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presents:

We Poor Shadows

by Hermynia Zur Mühlen (1883-1951)

London: Frederick Muller, 1943.

No translator named. No indication that the work was translated.

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Original German title:

Ewiges Schattenspiel.

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8 November 1938 - 7 March 1939.

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Dear Mrs. Ockerbloom,

Professor Gossman asked me to inform you about the copyright problems concerning the books of Hermynia Zur Muehlen. Indeed, these problems seem to be very murky, but I can help you to clear them up.

The marriage of Hermynia and my great-uncle Viktor von zur Muehlen was dissolved in 1920, so that neither the family as a whole nor any member of it is entitled to the copyright of her novels, fairy tales, essays etc. In 1938 she married her second husband Stefan Klein, a citizen of Czechoslovakia; he died nine years after her in 1960 – as we know – without a testament. They had no children, and neither had brothers or sisters who could claim the copyright.

The Publishing House – the Malik Verlag – where most of her books were published belonged to the Communist Party; it does not exist today.

Moreover, German copyright had a validity of 50 years (now 70 years) and Hermynia Zur Muehlen died in 1951; hence no other publisher, such as S. Bermann Fischer, or anybody else, can enter a protest against any form of reprinting, re-editing or republishing of her books; the books are available for everybody.

With respect to her translated books there we have the same situation. As I know, all of her books were translated by herself anonymously or under a pseudonym (i.e. Lawrence H. Desberry), perhaps revised by a native speaker.

In the last fifty years many of her books have been reprinted or republished without any problems. In many cases the publishers asked me or relatives of mine and always we gave the same answer. I would much appreciate seeing her works published, whether printed or posted to the internet or in any other form.

Sincerely yours

Patrik von zur Muehlen

WE POOR SHADOWS

A NOVEL

by

Countess Hermynia zur Mühlen

LONDON

Frederick Muller Limited

29 GREAT JAMES STREET

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H.M.

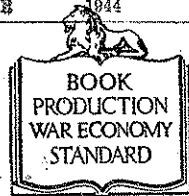
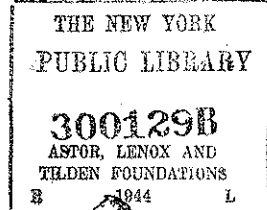
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TO MY HUSBAND



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED
IN CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

Part I

CHAPTER I

JOSEPH yawned. "I *am* tired," he said, stretching himself lazily. "Yesterday was really rather too much of a good thing. First the reception at the Russian court, after that I was on duty till evening, and a party at ten. And now having to get up at six in the morning."

Antoinette smiled at her twin. "Be glad you're not poor Stani. He's been closeted with grandmaman Inez for the last hour. Father and maman went into her room about ten minutes ago. It'll soon be our turn."

Marie Christine shrugged impatiently. "It's sure to be something unpleasant," she said in her hard young voice. "Franz is lucky, he's spared the family council."

Antoinette was gazing out of the window. "What a lovely day," she said softly. "Do look, Joseph. The big chestnut-tree looks like burnished gold. We ought to go for a drive in the Prater."

The folding doors flew open and a solemn-looking lackey entered the room. "The Countess is expecting the young ladies and Count Joseph."

Grandmaman Inez was leaning back on the pillows of her big four-poster, framed by heavy scarlet curtains. Her son Carl, the father of the five young people stood beside the bed, Ludmilla his wife, sat farther away in a gilt arm-chair, her still lovely face pale and angry. Stanislas, the unfortunate cause of the family council, was leaning against the big green stove, a look of despair and helplessness on his handsome face.

The beautiful room looked dreary and austere. Antoinette, who had the eyes of an artist and a happy knack of describing things, had once remarked to her brother Joseph,

Nov. 9, 1944, M.F.

"As soon as grandmaman Inez enters a room, it looks like a cell in a nunnery."

Going up to the bed, the young people kissed the old lady's hand. Joseph, more daring than the others, ventured a shy good-morning. Grandmaman Inez shook her head.

"Don't. It is far from being a good morning. I regret having to tell you that your brother has committed a great sin. A sin against the sixth commandment. He has . . ." Grandmaman Inez talked on, using expressions that made Antoinette blush all over.

"Dear me," said Ludmilla Herdegen crossly as soon as the old lady stopped for breath. "*Tant de bruit pour une omelette*. A little love affair; I admit, my dear mother, that he might have been rather more careful in the choice of his partner, nevertheless . . ."

"Ludmilla," Carl Herdegen interrupted her nervously, "please, my dear."

Grandmaman Inez sat up. Her small, thin figure nearly disappeared in the large bed, yet there seemed to be only one important person in the whole room, and that person she.

"Bozena," she said stiffly, "is not only Marie Christine's foster sister, but also my goddaughter. I am responsible for her soul. Therefore Stanislas will expiate his sin and marry the girl."

"Never!" Ludmilla was trembling with fury. "I shall never allow my son . . ."

"My grandson," grandmaman Inez said severely, "will expiate his sin and marry the girl."

"Grandmaman Inez"—Stanislas dared to draw closer to the four-poster—"Grandmaman Inez, I implore you, anything rather than this; any other kind of expiation. I'd rather enter a monastery."

Grandmaman Inez smiled grimly. "You have proved that you are not meant to be a monk, Stanislas. You will marry the girl."

"My career will be ruined," Stanislas moaned. "How can I become ambassador at a court with a wife like Bozena?"

"You will give up your career. You will live at Wohan and manage the estate. You will be a kind and faithful husband to your wife." The old lady turned to her son. "I am only voicing your opinion, am I not, Carl?"

Carl Herdegen, looking nervously at his wife, tried without much hope of success to get round his mother. "I am afraid, dear and honoured maman, that the young people will not be happy with each other."

"Happy? Do you really believe the purpose of holy matrimony is to make people happy?" Her mocking black eyes sought her daughter-in-law. "Since when is matrimony synonymous with happiness?"

Joseph, the old lady's favourite grandson, tried to say a good word for his brother. "Grandmaman Inez, Stani is so young, only just seventeen, and Bozena is only sixteen. Mayn't they wait a little longer?"

"My dear grandson, sometimes it is impossible to wait. Stanislas will marry in three weeks."

Antoinette remained silent. She knew too well that grandmaman Inez always had her way. She felt sad. Dear God, she thought, little Bozena, poor little girl. Antoinette's eighteen years felt wise and grown up.

"Has the peasant girl been told of her luck?" Ludmilla asked sarcastically.

Grandmaman Inez's voice was icy. Her eyes were as hard as stone when she replied, "Don't sneer at the peasantry. Bozena's parents are honest, God-fearing people. Her mother has led a virtuous life and born her husband fifteen children. Many of our young and less young society beauties might do well to imitate her." Her voice grew gentler. "Go and call Bozena, Antoinette. She is waiting in my dressing-room."

Antoinette obeyed. Her legs felt like cotton-wool, and her hands were trembling.

Ludmilla kept drumming on the arm of her chair, swallowing the ugly words rising to her lips. Stanislas, her favourite child, her handsomest, her cleverest son. She had dreamt of seeing him at St. Petersburg, wearing the gold-laced diplomat's uniform. And now . . . All that silly fuss

on account of a youthful sin which after all was committed by every young man. Her eyes fell on Joseph standing silently beside the bed, and her anger grew. Couldn't it have been him, the quiet, shy, plain boy? "Of course," she said, with an ugly smile for her first born, "you're safe from all worries. That kind of thing will never happen to you, because your love-affair will never come to anything. Your unhappy love-affair."

Joseph grew crimson. He was glad Antoinette had left the room. She was the only one who knew his innocent-guilty secret, that he was afraid of women and that the woman he pretended to adore did not exist. The young men of his regiment and the girls he met in society had teased him with his virtue till he, not knowing how to escape their mockery, had invented an unhappy love-affair.

Antoinette opened the door, pushing Bozena into the room.

"Come, my child," grandmaman Inez's voice sounded strangely soft. "Come here, and give your hand to your betrothed. You will marry in three weeks' time. Come, Stanislas."

Bozena stared at the old lady with a look of utter dismay. Perhaps for the first time in her life grandmaman Inez met with a loud and determined opposition. The beautiful, fair-haired, blue-eyed Moravian peasant girl burst into tears and put up her hand to ward off Stanislas who had stepped forward. "Marry," Bozena sobbed, "marry Count Stani? Gracious Countess, dear and honoured Godmother, I can't marry him, I really can't."

"You must, my poor child," grandmaman Inez said still very gently.

"Gracious Countess, it's impossible. Count Stani can't . . . Count Stani will not want to . . ."

"It does not matter whether he wants to or not, Bozena. He is going to marry you."

"No, No!" Tears were falling down her cheeks like summer rain. Her lips trembled, she looked like the child she was. "I won't marry him. He'll beat me. He'll laugh at me because I'm only a peasant girl. No, no."

Ludmilla watched the scene with a contemptuous smile. "The girl does not seem overjoyed at the idea of marrying my son," she said with a little laugh. "What about giving Bozena a nice little dowry? Then she'll be sure of finding a decent husband."

"Oh, yes," Bozena sobbed. "But I don't want a dowry. I don't want anything, as long as I needn't marry Count Stani."

Grandmaman Inez's wax-white cheeks—it was so early she had not put on rouge yet—flushed an ugly, angry red. "Do you want to burn for ever in hell, Bozena?" she asked harshly.

"No. Holy Mother of God, no."

"Then you have got to marry Stanislas. And don't say Count Stani. He is your betrothed. Call him Stanislas."

Her thin, wrinkled hand shot out, caught hold of the crying girl, and drew her closer. Holding her fast with her left hand, she gently touched the sunburnt forehead, making the sign of the Cross on the soft young skin. "God will help you," she whispered. Then, taking Stanislas's hand, she laid it in Bozena's. "Be good to her, Stanislas. You have done her a great wrong."

The black eyes had grown very kind; the hard voice very gentle. Looking at her Antoinette understood why so many people loved the grim old woman, and why grandfather Herdegen, whom the children had never known because he had been killed in the Spanish war of succession, had brought her home from Spain and adored her as long as he lived. When grandmaman Inez wanted to please, no one, with the sole exception of her daughter-in-law, Ludmilla, could resist her charm.

For a minute Stanislas stood motionless, rooted to the floor, his face deadly pale, his eyes unhappy. Then, bending down, he kissed his grandmother's hand and Bozena's forehead.

"I will be good to her, grandmaman Inez. I promise."

Bozena was still sobbing softly. After one more look at the old lady she hung her head. She knew she was beaten.

Grandmaman Inez suddenly remembered an unimport-

ant trifle. "I am sure I have acted according to your wishes, my son," she said. "You know I never forget that we women, even we mothers, have to submit to the wishes of the head of the family."

In the background a tiny smothered laugh quickly changed into a cough as Antoinette pressed her lace handkerchief to her lips.

Carl Herdegen smiled, gently resigned as always when his mother or his wife had come to a decision. "You know, dear and honoured maman, that your wishes are mine."

Grandmaman Inez put the black fan she had been holding upon the bed. "You can go," she said. "I must dress, so as not to be late for mass." She nodded majestically and dismissed them with a gracious smile.

"Carl," Ludmilla said, her voice shaking with rage, "come to my room. This shameful thing must be prevented."

Walking in front of him, her high heels tapped the floor and her soft white silk gown streamed behind her. Her husband followed her slowly.

Bozena fitted away to the upper floor. The others went to the blue drawing-room. Little Franz came running to meet them. "What's up?" he asked eagerly. "Why wasn't I allowed to come with you?"

Antoinette patted his thick, tousled curls. Franz, the youngest, was the only red-headed member of the whole family; the only one who did not take after either father or mother. His brothers and sisters called him "the English picture," and the red-haired boy with the rather long nose and oval face really did resemble a portrait by Gainsborough. Joseph, always prone to muse upon all things, often was struck by the influence the climate could have upon a person's looks, for Franz had been born in the last of the three years his father had been accredited to the Court of St. James.

"Do tell me what's up, Toinette? I've been waiting for you for ages." He looked round. "Where's my Bozi? She was going to make a ball for me."

"Your Bozi won't make any more balls for you," Marie Christine said, dislike and spite in her voice.

Joseph gazed at her reproachfully, "*Maxima debetur puero reverentia*," he said à trifle pendantically.

Toinette, kind as ever, drew the boy closer. "I'll make a ball for you. Tell me what colour you want."

Stanislas threw himself into an armchair. Marie-Christine went up to him. "Stani, how could you? That girl! You know what a success you are. You might have made love to the most beautiful women."

Stanislas sighed. "You're a girl, Marie Christine. You can't understand. It was so dull at Wohan. I had nothing to do but study the speeches of all the ancient and modern statesmen. And there was no one to talk to except Monsieur Venarius. It was awful without you all. And"—passing a hand over a non-existing moustache, he tried to look like a rake—"Bozena is a lovely girl. How was I to know that a passing love-affair might become a serious matter?"

The bell of the private chapel began to ring. Brothers and sisters hurried from the room. It would never do to annoy grandmaman Inez by being late this morning.

Even the chapel bore grandmaman Inez's stamp. Over the altar hung a painfully brutal Crucifixion by El Greco, and on the walls cruelly realistic pictures of the way of the cross. "My religion," grandmaman Inez used to say, is not *a Peau de rose*. The God I worship is a severe master. He hates us to cheat."

The old lady was kneeling upright in the carved pew, her eyes fixed on the altar. Her thin lips moved soundlessly. A black lace veil framed the hard, old face. "My God," grandmaman Inez prayed, "I have acted according to your will, despising worldly vanities. I have saved two souls. You know, my God, that my grandson Stanislas would have had a brilliant career." She threw a glance at the culprit. Stanislas was sitting in the pew behind her, a sulky look on his boyish face. Meeting her eyes he hurriedly knelt, covering his face with his hands. Grandmaman

Inez again addressed herself to God, "Oh, Lord, forgive him and the poor girl. And if it is possible, let the child be a girl so that the first son of the younger generation be not conceived in sin. But should your inscrutable will give Bozena a son, I shall love him for our dear humble Saviour's sake as tenderly as all the other great-grandchildren your mercy will give me." She rose from her knees and listened with reverence to the words of the Gospel.

Carl Herdegen felt worn out and depressed. Ludmilla had remained in her room. After a hysterical fit of weeping, she had not had time to make up properly; besides she was angry with *le bon Dieu* for not preventing this catastrophe. Carl Herdegen prayed fervently, in the childlike simplicity of a kind heart. He prayed for his children and the unborn grandchild; he also prayed for patience. If God would only grant Ludmilla a little more sense, a little more understanding. Thus Carl Herdegen prayed in the childlike simplicity of a kind heart.

Antoinette was kneeling a little apart from the others. A bright rosy light fell from the stained window upon her pale face. She had half closed her eyes and tears coursed down her cheeks. "Poor Bozena," she thought. "Poor, poor Bozena. Dear Lord, forgive poor little Bozena. She is going to have a baby. She will suffer the curse laid upon Eve: in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children. And last year she was playing with Franz like a child. Dear Lord, Holy Mother of God, help little Bozena."

Marie Christine, kneeling in the same pew, angrily watched Antoinette's tears falling on the prayer-book, leaving damp round spots on the black leather. Antoinette's kindness and ever ready sympathy always annoyed Marie Christine. Life will break her, she thought, and Joseph too. Stani has been broken by it already. But I'm different; it won't hurt me. I'll be guided by reason and not by my feelings. I'll be a great lady, greater than all the others. I am beautiful, more beautiful than maman was and than Toinette is. The young men call me the snow queen. I ought to be a queen. What a pity Alexander is married! I wouldn't mind being Empress of Russia. The big barbarously beautiful town on

the banks of the Neva . . . And jewels, worth a kingdom . . . They say the Grand Duke Constantine loves pretty women and lovely girls . . . They also say he's like a wild beast . . . I think I'll rip the roses off my white ball dress . . . then I'll be all white and gold, white silk and golden hair . . . Who knows . . ." Lifting her head, she smiled at the crucifix over the altar as if she were smiling at Constantine.

Joseph, seeing the look and the smile, felt a shiver run along his spine. His prayers were confused; he believed and did not believe. He felt religious doubts, knowing at the same time that for him a life without faith would be unbearable. Grandmaman Inez, coming upon him as he was chuckling over Voltaire's *Candide*, had said crossly, "That's where your silly ideas come from." Joseph, enchanted by the author's style had passionately defended him. Grandmaman Inez listening with a patience she seldom displayed, had at last said something which amazed her grandson, "God loves honest doubt and an honest seeking for Him, but playing with doubt pleases the devil." Listening to the Latin words, Joseph remembered their conversation. The grand triumphant words of the *Sanctus* filled him with rapture, and when the *Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum* sounded through the dimly lit chapel, he forgot his doubts and prayed as fervently, as simply as his father did, asking peace for all nations. The tall young man in the well-cut uniform hated war, believing it to be an evil remnant of barbarous times. He thought of the monarchs and the statesmen who had met in Vienna after Napoleon's fall, ostensibly to build up a new world. What did they know of the old one, of the pain and sorrow and suffering the common people had to endure? Perhaps the Corsican, the enemy had known it, had suffered together with the rank and file. Joseph bowed his head, "Lord, give peace in our days."

Between the first and the last pew in which the servants knelt, the guest-pew had remained empty. Not quite, though. Bozena was kneeling pressed close to the wall, her hands holding her rosary. She knew that she did not belong to the servants any longer, but she had not dared obey Carl

Herdegen's kind glance and kneel in the family pew. Bozena was trying hard to pray, but her thoughts kept straying to the old castle of Wohan where she had spent her girlhood.

In three weeks she would be mistress of the castle. She would have servants who would laugh at her behind her back, making fun of the peasant girl playing the countess. Of course she was different from other peasant girls. Ever since her seventh year she had spent almost every winter with the family in Vienna, and dear, kind Toinette had taught her how to behave. She could read and write. She even wrote a better hand than Marie Christine, whose enormous straggling letters no one could read . . . Nevertheless . . .

Bozena shivered, thinking of the large rooms, of being all alone with Count Stani . . . No, not Count, her godmother wanted her to call him Stanislas . . . If only she had not been at home last summer. The young Count—no, Stanislas—was studying for an examination and had been sent to Wohan with his tutor. He and she had been the only young people on the estate. What could she do, when the young Count . . . after all she was only a peasant girl . . . Of course she had never thought anything would go wrong. Bowing her head humbly, she confessed to herself that she deserved the shame, the misery. Her parents would never forgive her. There was one person, of course, who would have forgiven her, Wenceslas, the second gardener . . . He . . . Bozena hastily drove away these thoughts. She was betrothed to Count Stani. It was a sin to think of another man. Her eyes misted over. There was such a dear little kitchen in the gardener's house . . . and a lovely linen chest with big red and yellow roses painted on its lid and sides. But of course she would not want the linen she had spun herself now that she was going to be a countess. Such beautiful strong linen. What a pity.

Mass was over. Grandmaman Inez left the chapel. In the passage she stopped Stanislas. "You are leaving for Wohan in an hour's time. It would not be seemly for you to live in the same house with your betrothed. You will re-

turn the day before the wedding. Monsieur Venarius is accompanying you."

"Grandmaman Inez, and the ball?"

"We will have to manage somehow without the finest gentleman in Vienna." Grandmaman Inez had not left the chapel in a kindly mood. Stanislas suppressed a sigh, and bowed. "Just as you wish, grandmaman Inez." She gave him her hand to kiss. "A novena to St. Joseph, the patron saint of matrimony might not come amiss. God keep you."

Turning away, she caught hold of Bozena who was trying to run past. "Come with me, my child. Demoiselle Agatha has come to measure you for your wedding dress."

Bozena's cheeks flushed a rosy red and her eyes sparkled. Demoiselle Agatha was one of the best dressmakers in Vienna and worked for Antoinette and Marie Christine. "Demoiselle Agatha . . . For me . . ." she stammered.

"Yes," grandmaman Inez said coldly. "Countess Bozena Herdegen must be dressed according to her station in life. Come. No, wait a moment. Monsieur Venarius . . ."

The elderly man in dark clothes coming from the library bowed.

"Monsieur Venarius, my grandson, Stanislas, has given up the diplomatic service. You need not make him study politics any longer. I want him to study agriculture."

"Just as you wish, Countess."

"Your rheumatism will get better in the country, my good Venarius. Oh, I believe I forgot to tell you that you are going to Wohan with Stanislas. I hope you can be ready in an hour."

The old tutor bowed again and sighed deeply. He knew that he was being exiled and he also knew why.

A servant came and said in the tone of a subordinate reporting to his commanding officer, "Princess Galewska wishes to see the gracious Countess."

Marie Christine, waiting with the others for grandmaman Inez to leave, made a face. "Grandmaman Nataly," she whispered. "Maman has sent for her. I should love to watch the fight."

Grandmaman Inez, smiling absently at Monsieur Vena-

rius, said. "Ask the Princess to wait in the red drawing-room." She took Bozena's hand. "Come, my child. I shall present you to the Princess as Stanislas' betrothed."

Small, thin, straight as a rod, the light of battle in her eyes, she marched along the resounding stone passage. She was not afraid of Ludmilla's mother. She knew perfectly who would conquer.

CHAPTER II

SITTING in the stage coach, rattling along the road leading to Moravia, longing for the first relay station, for warmth and light and something to eat, Stanislas gazed furiously at Monsieur Venarius, sleeping calmly in a corner, and cursed his ill luck and grandmaman Inez's crazy ideas. The night was very dark, and heavy rain fell from a hostile sky.

Whilst the musty-smelling coach was carrying Stanislas farther and farther from his beloved Vienna, the candles were being lit in the Herdegen palace. Hundreds of small, fragile, shimmering, pale golden flames lit up the drawing-rooms and the large ballroom, crackling softly and exhaling a sweet scent of wax. Their tender glow made pretty women prettier still and beautified the plain ones.

Marie Christine stopped before the immense mirror in the red room, where later on the elder men would play cards. She smiled at her image in the glass. Snow white and gold, tiny golden specks in her greenish-blue eyes, the curls framing her lovely face as golden as the ribbon holding them in place, the face itself of a delicate transparent pallor. Marie Christine stubbornly refused to put on rouge, she knew too well that her natural pallor suited her and enhanced the charm of her small face.

I might be a little fatter, she thought, nodding at her image in the mirror. But my skin is beautifully white, like a chicken's breast. It was a good idea of mine to rip off the

roses. All the girls are wearing wreaths. It makes me look different.

She felt her heart beating in her throat. His Highness the Grand Duke Constantine had graciously promised to honour the ball with his presence. I'll stay in the big reception room, decided Marie Christine. In the background, where it is darker, my white and gold will stand out all the more.

She considered who might be her rival to-night. Marie Therese Eszterhazy? No, you can meet her type all over Vienna—dark eyes, dark curls, an impish smile; she's no match for me. Rosalie Rzewuska? Much too old. A matron of thirty-three, clever, well read, but almost an old woman. Our famous *beauté celeste*, Julie Zichy? Oh, no, a wild Muscovite surely won't care for that kind of baby angel face. I needn't worry. . . .

