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## The Murderess Robert Walser

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**Robert Walser**

THE MURDERESS

It comes to my mind that recently I walked over the mountain with a farmer. As we were chatting about all kinds of things, onto the street, in the middle of the pretty mountain village, stepped a stout woman who advanced towards us. Nothing about this farmer's wife struck me except her strong, robust appearance. To look at her more closely did not occur to me. When the woman had passed us, the farmer thought himself free to remark quietly (which he was completely justified in doing): "This woman who just went past us, you certainly didn't notice, did you, that she has twenty-five years of prison behind her." Astonished, I asked: "What for?" My farmer rushed in no way to respond. There was a pause, after the course of which he said: "She once killed her husband." Appalled, I inquired about the particular circumstances. Again the farmer, who was going over the mountain to inspect his meadows, was silent for a little while, after which with a strange ease, as if he were a champion storyteller and as if he were relating a half-forgotten ballad or horror tale, he produced the following: "One morning she stepped into the bedroom of her husband, who was lying in bed, with a hoe or mattock in her hand. As he opened his eyes and saw her in this state, he asked, because apparently the hoe frightened him: 'What are you doing in the room with a hoe?' To this the murderess replied: 'I'm about to show you.' With these terrible, so to speak drily humorous words, she raised the hoe to strike and bashed his head in." I begged the farmer to tell me why the woman had committed such a horrifying deed. "It's not known," he said, "one has forgotten it. Possibly the husband was a drunk who didn't want to work and because of that his wife turned bitter." Since his objectives bid him go a different way than mine, he took his leave and I went on alone, while I silently contemplated all kinds of things, and what astonished me the most was the good, natural appearance of the woman whom we had seen pass us so quietly and without any conspicuousness, as if she were not herself but simply anyone, not a murderess but any brave, honest, diligent woman. "In any

case an incredible strength must lie in her," I thought. "A crime and twenty-five years in prison and not to show the slightest sign of all of that: what great tenacity."

Translated from the German by **Annette Wiesner**  
and **Tom Whalen**