moment, he was afraid that it was going too wildly, that he couldn't feel anything except fear that it was going to hurt, easy, easy, he whis-

pered, but she threw her head back and, with his hands, he groped towards her breasts and found her rhythm, one, two, one, two, one two and then a flood broke over him, and he thought, it can't be, but she laughed and let it all run over him. He slipped out of her, the rhythm was broken. Now she lay next to him, her water ran from his belly onto the carpet. She sat up and said: 'Leopold is dirty. Leopold must wear a diaper. Dirty, dirty Leopold!' He thought, I'll push her away, but he pulled her towards him and kissed her and became hard again. It had been the shock that had confused him just now; but now, now he wanted to whisper in her ear, do you still have more, nice and warm, just do it, let it run, not exactly right now, but soon, as I'm about to come, when I tell you: now; but he dared not say it, so he hoped that she would feel it without him saying it, that she would know what he wanted and that she would do it at the same time as he did, that they would both run empty. And tomorrow he would go pay the Turk and bring a gift for his pretty-as-a-picture daughter, and he would bring Kathy with and say: But do you have this? And he would pick up the tree, and they would decorate it with lights and ornaments and garlands, and it would be Christmas.