Joseph was happy. No one forced him to make love to women or to talk nonsense to girls. He sat in the green drawing-room with his godfather, Prince de Ligne, talking about politics as was becoming to serious men. Joseph loved the fine old gentleman who embodied for him all the spirit and all the gallantry of days long past. Charles de Ligne was an old friend of the family, having fought in the Spanish war with Joseph's grandfather. After having talked over the world's news, Joseph told the old gentleman about the family council.

"I know," the prince said. "Your mother has asked me to talk over your grandmother."

Joseph frowned. How like maman. She is sure to ask every man and every woman she knows to save her darling Stani from the threatening misalliance.

"What did you answer, dear godfather?"

"That I was always ready to take up arms for a beautiful woman like Ludmilla, but that I would never dare oppose Countess Inez."

"Maman hates the idea."

"I can quite understand it. But I can also understand your grandmother's point of view, she being so terribly pious.

Unfortunately I can understand poor Stani, too. That's the worst of growing old, my dear Joseph, one understands everything and condemns nothing."

The prince screwed up his eyes and peered into the ballroom. "I think I can see my good friend, De La Garde," he said. "He's looking for me."

He got up, easily, gracefully like a young man in spite of his eighty years, and Joseph followed him, suppressing a sigh.

He did his duty as the eldest son of the house, trying hard to be amiable, to amuse bored dowagers and impatient young girls. At last, having exhausted every possible topic of conversation, he fled behind the thick velvet curtain separating the green drawing-room from the ballroom.

He remained alone for some time, watching the picture moving before his eyes. In the soft candlelight diamonds, rubies and emeralds glittered like tiny suns. Covered with jewels, the Russian women looked like beautifully adorned icons. At the other end of the room he saw grandmaman Nataly, fat, her green dress cut very low, wearing too many diamonds. She looked like a caricature of her beautiful daughter. Grandmaman Inez, a black lace veil over her diadem and a rope of pearls round her neck, trailing in defiance of fashion a long train behind her, made poor grandmaman Nataly look like a parvenue beside a queen. Antoinette had inherited grandmaman Inez's dignity, she held herself well and her movements were supple and graceful. She lacked self-consciousness; the kind smile hovering in her face was the same with which she looked at little Franz, when brothers and sisters were alone together. How different she is from Marie Christine! Joseph thought. She isn't half as lovely, but her dear little face has a charm of its own. The family can be proud of her and also of Marie Christine's beauty. What a pity Stani isn't here. I'm not fit to represent the family.

The big folding doors at the other end of the reception-room were thrown open. Two men entered.

"Quick," a young voice whispered on the other side of the curtain. "Quick! The ogre is coming. Save me."

Drawing back the curtain, Joseph saw a young, boyishly slender girl in a dainty green dress.

"Hurry up," the stranger whispered. "I can't bear to see him."

Putting out his hand, Joseph drew her behind the curtain. Before letting it drop he looked out once more and saw Prince Metternich making his bow to grandmaman Inez. A well-dressed, clever-looking man Joseph did not recognize, stood behind him, waiting to be introduced. The girl had thrown herself into an armchair. Looking round, she smiled. "Empire," she said, and Joseph thought he had never before heard so lovely a voice. "You have brought me to the right sanctuary, monsieur."

The green Empire room had been a whim of Ludmilla's at a time when Empire was the great fashion. Now, after the defeat of the Corsican, she felt rather ashamed of her "bad taste," and the small drawing-room was hardly ever used; only when there were big parties its doors stood open.

The girl looked at Joseph. "I believe you have been introduced to me," she said slowly, "but so many people have been introduced to me to-night. You must forgive me, monsieur, if I don't know . . ."

"Joseph Herdegen, and your most obedient servant, mademoiselle. I'm the eldest son of the family."

"And I'm Victoire Derville. My parents have come to the Congress, and I had to come too."

"That does not sound as if you had liked coming, mademoiselle?"

"No."

The violet eyes in the sunburnt face flashed with anger, but after the curt denial the girl remained silent.

Joseph looked at her furtively. He liked what he saw. The girl's features were irregular but full of life; the red mouth was a little too large, but the lips had a soft and generous curve; the nose was rather too long, but the nostrils were sensitive. Soft black curls fell down her neck. Having ascertained all this, Joseph suddenly remembered the terrible fact that he was alone with a girl. Feeling bewildered and embarrassed, he cudgelled his brains for

something to say. Victoire came to his rescue. "Tell me monsieur," she asked abruptly, "do you also hate traitors?"

"Yes," Joseph said. "I hate and despise them."

"That's right. Lift the curtain a bit and look into the room. You will see an arch-traitor. He is just kissing the hand of a fat old lady. Yes, the man over there."

"But that's . . ."

"Prince Talleyrand. The Duke of Benevent who used to be one of *his* most loyal servants."

"His?" Joseph did not understand what the girl meant.

Victoire shrugged impatiently. Her thin shoulders slipped out of the green dress. "The Emperor's," she said.

"Napoleon?"

"There is only one Emperor in the world—Napoleon. The others who have met in your capital are but puppets whose wires he used to hold in his hand. The Empereur. He is France; he is the whole world."

Joseph stared at her. He must have looked as disconcerted as he felt, for the girl went on passionately, "Yes, he was all that, and still is, even to-day, although your Monsieur de Metternich has overthrown him. Do you understand now, monsieur, why I can not bear to see the ogre? He has bereft France of her emperor; he has robbed us of the Prince of Rome, the poor, unhappy child. He is our real enemy. The others . . ." Another violent shrug sent her thin shoulders slipping out of the green dress. "Monarchs by divine right. How *demodé!* Your Emperor looks like a morose schoolmaster with that long nose of his; and le Roi de Prusse with his mournful, silly horse-face; and all the others, knaves or fools."

Joseph laughed and forgot to be shy.

Victoire's violet eyes grew wistful. "Monsieur, I hate traitors more than anything else in the world, and I must confess to you that my parents are traitors. They have belonged to all the parties that existed in France. They were royalists as long as it was not dangerous—Girondists, Robespierreists; Bonapartists. Now they have become royalists again."

Joseph felt his shyness returning. What could one say

to so undutiful a daughter? He had never met a girl who talked so frankly to a stranger. To make things worse still Victoire had crossed her legs and he could not help seeing her small feet and slender ankles. She seemed to guess his thoughts. Blushing a bright red, she hastily pulled down her dress. Then she said slowly, almost apologetically, "You are shocked at my frankness, monsieur. I know etiquette is still of great importance in this country. We are different. Perhaps we have seen life in the raw and have forgotten our manners. My aunt was beheaded under Robespierre; my brother was killed fighting for the King. He at least died for his cause. Revolution and war have changed us, monsieur—at least outwardly. I don't know whether one can change inwardly."

"Of course one can. If one is brought up the right way—if one grows up as nature means us to."

Victoire made a face. "Jean Jaques," she said flippantly. "No. That's not true either. Our tricoteuses had surely grown up as nature meant them to; no court ceremonial, no conventions had spoilt their pristine innocence. Yet aren't they the most terrible thing revolution brought forth? Women who look on, knitting; while men and women are being beheaded, who only turn away their eyes to pick up a stitch?"

"All the same natural man is good."

"He isn't, monsieur. You must have led a very sheltered life to believe in that fatal error. Is Monsieur de Metternich good? And Prince Talleyrand? Are all these people who are celebrating and dancing and overeating and getting drunk because the greatest genius of mankind has been overthrown, good?"

Falling silent, she stared so hard at Joseph that he grew uncomfortable beneath her gaze.

"Maybe you are good, monsieur, and that makes you think others are too. Perhaps . . ." Lifting her head, she gazed at a hand parting the curtains. Antoinette stood in the doorway, staring at them with wide-open eyes and a little amused smile on her lips. Joseph alone with a girl!

"Toinette," Joseph did his best to hide his embarrass-

ment, "come here. I want you to know Mademoiselle Derville. This is my sister Antoinette, mademoiselle."

The two girls looked at each other searchingly. Then both smiled.

"Monsieur," Victoire said, her face gentler than he had yet seen it, "I think I know now why you believe man to be good. You judge others by your sister."

She put out her hand. "Mademoiselle, your brother has saved me from meeting the ogre and from seeing the arch-traitor. I am grateful to him. But I must not keep him any longer. Perhaps you will stay with me a little while?"

"Prince Talleyrand has left. He was expected at court," Antoinette said.

Joseph looked perplexed. How on earth had his sister guessed who the arch-traitor was?

"And the ogre?" Victoire asked with a smile.

Antoinette looked at her brother, an unspoken query in her eyes.

"Metternich," Joseph said crossly. Now that Antoinette had spoilt their *tête à tête*, he disliked any one speaking in such a way of their guests.

"He is supping at maman's table. If you come with me to the ballroom, mademoiselle, you won't see him. We're going to dance."

Victoire forgot her politics.

"What fun! I do love dancing. Especially that new-fangled valse."

"If you don't mind, I should like you to meet my grandmother, mademoiselle. I know you have been introduced to her, but I should like you to talk to her, to get to know her." Joseph did not know himself why he wanted it. Never before had he cared whether grandmaman Inez liked or disliked the girls he knew. Offering his arm to Victoire, he led her into the room where grandmaman Inez was receiving privileged guests. Seeing the old lady in the armchair, Victoire stopped dead. "She is like Madame Mère," she whispered. "Why she's exactly like Madame Mère."

A very gentle, very well brought up Victoire dropped a deep curtsy and kissed grandmaman Inez's hand, answering

with charming diffidence the conventional questions put to her by the old lady.

Grandmaman Inez was tired. She would rather have died than have admitted it, and only Antoinette noticed the lassitude of the old body. Without saying a word she stuffed a cushion behind grandmaman Inez's back and ran for a footstool. Grandmaman Inez had been weary and bored before Joseph had presented Victoire to her. Now she was neither weary nor bored, nor did she feel the cold of the autumn evening. Looking at Victoire, she said kindly, "Go and dance. Mademoiselle is sure to dance well. She looks like it."

In the mellow candlelight which made pretty women look prettier still and beautified the plain ones, Joseph danced with Victoire. He had never cared for dancing, but this slight figure, warm and tender in his arms, made him feel as if he could go on dancing with her for ever.

Grandmaman Inez watched them through the open door. She smiled, hoping God had accepted the great sacrifice she had made yesterday and would give her as a reward the happiness of her favourite grandson.

A sudden hush fell upon the reception-room. Only the soft rustle of silk dresses was audible, a sighing and sighing like trees in which the wind is playing. Fair and brown and black and white heads were inclined; small feet in heeled silk and velvet shoes executed the ceremonial curtsy, due to members of reigning families.

Marie Christine was one of the first to stand up again. She looked in the direction from which the Grand Duke Constantine and his gentlemen-in-waiting were coming. For a minute her heart seemed to stop beating. She had been dreaming of the Grand Duke all the evening, or rather of what he might embody for one of the loveliest girls of Viennese society. She had seen herself walking beside him. . . . But now . . . an evil Kalmuk face, small cunning eyes beneath prickly brows, a conceited smile, a stiff bearing. . . . It flashed upon her that it was possible to pay too high a price for one's ambition. But the feeling was

gone in a trice. Mocking her own frightened heart, she asked herself with an ugly little smile, "Am I Toinette or Joseph or poor Stani to let my feelings get the better of me?"

She remained standing, her white hands hanging by her sides; on her delicate face the cold snow-queen smile, motionless, silent amidst the chatter of women, animated and excited by the coming of the Grand Duke. The big chandelier hanging above her threw a bright light upon her golden hair and her snow-white skin.

Constantine's hard eyes roved through the room. He felt bored. He hated semi-official parties where he could not drink as much as he liked and had to behave himself. He was hungry, and the idea of condescending to a lot of people before going in to supper annoyed him. And even when he went he would have to take in one of the old hags, the lady of the house or some other ancient dame. His sulky glance fell upon Marie Christine standing perfectly still, eyes hidden by heavy white lids. He turned to his host. "Who is the young lady in white under the chandelier, Count?"

"My youngest daughter, your Serene Highness."

"Will you present her to me?"

Carl Herdegen was anything but pleased by these gracious words. Constantine's reputation could hardly have been worse. If only it had not been Marie Christine the Grand Duke had singled out! Carl Herdegen, taciturn and notwithstanding many years of diplomacy nearly as shy as his eldest son, was an excellent judge of character, and a keen observer. It was to these qualities he owed his brilliant career. Strange to say he saw even his own children as they really were. He knew that Antoinette and Joseph could be trusted always to do the decent kindly thing; that, hidden beneath childish thoughtlessness and boyish vanity there was much good, a spirit of gallantry and of sacrifice in Stanislas; that little Franz was by far the cleverest but also the most eccentric of the family, and that Marie Christine only acknowledged a single thing—her mad ambition. Reluctantly he called the girl.

Marie Christine hesitated an instant, lazily lifting her green, gold-speckled eyes she looked the Grand Duke full

in the face. Then, slowly walking up to the two men, she stopped before Constantine and dropped a deep curtsy.

Turning away from his host and his gentlemen-in-waiting, Constantine stared at Marie Christine. Forgetting his boredom, he began talking animatedly. She answered with a bashful yes or no. But her eyes spoke a different language. The lovely cold face with the tempting, passionate eyes fascinated the Russian. He nodded absently when his host brought up people to be introduced to him and hardly said a word; he had eyes only for Marie Christine, and it was she he took in to supper, defying all etiquette and all rules of decorum.

Grandmaman Inez was pale with rage. "That liberation," she said to her daughter-in-law. "I'm not going to permit it. I'm not going to stand it."

"My dear mother-in-law," Ludmilla said, delighted with the Grand Duke's condescension, "I implore you not to make a scene. Marie Christine has been well brought up; she knows how to behave. The Grand Duke . . ."

"I don't care if he's the Grand Duke or the Tsar himself." Grandmaman Inez was shaking with fury. "If the man wasn't our guest . . . Unfortunately he is. But if he believes the laws of hospitality will make us say '*A la disposition di Usted*, he's mistaken. Our daughters are not for sale. Whatever others may be, *my* granddaughters are not." Sitting at the head of the table, she crossed herself. "Holy Mother of God, protect our house."

Ludmilla hurried away and took her place beside the Prince de Ligne. At the next table the snow-queen was smiling at the Russian, coldly, tantalizingly.

Antoinette's cheeks were rosy and her eyes were sparkling, but not from dancing. Sitting beside a tall dark-eyed young man, she was listening eagerly to his words. She had forgotten everything else—poor Stani, sleeping at some inn or other; Bozena sitting alone in her room, red-eyed, heavy-hearted; that charming Victoire who had tamed Joseph; Marie Christine, unexpectedly the queen of the evening. Looking deep into sad dark eyes, listening to a soft voice

speaking strange words of liberty and Greece she was wonderfully happy. How strange that a man could be so brave, so humble, so devoted to a cause as Alexander Ypsilantis was.

She had not known that one could love a country like a woman; that one could wish for nothing better than to make her free and happy. She had never seen a man who felt as one with the poorest shepherd, the poorest fisher, the beggar in the street, because they were Greek as he was. A beautiful idea and an unfamiliar one.

The young man's words painted for Antoinette the picture of a faraway country. A blue sea gleaming in the sun, olive groves of palest silver, wonderful snow-white temples, sages and poets wandering through a landscape transfigured by the soft mist of the past, a melodious language, beautiful words—Greece.

"I do not know, Mademoiselle," Alexander Ypsilantis said, "whether you can understand. Perhaps you must have your roots in the sacred soil; perhaps you must have looked upon its beauty as a child. Strange to say a German understood it, Herr von Goethe. He wrote about seeking Greece with one's soul. Yes, Mademoiselle, Greece is not only earth and stone and sea, trees and fields, it is also something to be sought for with the soul, harmony, beauty, liberty and justice." His face grew hard. "Enslaved," he said bitterly, "suffering under Turkish tyranny. That is the fate of my country."

"Perhaps," Antoinette said shyly, "the Congress will do something. Everybody is talking about the new world that is to be created. Maybe Greece will also . . ."

An ugly sneer came upon Alexander Ypsilantis's face. "The Congress, Mademoiselle? Even to-day, before it has met, you can be sure that one delegate will not be present . . . Justice! What are the statesmen and the monarchs, supposed to decide the fate of nations, doing? Celebrating, dancing, eating and drinking." Looking into Antoinette's tender eyes, his voice grew softer. "Your city is very lovely, Mademoiselle. She has a gay charm which other towns lack. She does not play like bored adults trying

to kill time, but like a happy child. May she be allowed to remain a child."

"But . . . some, some of us are quite serious people," Antoinette stammered.

"I know, Mademoiselle. I discovered it to-night."

His kind eyes held hers. Antoinette's cheeks were burning; strange words rang in her ears like the burden of a song: Greece, liberty, justice, beauty, Alexander Ypsilantis.

The wax candles glowed; the rooms were filled with music, jewels glittered. The whole town was celebrating the defeat of the enemy of mankind—the Corsican; celebrating it with pomp and splendour, with intrigues, with witty words, laughter and song. Gilded coaches drove along the narrow streets; servants bearing torches ran in front of them; the trembling flames cut the dark like red knives.

On a wind-swept island in the Mediterranean a man lay staring at the dark. He did not want to sleep. He feared the dreams that visited him—icy winter nights on an endless plain, snow, a grey frozen river . . . Burning heat, towering over yellow sand the pyramids . . . A city lovely as a rose, Paris, mad with joy, laughing, singing . . . A slender weeping woman . . . Victory, and again victory . . . Emperor of France . . . Kings humbling themselves before him . . . The daughter of the Habsburgs in the nuptial bed . . . And at last a boy, his son, the King of Rome . . . A grey October day . . . Leipzig . . . October had always been an unlucky month . . . Also in Russia . . . Paris again, a silent angry town, a strange city . . . Elba . . .

In Vienna men and women tired of dancing went to bed, the flaring candles lit their dreams. The streets grew empty, but not for long. The country sent heavy rumbling carts to town, bearing victuals for the capital which had become larger and more densely populated during the last months. In their stables horses woke up and pawed the floor. On a wind-swept island in the Mediterranean a man lay awake.

CHAPTER III

THE coach drove slowly along the drive: Bohuslaw, the old lodgekeeper bowing low on one side and Milena, his cheerful fat wife, on the other. Stanislas, forgetting to sulk and to feel miserable, abandoned himself to the happy holiday mood all the Herdegen children felt as soon as they saw the old grey stone castle. Wohan was the beloved paradise of their childhood—air and sun after endless dark winter days spent in town; heavenly freedom from throttling etiquette. There was bathing and fishing in the Morava, the green river flowing lazily at the bottom of the park. There were merry games on meadows and in the deep dark woods; mysterious and terribly exciting expeditions to old, half-ruined parts of the castle, where one often found strange baubles dating a hundred years back.

At Wohan even grandmaman Inez seemed changed. She hung her fine clothes in the press, walking about in skirts which only reached to her ankles and in heavy boots. She stalked over the fields with the estate agent, Huberpeter, inspected cottages, put her hand in her pocket and paid without a murmur for repairing damaged roofs, pigsties and crumbling walls. The servants and the tenants loved the old woman. She was proud of the fact that even during the times of serfdom no one had ever been flogged at Wohan. Huberpeter, ten years older than his mistress, born and brought up in the Sudeten-Land, used to wring his hands in despair. "Most gracious Countess, the thing can not be done. Your indulgent kindness to the rabble will bear evil fruit. At Prince Karek's estate, Wognin, the serfs are flogged in turn, just to prevent their growing rebellious. How am I to control the serfs if the gracious Countess will not permit me to use the whip?"

Grandmaman Inez gazed so long at the small, sturdy man's freckled face till he grew red and confused. Then she said, as one addressing a servant, "My good Huberpeter, you'd better read the Gospel. Where is it written that we are allowed to take the whip to our poorer brethren and

sisters? Didn't our Lord say: 'Whatsoever thou doest unto the least of these my brethren thou doest unto Me'? Am I to take the whip to my Lord and Saviour, Huberpeter? Remember what I say. At the first crack of a whip heard at Wohan you are dismissed."

Huberpeter did remember. At Wohan no serf was flogged. At Wohan every man and woman was treated as a human being. Many years later, after Joseph II had abolished serfdom, Huberpeter used to boast, "We did not wait for the abolition. We were always enlightened and humane. Never in all my life did I order a serf to be flogged."

Monsieur Venarius, hearing the old man's words, smiled superciliously. Of course the young Countess, listening to the dictates of her pious heart, had always known what was right. But who had taught her, a young widow living at Wohan, the rights of man? Who had lectured her on long winter evenings, explaining right and wrong, justice and injustice? Who but the tutor of her eldest son Aloisius, Monsieur Robert Jean Venarius from Fribourg in the free country of Switzerland?

The young widow had been a good pupil. Monsieur Venarius remembered her—slender, her long black curls falling down her back, her big black eyes devouring his words, her thin white never-idle hands. He had often felt amazed at the unworldly spirit of the young woman. Whatever problems life put before her she judged by the teachings of her faith. She was a great lady, despising pomp and rank because she followed her crucified Lord who had not had where to lay his head. She was a humble tyrant who ruled her children with a rod of iron; she was a loving and devoted wife who always had her way. Monsieur Venarius had shared joy and sorrow with her. He had comforted her with the sayings of Marcus Aurelius when Aloisius had died at the age of ten; he had watched with her by the body of her husband who had been killed in the war and brought home to be buried at Wohan; he had taught Carl, her second son, and later Carl's children; he still accompanied grandmaman Inez once a year to the gate of the Carmelite convent where her only daughter Marie Therèse was mother superior. They

had grown old together. Monsieur Venarius was four years younger than his friend and pupil, and for both of them there was no place like Wohan. Here, free from all the petty man-made conventions, they could breathe freely and live as God and nature wanted man to live.

Grandmaman Inez had great hopes of Stanislas's stay at Wohan. Here the young sinner would be more likely to feel remorse and do penance for his sin than in town. Unfortunately Stanislas had shown neither remorse nor the least wish to do penance during the long drive from Vienna to Moravia. He had either sulked, staring morosely out of the coach window, or had declaimed about the heartlessness and lack of sympathy of the old who were incapable of understanding that a young man of the world was no monk. But now, seeing the sun set in a crimson glory behind the old grey castle and tiny rosy clouds floating like tropic birds over the black forest, Stanislas could not help feeling happy. Running up the steps, he greeted Mrs. Widowek, the housekeeper, like the old friend she was, telling her that he was starved.

Monsieur Venarius followed him slowly, the long drive had shaken his old bones. Leaning upon his stick, he limped into the house and gave Mrs. Widowek a letter from the gracious Countess. The housekeeper took it with a flattered smile; she was very proud of being able to read and write.

Whilst Stanislas was helping his tutor out of his great-coat and looking round at the old armour hanging in the hall, Mrs. Widowek studied the letter and cried out joyously, "Our young Count Stani is going to marry!" Her round eyes grew wet with emotion. "I'm to arrange the upper floor for the young couple! Not that there's much to be done; I always keep everything spick and span." She wheezed slightly and said solemnly, "May God bless our young Count Stani and his highborn betrothed."

