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## SPRING IN A DREAM.

I sat at the table writing letters. In a corner of the room, beside the stove, Konrad and the Little Father were playing "sixty-six." It was very warm in the room. On a long bench, before the side windows, there were pink and brown chrysanthemums growing in a china trough. They seemed to be expanding before my eyes in the autumn sunshine that streamed over everything—their patterned leaves painted a grotesque shadow on the floor—a shadow that seemed too delicate and fine for the heavy room, the massive furniture and our health and laughter. It quivered as though longing to go back and hide among the petals of the plants.

Curious fancy, this, the terror of captive shadow. For a moment I wanted to write about it to F. Instead, I told him that Gertrud had

baked a "zwetschgentorte" to await his arrival, that twice the Little Father had been caught in the act of stealing a piece; it was beautiful, and covered with the thick sort of sugar that he loved!

Michael's couch was drawn up before the front windows. He alone was silent. He lay back, his knees covered with a little quilted rug, reading the newspaper, and frowning at the pages. I caught the other two watching him, we three glanced at one another, smiled and nodded superciliously. We knew that any moment we might be the victims of an outburst—a tirade against Russia—denunciation of Germany—that it would end in a storm of tears and maudlin sentiment until I got up and dried his eyes and said: "But Michael dear, truly it is not so bad as you think—wait a little." Then, exhausted, he would leave us in peace. "Michael is much weaker," I wrote to F., "and so difficult to manage. You could not believe it to be the same boy who climbed over the roof with us and threw stones down the Police Prefect's chimney—then was so adorable to the Police Prefect, do you remember, that he asked us all to supper. How long ago that is! The Little Mother is the only one of us who does not lose patience with him. After all, he ought to realize that we have so short a holiday at home and no time to be eternally sympathetic. Konrad and I let off steam by long walks only to come back and find the Little Father in tears because he was not allowed to lose his temper and Michael had been so idiotic."

I paused and nibbled the penholder.

"Blood of a dog," cried the Little Father. "How many devils have you got among the cards—you wretched fellow."

"Youth against age," laughed Konrad. He beckoned to me. "Come over and look at these cards."

I went. Standing beside him I put my arms round his neck, rested my chin on his shoulder and watched the play. He had the most amazing luck, kept rubbing his head against my cheek and chuckling.

"Tak-Tak," the Little Father spitting out the word.

The newspaper rustled to the floor. We glanced carelessly at Michael—outburst presumably postponed. He was lying back on the couch, his eyes closed.

The door opened and the Little Mother came in, her apron gathered up in one hand, her round face red with excitement.

"After the gale last night," she said, "the orchard is full of fruit, one cannot walk a step. And such a fine crop, see children!"

She spread out her apron and showed us the great apples and pears. She tumbled them on to the table; started polishing them one by one.

"You must spend the whole afternoon gathering them. Dimitri can't

stoop because of his back, but it will do you young things good to stretch yourselves a little."

"Mother," said Michael. He sat up. "Give them to me, I'll polish them. I've got a clean handkerchief. Put them on the quilt here."

She suddenly bit her lip, the tears started to her eyes. I saw that she felt she had been unkind in speaking so before the invalid. With trembling hands she carried the fruit to him and then, not trusting herself to speak, hurried from the room.

Michael's persistent frown deepened. We all felt uncomfortable, and the Little Father, throwing down his cards asked Konrad to go with him, and help poultice the horse. I gathered up my writing things, but felt a decent interval must elapse before I left Michael alone.

He picked up an apple and held it in the palm of his hand.

"I know what tree you grew on," he said. "You're one of the 'pink all through' sort. Father thrashed me once for cutting my name on the bark of that tree."

I sat staring in front of me. I noticed that the sun had moved round the corner of the house.

Michael's voice: "And these pears, there's the bench round that pear tree where we used to have tea after school in the summer. I carried the samovar for Gertrud. Once I carried the cups, and dropped them all. We used to have to fish out the little pieces of leaf and petal before we drank. . . . I helped Dimitri cut the orchard grass one year—I smelt of it for days. I remember, at night, the trees in the moonlight looked as though they were standing in pools, sometimes like immense white birds; there was that cherry tree we always called the stork. . . ."

He gathered all the fruit up and sat with his hands spread over it. He began to cry, very slowly, the tears dripping down his face—

And now the sun, shining through the front windows painted on the bare floor the shadow of Michael with his lap full of fruit.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD.