

The Midwife

The chapter delves into the complex life of G, an artist whose early wild years in the city contrast sharply with her later conventional existence as a successful painter, wife, and mother. G's studio in a gritty neighborhood symbolizes her rebellious past, where she lived in chaotic freedom, disconnected from her disapproving parents. Her art initially served as a raw, unfiltered expression of her inner turmoil, but as she gains recognition, her work evolves into more polished, somber pieces. This shift mirrors her personal transformation, as she enters a bourgeois marriage with a lawyer who critiques her art and life with moral disdain. G's relationship with her husband is marked by a power dynamic where his authority and disapproval echo her parents', drawing her into a cycle of submission and self-doubt.

A significant theme is G's exploration of shame through her art, particularly in a series of autobiographical paintings that confront her bodily and sexual experiences. These works, initially grotesque and pornographic, eventually become a means of liberation, allowing her to externalize and dissolve her shame. Her gallerist, an ugly yet kind man, plays a pivotal role in legitimizing her work, helping her reframe her "unacceptability" as artistic strength. However, her marriage introduces new tensions, as her husband's criticism severs her connection to her gallerist and isolates her from her artistic peers. G's pregnancy and motherhood further complicate her identity, as she grapples with the societal expectations of femininity and the visceral bond with her daughter, which becomes both a source of revelation and conflict.

The narrative also shifts to Mann's farm, a decaying yet mythic place where time seems suspended. The farm, once a utopian community, now reflects neglect and failed idealism, with Mann entangled in local politics while his wife maintains order amidst chaos. The descriptions of the landscape—wild, untamed, and watched by an ominous mountain—mirror G's internal struggles. The farm's disarray parallels G's

studio in her wild years, suggesting a broader commentary on creativity and control. Johann, a German teacher living on the farm, recounts its history, emphasizing Mann's futile battle against modernity and his wife's quiet resilience. The farm becomes a metaphor for lost dreams and the tension between preservation and decay.

The chapter culminates in G's fractured family life, where her husband usurps her role as a mother, leaving her alienated from her daughter. The kitchen becomes a stage for their performative domesticity, with G increasingly sidelined. Her art, once a refuge, now reflects her emotional exile, as she channels rage and competence into her work. The final scenes at Mann's farm—with its eerie, observed landscapes—echo G's sense of being scrutinized and judged, both by society and her own conscience. The chapter weaves together G's artistic journey and the farm's decline, illustrating how personal and creative autonomy are eroded by external expectations and the weight of history.