Taking up the coat Stanislas had thrown on the table and smoothing it, she said, "May I ask the name of the highborn betrothed?"

Stanislas flushed. Of course the servants would have to

be told. And if he told the housekeeper she would spread the news, sparing him an unpleasant half-hour. Turning his back upon her, he said crossly, "I'm marrying Bozena. In three weeks."

Dropping the coat, Mrs. Widowek stared incredulously at Monsieur Venarius. "Count Stani is making fun of me, isn't he?" she said, her voice shaking ominously.

Of course she had not been blind last summer. She always knew and noticed everything. She had not said a word to anyone. Surely young gentlemen can have a bit of fun if they want to. And as to Bozena it might bring her a nice fat dowry and great happiness. Every tear the girl shed over her shame would be paid for in silver and gold. No one knew that better than Mrs. Widowek. Did she not owe her situation to the fact that long ago the brother of the late Count had trifled with her? Only at that time no one had thought of marriage.

Monsieur Venarius shook his head. "No, Mrs. Widowek," he said gravely, "it's perfectly true. Stanislas and Bozena will be married in three weeks."

Mrs. Widowek wrung her fat hands. "Dear God, since when do young gentlemen . . . My own little Count Stani I dandled on my knees . . . It's impossible." Sniffing loudly, she wiped her eyes with her black silk apron.

"Grandmaman Inez wants me to marry Bozena," Stanislas said sullenly.

"Oh, well, then, of course . . ."

With a last sniff Mrs. Widowek fell silent. Of course if the gracious Countess wants a thing to be done, it will be done. The wishes of the gracious Countess are somewhat like the Ten Commandments. They must be obeyed and there is no twisting or turning of them. Bozena . . . in three weeks. She, Mrs. Widowek, will have to call the girl she knew as a bare-footed brat, gracious Countess. Mrs. Widowek blinked; her eyes seemed to grow smaller. She must be careful. Count Stanislas is sure to repeat her words to Bozena as young lovers do. She must be very careful. "Miss Bozena," she said haltingly, "is very beautiful and will be a devoted wife. I always used to say Miss Bozena was meant

to be a great lady. Yes, old Mrs. Widowek has good eyes. Our gracious Countess has often said to me, 'Mrs. Widowek,' she has said, 'you see everything, you even see things which don't exist.'"

Monsieur Venarius felt sorry for Stanislas, standing beside an old armoured knight, looking angry, unhappy and helpless. "We're both half frozen, dear Mrs. Widowek," he said. "And very hungry. Do give us something to eat."

"Fancy me forgetting. Of course. Just a moment." The housekeeper rolled through the hall like a black ball and disappeared behind the big oak door. Monsieur Venarius went up to Stanislas. "Come along, my boy," he said kindly. "We'll have a wash before supper. We . . ." He stopped, staring at his pupil. Stanislas's fine brown eyes were full of tears.

"Stani," the old tutor said, "be a man. After all, it's not so terrible to marry a lovely girl."

"They'll all laugh at me," Stanislas said, his voice trembling. "They'll all make fun of me and my peasant wife. Grandmaman Inez must be mad."

"If any one dares to make fun of your wife, Stanislas, you will know what a gentleman has to do. Do try not to think of yourself but of Bozena. Do you believe it will make her happy to marry so reluctant a lover? Remember, she is beautiful, good, charming, affectionate . . ."

"And has an immortal soul for which grandmaman Inez is responsible," Stanislas snapped.

Monsieur Venarius, less convinced of the existence of an immortal soul than of the rights of man, ignored his pupil's outburst. Turning away, he began slowly, painfully, to climb the stairs. Stanislas stared round the hall as if the old familiar place had become strange all of a sudden. Then he ran after his tutor to help him up to the first floor.

After having served supper herself, Mrs. Widowek decided to risk an hour's-walk in the dark so as to be the first to tell Bozena's parents of their daughter's luck. The sky was overcast and gusts of wind kept hitting her in the face. The little farmhouse was shrouded in night when she

reached it. Bozena's grey-haired, heavy-limbed mother—Bozena was her eighth child—shook her head despondently. "Marry? Count Stanislas is going to marry Bozena? I don't believe it."

Bozena's father, nursing his rheumatism by the fire, looked angry. "His own sister's foster sister," he growled. "To seduce his sister's foster sister. I'd never have believed it of him."

Mrs. Widowek ignored the old man. "Of course he'll marry her," she said. "The Countess wants him to."

Bozena's parents looked at each other and then at the fat, excited little woman.

"The Countess! Of course, if the Countess wants it . . ." the old man said hesitatingly.

His wife interrupted him. "He's really going to marry her? Marry her properly? In church? Our Bozena?"

"Yes, in church, in Vienna. After the wedding they're coming here."

Bozena's mother sat up. She pulled her red kerchief straight, and smoothed her shabby skirt with her toil-hardened hand. "My Bozena was always a beautiful girl," she said proudly. "Countess Antoinette is not half as beautiful. And a good girl too. Last year when the brown cow died she bought a new one for her father. The young Count will have a good wife."

Mrs. Widowek felt annoyed. To think of Count Stani condescending to marry this peasant girl and her parents not even falling on their knees and thanking God and Countess Inez for the undeserved mercy. "It's a great honour for Bozena," she said sharply.

"An honour?" Bozena's father repeated slowly, seeming to ruminate his words according to his wont, "An honour? After all, he knows why he's marrying the girl. Since when is it an honour for an unmarried maid to be with child?"

"From a highborn young gentleman," Mrs. Widowek interposed.

"Child is child, and unmarried maid is unmarried maid," the old man declared, "however highborn the young man may be." Bending down he threw a log upon the fire.

Bozena's mother had been thinking hard. "What a blessing," she said, "that Bozena has got her wedding chest full of linen. I'll show it to you, Mrs. Widowek. She's got enough linen for a queen."

Mrs. Widowek smiled contemptuously. "Bozena won't want it. A highborn Countess does not wear the same linen as a peasant."

The fact that the beautiful strong linen she and Bozena had spun was not good enough, made Bozena's mother realize that her daughter was going to be a person of rank. "Of course," she said eagerly, "of course. It will do for Aniska. Bozena will wear clothes like Countess Antoinette and Countess Marie Christine, and chemises like cobweb. Bozena will be a great lady." She looked at Mrs. Widowek, an anxious question in her eyes. "Shall we have to call our daughter gracious Countess?" she asked shyly.

The old man flew into a rage. "Don't be an idiot. Bozena would remain our daughter, even if she married a king. She has no reason for being ashamed of us. My grandfather was a free peasant on his own land. And I'd like to find a man in the neighbourhood whose crops are finer than mine."

Mrs. Widowek felt horrified. The way these common people talk! They're not even capable of understanding how great an honour Countess Inez and God are conferring on their silly daughter.

"I'd have preferred Wenceslas as a son-in-law," the old man said. "Mix with your likes. I'll tell you one thing," he turned to his wife. "If they treat Bozena badly, if they despise her because she's my daughter, I'm not going to stand it."

"Don't talk nonsense," Mrs. Widowek reproached him. "Treat her badly! What an idea. Hasn't the Countess told the young Count to marry the girl in church?"

The old man nodded, his face gentler. "The old Countess is a good woman. Good and wise. If she wishes it . . ."

"When," Bozena's mother said, "shall we see our gracious son-in-law?"

Mrs. Widowek frowned. She hated being asked questions

she could not answer. After all she could read and write; she belonged to a higher class than these simple, common people. Smiling condescendingly, she said, "The young Count is fatigued after the journey. He will let you know when you are to come to the castle."

"If he wants to marry my daughter, he's got to come here," Bozena's father said harshly. "After all I'm the father . . ."

"Don't talk so, master," his wife said plaintively. "You forget . . ."

"Mr. Venarius is coming to-morrow to talk things over." Mrs. Widowek took up her big black shawl and wrapped it round her. Bozena's mother squeezed her hand, thanking her humbly for her "kind visit." The old woman's humility pleased Mrs. Widowek. She smiled graciously. For the last thirty years she had been trying to imitate Countess Inez's smile. To-night she felt with delight that she had got it right at last.

"Bozena is sure to be happy," she said, standing in the doorway. "And you will rejoice in your highborn grandchildren."

Walking home along the uneven path, she stumbled over a root and stubbed her toe. The pain filled her anew with anger, anger with the common people and regretful anger that forty years ago, when the most respectable Mrs. Widowek who could read and write, had been a pretty young girl; there had not been a gracious Countess with a tender conscience and an iron will living in the old palace at Prague where she had been in service.

The Morava, dreamily flowing between her banks, sent out a delicate grey-blue veil of mist, which rose slowly and disappeared revealing the pale golden morning sun. Stanislas's eyes looked with delight at the peaceful sleeping plain. He felt happy. He loved Moravia, the endless plain, the horizon fringed with dark forests, the tiny villages dotted here and there. How dear and familiar were the noises of the estate waking up to a new day. From the poultry yard sounded the crowing of cocks and the silly giggling

cackle of hens. Somebody must have opened the door of the aviary, for the peacock came strutting past. His feathers gleamed in the sun. He stopped and spread his magnificent tail. Stretching his long thin neck, he uttered a piercing cry. Stanislas burst out laughing and began to imitate the bird's cry, as he and his brothers and sisters had loved doing ever since they were babies. The peacock, seeming to recognize one of his tormentors, stopped dead and gave a second, furious cry. Stanislas, still laughing, tried to cry him down. Monsieur Venarius, looking for his pupil, who ought to have been bowed down with remorse and ready to do penance, found him on the terrace, yelling at the top of his voice and looking anything but remorseful. The wise old man did not feel displeased. A gay, childish Stanislas was easier to influence than the young man who wanted to impress him with his worldly wisdom and scepticism.

Monsieur Venarius carried in his pocket detailed instructions written in grandmaman Inez's tiny energetic hand. The fortnight at Wohan was to be taken up by visits to the tenants and the neighbouring peasants, by "studies," as grandmaman Inez called it, in the stud, the dairy, the kiln, and the forests. "Let him," grandmaman Inez had written, "do things himself and not fear to soil his white hands. Let him milk cows, groom horses, cut down trees. Let him learn to be a good farmer. But do not let him neglect religious contemplation. See to it, my good Venarius, that he spends a part of the day praying in the chapel. And, this is most important: see to it that he makes friends with the Sametils." The name of Bozena's parents had been heavily deleted and replaced by the words "his parents-in-law." Reaching this passage Monsieur Venarius could not help smiling. He knew that grandmaman Inez writing "the Sametils" had been tempted by the devil of pride, had thought, only for an instant, disdainfully "those Same-tils," and, wanting to punish herself, had hurriedly written "his parents-in-law."

She had set down so many things that it would have taken a year to do them all. How like the old lady, the tutor

thought, to have squeezed everything in so short a space of time.

On the last of the closely written pages grandmaman Inez implored Monsieur Venarius to instruct Stanislas at least once a day in the duties of a husband and father.

Feeling in his pocket the paper with the instructions, the old tutor came upon the future model farmer, husband and father trying to cry down a peacock and splitting his sides with laughter.

During breakfast Monsieur Venarius cautiously mentioned grandmaman Inez's wishes and the visits Stanislas was to pay.

"I know," the boy said, "I must look up old Huberpeter. grandmaman Inez gave me some tobacco for him."

"Yes, but afterwards we must go and see Bozena's parents."

Stanislas made a face.

"To-day? Can't we put it off till to-morrow?"

Monsieur Venarius shook his head. "Countess Inez wanted it to be your first visit, Stanislas."

Stanislas put down his treacle cake and looked woefully at the old tutor.

"What on earth am I to say to Bozena's parents, Veni?" he asked, using the children's old pet name for Monsieur Venarius.

"I can imagine that the Sametils will have something to say to you, my boy. Don't lose your temper if the old man scolds you. You've got to keep silent as long as he talks and then tell him that you are going to marry Bozena and be a good and faithful husband."

"How awful," Stanislas said with a moan. "To be a husband. It sounds dreadful."

"And not only a husband," Monsieur Venarius added, remembering the letter in his pocket, "but also a devoted and loving father."

To his dismay, Stanislas burst out laughing. "Isn't it funny that I'll soon be a father." His eyes grew soft. "Do you think my son will be good-looking?" he asked artlessly. "Bozena is lovely and I'm very handsome. The

child ought to be beautiful. I rather like babies. I remember what a darling Franz was as long as he was quite small. To think that I shall have a son before Joseph has one!"

This did not sound exactly like remorse. Nevertheless Monsieur Venarius believed he would be entitled to write to grandmaman Inez, "Stanislas seems to harbour affectionate feelings towards his child. Pray, dear Countess, be comforted . . ."

After breakfast they went to the pretty ivy-grown little house in which Mathias Huberpeter lived. Huberpeter, who had been estate agent at Wohan for about fifty years, was an old man of eighty. For the last twelve years the real manager of the estate had been a French emigré, the Marquis de Venelles, who, flying before the storm that shook his country, had not wanted to fight with the Royalists against France. He had gone to Vienna where friends had procured him the situation at Wohan.

"What was I to do?" he used to say, speaking of those early days. "I was a small squire. I knew the soil, and the soil is the same everywhere. A man who lives with fields and meadows and woods can never feel a stranger. What was I to do? To fight with Frenchmen against Frenchmen? Kings come and go, but the nation is immortal. I preferred staying here and working as a man should work, to shedding the blood of my countrymen."

Monsieur de Venelles understood that old Huberpeter was to live on in the agent's house and to retain the illusion of being master on the estate. Monsieur de Venelles did all the work and old Huberpeter drove behind Ali, the gentlest of all horses, over the fields, and criticized. He disliked the Frenchman, it annoyed him that the stranger had so easily learnt the language of the country and had not to turn to him for help.

As soon as he had greeted his visitors, he began complaining of the "Foreigner."

"He's absolutely mad," he grumbled. "There's a fool at the other end of the world who imagines dunging with powdered gypsum is good for the crops. What does our

Venelles do? He believes the other fool and dungs with the hellish stuff."

"The fields look all right," Monsieur Venarius said soothingly.

"He's ruining everything," the old man growled. "Of course the fields yield more during the first years. But what's going to happen later on . . .?" He described at length barren and ruined fields, cursing the fool at the other end of the world and the Frenchman at this.

Of course Mrs. Widewek had told him the news, but he seemed inclined to ignore it. When Stanislas said, "I shall soon come here for good," the old man shook his white head and grumbled, "As long as I'm agent here, there's nothing left for others to do. You'd better stay in Vienna. You're not meant to live in the country."

Stanislas, ever ready to contradict, grinned. "I shall work very hard; and my wife, Bozena, will help me."

The old man made a face as if he was looking at something repulsive. "Bad times," he said. "Terrible times. In the good old days no one thought of marrying a common girl because she was with child by him. That's the result of that cursed revolution which was made by Venelles and others like him. All men have become Jacobins. Only a Jacobin could force a young gentleman to marry a peasant girl."

Stanislas burst out laughing. "Grandmaman Inez is making me marry Bozena. Surely you don't call her a Jacobin, Mr. Huberpeter?"

"The gracious Countess conforms too strictly to the teachings of the Gospel," Mathias Huberpeter declared. "Much too strictly. We poor sinners were never meant to do so. Whoever does, is a Jacobin."

Monsieur Venarius decided to write in his letter to grandmaman Inez: "Stanislas has spoken with praiseworthy frankness of his marriage to Bozena."

In the afternoon Stanislas suddenly decided to pay the dreaded visit to the Sametils. "I want to get it over, and I'd rather go alone," he told Monsieur Venarius.

As children they had often gone to the farm where Marie Christine's foster-sister lived. They had played with her and with her brothers and sisters; had drunk milk, had eaten cake baked by Bozena's mother; had coaxed the farmer to make a kite for them, and no one in the world could make a better kite than old Sametil.

To-day everything was different. Seeing Stanislas, Bozena's mother burst out crying, and told her youngest boy to call his father and be sure and tell him he must come at once, because Bozena's betrothed, the young Count was waiting for him. Nepomuk ran off and Stanislas watched him enviously. He longed to get away from the red-faced, excited woman who was so different from the Mrs. Sametil he had always known. It would not even be the act of a coward, he thought; a gentleman may run away from a woman, a delicate, helpless creature.

The delicate, helpless creature wiped away her tears and with arms akimbo, said severely, "How did it happen, Count Stanislas? Tell me, how could it happen?"

Stanislas blushed all over. What was he to say? After all he could not tell Bozena's mother of the lovely summer's night; of the silver moon riding the heavens and the scent of the roses; of Bozena looking so lovely in the soft light. . . . "I don't know," he stammered, feeling miserable.

"My daughter Bozena, the best girl in the world. As innocent as a baby. And so beautiful. She might have married Wenceslas, the second gardener. He is sure to be first gardener when the old man dies, and then Bozena. . . ."

"But I . . . I" Stanislas hunted desperately for the soft answer which, so he had learnt, turneth away wrath, "I'm quite a good match, too."

Mother Sametil suddenly remembered that she was talking not only to the man who had seduced her daughter but also to her future son-in-law. Her voice took on another tone. "Ah, well," she said with a resigned sigh, "youth must have its fling. And if the young Count is going to make an honest woman of her. . . ."

Father Sametil came plodding along the path, closely followed by little Nepomuk, staring at his mother and

Stanislas with wide-open eyes and a wide-open mouth. Father Sametil was neither excited, nor did he scold. He gazed sadly at Stanislas and only said, "Well, well!"

Feeling like a criminal, Stanislas remembered a faraway day when he, a boy of ten, had lied to grandmaman Inez, laying the blame for an escapade upon Antoinette, who had taken her punishment without a word. Stanislas had sulked all day long, hating grandmaman Inez, hating Antoinette and, most of all, himself. Before going to bed he had felt that he could not bear it any longer and had confessed his sin. Grandmaman Inez had shown herself strangely indulgent, rather praising him for his confession than scolding him for his wickedness. Now, standing shamefacedly before the old peasant, Stanislas felt exactly as he had felt the day he had let Antoinette bear the punishment instead of him. He went up closer to old Sametil. "Forgive me," he said, and his voice was that of a little boy. "And don't be angry with Bozena. It's not her fault. She's only a child. But I'm a man, I ought to have known."

Father Sametil still kept silent, and his kind old eyes were wet and very sad.

Stanislas put out his hand, proving that, in spite of all, grandmaman Inez's and Monsieur Venarius's teachings had not fallen on stony soil. "I'll be good to Bozena. Forgive me—father."

Standing on the threshold, mother Sametil sobbed anew, but now she was weeping with gratified vanity. "Father," the young Count had called her husband; "father." She must tell it to the neighbours as soon as their visitor had gone. Father Sametil smiled. Slowly, shyly, a kind smile appeared on his wrinkled face, and his hard hand squeezed Stanislas's thin, white fingers.

"Well, well," he repeated, but now the word sounded different. "Well, well. Bozena is going to have a good husband after all."

Stanislas looked away; his own eyes were full of tears and a future husband and father must not cry like a baby.

In the evening Monsieur Venarius hunted all over the castle for his pupil. He found him at last kneeling in the

chapel before the picture of his patron saint. Monsieur Venarius noiselessly closed the door and returned to his room, where he went on writing his report to grandmaman Inez.

"Gracious Countess and dear friend, you could not wish our Stanislas to be a better boy than he is. I can assure you that he regrets his sin, and I am glad to tell you that I succeeded in guiding his steps in the path of religious contemplation and prayer."

CHAPTER IV

GRANDMAMAN INEZ got up slowly from her prie-dieu and, sitting down in the armchair beside her bed, said to Bozena, "Come, my darling child, sit on the small stool and let's chat a little."

Bozena obeyed silently. The hard, old woman's kindness touched her, calming anger and bitterness in her rebellious young heart. Grandmaman Inez never lied, partly from pride—why should a lady lie?—partly because even a white lie was forbidden by the Commandments. The old woman's "darling child," really expressed her feelings. They had knelt side by side, praying to God, both of them poor sinners, both of them in need of God's mercy, the child on the eve of a day which would determine all her life, the old woman on the eve of a day on which she was going to sacrifice all worldly vanity to her conscience. Kneeling beside the girl, grandmaman Inez had once again felt the deep humility which often overwhelmed her and had told herself that it was not the little sinner who stood most in need of forgiveness, but she herself, an old woman whose long life had not always been lived according to God's law, whose temper had often got the better of her charity.

Gently laying her hand on Bozena's fair head, she remembered an hour passed in the same room many years ago, on the eve of Carl's wedding. At that time grandmaman

Inez's hair had still been black and her figure slender and supple. Carl had adored his mother, believing her the wisest and best of all women. Only once had he dared oppose her.

"You are marrying a bad woman." On this quiet October evening the words came sounding out of the past. "A woman who only knows how to play. A woman for whom nothing is real. A woman who plays with religion, with duty, with love."

She had said many hard and bitter words, about the sins of the flesh, the temptation of earthly beauty, about the transitoriness of golden hair and dazzling white skin and the immortality of virtue, about the wrong a man does to his unborn children in giving them a frivolous mother. Carl had listened in silence. After she had stopped talking he had mutely kissed her hand and left the room. From that time on there had been an invisible wall between them, an estrangement which hurt both. Even long after, when Carl knew how right his mother had been, he was much too loyal a soul to return to the old affectionate terms with her. He grew more and more taciturn and reserved. No one knew what he really felt or thought.

Grandmaman Inez looked down at Bozena sitting at her feet, her pale face lit up by the light of a thick wax candle. Stanislas, too, had been tempted by his own youth, by Bozena's beauty, by the frivolous atmosphere of society. Nevertheless he had chosen more wisely than his father; he would have a devoted and serious wife, a good mother for his children. Through grandmaman Inez's ever active brain flashed the words spoken by Monsieur Venarius, when he tried to console her, words more suitable for a wordly minded philosopher who had spent his youth reading the *Encyclopédie* than for a pious Catholic; words which ought not to have comforted her, but which had done so all the same.

"The blood of strong and healthy peasants is not a bad thing, dear Countess," the old tutor had said. "Stanislas is delicate and much too highly strung. A little fresh blood won't hurt the family."

Grandmaman Inez had hastily bidden him be silent. "Man has an immortal soul, not only a perishable body,

and your talk is of the stud farm," she had said sharply. Now, remembering this worldly, and to her most vulgar idea, she could not but find it comforting to dream of strong, lusty great-grandchildren. The clock of the neighbouring church struck eleven. Bozena lifting her head, met grandmother Inez's eyes. Her lovely young face was pale with fatigue. The old woman noticed it. "Go to bed, my child. I wanted to say many things, but it is too late. God bless you this night and all the nights of your life. Sleep well."

Bozena kissed her hand and left the room. Walking along the passage she stopped before the girls' room and peeped through the keyhole. A pale glint met her eyes. Softly opening the door, she went in.

Antoinette sat at the window, looking out upon the deserted moonlit street. Marie Christine was trying on a golden hoop before the mirror. Round her white neck she wore a rope of pearls Bozena had never seen before.

"You haven't gone to bed yet?" Bozena said.

Antoinette turned round, her tender grey-blue eyes were dreamy. "No, Bozi, we did not feel like sleeping. Sit down, dear."

Marie Christine, still gazing into the mirror, did not pay any attention to her foster-sister. Marie Christine had changed during the last weeks. She had grown thin, her small collar-bones showed, and her wrists were fragile as a child's. In her wide, white dressing-gown she looked like a little ghost, a terribly alive little ghost with feverish eyes.

Bozena sat down beside Antoinette and caught hold of her hand. "I'm so frightened, Antoinette; so awfully frightened."

"Silly, what are you afraid of? Stani will be kind to you and. . ."

"Everybody will make fun of me."

"No one will dare to. You belong to us now. You're our sister. Who would dare make fun of a Herdegen?"

A soft laugh sounded through the room.

"Never mind, Bozena. A time will come when all the Herdegens will be nobodies compared to me; just as to-day you are a nobody compared to them."

"Don't, Marie Christine."

Antoinette's gentle voice was full of trouble, and her kind face looked worried.

"You don't understand me, Toinette; you don't understand life. There is nothing a beautiful woman cannot achieve. Of course she must not play the fool and fall in love like you."

"Marie Christine!"

"My dear, I'm quite ready to admit that your Alexander is terribly good-looking. You're not the only one who has fallen in love with him. But when all is said and done, what is he? Who is he? A prince, I know. But what kind of a prince? And his eternal talk about Greece and liberty. The day before yesterday he took me in to dinner. He thought that being your sister I must be as emotional as you. My poor Toinette, your Alexander bored me to death."

Antoinette flushed, but being a well-brought-up young lady she managed to keep her temper.

"We're not talking about Prince Ypsilantis," she said coldly, "nor about a rather doubtful royal crown. We're talking about our Bozi who is going to be married to-morrow."

"Maman did get a new dress in spite of her despair," Marie Christine said mockingly. "Violet, half-mourning, you know. As to our Bozi, she's making an excellent match; and I really don't see why I should pity her." She turned to her foster sister: "How does the gold hoop suit me, Bozena?"

"Very well, Marie Christine."

"I ought to have an ermine cloak, reaching to the ground. . . . Yes, Poland will have a lovely queen."

"Poland has not even got a king yet," Antoinette said wearily. "I really can't understand you, Marie Christine. We're half Polish ourselves. How can you wish that unfortunate, murdered country to have as king, a man who. . ."

"Who's a real man," Marie Christine interrupted her sister. "You've been infected with your lover's madness,

Toinette, and keep seeing enslaved nations and down-trodden people. You're getting to be as great a bore as your Alexander."

She came over to the sofa and sat down beside the two girls.

"What about your other lover, the Prussian, Toinette?"

Even Bozena smiled. The Prussian Count Bredar, who had come to Vienna in the suite of the King of Prussia, had become a figure of fun for the Viennese. The fat little man walked about in the newfangled "Teuton party clothes" with Spanish cap, French puffed sleeves and Tudor collar—filling the hearts of Viennese street urchins with joy. Antoinette tried to find an excuse for the man who sat at their table about once a week. "He claims that his costume represents German virtue, and that wearing it makes men virtuous."

Marie Christine shrugged. "Your lovers, my poor Toinette! One of them enthuses about Greece and the other about German virtue."

"You never do your duty as daughter of the house," said Bozena sharply. She hated Marie Christine making fun of Antoinette. "Of course poor Toinette must try and make up for your rudeness. And she does it so well that the cleverest men love to talk to her, men like the famous Herr von Humboldt."

"Rather distinguished for a German, but terribly learned," Marie Christine said carelessly.

"Your Grand Duke is neither the one nor the other."

At last Antoinette was losing her temper. Marie Christine did not mind. She repeated with a smile "Your Grand Duke" as if the words sounded good to her. Taking the golden hoop from her hair, she put it on the table. Antoinette and Bozena watching her, admired, as they so often did, Marie Christine's graceful, cat-like movements.

Marie Christine undressed without saying another word. She got into the big bed she shared with her sister, and Antoinette noticed that she did not kneel down and say her prayers as usual. But she soon forgot to wonder at it. Bozena clung to her, burdening her with all her fears and sorrows.

When at last the two girls kissed good-night, Marie Christine was sleeping, her golden head sunk deep in the pillows, her thin hands folded on the counterpane. It was past one o'clock. Bozena's wedding-day had dawned.

Bozena stood beside Stanislas before the altar in the chapel. She was lovely in a blue-and-white dress. Grandmaman Inez's scruples had not permitted the perfect white of innocence. Stanislas, wearing the dark clothes he had insisted upon, looked stiff and embarrassed. He was afraid of doing the wrong thing. Bozena's calm pleased him. She moved slowly; she knew exactly when to kneel, and when to stand.

Ludmilla was weeping, not very freely on account of her rouge, but enough to arouse the compassion of friends and relations whispering behind prayer-books. "Poor dear Ludmilla. It's all the fault of her mother-in-law. Such a handsome young man. It's really a shame."

Carl Herdegen prayed for the happiness of the young people, hoping it would be greater and more lasting than his had been. Antoinette dreamt of her own wedding; dreamt of riding away with her lover as soon as the wedding was over; riding through a far-away country at the head of an army; liberating Greece. Marie Christine did not hear the wheezing of the small, asthmatic organ; she heard solemn music and saw herself walking along the nave of St. Stephen's Cathedral beside a figure in uniform. The ugly Kalmuk face was hidden by clouds of incense. Joseph tried in vain to follow the ceremony; he too saw another figure—a boyishly slight girl with violet eyes, a red, generous mouth, and a stubborn chin. He remembered with a sudden gush of happiness that he would see Victoire at a reception tomorrow.

Grandmaman Inez, kneeling in the first pew, was blissfully happy. She had saved two immortal souls and preserved a third, yet unborn soul from disgrace. Grandmaman Inez, her eyes never leaving the altar, thanked God that He had given her the strength to unite two human beings who did not love and did not want to belong to each other.

In the servants' pew Demoiselle Agatha, who had made Bozena's trousseau, was kneeling beside the housekeeper. Demoiselle Agatha felt happy too. The last weeks had yielded her a large profit. Golden coins not earned by sewing. Of course she had had to work hard. Running about so much had made her feet ache. But then, poor women who have to earn their living are not meant to be lazy. She glanced towards the second pew. Marie Christine's golden head was bowed as if in prayer. Demoiselle Agatha crossed herself; then her hand felt for the big black velvet bag in which lay a letter, a letter with a red seal bearing the imperial arms of Russia.

"Your city," said a young Frenchman to Antoinette, "really deserves the title of *mâtire de plaisir* of Europe. She even manages to have fine weather for her fairs."

Antoinette nodded. She was sitting beside her father in one of the high stands in the Augarten, the large park where every year a big fair was held. On her left sat the fat Prussian count. Her eyes roved about, but the man she was trying to discover amongst the crowd was probably wandering about and talking to the "common people." Alexander Ypsilantis liked neither society nor festivals, and this year the famous old fair was much less a celebration of the people than of their rulers. It had become good form to mix with the people, to speak to them, enjoying their artlessness and collecting new topics for dinners and receptions.

How blue the sky was! How warm the sun shone! Autumn, childishly vain like Vienna herself, was trying to pose as spring. Had not trees and bushes glittered red and yellow it might have been May instead of October. Antoinette, still searching for the one figure she longed to find, saw the ugly Kalmuk face she had learnt to hate; and noticed in the row below a small, gloved hand graciously waving in the direction of the Kalmuk. The snow-queen had not studied royal gestures in vain.

Stanislas and Bozena sat at Carl Herdegen's left. The bride had to be presented, and the fair gave opportunity of doing it in an unceremonious fashion. Of course Lud-

milla, weeping hysterically, had declared that she would stay at home if Bozena went to the fair. Grandmaman Inez had smiled and said kindly, "It would do you a world of good, my dear. Women of a certain age ought to take a rest from time to time." After that Ludmilla simply had to go, beautifully dressed in a fur-edged wine-red dress and a Paris hat. She had refused to sit in the same row with Bozena, and Marie Christine had followed her example. Not because she was ashamed of her sister-in-law, but because she was glad to escape her father's anxious, critical gaze. She knew her mother looked away as soon as the Russian uniform drew closer. Ludmilla did not object to a little flirt with the Grand Duke. After all, Marie Christine really was a lovely girl. Why shouldn't Constantine. . . . Even if it were only amorganatic marriage . . . or no marriage at all. . . . Wasn't that Narischkin woman a great lady, although every one knew that she and the Emperor Alexander . . . ?

Bozena was very quiet, hiding her shyness behind a dignified calm which made a good impression. Of course the friends of the family knew where she came from, but one could not well be rude to a woman who had walked about the fair arm in arm with the Prince de Ligne. Strangers asked themselves where the young man had found such a beautiful bride.

Joseph, hunting high and low, at last discovered Victoire sitting with friends in the highest row of another stand. The girl was cross, staring at everybody and everything with big, hostile eyes.

"Celebrating," she said without answering Joseph's greeting. "You people can't do anything else. Did thousands of men die for this? Did they suffer and get killed so that stupid monarchs might live here luxuriously and have as many intrigues as they like, whilst the ogre conspires with the Duke of Benevent? Oh, I forgot, he calls himself Talleyrand again, and sells my poor country to a wicked fool."

Joseph tried to divert her thoughts, but she hardly listened to him. "Those people over there," she said, pointing disdainfully at the crowd, "acclaimed *him* enthusiastically

as long as he was victorious; to-day they acclaim others; and if yet other should come . . ."

Joseph felt hurt. "The Parisians too acclaimed and cheered all who came into power during the last twenty years."

Victoire turned up her nose and said nothing.

Joseph tried once more. "Isn't it rather fine," he said shyly, "that we all make merry together, rulers and subjects?"

"Merry, merry." Victoire shot him a glance of dislike. "You Autrichiens can do nothing but laugh and dance and sing."

"And fight and die for our country, still laughing and singing," said Joseph furiously.

Victoire stared at him in amazement. "Tiens, Monsieur, you can get angry? I'm glad you can. I rather like what you said. It's a good thing to love one's country gaily. Not making a duty and an unpleasant virtue of it. The other day I had the misfortune to sit beside dear Toinette's lover at a dinner—no, not charming Alexander Ypsilantis, but the Teuton, Count Bredar, the Prussian. He also talked about love of country, with capital letters. I felt quite sorry for a country which is loved in such a manner. Not like a beautiful and adored mistress, but like an ugly, nagging wife."

"It must be hard to love Prussia in any other way," Joseph said with a smile.

"Oh, look, monsieur, a Montgolfière!" Victoire cried out, forgetting her bad humour.

A big balloon slowly rose from the ground and floated overhead. People cheered and shouted. Joseph saw beneath him a sea of faces, pale, red, silly, clever, astonished, vulgar, refined, brutish. Joseph stared at them. The masses, he thought, have not only got one face but a thousand faces, each differing from the other. Every one mirrors a different soul, a different character. But we, blinded by our stupid pride, call all these men and women by a single name—the people—and feel justified in determining their lives. What do we know of the people? We force them into wars which do not profit them. We sell them to strange kings and

emperors if we gain something by it. We expect them to endure everything. We spin a police net around them to prevent them from thinking, speaking their minds, living. But man lives and man thinks. If he may not speak his thoughts, he is nothing but a slave. . . .

The shouts grew louder. The aeronaut was waving many brightly coloured little flags, the flags of all the nations whose representatives, monarchs and statesmen had come to Vienna for the Congress.

A pale, dark-eyed woman in deep mourning sitting beside Joseph, said, "*Mon Dieu*, the flags of all nations. If only this dream came true. If only peace could be assured."

"Who is the man in the balloon?" Victoire asked.

"I believe he's called Kraskowitz, mademoiselle. That's all I know about him."

Victoire frowned. "Isn't it just like you? You know all about statesmen, all about traitors, but you hardly know the name of a man who goes up in a balloon, risking his life. Look, monsieur, how high the balloon is. I wonder what the man thinks seeing all the Kings and Emperors and Princes of this earth looking so tiny and insignificant beneath him?"

"Probably he's only thinking of the moment when he'll land safely and feel solid earth under his feet once more," Joseph said prosaically.

Victoire threw him an astonished glance. "You are funny people, you Autrichiens, monsieur. As a rule one thinks of you as living in blue and pink clouds, listening to the songs of the wind and the Danube. Your feet only seem made for dancing, and your arms for clasping pretty women. And then, unexpectedly, your dancing legs stand firmly on the ground; your embracing arms know how to work, and your head, which seemed filled with songs, knows how to think."

Driven by a gentle breeze, the big balloon was floating over the Danube. The shadows were growing longer. In the gloaming the bright dresses of the women looked like immense flowers.

"How lovely," Victoire said softly.

"Yes, my country is lovely, mademoiselle. I wish . . . I wish I could teach you to love it."

Victoire's smile was curiously gentle. "Your country is lovely, and I think one might be happy here. And good, too. But I'm not quite sure. I'd have to see Vienna in her everyday mood—not as she is now, all dressed up and gay. And I'd have to see you, too, in your everyday mood. Not all of you, I'm being unjust. I'm sure you, monsieur, are always as you are now, and so is Toinette, and Madame Mère—the Spanish Madame Mère. But the others. . . ." Her eyes and the tiny gesture of her hand expressed doubt, uncertainty, even fear.

"Will you come and watch the Hungarians and the Bohemians dance, mademoiselle?" Joseph asked, not quite sure whether the girl had encouraged or gently rebuffed him.

"Hungarians and Bohemians? How funny! What are they doing here? Surely they belong to other nations and speak another language?"

"We all belong together, mademoiselle. Our real home, Wohan, is in Moravia. As to the language, it signifies nothing. If it did I should have to be a German."

Victoire laughed, the idea amused her. Taking Joseph's arm, she left the stand.

Night had fallen and hundreds of Chinese lanterns lit up the park. In front of the castle fireworks were being let off; rockets shot into the air, falling back in a shower of tiny luminous stars. Ghost cities appeared on the sky, buildings standing far away, in St. Petersburg, in Rome, in Berlin or Copenhagen. Countries and cities had drawn closer to one another. After many years darkened by war the world had at last found peace. Not only the rulers felt safe after dread times which had taught them that even crowned heads can fall, but also, and even more, the men and women had learnt what war signified. The women felt blissfully conscious that they need no longer tremble for the life of a son, a lover, a husband; the men knew they would not be sent to strange countries, to suffer, to fight, to die. Human happiness rose as high as the rockets. Was it an omen that

the rockets fell back to earth and disappeared? Must man always stretch out his hand in vain for heaven's most wonderful gifts? May he only hold them fast for a few minutes—in the life of nations years are no more than that—and see them fade away after so short a time? Probably very few watching the fireworks thought of this. Perhaps Monsieur Venarius who, remembering his own simple and grave country, slightly shook his head at the dancing, the singing, the laughter sounding around him. Perhaps grandmaman Inez, who, sitting at her window and seeing the sky glow red above her, thought of other cities and another sky from which fire and brimstone had fallen.

One golden head certainly did not think of grave and heart-breaking things. A white figure was hurrying through the shades to a bower of yew. Marie Christine held in her hand the plan of the park, path and bower were sketched in red Chinese ink—she could not miss her way. On the stone bench in the bower sat the man with the Kalmuk face. Behind him stood the strange taciturn gentleman-in-waiting who hardly ever spoke and of whom people only knew that he had once saved the Grand Duke's life and that he never left his side.

"You are late, mademoiselle," Constantine said rather crossly. He was not accustomed to be kept waiting.

Marie Christine—did ever a young girl go with so cold a heart to a tryst—shrugged thin shoulders. "If I'm too late, sire, I can go back at once."

Constantine laughed. Marie Christine's coldness and indifference were something new, and amused him at the moment.

"Surely you can understand my impatience, most charming mademoiselle? The hours have seemed like years."

He pulled the girl down beside him. The hand grasping hers was hot, and Marie Christine, half sick with loathing, wanted to tear away her own. But this hand imprisoning her fingers might have a crown to bestow, and she left her small cold one in the big hot one.

For the first time she allowed Constantine to put his arm round her. She listened silently to his words, answering in

monosyllables, often laughing with a tender little sound to soften a "no."

The arbour was hidden by the dark. Constantine's voice grew more passionate, more pressing. The snow-queen saw hovering over her head the crown of Poland.

Like a ghostly sentinel the silent Russian stood in front of the arbour till his figure, too, was drowned by the shades of night.

CHAPTER V

IN the market-place," Victoire had said. "By the fountain at noon. I've got to do some shopping."

Joseph, afraid of losing a minute of the happy time he was going to spend with her, reached the fountain at eleven. Cold rain fell from the grey November sky; sometimes a few clumsy snowflakes flew through the air. Thin mist played around the fountain. Joseph, vain for once in his life, had left his coat at home and shivered in his uniform. He leant against the fountain and waited.

Laughing children ran past, playing with coloured balls, throwing them to each other. The balls kept changing hands. Sometimes the dark-haired boy held the red ball, sometimes the rather dirty urchin with the fair curls snatched at it. A blue ball was caught by a tiny boy who had hardly time to clutch it, before a bigger, rough-looking playfellow took it away from him.

Two men stopped, watching the playing children.

"Like the Congress," said the elder man. "The only difference being that the Congress unfortunately plays with countries and not with balls."

"It's a wicked game," said the younger man, talking with a strong Swiss accent, "to give a country another ruler. Think of unfortunate Saxony which is to become a Prussian province, just because the Emperor Alexander wishes it."

"They say Prince Metternich is against it."

"They say a lot. They also say the Prince is in disgrace with the Tsar."

"They say Count Stadion . . ." The elder man swallowed the next word and stared angrily at a very pretty, very well-dressed woman who was slowly walking past, shamelessly ogling the Swiss.

"Come on," said the elder man nervously.

"In broad daylight," the Swiss exclaimed, greatly shocked. "Really, Viennese morals . . ."

The elder man shrugged contemptuously. "If the lady only wanted to assail your morals . . . But all these young women have a second calling, that of stool pigeon, which renders them most dangerous to honest men." They walked on, the young woman making a face behind their backs.

A group surrounding a young man roasting sweet chestnuts burst out laughing. "I give you my word for it," cried the young man.

"Are you Alexander that you are always giving your word?" said a young girl, grinning broadly and holding out her hand for chestnuts.

The laughter following her words sounded less good-natured than before. The Viennese disliked the Russians. Dirty, brutal and vulgar was the sentence passed upon them by the people.

A fat woman, a basket hanging from her arm, heaved a deep sigh. "Meat's gone up again. Everything is getting dearer."

"The foreign monarchs and their attendants are eating us up," said an elderly, surly-looking man. "They do nothing but dance and gamble, and eat and drink, and make love to other men's wives."

"We might just as well have kept Napoleon. At least he was only one man, and not I don't know how many."

A pleasant-looking man walked up to the youth who preferred Napoleon. "Come along, my friend," he said, putting his hand on the youth's arm. "I'd like to have a good look at you."

"What a life," the fat woman moaned. "They won't even let us grumble any more."

The pleasant-looking man and his companion had vanished.

"Narks," the fat woman grumbled. "Narks all over the place. Sometimes lying in bed with my husband I ask myself whether he hasn't become a nark too."

"Shut up," whispered the surly-looking man. "You'll land us in prison with your silly talk."

The fat woman obeyed and stared silently at some court carriages driving past. Servants, bearing thick sticks, ran in front of them.

A few boys shouted "vivat," but the elder people looked angry, for in the first carriage sat the man the Viennese hated most of all—the Grand Duke Constantine. Looking in vain for bows he might graciously return, the King of Swabia peered out of the second coach—another man greatly disliked by the people.

"They say he didn't even take off his hat on entering the Imperial palace," said one of the politicians surrounding the little iron stove on which the chestnuts were turning a beautiful mellow brown.

"I was told that they had to cut a big round hole in the dining-table for his belly."

"Look, the poor horses can hardly drag him along."

The third court carriage brought wide grins to the faces round the little stove.

"Look, the King of Prussia. Doesn't he look silly? Where has he left his beloved Countess Zichy?"

"Prince Metternich is furious with him," said a man well versed in affairs of State because his aunt cleaned the steps of the Metternich palace. "At first he was hand and glove with our Emperor and ready to do what Metternich told him, but now he runs after the Tsar and does what he wishes, all on account of that miserable Saxony."

The carriages had driven past, but the next spectacle the little group gazed upon was funnier still. Five Germans came walking along stiffly, three of them wearing with an air of pride and defiance the Teutonic costume.

"Look at the German fools! Don't they look as if they had come out of a Punch and Judy show?"

"Oh, I know them. They sit in the Camel Inn every evening, singing patriotic songs and explaining to all and sundry that God meant Prussia to save the world."

Laughing, the fat woman pushed the basket higher up on her arm. "I'm going home. What's the good of staring at people who cost us such a lot of money?"

A cripple, who had watched the whole scene without saying a word, bent down and took up the crutch lying at his feet. "Those are the people I lost my leg for," he said sadly.

Joseph, who had listened to the conversations, returned to his place by the fountain. The words of the cripple reminded him of what his father had said the other day. Carl Herdegen had returned home tired and depressed. "What's the good of it all?" he had said wearily. "The Congress is supposed to give peace to Europe and already they're all fighting tooth and nail. The Tsar threatens to leave Vienna about four times a week, and the King of Prussia suffers from megalomania. He insists upon getting Saxony and won't take a 'no.' Look at the map, then you'll understand what it would signify to us. We should never be able to feel safe. Bohemia would always be in danger. It's a sight to make the angels weep: blackmail and bribery, all the chancelleries conspiring and intriguing, using the women to do their dirty work. The whole thing is disgusting."

"That's because they are all godless," grandmaman Inez said severely. "The Prussians are regular heathens. They're worse than the Russians."

Joseph, lost in thought, did not see Victoire before she stood right in front of him. She was wearing a green, fur-edged cloak, green shoes also edged with black fur, and kept her hands hidden in an immense muff. In Joseph's eyes she was more beautiful than any of the women who came past. After the first greeting he saw to his dismay that her eyes were red-rimmed as if she had been crying. "Is anything wrong?" he asked nervously.

"I can't tell you here. Let's go and sit down somewhere. I want to ask your advice."

Joseph considered a moment.

"I don't want to go where we are likely to meet people we know," Victoire said impatiently. "Let's go to a small inn where there is only *peuple*."

They found a small clean-looking inn in a side street. The innkeeper, rather bewildered by the distinguished guests, led them to a table in a nook. Joseph ordered wine.

Victoire took off her cloak and played for some time absently with her muff. Joseph was on tenterhooks. At last the girl looked up. "My parents intend to go back to Paris in three weeks."

Joseph grew pale. Victoire leaving Vienna for Paris, which suddenly seemed as far away as another continent! He tried to speak, but his mouth was dry and his tongue too heavy to form words.

Victoire shot him an impatient glance and said harshly, "My parents are anxious to return to France. Honours are being bestowed and positions are being conferred. You understand, monsieur, that one has to be in Paris to prove one's loyalty to the King. Otherwise one might easily be left out in the cold. So, you see . . ."

Joseph still remained silent, struggling in vain for the right words, which would not come.

"Are you struck dumb?" Victoria asked angrily. "I ask for your advice and you don't answer. Can't you understand? Nothing will induce me to go back to Paris, to the court of this usurper. What am I to do? Shall I enter a nunnery? Shall I run away and emigrate to America? Shall I . . .?" She stopped and looked at Joseph expectantly.

"Stay here. Stay with me for ever, Victoire." Joseph's heart was crying out the words, but they stuck in his throat, and he stared at the girl, helplessly, foolishly.

Victoire sighed. "I . . . I thought, monsieur . . . When we were together, you . . . I thought you loved me."

"I love you more than my life, Victoire."

"That is too much, *mon ami*, because I don't love you. I only want to marry you."

"That is all I want, darling Victoire."

"I don't love you, *mon ami*," Victoire repeated with cruel frankness. "I love neither you nor your country. I

love only France and the Empereur. But I like you. You are kind, a bit bungling, rather a bore, but, *mon Dieu*, one does not expect one's husband to be amusing. I'll try and be a good wife. I'll never take a lover. And if you wish for children I'm quite ready to have them."

Joseph flushed deeply and looked away. Young girls were not expected to know about these things.

Victoire did not notice his shocked expression; she went on calmly, "I like your father and dislike your mother. I admire your grandmother, the Spanish Madame Mère; and I am very fond of Toinette. Do you think we could make our marriage a success, Monsieur?"

"Even if it wasn't a success, even if it was hell . . ."

Bending down, Joseph took her hand. She smiled. "It needn't be hell, *mon ami*. After all, I'm rather a pretty girl and not at all stupid."

Taking her hand away, she pushed back the soft curls which had slipped out under the fur-edged hat.

"Then you like my idea and I can tell my parents that I am betrothed to you?"

"Yes, Victoire, and I . . ."

He suddenly remembered grandmaman Inez and felt troubled. She had seemed to like Victoire, but what would she say when she heard that her grandson had asked the girl to marry him without having first asked grandmaman Inez's advice, without her permission? He thought of Stanislas who had vainly tried to oppose grandmaman Inez's wishes; of his father who gave way in everything and did not even sit down before grandmaman Inez had said, "Sit down, my son." He remembered the many years—there were only eighteen of them, but to Joseph they seemed many and long—during which he had always known one member of the family had to be obeyed unconditionally—grandmaman Inez.

He glanced at Victoire. Now that she had said what she wanted to say, she had grown embarrassed. Her face was pale, her violet eyes were hidden by heavy blue-veined lids; the long, dark eyelashes lying on her smooth cheeks made her look touchingly young. Joseph thought her sweet and

pathetic. Grandmaman Inez's image disappeared. Joseph saw and loved only Victoire, just as he would do in all the years to come.

"Let's go," he said more decidedly than he usually spoke. "I must tell my parents first. Then I'll pay a visit to yours, and ask for your hand. Come."

Victoire got up. They left the inn.

"What a lovely day," Joseph said, offering his arm to the girl. "What a lovely day."

Victoire laughed. "It's snowing hard and the wind is bitterly cold. If you call that a lovely day."

They walked down the crowded street. Snowflakes clung to Victoire's eyelashes. The wind drove her soft curls into Joseph's face. People hurried by with red noses, complaining of the weather. Joseph did not understand them. He felt as if spring had come.

At home the atmosphere was icy. Franz was standing before the door of the green drawing-room, shamelessly listening at the keyhole.

"Don't go in," he told Joseph. "Something awful must have happened. They sent me out of the room."

His blue, rather cold eyes looked up at his brother. "I wonder who's going to have a baby now?" he said calmly.

"Franz!" Joseph was horrified.

"Of course I know that Bozi . . . You always talk so loudly, all of you do. You seem to think I'm deaf. Besides, why shouldn't I know? Mares have babies, and cows and dogs. The other day Monsieur Venarius said the whole thing was just something biological."

One could see how proud the boy was of the new and learned word.

"Oh, all right," Joseph said shortly. Somehow he could never rid himself of the feeling that his youngest brother was older and more experienced than all the others.

"Joseph," little Franz asked eagerly, "what's a *rañera*?"

"I don't know. Where did you get the word from?"

"Grandmaman Inez called someone a *rañera*. After that they sent me out of the room."

Joseph felt an icy shiver run along his spine. When grandmaman Inez spoke Spanish—a thing which happened about four or five times a year—the language was a storm signal, hoisted as a warning high over the raging sea of family discords. Of course it had to be to-day, Joseph thought despondently. It's always the same. As soon as I want to talk about my affairs . . . But I can't put it off. Victoire is sure to have told her parents by now. They'll expect father and me in the afternoon.

Standing before the closed door, he followed his little brother's evil example, shamefacedly and red in the face. He could only catch a word here and there; but hearing the voices sufficed. Grandmaman Inez's voice, low, cold and cutting like winter wind; maman's loud, shrill, threatening, pleading, broken by sobs and sometimes, very seldom, his father's, weary and depressed.

Taking his courage in both hands, Joseph opened the door. Standing on the threshold he bowed, then going up to grandmaman Inez he kissed her hand. After having also kissed his mother's, he bowed to his father.

"I am glad you have come, my grandson," grandmaman Inez said. "This is a thing the men of the family must decide. We women have to submit unto them. Such is God's will."

The gentle reproach in her voice was meant for God. Carl Herdegen smiled at his son. Both knew the sentence—the usual prelude to an order given by grandmaman Inez.

"Your father agrees with me," grandmaman Inez said, slightly lifting her fan. "He does not wish the girls to go to the ball given by Princess Bagration."

"Antoinette can remain at home," Ludmilla said angrily.

"I should not mind Antoinette going. She is a modest young girl and knows how to behave, which is very important for women frequenting that house. But Marie Christine is not going to cross the threshold of that *burdeos*."

"Dear and honoured mother-in-law," Ludmilla said, her trembling voice expressing anything but love and submission, "everybody goes to Princess Bagration's parties. All our friends and acquaintances scramble for invitations."

"Because she is not only a *rañera* but also a procuress."

"Dearest maman . . ."

"Be silent, my son. You know more about that woman than I do. She is not received at Court! That speaks volumes. For, although I am a most loyal subject of our good Emperor, I must say, he permits too much; he tolerates too much. These foreign monarchs seem to think our town is a brothel, and he tolerates it. If this *rañera* is not received at Court, what must she be?"

She fanned herself with her big black feather fan, not because the quarrel had heated her—grandmaman Inez's small face never grew red when she was angry—but because the fan was a weapon for this woman of Spain, or a quill she used to punctuate her orders.

Carl Herdegen recognized the full stop.

"I quite agree with you, dear maman. Ludmilla, you really must see . . ."

"I see that my daughters are to have no chances at all." Ludmilla was crying. "And as to modesty, do you think it's decent that Antoinette has eyes only for that lunatic of an Ypsilantis? That she compromises herself with him, that . . ."

"We can talk about Antoinette another time," grandmaman Inez said icily. She turned to Joseph. "Do you want anything, my grandson? What brings you here at this unusual hour?"

Joseph felt his heart missing a beat and his hands growing cold. "Grandmaman Inez," he said, his voice faltering, "dear and honoured parents, I want to ask . . . to ask your permission to marry Victoire Derville."

Carl Herdegen took a step forward and put his hand on Joseph's shoulder. "My dear boy," he said softly. "My dear boy."

Grandmaman Inez said nothing. Did her silence mean consent or annoyance?

Ludmilla burst out laughing. It was an ugly, malicious laugh. Joseph knew she was thinking of Stanislas and his unfortunate marriage, and feeling furious because it had not been her eldest son who had contracted the misalliance.

"I shall never permit it," Ludmilla said very loudly. "Never. A French girl who is crazy about the Corsican. Never."

"Your weakness is Englishmen, isn't it, my dear daughter-in-law," grandmaman Inez asked sweetly.

Blushing under her rouge, Ludmilla bit her lip and turned away her head.

Grandmaman Inez smiled at Joseph. "I am pleased with your choice, my grandson. Of course the decision rests with your father, as always. But I approve."

She threw an encouraging glance at her son.

Carl Herdegen drew a sigh of relief. "So do I, my boy," he said very kindly. "You have my permission and my blessing."

"I suppose the girl has been told of your feelings. Perhaps she has even said yes already."

Joseph gazed at his mother with unhappy eyes. If he spoke the truth grandmaman Inez might feel angry at not having been consulted and might change her mind. But Joseph Herdegen could not lie, for him a lie was the acme of vulgarity, unworthy of a gentleman.

"Yes, dear maman," he said softly.

Ludmilla laughed irritatingly and looked at grandmaman Inez. "How do you like these French girls, my dear mother-in-law?"

"Quite well, my dear," grandmaman Inez replied with a wicked little smile. "Poor things, they have grown up in times of dread and terror. We must judge them accordingly. I shall welcome Victoire as my very dear granddaughter."

Once again the fan put a full stop to grandmaman Inez's words.

Forgetting all conventionality, Joseph fell on his knees before the old lady, kissing both her thin, small hands. Grandmaman Inez smiled indulgently, gently patting his brown hair.

"You, my son," she said, "will go and see the Dervilles this afternoon and ask for Victoire's hand. And you, my grandson, will tell Victoire that I should like to speak to

her. As to the Princess Bagration's ball, my dear Ludmilla, you will have to submit to your husband's wishes and leave the girls at home."

Feeling wonderfully happy, Joseph once more kissed grandmaman Inez's and his mother's hand, gratefully pressed his father's, and ran from the room—for Ludmilla had begun crying again. Franz was still standing before the door. He caught hold of Joseph's arm. "Do tell me, who's going to have a baby now?"

Joseph picked up the boy and set him on his shoulders. "I am," he said gaily.

"Who's the girl?" asked the terrible child.

But Joseph had already put him down again and was racing along the passage to look for Antoinette and to impart to her the great and happy news.

A few days later, on a quiet evening, the betrothed sat in the green drawing-room, guarded by Antoinette who discreetly kept her eyes glued to her book. Victoire was telling Joseph about her talk with the Spanish Madame Mère. She spoke softly, with a kind of awe.

"It was really rather a strange experience, Joseph. Never had I met a human being for whom life and death, God and religion were so serious a matter. I had kissed her hands and said a few silly, conventional words and had sat down on the stool at her feet. She gazed at me in silence. Do you know, Joseph, that her eyes penetrate to one's very soul?"

"I know, darling Victoire."

"I felt for the first time in my life how poor, how mean my soul was. Madame Mère—did I tell you, Joseph, that she let's me call her so?—it slipped out whilst we were talking and she smiled and said, 'You can call me Madame Mère, my child. I know you could not pay be more honour.' What was I saying? Oh, yes. Well, Madame Mère scrutinized my soul for quite a long time and I began to feel frightened."

"You need not have, my darling," said Joseph, blinded by love.

"What do you know about my soul, *mon ami*? Luckily Madame Mère did not seem horrified. She smiled and said:

'You will be a terribly irritating but a good wife, my granddaughter'."

Joseph took Victoire's small, sunburnt hand into his own, and Antoinette, looking up, quickly bent over her book. Victoire gently pulled away her hand.

"Don't, Joseph. I'm coming to the serious part. Madame Mère looked at me and said, 'Do you know, my child, that you have not only chosen a husband but also a country?' I did not understand her, and seeing this she went on: 'You love France best. You must go on loving her, but you must also learn to love your new country, Austria.'

"I did not like this. For you know, Joseph, that I don't like the Autrichiens. Madame Mère, taking my hand, said very solemnly, 'When you are standing with Joseph before the altar, Victoire, think of Ruth's words: "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." I too loved the country I left behind me and wanted to remain what I had been, a Spaniard. But when my first son was born I saw that I had changed. This country and her people had made me love them. You too . . .' She saw my face and said, 'We'll talk it over in a year's time. I beg of you'—yes, Joseph, Madame Mère really said beg—not to close your heart to the beauty of this country and the simple goodness of her people.' Then she kissed me and the audience was over."

Joseph again caught hold of her hand and this time Victoire left it in his. "I love Madame Mère," she said. "And for her sake I shall love you too, *mon pauvre* Joseph."

Joseph dropped the girl's hand as if it had been a live coal. Grandmaman Inez, he thought half sadly, half angrily, you decide everything for us, and I am willing to believe in your wisdom. Nevertheless, I should prefer to gain my wife's love without your help.

Victoire was surprised. Making a face, she said, "Come, Toinette, put away your silly book and talk to us. Your brother is cross. What are you reading?"

Blushing deeply, Antoinette laid the book on the small Empire table. "Homer," she said in a low voice.

Victoire smiled, her violet eyes grew very tender. "Toinette," she said. "Poor dear Toinette."

CHAPTER VI

THE Viennese had more than enough of the foreign monarchs and their courtiers. They devoured everything. They made the prices rise. They danced, not only at balls but also on the honour of many an honest citizen who was unfortunate enough to have a pretty wife. The one good thing about them was that they gave the Viennese something to speak about. There was no end to the gossip and the scandal talked in the market-place or the inns. Of course the police had informers everywhere, and men and women were arrested for a thoughtless or daring word. All the more did the Viennese rejoice on a dreary November day, when their tongues were unexpectedly allowed to wag, to slander, to gloat over the newest scandal. Not that the police had suddenly turned soft-hearted, but it seemed advisable to let his Majesty the Tsar know what the country thought of his noble brother. Perhaps it would induce him to tell the Grand Duke to behave himself and to make him understand that Austria wasn't Russia.

People were standing in groups, defying the rain and the wind, whispering, "They say old Colonel Windischgrätz simply went for Constantine during parade. He drew his sword and the Russian ran back to the palace like a hare."

"Old Windischgrätz was perfectly right. That'll teach the Muscovite not to hit our officers."

"You ought to hear what's told about his love affairs. He's worse than a Turk. Of course, fine gentlemen, being only human, like their fun, but Constantine behaves like a heathen."

"Why can't he be like the King of Denmark? Such a nice man. Walks about among the common people as if he belonged to them. And always a smile and a kind word for every one. Although he's having a bad time, poor man, with the Prussians wanting to rob him of his country."

"The Prussians are born robbers. They want to have everything."

"But it's not the Prussians who want Denmark."

"Oh, well, I thought it was them, because they want to steal Saxony."

"Anyway, King Frederic of Denmark is a good man. And he's got good taste, too. That little hussy in the suburb. . . . The police is furious because she calls herself Queen of Denmark."

"I," said a quiet, elderly man, "dislike the English most of all. They're all mad. And they never buy anything and never give tips, and are always complaining that things are too expensive."

"That's true. Besides they're awfully high and mighty. But the Russians are the worst of all."

Thus the Viennese gossiped in wind and rain, not knowing what surprise was in store for them before night fell.

Grandmaman Inez heard the news from Countess Colloredo who came to see her with her daughter, Judith Crenneville. Grandmaman Inez disliked the Countess; she could not bear women who, having once been beautiful, could not forget it; nor women who knew everything, or rather who knew everything better.

Judith Crenneville, a matron of four years standing and still young, went and sat with the girls whilst her mother talked away excitedly. "Yes, it's quite true, my dear. Constantine is leaving the town to-night. Alexander ordered him to. No one knows it as yet. I'm the only person. Well, he won't be a loss."

Grandmaman Inez threw a hasty glance at the girls. Antoinette looked dismayed; Marie Christine sat very straight on her chair, her pale face absolutely expressionless. Countess Colloredo also looked towards the little group. Feeling the cold blue eyes on her face, Marie Christine bent forward, smiling, animated, talking gaily.

Grandmaman Inez drew an inaudible little sigh of relief. She suddenly grew amiable, even talkative.

The visitors did not stay long. Countess Colloredo was bursting to tell her news to others. After they had gone, Antoinette, getting up, said, "Come, Marie Christine, I want to show you something."

Grandmaman Inez lifted her hand, the fan she was holding, trembled a little, but she said nothing, and the sisters left the room.

Marie Christine threw herself on the sofa in the girls' bedroom. Her pupils were strangely dilated, making her blue eyes look almost black. She remained silent, biting her lips. Antoinette, kneeling down beside her whispered, "Matzi . . ." She could not prevent herself using the old pet name her sister hated. "Matzi, tell me darling, what does . . . the news . . . of . . . ?"

Marie Christine laughed harshly.

"Do you know how people will call me? The Russian widow. Just as they called the little girl in the suburb the Danish widow when it was rumoured that the King had left Vienna." She shrugged nervously. "Yes, I'll be the Russian widow."

"Matzi, dearest, tell me the truth. How far . . . ? What happened, you know what I mean?"

"Everything."

The young voice was icy, the young face stony. Antoinette's tender eyes filled with tears. "Poor darling Matzi."

Marie Christine shook her head impatiently. "Don't, Toinette. I don't want to be pitied. I . . . I wanted something *irrévocable* to happen, so as to make sure of him. And of the Crown of Poland. It was dreadful," she shuddered. "Dreadful. But I told myself it's got to be; it's the only way to hold him." Her voice grew shrill. "The wild beast. The barbarian. How could I imagine he would treat my father's daughter, a Countess Herdegen, like a little kitchen-maid, like a nobody one takes up and drops, as soon as, as soon as . . ."

"You must forget all about it, Matzi. In a month's time no one will remember that you compromised yourself with the Grand Duke. You know how soon the people here forget. Then you can begin . . ."

"Toinette," Marie Christine's voice sounded piteous, and she suddenly looked like a little girl, "tell me—perhaps you know—does one always have a baby, like Bozena?"

"When did you lose your innocence?" A boy's voice

sounded from the threshold. Looking up with a start, the sisters saw little Franz.

"What are you doing here?" Antoinette said angrily. "Go away. You're always poking your nose into everything. you awful child."

"I've got a right to be present when the honour of my sister is at stake. Papa must challenge Constantine, and Joseph and Stani. What a pity I'm too young," he added woefully.

"Franz," Antoinette said imploringly, "you must not tell any one what you have heard. Promise."

"All right. But if Marie Christine is going to have a baby, people will notice. They did with Bozi."

"She won't have a baby."

"How can you be sure? It's too soon to know. Dogs take nine weeks; horses eleven months; cows and women nine."

"Oh, stop talking nonsense and go away, you terrible boy." Antoinette got up and tried to put her little brother out of the room. Marie Christine gave him a strange look. "Tell me," she said carelessly, "how do you manage always to know everything?"

"Because I look on and hold my tongue. Sometimes you're terribly funny, all of you. You fidget and fuss and dance like puppets. You make me laugh."

"You're perfectly right," Marie Christine said. "We are funny. And I'm funnier than all the others. Queen of Poland . . . and now deserted in my shame like any unfortunate creature from the gutter."

She got up slowly, heavily. "Toinette, if you love me, don't let any one come to our room. I'm going to stay here. I've got a headache. Go, please, both of you. I want to be alone."

Antoinette put her arm round the boy's shoulder. "Come, Franz." In the doorway the boy turned round. "Don't be sad, Marie Christine. In four years I'll be old enough to challenge him. Then I'll run my sword right through his heart. I promise."

Marie Christine smiled. That hopeless little smile burned

itself into Antoinette's heart. It was the last time she saw the snow-queen smile.

Ludmilla tried to insist upon seeing her daughter. She guessed what Constantine's departure meant to her, but Antoinette would not let her mother go up. "Marie Christine has a terrible headache, maman. She begged to be left alone till after supper."

Ludmilla burst into tears. "You're exactly like your grandmother, Antoinette. You want to tyrannize me. But I'm not going to stand it. I'm going to my child, to my poor unhappy child."

Little Franz interfered. "People who have headaches must be left in peace," he said in the pedantic way he often affected. He went up to his mother and stared at her. Ludmilla ceased crying. The strange matter-of-factness of her youngest child always frightened her. She never got the better of the boy—in fact no one did. Even grandmaman Inez treated him with a certain polite caution. Franz always had a reason for all he said and did; a reason he expressed in well-chosen words. Monsieur Venarius, nearly as fond of the little boy as of Joseph, was convinced that Franz would become a scholar, perhaps a famous philosopher, or a naturalist; certainly something no member of the Herdegen family had ever been.

Ludmilla said nothing and hunted for her handkerchief.

"You put it into your little bag a moment ago, maman," the boy said. He found it for her, fished out the handkerchief, pushed an armchair closer to the fire and, giving her his arm, politely led her to it and made her sit down. She obeyed. Antoinette felt greatly relieved.

After supper—Carl Herdegen believed in Marie Christine's headache and grandmaman Inez pretended to do so—Ludmilla went with her husband to a reception given by Prince Metternich. She had at first refused to go, complaining of fatigue, but grandmaman Inez had said, stressing every word, "Go, my dear. You must show yourself to-night. Make yourself beautiful and be gay. Remember me to the Prince."

Joseph went to see Victoire. Antoinette sat in the green drawing-room and tried to work at her embroidery, but the figure of the shepherdess in white leaning on her crook and flirting with a shepherd in blue kept dancing before her eyes. She could not prevent herself thinking of Marie Christine, of feeling anxious and sad. Grandmaman Inez had gone to her room. "To-morrow, Antoinette," she had said, "I want to talk to Marie Christine before Mass."

She had gone upstairs and Franz, watching her, had said in an amazed tone, "Did you ever notice, Toinette, that grandmaman Inez is an old woman? I never did before."

Antoinette worked, she chose her threads with great care, white and gold for the shepherdess . . . white and gold. Oh, poor, poor, snow-queen. Blue and silver for the shepherd. If only there never had been royal shepherds, tempting a foolish girl with a crown. Red for the roses blooming at the shepherdess's feet. Where will Marie Christine be when the roses are once more blooming at Wohan? She slowly stuck her needle into the embroidery, made a tiny stitch and pulled the needle out. It gleamed in the candlelight. How pointed it is, Antoinette thought, like the point of a sword. Will father really challenge . . . ? No, the Emperor will forbid it, because Constantine is a Grand Duke. How unjust, how terribly unjust. How much injustice there is in the world. . . . The men who fight for justice are heroes. . . . Antoinette felt bitterly ashamed. What a bad sister I am, thinking of other things, of . . . of . . . whilst my poor Matzi. . . ."

Putting the embroidery on her lap, she folded her hands. "Holy Virgin, dear Mother of God, help poor Matzi."

Her tears fell on the red roses, dyeing them black.

Little Franz put his head in at the door. He hated going to bed and to-day with Monsieur Venarius spending his evening with one of the Swiss delegates, and grandmaman Inez having retired early, he made the most of his liberty.

"Don't cry, Toinette," he said half disdainfully, half kindly, sitting down beside her. "What's the good of crying? Monsieur Venarius says the water comes from the lachrymal glands. Funny, isn't it? Maman must have very

big glands, she can always cry. Now listen, I want to tell you something terribly important."

"What?" said Antoinette wearily, drying her aching eyes.

"About an hour ago Demoiselle Agatha came here. She was very excited and in a great hurry. Marie Christine let her into her room."

"How do you know?"

"Jean told me."

The boy was always the first to know what was happening. His sisters teased him about it, telling him he would end as chief of the secret police.

"Marie Christine really let the woman in?" Antoinette asked in a trembling voice.

"Yes."

"Has Demoiselle Agatha gone?"

"Yes, she only stayed for about five minutes. She was laughing when she left. Jean saw her go."

Antoinette felt bitterly hurt. Marie Christine had not wanted to see her nor any other member of the family, yet she had talked with this stranger, this dressmaker. . . . What could she have said to her?

Franz sat down on the arm of her chair.

"He's gone," he whispered mysteriously.

"Who?"

"Constantine of course. In a closed coach. Attended only by two men. François the cook saw him drive off. On the road to Bohemia. It's a shame, now we can't challenge him."

A closed coach on the road leading to Bohemia! She heard the horses trotting and the coach rumbling. Thought she saw it drive through the city gates, drive farther and farther, on the road to Bohemia. The noise of trotting horses and the rumbling coach died away. All was still. The black November night swallowed the horses, the coach, the passengers. How terribly final. As final as death. Marie Christine, a week ago you danced with him at the Schwarzenberg's. Your laughter was the merriest in the room; your dancing the most graceful, Marie Christine; and now? A November night, a coach on the road to Bohemia, and you?

"I must go to Marie Christine" she said, getting up so quickly that her embroidery and the brightly-coloured threads fell on the floor. Franz picked them up.

"Yes, do go, Toinette," he said in a wheedling tone. "I want to know why that horrid Demoiselle Agatha came here."

Antoinette ran upstairs. She knocked, knowing how Marie Christine hated any one entering the room without knocking. No one called out "come in." She knocked a second time, no answer. Toinette suddenly felt sick with fear. She clutched at the door handle. Oh, what had happened? Franz, standing behind her, took her hand from the handle and opened the door. Antoinette, half crying, caught hold of her little brother's hand. Hand in hand they entered the room, the empty room.

On the big bed lay jumbled together cloaks and dresses and hats, as if some one had had to choose from them in a hurry. Gloves had fallen on the floor. On the dressing-table a candle was still burning. Antoinette saw all this and one thing more, a big piece of white paper with her name, lying on the table.

She wanted to go up to the table, wanted to take the paper, but she felt incapable of moving. Giddy and shaking all over, she leant against the wall, seeing tiny fiery stars dancing before her eyes.

"There," a voice came from an immense distance. "Read, Toinette."

The boy stood before her, holding out the paper.

"Tell grandmaman Inez, Toinette, that he has sent for me. I shall get into his coach at the city gates. When we meet again I shall be Queen of Poland."

MARIE CHRISTINE"

Antoinette sank to the floor, her wild shriek rang through the silent house. Franz, frightened for the first time in his life, bent down hastily to the half-fainting girl and shouted for help. Servants rushed into the room. After them came, very thin, very small, very straight, grandmaman Inez.

Antoinette got up slowly, still clinging to her brother.

"Grandmaman Inez," she sobbed. "Grandmaman Inez . . . Matzi . . . Marie Christine . . ."

Grandmaman Inez made a slight gesture with her fan, and the servants left the room.

Antoinette gave the letter to grandmaman Inez. She read it in silence, her wrinkled old face unmoved. Once she lowered the hand which held the fan, and little Franz, who loved Roman history, was reminded of a gladiator's show in ancient Rome, of a vanquished man praying for his life and of a merciless thumb being turned down. Whom had grandmaman Inez condemned to death?

Grandmaman Inez folded the paper carefully, then, looking at the brother and sister who still clung together, she said calmly, "It is late. Go to bed."

She turned away and walked towards the door. Stopping on the threshold, she threw a strange glance at the brother and sister and said in a toneless voice, "The sins of the fathers . . . unto the third and fourth generation . . . One of your ancestresses, a beautiful fair Swede also wanted to become Queen, or rather Empress of Russia. They married her to an indulgent Pole. She was white and gold and heartless like Marie Christine. She was your mother's great-grandmother. . . ."

She tottered for an instant. Then, holding up her head, she repeated "to the fourth generation," and left the room with firm and steady steps.

In the immense audience hall where Francis I received his loyal subjects, grandmaman Inez looked even thinner and smaller than usual. After having curtsied deeply like a tiny black ghost, she slowly rose and looked the Emperor straight in the face.

"Dear Countess," said Francis, looking rather frightened and not at all autocratic, "Pray sit down."

It was not the Emperor but grandmaman Inez who, with a gesture, ordered the gentleman-in-waiting to leave the room. He looked helplessly at the Emperor, but Francis only nodded with a smile. Grandmaman Inez and the Emperor were alone.

Grandmaman Inez was a loyal subject. Nevertheless, for her who had known and adored the Empress Maria Theresia, Francis was only the grandson of that great woman, just as Joseph and Leopold had only been her sons. Men, subject to faults and imperfections, as are all sons and grandsons, badly in need of the advice and help of their women-folk.

The Emperor, knowing only too well what he was going to be told, looked worried; his long nose seemed longer and more pointed than ever, giving his face a mournful expression. The whole affair was annoying beyond words. How was he to remedy something that could not be undone?

"Dear Countess," he said nervously, "I am terribly shocked. Your letter and the letter of my good Herdegen, your dear son. . . ."

The grandson, grandmaman Inez thought. His grandmother would never have spoken thus. She would not have been shocked, she would have been furious and would have made things come right, at any price.

"Your Majesty," she said, and her voice was hard, "a few months ago my grandson, Stanislas, seduced a peasant girl—an innocent child. I insisted upon his marrying her."

"Oh, yes, the beautiful young woman I saw at the Augarten fair."

"I did not come here to talk about beauty, Your Majesty. My grandson only did his duty. I insist upon the Grand Duke Constantine doing his."

"Dearest Countess, unfortunately he's not my subject. I have no right to command. I'm terribly afraid His Majesty the Tsar will hardly . . ."

"Your Majesty, when Frederic of Prussia, that bad man, threatened your late grandmother, my beloved Empress Marie Theresia, a Herdegen was the first to come to her aid. Had I come to my Empress as a petitioner" (never, the Emperor thought desperately, was a petitioner so imperious and so wanting of respect) "the banns would have been put up to-morrow at the latest."

"My dear Countess, I share your grief and your indignation, nevertheless . . . the Grand Duke . . . I am helpless. . . ."

Believe me, no one can regret the whole terrible affair more than I do."

"Your Majesty, when monarchs regret a thing they have the power to right it."

"As long as the wrong is done by one of their own subjects, dear Countess."

"The Tsar is, whatever his morals may be, a Christian prince, though not a Catholic. He must understand that the salvation of two souls is at stake."

Somehow the connection of Constantine with the salvation of souls struck the Emperor as shocking.

"Even if I could persuade the Tsar," he said haltingly,

"A morganatic marriage . . ."

Grandmaman Inez flew into a rage. "Your Majesty, my ancestors were grandees of Spain, and the Herdegens can trace their family back to the seventh century, which the Romanows can't. Our families do not go in for morganatic marriages. Besides, it's against the teachings of our Lord."

The Emperor scratched his head and sighed deeply. What was he to say to the old lady?

"I shall do my best, dear Countess."

Grandmaman Inez gazed at him compassionately. Unfortunate grandchildren, lost and helpless without their elders.

"Perhaps it would be best, Your Majesty, if I spoke to the Tsar myself."

"No, no," Franz said hastily. "That's quite impossible. You really must leave it to me."

Whatever had happened, he could not expose Alexander to the untender mercies of the old lady. One never knew what she might say or do. He got up. "I promise to do all I possibly can."

Grandmaman Inez also got up slowly. She stood before the Emperor, a little old woman, bowed by grief, yet unbroken.

"Your Majesty," she said, and for the first time her voice was that of a woman half dead with lassitude. "Your Majesty, my granddaughter Marie Christine is only sixteen."

The Emperor's kind eyes grew sad. Sixteen, a child, with

no future left. Sixteen, with nothing but a long desolate life to look forward to. He sighed. Children, hostages to fortune, how they could break one's heart! He thought of Marie Christine, how lovely she had been! How young, how happy. And now . . . At the mercy of a man whom one could not help despising, even if he was the Tsar's brother. He put out his hand.

"Dear Countess, dear friend of my grandmother, I wish she were here and could help you. But I'll try. I'll do my very best."

A deep curtsy, a bow, the doors flew open. The audience was over.

Ludmilla went about weeping. Carl Herdegen was still more taciturn than usual; a deep wrinkle appeared over the bridge of his nose, and Antoinette was dismayed to discover on a bright morning, that his hair had turned grey at the temples. Joseph tried to console himself by spending most of his time with Victoire, but the girl was a bad comforter.

"It's her own fault," she said. "I really can't be sorry for her."

"You never liked Marie Christine, Victoire," Joseph said reproachfully.

"No, I never liked her. She was as cold as ice. She only loved herself, and she did not even love herself well. The one thing I mind is that our dear Toinette will have to suffer for it."

Victoire was right. Marie Christine had not only ruined her own life but also Antoinette's, although Antoinette's misfortune was a most respectable one, bearing the features of fat Count Bredar.

Three days after Marie Christine's elopement, the German asked for Antoinette's hand. Carl Herdegen was loth to compel his daughter, but grandmaman Inez declared, "It's generous of the Count to want to marry you just now. I know you do not love him, Antoinette. You love another. But one must not love a fool, my child."

"He isn't a fool, he's a saint."

"One must not love saints either, they are not meant to

marry. I know the Prussian is not good-looking and he is twenty years older than you are. But you must not forget that Marie Christine has ruined all your chances. You've got to be grateful to get any kind of husband."

"I don't want a husband. I'll become a nun."

"You have not got the vocation, Antoinette. God meant you to be a wife and a mother."

"But not the wife of this, this . . ."

"At first you will be very unhappy," grandmaman Inez said calmly. "But you will get over it. You will never love him, therefore he will not be able to hurt you. And your children will make up for everything."

"Grandmaman Inez, I'm really to go away, to leave my dear home? Vienna, Wohan, my brothers? Oh, I can't!"

"Our real home is heaven, Antoinette."

"I wish I was there," the girl cried despairingly.

"Don't talk so wildly, my child. God will call you in His own good time."

"Grandmaman Inez"—in her helpless despair Antoinette dared something which no one had ever dared, to touch upon grandmaman Inez's own secret life—"Grandmaman Inez, did you love Grandpapa?"

Grandmaman Inez grew very pale; her black eyes glowed with so bright a flame that Antoinette felt frightened.

"Yes, Antoinette, I loved him and that is one of the reasons why I want to spare you the sorrow of losing the man you love." She made a slight yet decisive gesture with her fan. "You will marry Count Bredar. I wish it. And so does your father, of course, otherwise I should never have tried to persuade you. Joseph is marrying on the 20th of February. Your wedding will take place on the same day."

Antoinette silently bowed her head. If only she could be like Marie Christine and defy them all.

"Come here, my child," grandmaman Inez said gently.

"I know what you are thinking of. Believe me, Ypsilantis would never have married you. He has another mistress—Greece. You will forget him."

"Never, grandmaman Inez. Never."

"You can pray for him. Even a faithful wife may do

that. Go and call your father. I want to tell him you are willing to marry the Prussian." She put out her hand. "Look upon it as a visitation of God and bear it as a Christian."

Antoinette left the room. She gave up trying to escape the dreary future looming before her. She only grew very pale and silent and turned away her head when Franz teased her. The boy had somehow heard grandmaman Inez's words and insisted upon calling Count Bredar "Antoinette's visitation." She smiled when her betrothed came to see her. She was outwardly calm and resigned.

She often thought of Marie Christine. After a fortnight the family had heard from her for the first time. The snow-queen wrote, that, obeying the Tsar's wish, she had married Prince Kramsin. She was going to live in Warsaw. Kissing grandmaman Inez and her parents' hands, and sending her love to Antoinette and her brothers, she remained with gratitude and duty their obedient daughter, Marie Christine Kramsin.

"Do you know who the man is?" Joseph asked his sister. She shook her head sadly, and he told her. "The Russian who was always at Constantine's heels. The man who never spoke. They have made him a Prince. Probably our Emperor insisted upon that."

Antoinette shuddered. How cruel life was! Matzi, alone, forsaken in faraway Poland, the wife of that sinister man. And she herself . . .

She had always submitted to the family's wishes. She submitted again. In February when Joseph, blissfully happy, married Victoire, a second couple stood before the altar—Antoinette and the Prussian count.

CHAPTER VII

THE March violets were out at Wohan. Stanislas, sauntering through the woody part of the park, deadly bored and very cross, stopped suddenly, staring down at the tiny

blue flower-nests. The ill-humour from which he had been suffering for weeks flew away. He saw the soft green shimmer of grass, the tiny buds on the old willow trees and, as he breathed deeply the damp scent of reborn earth, happiness filled his seventeen-year-old heart. Spring is coming at last.

Winter had been endless and dreary. Through the windows he had seen day by day the snow-bound white plain; the lazy, grey waters of the Morava flowing between dead fields; the heavy overcast sky, hanging low over the old house, depressing and dispiriting. And in the big sitting-room Bozena, sewing in the window seat, or dreamily looking through the half-frozen panes—Bozena always Bozena, the stranger who was his wife. Bozena, daily losing more of her beauty, growing heavy and clumsy, with an enormous belly and a small, pale, pinched face. Every morning waking up beside her, Stanislas told himself, poor dear, she is suffering, she is bearing my child, I must be kind to her. And then Bozena made a gesture, said something, or laughed at something Stanislas did not think funny at all, and all his good resolutions vanished in a flare of disgust. They sat together in silence. They had nothing to say to each other. Stanislas longed for his sisters and their merry, amusing talk; for the gay, frivolous jests of his friends; for brightly-lit ballrooms; for the rustle of silk dresses; for heady perfumes; for grandmaman Inez's hard, wise words; for Monsieur Venarius's daring intellectual speculations; for a world to which he belonged and where Bozena was a stranger and would ever remain one.

Sometimes he would ask himself despairingly, and he was young enough to despair easily: "What is it that comes between Bozena and me? She was brought up with my sisters. She only spent the first seven years of her life at home with her parents. Monsieur Venarius and Joseph believe that man is made and formed by education. Grandmaman Inez says all men are equal in God's sight. Yet Bozena is quite different from me."

Bozena sensed Stanislas's silent hostility. She knew he was always on the watch for her to say something; to do some-

thing well-bred people did not say or do. How terribly things had changed! Formerly they had been children playing together on the meadows and in the woods. There had been no difference between them then. But now, in these rooms even the old furniture seemed to spy on her; and the portraits of the Herdegen ancestors seemed to look down disdainfully on the peasant girl, Bozena, the daughter of old farmer Sametil. Sometimes she felt fear for her child. What are you going to be, my baby, a boorish Sametil or a real Herdegen, Stanislas's son? That was the only thing they both agreed upon—the child was going to be a boy.

Living under one roof, they were separated by an abyss. They spent long and joyless days, each thinking angry thoughts. Bozena grew more and more quiet. She could remain silent for hours, staring in front of her with sad eyes. Stanislas, always highly strung, was fast becoming a mere bundle of aching nerves. If only Bozena had scolded. If only she had complained. This everlasting silence, this false calm, was more than he could bear.

He roved through deep snow in the black and mournful forests. He rode over the estate with Monsieur de Venelles, talking with him about Vienna, about balls and parties, the light-hearted mirth of his beloved city. Monsieur de Venelles spoke of France, his dear country he could not forget; of Normandy where he had lived on his small estate.

"I ought not to have fled," he said. "But how could I remain? I knew the peasants had suffered great wrongs during centuries. I knew they had starved like lost cattle. But unfortunately I also knew that what was happening now was wrong too, a terrible bloody wrong. I could not take sides. And I could not look on." He looked around. "Moravia has become my second home," he said. "But when I can't sleep I hear the roaring of the waves and get homesick. Oh, Monsieur Stanislas, the sea, always changing, always beautiful in all her moods. One could die of longing for the sea."

He pulled up his horse, and said in a changed tone. "These old trees must go. Every one of them."

In Monsieur de Venelles's presence Bozena became a different being. He treated her like a great lady and a lovely woman, and her movements grew more graceful, she lost her shyness. Stanislas, noticing it, felt ashamed. Bozena was never so happy as when the Frenchman left his part of the castle to visit them.

Mrs. Sametil's visits were less pleasant. Old Sametil Stanislas liked, perhaps because he hardly ever saw him, perhaps because the old peasant had a dignity and an assurance of his own which impressed the younger man. Not that Father Sametil was amusing. His conversation was limited to "well, well," and "of course," to advice concerning the cows or the pigs, to a "God greet you" at coming, and a "God keep you" at going, as was the custom of the country. Stanislas loved the old man's "God greet you"—it always seemed to him as if he really brought God's greeting into the house; God's greeting and the greeting of the kindly earth, and of all simple and innocent creatures who know no vain pride. After Father Sametil's visit, Stanislas was kind to Bozena for a short time.

But Mother Sametil, red-faced, excited, bubbling over with pride, who called him "Sir" or "My dear son, Count Stani"; who was eternally finding fault with Bozena, telling her she was not "grand," not "ladylike" enough, was another thing. She gossiped endlessly, talking about what "he said, what she said." Her obscene allusions sent the blood to Stanislas's cheeks. Mrs. Sametil's visits were a nightmare to him and, had he but known it, also to Bozena. When the old woman had left the girl fled to her bedroom. Looking up at grandmaman Inez's portrait over the bed, she cried bitterly. Stanislas, walking up and down the big library, tortured himself with the idea of the son turning out to be a daughter, and resembling Mother Sametil. . . . On such days he did not behave like a gentleman to his wife.

A letter from Monsieur Venarius had come. A farm servant had brought it from the neighbouring town. It was a long letter, beginning "*Eheu: fugaces*, this my very dear pupil, is the sad motto to sad news." On the first pages the

old tutor wrote about the health of the family; about politics and the violent snowstorms which were preventing sledge parties. Only after this came the sad news.

Stanislas read the letter again and again. He could not, would not believe it. Marie Christine, his beautiful ambitious sister, the snow-queen of whom he had been so proud and whom all had admired, Matzi, the darling little girl with whom he had played at Wohan. He seemed to see her, slender and fragile, the little face rosy from romping, the golden curls damp and tangled. He heard the childish voice: "Catch me, Stani. Don't be so lazy." Truly the days and the years fly past, bringing sorrow in their train. Stanislas laid the letter on the big table and went over to the window. His eyes were wet. Marie Christine, poor snow-queen, alone, forsaken in Poland, amongst strangers. Living with a man of whom Stanislas knew nothing; whom he had seen only once or twice. A queer, weird creature about whom strange things were told. And now Marie Christine's young beauty belonged to him—Marie Christine's life, Marie Christine's ambitious soul.

Stanislas was not accustomed to suffer. He shrunk from the first great sorrow of his life. Taking up the letter, he went like a child who has been hurt and wants to be comforted, in search of Bozena, whom he found sewing in her small sitting-room. Hastily, his words tumbling over one another, he told her what had happened, waiting impatiently for a kind word. He gave her the letter. "Read, Bozi; read."

Surreptitiously wiping his eyes, he perched on the arm of her chair and put out his hand. But before he had time to take hers he saw on her face an ugly, mocking smile, and Bozena said very quietly, very coldly, "Matzi, too."

She is pleased, Stanislas thought, bewildered. She is pleased because Marie Christine is as she was. She is glad that the same disgrace can fall upon all women. She is happy, because my father and grandmaman Inez are suffering as her parents suffered when they knew. What a wicked woman she is! She knows neither pity nor mercy. She would calmly look on, knitting, whilst we were being be-

headed. She hates us. She wishes us ill. She belongs to another race. We have nothing in common and—she is my wife.

After the first moment Bozena had been horrified at the malicious joy she had felt for an instant. She thought of grandmaman Inez; of kind Carl Herdegen; of Toinette who would be so sad; and also thought, the first time for many weeks, with a kind of maternal pity, of Stanislas who had never known pain and sorrow and who longed to be comforted. Poor Stani! She wanted to say something kind; to cradle the dark curly head she loved in spite of all, on her breast; to kiss his wet eyes. But already Stanislas had jumped up.

"You are glad," he cried furiously. "You are glad, you wicked woman. You haven't even got the decency to hide it. You think Marie Christine is the same as you were. But it's not true. You're a Jacobin, a tricoteuse. You'd like to send us all to the guillotine. I hate you! Hate you! And I hate the child you are going to give birth to. It will be a bad child, a mean child; it's mother's child."

Stanislas stopped abruptly; notwithstanding his rage, he felt he ought not to have spoken so of his unborn child. After all, it wasn't the unfortunate creature's fault.

Bozena got up heavily. "I know you hate me. I also hate you. And my child will hate you—you and your noble family who despise us because we are only common people."

Dragging her feet, she left the room. She did not come to dinner. Mrs. Widowek, having carried up a tray, told Stanislas: "The gracious Countess is not feeling well; she is going to stay in her room. I only hope it's nothing serious, the gracious Countess being in a family way."

"Oh, all right. Don't for goodness' sake talk such a lot." Stanislas said crossly. He hated Bozena. But this stressing of the words "gracious Countess," behind which leered a sneering "the peasant girl is playing the fine lady," angered him. He hated Bozena, but she was going to be the mother of his son, the mother of the first male Herdegen of the youngest generation. "Tell the Countess," he said haughtily, "that I shall have the pleasure of asking after her health

in the afternoon." He ate little and drank more than was good for him.

A terrible time followed. Two children, accustomed to making it up after every quarrel, quickly forgetting what had been, as children do, had suddenly grown up and knew that each of them had spoken words the other would never forgive. A boy and a girl, children no longer, were frightened to death by the awful feeling of loneliness that only "grown ups" know, the feeling of belonging to no one and nowhere. Two unhappy children looked with miserable eyes at the familiar landscape which had suddenly become strange and hostile.

Bozena did not leave her room. She did not even receive her mother who invaded Stanislas's study and worried him for hours. She sat at the window, staring out. She cried because she could no longer pray "Our Father," because she could not honestly say "As we forgive them that trespass against us." She could not forgive her husband. She hated him. As soon as the child is born, she told herself, I'll enter a convent, or die. Better to die—even grandmaman Inez cannot forbid that.

Stanislas went about like a lost soul. He felt the passionate remorse of the quick-tempered who do not think before speaking. He cursed himself and his silly pride. He grieved for Marie Christine and her tragic fate, for Bozena, and, most of all, for himself.

After several days on which he had not seen Bozena, he grew desperate and confessed his sins to Monsieur de Venelles, asking his advice. The Frenchman shook his head reprovingly. "Sometimes, Monsieur Stanislas, I can understand those fiends, the sansculottes. Forgive an old man telling you that you have really not behaved like a gentleman."

"Grandmaman Inez," Stanislas said piteously, "would say, not like a Christian."

Monsieur de Venelles smiled. "Perhaps it's the same thing. Perhaps our Lord was the model of a gentleman, as the knights of old claimed."

"What am I to do?" Stanislas asked helplessly.

"Wait, *mon ami*, wait. Some wounds can only be healed by time." He took a pinch of snuff. "When spring comes Monsieur Stanislas, hard hearts grow softer. Go to your young wife on a spring day and tell her you love her. Then . . ."

"It will never be spring," Stanislas cried hopelessly. "Never, never." He drew his fur coat closer and stared at the bare beech-trees looking like fantastic skeletons in the dusk.

And now the March violets were out, and when the wind shook the old willows a transparent green veil seemed to flutter in the air. Stanislas, drinking in the soft spring breeze, thought: "A miracle has come to pass. If only I could paint this blessed, wonderful resurrection of nature." He smiled. "I'm becoming poetical. If the family knew, how astonished they would be."

He was wrong. Carl Herdegen would not have been astonished in the least. He who so seldom spoke to his children and who watched them so closely had once said to grandmaman Inez, "Dear maman, Stani was born a poet. You'll be proud of him one day."

Grandmaman Inez, absently playing with her fan, had replied, "God's Providence has, strange to say, permitted men to be poets; although I only know one, excepting the singer of the Psalms, worthy of the name—Dante. I cannot believe that our Stanislas will ever become a second Dante, or a psalmist either."

Ludmilla had been indignant. Poetry was no profession for a high-born young man. Writing poetry in one's spare time, like the German minister and courtier, Herr von Goethe, was all right; it did no harm, and maybe gave some people pleasure. But to spend one's life writing poetry. . . .

Carl Herdegen would have understood Stanislas's shining eyes and the tender hands, carefully picking the little fragrant flowers. The boy rose from his knees. Standing still, his hands full of violets, he asked himself wistfully, "Whom can I give them to?"

Walking on slowly, he reached a narrow path leading to

a village. At the crossroad, under a high, bare lime-tree, stood a statue of the Virgin. Pious hands had hung the branches with votive offerings, waxen hearts half melted by the spring sun, metal ones, tinkling like a fervent litany, swinging to and fro in the soft spring breeze. Stanislas crossed himself and, dividing the violets, he laid half of them at the feet of the Mother and the Child. The second half he carried home.

He had never imagined it would be so easy to make it up with his wife. He entered her room without having been announced by Mrs. Widowek, as had been his custom during that terrible time, and held out his hand with the violets. "Look, Bozi, spring has come."

She gazed sadly at the flowers and said nothing.

All the kindness, all the tenderness he had inherited from his father awoke in Stanislas. "Oh, my poor Bozi, how pale you are. How sad. Forgive me, I love you. I'm a bad Christian and a bad gentilhomme. But our son will be a better one, won't he, Bozi darling?"

Bozena cried softly, soundlessly. Her shoulders shook and tears ran down her face. Stanislas felt deeply moved. He took her in his arms, vowing—luckily she did not remember how often he had done it before—to love her and make her happy.

Clinging to each other, they looked out of the window. Wohan was smiling in the tender glory of the first spring day. Birds were twittering and singing in the bare trees, carrying straws to build their nests. In the noon sun the silver Morava gaily eddied past the old castle, glistening and shining.

In Vienna, too, it smelt of spring. Flower-girls offered snowdrops and violets to passers-by—smiling, pretty girls, a bit of spring belonging to the happy, lovely city. St. Stephen's tower seemed to stretch itself and to caress the tiny pink clouds floating around it like angels at play. The women's dresses were bright patches, billowed by the wind; even the oldest, greyest houses smiled, feeling sunbeams touch their wrinkled faces. Sparrows twittered like mad.

Then days came on which human voices twittered still more loudly than the sparrows. At first people only spoke in whispers. "Nothing is known for certain. The whole thing may be just a rumour. . . ." "It's certainly only a rumour. . . ." "How often have we heard it before. . . ?" "Be careful, some one is listening. . . ." "Yes a lovely day, this year spring has come early. . . ." "Dear me, I'd better not have said that; it might be taken as a symbolic expression, the spring of the nations. . . ." "Because, if it's really true. . . ." "They say Metternich looks awfully worried. . . ." "No wonder, if it's true. . . ." "They say the Empress Marie Louise wept. . . ." "Who can tell if she wept for joy or for fear. . . ?" "And all those couriers riding between Paris and here. . . ." "One really ought to know what's happened. . . ." "If *he* came back, what was the good of all those foreign monarchs eating us out of our house and home. . . ?" "Ah, well, I wish the Swabian joy of it. . . ." "And the Prussian too. . . ." "And the Russian who worried our poor Emperor to death. . . ." "And the English, those stuck-up niggards. . . ." "But if *he* came back we'd have war. . . ." "Good God, another war. . . !" "Look, there's old Gentz driving past. He'll have his hands full if Napoleon comes back, writing against him, inciting people against him. . . ." "I'd like to know what he's thinking. . . ." "There's the Emperor. *Vivat, vivat, Francis, Vivat!*"

Victoire could not sleep. She could hardly eat or drink. She was incapable of remaining quiet for even an hour. She drove about; she went out on foot, walking through the streets, hoping to hear some news. She worried Joseph to death with her questions.

"He has landed. That at least is certain. I know it, Joseph. It can't be kept back any longer. Oh, that I could have helped him to escape, *mon empereur*. Did the fools really believe they had conquered him, the dwarfs the giant? Do you know what he told the French? 'The eagle will fly from church tower to church tower till he reaches Notre Dame.' He's marching through the Provence. Everything is in flower. The children break flowering branches

from the trees and strew them at his feet. All France is a single shout of joy, *Vive l'empereur!*"

She walked about as if she had gained a victory. She laughed and cried. She prayed in St. Stephen's for Napoleon's victory. She was deliriously happy, lovely and madly irritating.

At night she woke Joseph. "Get up if you love me. I must know what has happened."

"Dearest, it's perfectly dark still. There isn't a soul in the street."

"You're not human, Joseph. Are you made of wood and stone? Dear God, aren't you glad?"

"How can I be glad? Another war?"

"They'll never dare to fight against him."

"They will, and, forgive me, Victoire, they will be victorious."

"No. Never!"

Victoire jumped out of bed and walked up and down the room in her nightgown, with bare feet.

"You are his enemy. You, you Autrichien. You are my enemy too. I hate you."

Joseph remained silent.

"Why don't you say anything?"

"What do you want me to say, darling? I'm not his enemy. I only wish for peace—peace for my country and for all the nations of the world."

"Why do you look so sad?"

Joseph smiled. "Do you think it's pleasant to hear the bride whom one married only a month ago say that she hates one?"

Victoire felt remorse. Besides she was shivering in the cold room. She crept back to bed. "I'm cold, *mon ami*."

He held her fast, trying to soothe her. She began to cry. "I don't want him to be conquered. I don't want your country to suffer—it's mine, too. I don't wish any one ill, except the ogre, and that horrible Prussian Gentz, and Monsieur de Talleyrand, and the Tsar, and the English, and the Prussians. . . and I'm miserable."

The Congress still dined, danced, gambled and made love.

Perhaps the laughter in the ballrooms sounded a trifle forced, perhaps there sometimes fell on the faces of statesmen a fugitive shadow, caused by the Corsican who was again called Napoleon. But the gay tunes drowned everything. They also drowned the anxious sighs, the sobs and weary words of thousands of unknown small people trembling anew for their life, their fields, their goods and chattels. Hostile glances followed Prince Talleyrand, who seemed to have become omnipresent. He was seen at the same time entering the Metternich palace, leaving the apartment of the Tsar in the Imperial palace, driving through town and entering his own hotel. His face had grown sharper, the long nose nearly reaching the thin lips. Beneath the bushy brows the eyes were deeply sunk in their sockets. The Viennese asked themselves nervously: What is the cunning fox planning? Yesterday he was the loyal servant of his Majesty King Louis XVIII. But who knows whether he has not gone over to his former master overnight; whether he is not plotting for Napoleon? Vienna grew hysterical. Police reports accumulated. Every letter leaving the capital was read by the secret police, and for the first time the loyal family Herdegen was made the subject of a police report.

"Countess Victoire Herdegen, *née* Derville, wore at a dinner given by the Countess Colloredo a white dress embroidered with violets, the emblem of the *Empire*. In her hair she wore a wreath of violets. She was overheard saying to Countess Judith Crenneville, the daughter of her hostess, that summer was drawing close, the humming of the bees proclaimed it. Our agent took this to be an allusion to the golden bees often used as an ornament on furniture dating from the time of the *Empire*. She was also heard to say that the Provence was in flower, one could smell the fragrance of the new spring as far as Vienna. Our agent further noticed that the Countess Herdegen, addressed by Prince Metternich, only slightly inclined her head and listened to his amiable words without smiling or looking pleasant as is the custom. She cut the conversation short herself, simply turning her back upon the Prince, who, so our agent reports, looked perplexed and decidedly annoyed. . . ."

"Our agent" had not exaggerated. Victoire had really not behaved as the bride of an officer of His Majesty Francis I had to behave. Joseph did not reproach her; he knew it was no good. But Carl Herdegen called upon her the same night. The young couple were still living in the Herdegen palace, waiting for their new home to be put in order.

"A clever woman, my dear Victoire," said the old diplomat, "and you *are* a clever woman, does not go in for politics in so childish a manner. Mind, I'm not speaking of your opinions, only of your behaviour. The affront to Prince Metternich . . ."

"I simply couldn't help myself. When he spoke to me I saw red."

"A woman who is incapable of controlling her feelings had better keep away from politics, which demand self-control and cold-blooded intelligence. As soon as feelings get mixed up with politics everything goes wrong."

Victoire felt abashed. She had expected a scolding. This short lecture on politics bewildered her.

"Are you angry, *cher père*?" she asked with the sweet unexpected girlishness which was her greatest charm.

"No, my child. But do try and be a little more careful; a little wiser for your husband's sake."

Impulsively Victoire bent down and kissed his hand. "I love you, *cher père*. I love you very much indeed."

Carl Herdegen smiled kindly. "I always thought, little Victoire, that you hated the *Autrichiens*?"

Victoire grew red with confusion. "Perhaps," she said hesitatingly, "perhaps I have begun to love them just a little."

Grandmaman Inez spent many hours kneeling in the small chapel. She prayed for peace. She knew war; she had seen it so often during her long life. Out of the past rose pictures of horror—devastated villages, ragged hunted women and children fleeing before the enemy. Why, said grandmaman Inez angrily—and she also put this question to God—why cannot men be sensible and live in peace? It is written in the Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt

not covet thy neighbour's goods." But how can the people believe in these teachings, seeing their rulers making mock of them? It is a great misfortune that our rulers are men. All men are childish, frivolous and prodigal. They do not mind squandering human blood and—money. How different was my beloved Empress. She feared and hated war like the devil because she was a woman and knew what it meant.

Grandmaman Inez was so sad that she grew gentle. She often talked with Monsieur Venarius, whose ideas, although coming from another source, resembled hers. She honoured and admired the old Swiss, and wondered at him being so sensible. But then perhaps a tutor was not a real man.

Thus the days passed. Gradually the music grew muted; balls and receptions came to an end. Over the green hills of the Wiener Wald hung a dense black cloud, drawing closer and closer.

The news from France was bad. . . . Napoleon was approaching Paris. . . . The King had fled. . . . Napoleon had entered his capital. . . .

The black cloud hanging over the hills, lovely with spring, grew darker and darker. Sometimes a flash of lightning lit up the hills and the valleys. Those who saw it knew what it prophesied: War!

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a saying in the Herdegen family that came into use when the younger generation was reading *Robinson Crusoe*: "If I were shipwrecked on a desert island I should take Franz as my Man Friday. He always knows what to do."

Little Franz was really an exceedingly practical character. Perhaps this was due to his intimacy with Monsieur Venarius. The two strangely assorted friends loved to stroll on fine days under the big old trees of the Prater, and there was hardly a topic that they did not discuss. Sometimes

Monsieur Venarius, looking down and seeing how small and young the little figure walking beside him was, tried to bowdlerize certain topics *ad usum dephini*. But to Franz everything seemed perfectly natural, and he thought nothing either indecent or funny, so that the old tutor always forgot anew that he was talking to a boy of eleven. The only person Franz really loved was the old Swiss. He was fond of Bozena and Joseph, although he rather despised the latter on account of his "silly sentimentality." Antoinette, whom he liked, he thought stupid; Marie Christine he disliked; and for Stanislas he felt a slight contempt, not quite free from envy. As to Victoire he watched her meditatively as if she were an unknown little wild animal of which one did not know whether it bites or not. Victoire honestly disliked the boy. She called him to Joseph "*Le code Napoleon: La recherche de la paternité est interdite*," though this was not meant as an attack on the boy, but on Ludmilla whom she hated.

During these hectic, restless April days whilst the whole world was preparing for the last struggle with Napoleon, Victoire discovered with amazement that Franz was the only one of the family whose presence she could bear. The boy was rather taciturn. He listened politely to her passionate hopes and fears. He even admitted that the Corsican was a great man—greater at least than his enemies. Sometimes when Victoire expatiated on Napoleon's just cause, he cited in the pedantic manner he had copied from Monsieur Venarius a Latin tag or two, as "*quid juris*," or said dryly, "We'll see, *ut fata trahunt*." They had another taste in common, admiration of Beethoven's music, which most people thought vulgar and ugly. When Victoire played on the piano "The battle of Victoria," she shed tears of enthusiasm; Franz wagged his head in time to the music and softly hummed the tune. Grandmaman Inez entering the room whilst Victoire was playing, shook her head. "It cannot be right to bare one's soul like that to human beings." Sitting down, she asked Victoire to play her the old children's song, "*Frère Jaques, dormez-vous?*"

"That's what I like," she said. "It's a question God puts

to us all: Are you sleeping? Followed by the command: *Sonnez les matines*—ring in the morning office—wake up, day has come, go to work. If we were all awake, the world would be different." She smiled at Victoire, "You have a pretty voice, my granddaughter; fresh and sweet."

Victoire blushed, and repeated the little song.

On the whole she was in disgrace. Grandmaman Inez lectured her at least once a day on the topic "Wives submit to your husbands." "St Paul demanded it," she said. "And even you will not think yourself cleverer and wiser than the great Apostle."

Victoire suppressed a smile. She did not mind Madame Mère's sermons even if she did not act up to them.

Then came a day on which Joseph came home early, looking very pale and nervous. He was to join his regiment in a week, and it was only a question of time before the regiment would be sent against the Corsican. How could he tell Victoire he was going to fight against her country, against her Emperor?

Victoire stiffened at the first words he said. Her face grew pale; her violet eyes looked black.

"You're not really going to? You can't."

"I've got to, Victoire."

"Against my country? Against *him*?"

"Don't make it harder for me, dearest."

"Against France? Against *Napoleon*?"

"I've got to," Joseph repeated wearily.

"If you do . . . then . . . I won't be your wife any longer. . . . I'll leave you, you enemy, you *Autrichien*."

Joseph said nothing. Victoire raged till she was out of breath. Then she threw herself on the sofa and began to cry. This was worse than her anger. She put her arms round Joseph's neck. She sobbed, she implored him, she kissed him, pushed him away, drew him close again, begged him to give in, covered his face with kisses.

"I only want you to say one word, Joseph, that you won't join up, that you won't fight against my country. Listen, dear, I'll love you, I'll make you happy, so happy, *mon pauvre* Joseph, as you have never been before. I'll never

be bad-tempered again. I'll do whatever you want. Just say one word."

He could not say it.

Seeing that her prayers were unavailing, she got up and ceased weeping. Her charming face was cold and hard.

"All right," she said. "I've sold myself to an enemy. I'm your slave. Will you do just one thing for me? Leave me alone till to-morrow. I simply can't bear to see you. Go."

He tried to kiss her hand. She snatched it away. "Go, please. We'll talk things over to-morrow."

"Don't forget that I may not return," he said softly.

She shrugged. "After all, you want to fight."

She turned away and he left the room. Standing before the door, Joseph reflected. To whom could he entrust this beloved, unreasonable woman? Not to grandmaman Inez; she was too severe, and Victoire was really unhappy. His father was at court. His mother? No, the two women heartily disliked each other. He himself would be on duty all night. How he missed Antoinette and her loving kindness. Slowly walking along the passage he heard quick, light steps coming downstairs. His face grew brighter. Franz, of course. How could he have forgotten him? He caught hold of the boy as he was going to run past. "You've got to do something for me, Franz. I've just heard that my regiment is off in a few days' time."

Franz whistled, a sure sign that something had moved him. It was the only way he ever betrayed his feelings, and even grandmaman Inez had not been able to cure him of this habit.

"What about Victoire?" the boy said.

"You can imagine how unhappy she is."

"Poor Joseph," Franz said rather superciliously.

"Poor Victoire."

"She ought to have thought of it before becoming your wife. A woman always marries her husband's country."

"Don't philosophize, for goodness' sake. I want you to help me."

"What can I do?"

"I hate the idea of Victoire being all alone. God knows what thoughts may come to her. Be a dear, go and talk to her; try to make her think of other things. She likes you."

"She doesn't like me in the least, but she knows I'm clever and that impresses her because she is a woman."

"Can I trust you? I've got to go."

"All right, I'll manage her. Don't worry."

Joseph left the house in low spirits. Franz ran upstairs and knocked at Monsieur Venarius's door. Standing in the doorway, he asked, "How long does a terribly unreasonable woman take to get over a fit of temper and be able to listen to words of wisdom?"

"Why on earth do you want to know?"

"Never mind."

"I can't tell you. Thank God I've never had anything to do with women. But I should say an hour or two."

"Thank you, Monsieur Venarius."

"Run away, there's a good boy. I've got to finish a compendium."

Franz waited exactly for two hours, then he crept on tip-toe to Victoire's room. Standing before the door, he heard her rummaging about, and entered the room without knocking. Victoire was kneeling before a big trunk and carefully putting in clothes and linen. Whatever happened, nothing could make her untidy.

"You're packing?" the boy said.

Victoire started. Seeing her youngest brother-in-law, she grew calm again. "What do you want? Yes, I'm packing."

"You're going away?"

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"Home. To France."

The boy sat down and looked compassionately at Victoire.

"I don't believe you'll ever get through. The soldiers will capture you. Maybe they'll shoot you as a spy."

Victoire stared at him, her eyes round with dread.

"But I can't remain here, Franz."

"Why?"

"You're too young to understand. Joseph is going to

fight against my country. I can't bear to see him, to live with him. But you can't understand."

"Joseph," said the boy slowly, "is just as miserable as you are. But he's got a country too, Victoire."

"What am I to do?" the girl cried, beside herself. "I can't remain in a town that is *his* enemy, that will whine if he conquers and exult if he is conquered. I must go away, Franz; I really must."

The boy reflected. He understood Victoire better than Joseph did. Nothing would make her change her mind.

"All right," he said. "I'll go with you. You are too young and pretty to travel alone. I'll come with you."

"You're crazy. How can I take you to France?"

"I'm going to take *you*, and not to France."

Victoire laughed angrily.

"Silly child."

"Have you booked a seat in the coach, Victoire?"

"No, I never thought of it."

"There you are. You probably don't even know when the coach starts. But I do. There's one leaving in two hours. But it's not going to France but to Bohemia. We'll take it and go to Wohan."

"I'm not going to Wohan."

"Either you come with me to Wohan or I'll call grandmaman Inez and tell her everything. Then you'll have to stay here."

Although Victoire had been married for little more than a month she had learnt that there were two members of the Herdegen family who never gave way—grandmaman Inez and Franz. She tried a few objections, went into tantrums, tried wheedling and cajoling, half knowing that all was in vain. Franz listened, nodded, picked up the slipper she had thrown at his head, missing him by an inch, and repeated his threat. An hour later she and Franz left the house by the servants' entrance.

For the second time a Herdegen eloped, but this time she was accompanied by a very young, innocent and gallant little cavalier, who carried her bag. "We'll send for the trunks," Franz had said, who managed somehow to get two seats in

the coach and who wrapped her in a warm blanket he had thoughtfully provided, for the nights were still cold.

At eleven the coach started. The fat horses trotted through deserted streets, through the gate Marie Christine had passed, reaching at last the rain sodden, rough highway. The coach rolled and pitched in the dark like a ship in a heavy sea.

Franz took fruit and cake out of a basket and offered them to Victoire. She shook her head silently and the boy saw tears coursing down her cheeks and wetting her veil. Biting into an apple, he gave way to a feeling of utter amazement. Why on earth was she crying? She had wanted to go away. And now she seemed sorry because she had gone. Monsieur Venarius was right, God had only created three sensible women—Catherine of Russia, Marie Theresia, and grandmaman Inez.

He took Victoire's hand. Monsieur Venarius had once told him women were like children; they loved being petted. Victoire's fingers clung to the small, sticky hand as if they would never let it go. Rocked by the rolling coach both fell asleep.

Joseph, returning home tired out and anxious, saw on the hall table a letter addressed to him in his youngest brother's large, characteristic writing.

MY DEAR AND VALUED BROTHER,

I am sorry to say your wife is absolutely mad. She wanted to go to France. Luckily I managed to dissuade her. As we both agreed it would be better for Victoire not to remain in Vienna during the war, I am taking her to Wohan. Do not worry about her. I shall protect her and look after her.

Your obedient servant and faithful brother,

FRANZ HERDEGEN.

P.S.—Tell grandmaman Inez that I could not act differently. A second scandal would have been too much for the family. And tell father I had to take ten Thaler out of the left-hand drawer of his writing-table, not being sure whether the money I had would suffice.

Notwithstanding lassitude, worry and grief, Joseph laughed. He had not expected this elopement. Maybe it really was the only possible thing. His father was of the same opinion. Ludmilla cried as usual and declared between sobs that she had always been against the marriage. But of course Joseph had to marry a foreigner. Just like him. . . . Poor darling Franz, the helpless, innocent child, travelling alone with that foolish woman, exposed to all the dangers lurking on the highway—brigands, murderers, bolting horses, upset coaches. . . . God alone knew what misfortunes would befall him.

Grandmaman Inez stopped the waterfall of her words with an energetic wave of her fan. "Of all your children, my dear, Franz is the least helpless. He has been blessed with far more common sense than all the other members of the Herdegen family. Also with more than your own family can boast of. Try and calm yourself."

"I'm so glad, dear and honoured maman, you're not angry with the children." Carl Herdegen looked relieved.

"What is the good of being angry with Franz? If he believes a thing to be right, he simply cannot understand any one being angry with him for doing it. And as for Victoire . . . she's a child; much more of a child than the boy. Joseph must treat her more strictly when he comes back. As soon as women try to rule the family, things invariably go wrong."

Nevertheless, even grandmaman Inez felt reassured when a few days later a messenger came from Wohan, bringing a letter telling of the safe arrival of the two culprits as well as other welcome news.

"We came just in time," Franz wrote in a letter addressed to grandmaman Inez, "to welcome the youngest Herdegen. His face is red and full of wrinkles, and he looks rather like a sick monkey. He has got brown hair like Stani and blue eyes like Bozi. He keeps yelling at the top of his voice. Stani is very proud of him, I can't understand why. The brown mare has foaled, and the foal is much prettier than Stani's son. I beg grandmaman Inez's

permission to return to Vienna as soon as possible. The noise the baby makes—he is to be called Ferdinand after our honoured grandpapa—is unbearable and makes it impossible for me to get on with my studies. All Wohan kisses the gracious Countess's hands and I, too, kiss the hand of my dear and honoured grandmaman Inez and my dear parents and remain

Grandmaman Inez's devoted and obedient servant,
FRANZ HERDEGEN."

The arrival of the youngest Herdegen in a world filled with unrest and fear called forth different feelings. Carl Herdegen felt a wistful joy. Now I'm a grandfather, he thought, an ancestor, what can I leave to the tiny creature who has just drawn his first breath at Wohan? He was not thinking of money or estates; he was thinking—just like Carl, Ludmilla would have said impatiently, had she known his thoughts—of other things, things that were not for sale and barter: an honoured name, a clean life devoted to the service of others. He thought of his own father who had been killed in a battle as a young man. He knew little about him, only that the whole regiment had loved him for his gallantry and his kindness. Not much to remember a man by, but perhaps enough for a life that had ended so soon. What would little Ferdinand in days to come remember his grandfather by? Carl Herdegen humbly bowed his head. He had loyally served his country. He had done good work in the diplomatic service. He had never been envious of others who had attained greater honours with less work and trouble. He had been a good son to grandmaman Inez and a kind, forgiving husband to Ludmilla.

But the children? Yes, he had failed his children, not because he did not love them but because he had always lacked the courage to interfere with them. He had only been a looker on. Had he done right? Joseph, his first-born had chosen the right path; Toinette—thinking of her he felt guilty and unhappy—Toinette in a strange country, married to a man so much older than she, so absolutely different from them all. Of Marie Christine he did not even dare

to think. Stani . . . Stani had ceased being only his son, he had become a father himself. Stani, so young, so childish. I did not do my duty to my children, Carl Herdegen admitted sadly. I must try and do it to little Ferdinand, my grandson, but also to Franz who is not . . . He hurriedly banished the face of his English friend rising before him. He had forgiven him long ago. Who could have resisted Ludmilla's young beauty and her imperious caprice?

Ludmilla was saying crossly, "Isn't it like the peasant girl to have a son? Couldn't it have been a girl? The first Herdegen of the young generation to have a peasant woman for his mother!"

Grandmaman Inez gazed at her daughter-in-law with undisguised disapproval. She was all the more angry with her because she herself had once harboured the same sinful thoughts. Now, hearing them spoken by another, she saw with remorse and disgust how mean, how ugly, how ill-bred her sin had been. "I thank God," she said harshly, "that my first grandson is really the son of his father and that he has got a good, honourable and healthy mother. I welcome little Ferdinand with all my heart. God bless him and his dear parents."

The same evening, talking to Monsieur Venarius, she said, "Tell me, my dear old friend, how is it that a woman whose family has been noble for many generations can be as vulgar and common as any upstart?"

Monsieur Venarius smiled a trifle maliciously. He did not share grandmaman Inez's firm belief in a noble descent. He knew Swiss peasants who were finer gentlemen than many a nobleman.

Noticing the expression on his face, grandmaman Inez smiled in her turn. "You are an incorrigible Jacobin, my good Venarius. Don't trouble to deny it." Still smiling, she went on, "Have you grasped, my dear old friend, that I am a great-grandmother now? I must confess I don't feel like it in the least." Her gaze sought the mirror on the wall. Monsieur Venarius smiled again.

Turning away her eyes from her image, grandmaman Inez met Monsieur Venarius's smiling ones and lifted her

fan. A roguish expression came upon her old face. "Yes, my good Venarius, in the sight of God all men, and standing before a mirror all women, from five to a hundred are alike. I wanted to find out whether little Ferdinand will see in my old face a last trace of the beauty his dear great-grandfather loved so tenderly when he brought home his bride."

"He will, dearest and kindest of friends," the old Swiss said, touched by her words. "And he will also see in your dear face all the kindness and loyalty you have always shown to God and to even the poorest of His children."

"He will see the same in your face, my old friend. Prepare yourself, my good Venarius to whom we all owe so much, for your youngest pupil. Do you remember how you taught Joseph and my dear dead son Aloisius to read and write? Do you remember?"

In the gathering spring twilight, years long past came to life again; long summer and winter days at Wohan when a young Monsieur Venarius had taught grandmaman Inez, no grandmaman then, together with her boys, wisdom and knowledge; and his eldest pupil had been much more eager to learn than the younger ones. The words "do you remember?" a magic spell for the old, made them forget the sorrows of the present and recalled to life a sunny, happy past, a time of flowers and soft murmuring of old trees, of mad canters over autumn fields, of dreamy summer afternoons on the terrace, listening to the song of the fountain, a time when the world had seemed as young as they were, as full of joy and hope. Grown old, they were trying to recover it to escape from death and loneliness, to go back to the Wohan of their faraway youth and the things which would never return.

Stanislas was delighted to see little Franz and his sister-in-law. The ghastly hours when Bozena's hardly human shrieks of pain had rung through the old house had frightened and shocked him. He had vowed—how many times had he done it before?—to be a faithful and loving husband to the poor dear woman who was suffering so frightfully, and to make her happy at last. Later, when the shadow of death hovered

for a day or two over Wohan and the doctor from the neighbouring town looked serious and shook his head mournfully, Stanislas had really done penance for his sins. Grandmaman Inez would have been pleased to see her pale, frightened grandson lying on his knees in the chapel before the image of the Virgin, imploring her, who had known the hard lot of women, to help his poor little Bozena.

But now the child lay in its cradle, a boy as they had always known it would be, a real little Herdegen with a tiny aquiline nose and an obstinate chin. Only his blue eyes, fringed with long golden lashes, were his mother's. Stanislas loved the baby. Nevertheless, it was rather a bore always to have to walk on tiptoe so as not to wake it, besides having to be considerate, tender and patient with Bozena, who recovered so slowly.

Nor was Victoire especially amusing. She took endless solitary walks. She made friends with Monsieur de Venelles, glad to speak French once more. She was moody during the meals and got cross whenever Joseph's name was mentioned. But she was young and strong; there was no need to spare her: And during the short hours when spring with all its beauty drove away her black mood, she was like the women Stanislas had known in Vienna—gay, intelligent and playful. How delightful her playfulness was compared to Bozena's staidness, to the importance she attributed to every trifle. Victoire's light-hearted laugh robbed things of their weight, and Stanislas had always hated being burdened by the heaviness of things and people. When she was in a happy mood Victoire proved a charming playfellow; all the more charming because she was also a pretty woman.

On the other hand Franz was rather a trial. He quarrelled with the nurse and the doctor who had remained on at Wohan. No one knew where the boy had got the strange hygienic ideas from, for which he fought passionately. The unhappy infant," as the nurse complained, had to lie naked in the sun. However well they wrapped it up, the boy always found an occasion to creep up to baby Ferdinand like a Red Indian and to lay bare the tiny limbs. "Young animals," he declared in Monsieur Venarius's rather pedantic way "al-

ways lie in the sun. Therefore it must be the right thing for the human young. Air, sun and water are good for the baby." He fell in love with the child or rather with his own medical wisdom. He dragged the infant from his cradle. "He'll grow up an idiot if you keep rocking him. Young animals are never rocked." None the less baby Ferdinand thrived; he grew fat and sunburnt, and stopped crying as soon as his young uncle appeared.

Bozena did not seem to profit by the boy's medical genius. She simply could not get well. She was so terribly tired; it hurt her to move. She only wanted to lie quiet and look out of the window, white and motionless as if she were already dead. Rising from the garden she heard Victoire's and Stanislas's voices, laughing or quarrelling, and her pale face grew paler still. She felt so useless, so unwanted; and when the doctor made her give up suckling the baby and a wet nurse was installed at Wohan, she absolutely lost her balance. She had nothing in common with the merry, playful people surrounding her; nor with her kind and taciturn father, who, standing beside her bed, like an old gnarled tree, repeated with a worried look upon his face: "Try and get well soon, Bozena. Try and get well soon." As to her talkative mother, how could she understand her? The old woman cried out with delight, fingering the baby's dainty clothes; touching with toil-roughened hands the soft linen of Bozena's bed; eating greedily the dainty dishes her daughter pushed away impatiently.

Bozena was living in a vacuum. She no longer belonged to her parents, and did not belong to the Herdegens. She felt like suffocating. Franz was the only one who noticed that something was wrong. Stanislas believed that after childbirth all women ailed and looked ill for a long time. Victoire thought only of herself and sometimes, very rarely, of Joseph, who was by now fighting against her Empeur. But the boy saw his Bozi growing paler and thinner day by day and knew that neither the doctor's medicines nor his air and sun cure did her any good.

He asked her point blank, "Why don't you want to get well, Bozi?"

Lifting weary eyes, she said tonelessly, "Why should I? Nobody wants me."

"You've got to pull yourself together. Think of little Ferdinand."

"Little Ferdinand is a rich child. Rich children don't need a mother."

"Think of Stani."

The pale face on the white pillow grew distorted. "I am thinking of Stani. That's just the reason why . . ."

The boy could not understand this exaggerated sensibility. He only knew that Bozena wanted to die and that it was Stanislas's fault. Or was it? Perhaps human beings are like plants; one must not transplant them when they are in flower; one can only do it as long as they are tiny plants. Franz was convinced of his own wisdom, but he was intelligent enough to know there were some things, very few, he simply could not understand. Bozena and her longing for death belonged to these mysterious things. Whom could he ask for help? Not his father, he was too gentle; not maman, she was too selfish. Toinette who would have known what to do, was far away, married to that horrid Prussian count. But there was one woman he knew, hard as stone, wiser than all other women and—yes, kind like the earth, the sun and the rain—grandmaman Inez.

The boy, less impulsive than his brothers and sisters, took three days to make up his mind. Then he sat down and wrote to grandmaman Inez. The letter was hard to write, for Franz knew nothing about what he called in his letter "the strange feelings of females." But the result of these "strange feelings that no sensible man could understand" he described with the exactness of a doctor's diagnose.

Grandmaman Inez read the letter several times. She shook her head and sent for Monsieur Venarius. "I hope you don't mind leaving for Wohan to-morrow," she said.

"Of course not." The old Swiss had long ago given up wondering at grandmaman Inez's sudden decisions. A day later, on a glorious May morning, grandmaman Inez and Monsieur Venarius drove through the city gates, and took the road leading to Bohemia.

CHAPTER IX

GRANDMAMAN INEZ was walking with a queer expression on her face along the wide passages of the castle. She kept stopping, gazing at a crumbling wall, at family portraits whose gilded frames had faded and were fly-blown. Later in the day she stood for a long time in the old lime-tree avenue, staring at the castle which looked grey and forbidding in the morning sun. The idea she was trying to banish kept returning, like the bats flying round the house in autumn: Wohan is growing old. Of course the castle had been over two hundred years old on the day grandmaman Inez had come here as a bride, but she had never noticed it. To-day she saw how it had aged, and she, who so often and so conscientiously meditated upon the passing away of all earthly things, felt a strange fear. Wohan was growing old, and she herself. . . . ? She had been seventy-one last month, but she had never given it a thought. Now she felt suddenly frightened by the many, many years lying behind her and, still more, by the few still before her. She was not afraid of death; Purgatory would of course be terrible, but after that came eternal bliss. But she must not die yet. Carl would be lost without her, and also Joseph and Stanislas, and Stanislas's wife. Thinking of Bozena, grandmaman Inez frowned and fanned herself impatiently. Bozena made her feel old. Formerly she had only to say a word and children and grandchildren had obeyed and given up their silly notions. But Bozena . . . how many words had she already wasted upon the pale, thin girl who did not want to live.

When the coach with grandmaman Inez and Monsieur Venarius had stopped in the court of Wohan, Bozena had felt frightened. Her godmother would not bear patiently with her—and after all she had no right to expect it. Did she not possess everything a young woman could wish for—a handsome husband, a lovely baby, money to spare? It would be impossible to explain to grandmaman Inez how terribly lost and forsaken she felt, how lonely in a strange world.

Grandmaman Inez asked no questions. She sat very straight beside Bozena's bed, looked at her searchingly and said dryly, as if she were talking of something commonplace and rather uninteresting:

"So you want to die, Bozena?"

She did not, as the girl had expected, talk about the duties of a wife and mother, nor did she call Bozena ungrateful and remind her of what she owed the family. She only said coldly, "What a pity. I never thought you were a coward. A bad heritage for my grandson." Then she spoke about other things.

That had been the first day. Since then many days had passed. Bozena was still ill and grandmaman Inez still staying at Wohan. Monsieur Venarius saw with tender pity how shrunken and pale the old woman looked. He was the only one who knew how worried grandmaman Inez really felt; how sorry she was for the girl she had forced to marry Stanislas, and how soft her old heart felt towards her. "It's a battle between the two women," he said sadly to Monsieur de Venelles. "I think if Madame Bozena knew how the old lady is grieving over her, she would try and get well."

Monsieur de Venelles nodded absent-mindedly. He was thinking of other things and felt no interest either in Bozena Herdegen's sorrow nor in grandmaman Inez's worries. Europe had armed against France. Every day might bring news of a battle being fought. Monsieur de Venelles rode to the neighbouring town every afternoon, hoping to hear something new. He came home at dusk. Sometimes, reaching the crossroad, he stopped his white horse. What if he took the other turning and instead of riding back to Wohan rode on and on till he met a French regiment? What if he joined it, fought with it? Fought? For whom? Against whom? Against what? For his country. But was Napoleon, that mad war-monger, really the peaceful, patient, hard-working France he had known so long? Would his victory prove a blessing to France? Monsieur de Venelles did not know. He shook his head wearily and patted the old horse. He was a Frenchman living in a hostile country, but even that was not quite true. The country and its people

had received the refugee kindly, had given him a second home. Was he to fight against them?

An old peasant drove past on a shabby, rattling cart and called out a greeting. The French agent was very popular. He never overreached anyone as other estate agents did, and he knew what hard work was. Monsieur de Venelles returned the old man's greeting. If I took the other turning, he thought, I might have to kill that good old man's son. He gave his horse the rein and it began to trot. In the hazy distance the Frenchman saw the old castle of Wohan standing on the hill. In the valley the Morava, swollen by yesterday's rains, licked the banks with white tongues of foam. On the immense plain the fields lay breathing softly, the corn ripening for the harvest. Monsieur de Venelles sighed. No, he could not serve a man whose horses had trampled on so many fields, stamped upon so many crops, destroyed so many harvests.

At night he lay awake, France called him, and Austria held him back. He loved them both. Coming from the big plain the wind roared before his window as the sea had roared in Normandy; the fields he had ridden past were like the fields of France. And the men . . . ? Dear God, were not men the same everywhere, good and bad, gallant and cowardly, unselfish and selfish, and, God help them, very often both together?

Riding over the estate in the dawn, he often met Victoire who was much too excited to sleep. She too was feverishly waiting for news, but, unlike the Frenchman, she knew no doubt; she felt only a single longing, a single wish—Napoleon's victory. She believed in it firmly. He must conquer, but when would it be?

She never thought of Joseph at Charleroy with his regiment. She hardly noticed the people she was living with. She dreamt of Napoleon's early triumphs that she had, still half a child, celebrated in Paris. In the deep green peace of the woods at Wohan she heard the bells of Notre Dame ringing in a new victory.

Grandmaman Inez ignored her. Only once, noticing that Victoire did not call her Madame Mère any longer, but only

Madame, she said gently, "I quite understand your not calling me by our old name, my child. But believe me, I often think of Madame Mère and pray for her; she must be suffering great anxiety and fear."

Victoire hung her head and had the grace to feel ashamed. Franz, who was present, shook his head and glared at his sister-in-law. Later on he said to Monsieur Venarius, "Grandmaman Inez is growing very old. I was frightened to see her so patient. Do you think she is going to die?"

For once the old tutor lost his temper. "Don't talk nonsense, you little fool." But he too worried terribly about grandmaman Inez, seeing her so gentle with Bozena, watch-how kindly she talked to the girl, calling to her aid all the things which had once induced her to live on and do her duty: religion, love, motherhood, the invincible sense of honour of a human being who knows his responsibility. Sometimes she asked Monsieur Venarius half despondently—only half, grandmaman Inez would never be quite despondent—"What is the matter with the child? The doctor says she is perfectly well, physically. I'm too old-fashioned to understand that kind of mysterious illness. Do *you* know what is the matter with Bozena, my good Venarius?"

Monsieur Venarius was probably the only one who could have told her, but how could he say something which contradicted his belief in the equality of man? How could he tell the old woman, "Bozena is suffering from the incurable, hopeless loneliness of the declassée? Of the woman who has married above her?" The old tutor did not believe in classes; men were equal and therefore every human being must understand the other, must be able to live in every environment, must . . . Yes, the human being *must*, but somehow he or she did not seem able to do it. What had the Jesuits, those cunning foxes whom Monsieur Venarius hated with a passionate hate, said? "Give us the children up to their seventh year, then they will belong to God for ever." Could they be right? How truly awful, how terribly bewildering if the Jesuits proved to be right, even in a single case.

At last grandmaman Inez found advice where she never

would have sought it. The adviser was Franz. They met on the Watteau meadow, which took its name from the swing hanging between two trees. In the arbour at one end of the meadow stood a naked Eros, taking aim at a naked woman. Grandmaman Inez hated the two figures, not because they shocked her but because she thought them affected and vulgar. She loved sober forms and lines, and had always disliked the slightly frivolous Viennese baroque. Franz was amazed to see grandmaman Inez sitting on the stone bench beside the Eros—a small dark figure, contrasting strangely with the red roses climbing the plinth of the nude statue. Seeing the rosary in her hands, he wanted to pass with a bow, but she called to him: "Come here and sit down, Franz."

He obeyed. Grandmaman Inez rarely addressed him, she did not treat him like her other grandchildren; though invariably kind to the boy, she was polite and stiff as if he were a mere acquaintance.

"What can I do for grandmaman Inez?" he said courteously, sitting down beside her. The strange boy had excellent manners.

Grandmaman Inez put the rosary in her pocket and took up her fan. "I'm greatly worried, my grandson," she said.

The boy stared at her in amazement. Grandmaman Inez telling a member of the family that she was worried, telling it to the youngest of them all!

"Something must be done about Bozena," grandmaman Inez declared. "Otherwise she will die. I have tried everything and I must admit that I am at my wits end."

The boy flushed. Could it be that grandmaman Inez was asking his advice?

"If grandmaman Inez would permit me to talk freely," he said hesitatingly.

"Talk, my grandson. Don't lose your time with phrases."

"Grandmaman Inez, you must promise not to be angry. You see, dear and honoured grandmaman Inez, you're not taking the right way about it."

Grandmaman Inez's smile was a trifle grim. "So the egg

is wiser than the hen. What am I doing that I ought not to do, my grandson?"

"Grandmaman Inez, you're much too kind and too patient."

Grandmaman Inez stared at the boy. Her fan began moving rapidly. "Too kind; too patient? That is something I have never been reproached with before, my grandson. God knows I'm not made that way," she added with a wry smile.

"Yes, grandmaman Inez. You are treating Bozi like a stranger. It's only strangers you are so patient with. I believe it hurts Bozi and makes her feel she doesn't belong to the family. I know all about it," he went on, plucking up courage. "You are much less strict with me than with my brothers, and I feel glad when you scold me like the others."

Grandmaman Inez's pale face flushed. She put her hand on the boy's shoulder, quite gently at first, then suddenly shaking him with a strength which astounded him.

"You are a wise boy, my grandson, or rather you are a wise man. God forgive me if I have treated you differently from your brothers and sisters. And you too, forgive me, my boy. Perhaps you are right. Anyway I shall find it easy to profit by your advice."

Franz caught hold of the old hand, still holding his thin boyish shoulders, pulled it down and kissed it. "I'm very glad, grandmaman Inez, because after all . . ." He grew embarrassed and fell silent.

"After all?"

"It sounds terribly conceited, although it's true."

"Never mind how it sounds. One must always speak out, my grandson."

"I . . . I only thought . . . we two ought to understand one another. Because, grandmaman Inez, we're by far the cleverest of the family."

Grandmaman Inez burst out laughing. Franz had never seen her laugh like that before.

"Oh, you fount of wisdom, perhaps you are right. The Herdegens have never distinguished themselves for clever-

ness. Of course I'm not thinking of your father," she added hastily.

"Father's an angel," Franz said rather ambiguously.

Grandmaman Inez nodded. "Your dear mother too..." She stopped dead, she hated lying. Lifting her fan, she let it fall gently on the boy's shoulder. "Go and do your lessons, my grandson. It would be a pity should your wise head remain empty. Thank you for your advice."

Grandmaman Inez decided to try the boy's idea at once. Entering Bozena's room, she went up to the bed and gazed at the girl silently, with angry eyes. Then she said in an imperious tone, "I forbid you to die. Do you understand? You are not to die."

Bozena burst into tears. She had always been expecting these words; had always known that grandmaman Inez would forbid her to die. It was a relief to have it happen at last.

"You are going," grandmaman Inez went on, still as if she were talking to a naughty child," to get up for half an hour to-day. To-morrow you will stay out of bed for an hour. And next week we shall walk in the garden. I'm not going to permit a grandchild of mine to behave as badly as you have been doing. Do you understand?"

A pale smile came upon Bozena's white face. Grandmaman Inez had spoken to her as she spoke to Stani, to Joseph, to Antoinette. The terrible burden of loneliness seemed to lift a little—not quite, it would never do that—but at least she felt able to breathe.

"I'll try, grandmaman Inez," she whispered chokingly.

"You'd better, if you do not want me to be very angry. It is very heartless of you to grieve your grandmother and your godmother. Do you understand? You are hurting me with your silly desire to die."

She stopped talking, touched by the expression on the thin, young face. Murmuring some unintelligible words, she bent down and kissed Bozena. "Do not be silly, little girl. Life was never meant to be a pleasure. I shall come for you in half an hour. We shall sit by the window and you will see how lovely the roses are this year."

Leaving the room, she walked with tiny, weary steps towards the chapel. Reaching it, she sat down in the pew, a thing she never did, but God would know she was too tired to kneel. God would know she was very old, breaking up like the castle at Wohan and greatly in need of a prop. He knew, but beyond Him no one must know. She grew more cheerful. After all, she could have the castle repaired for baby Ferdinand and the other still unborn great-grandchildren. She would have to live on for these great-grandchildren's sake. Bozena was not fit to bring up a boy, Stanislas still less. And what about Victoire, that stubborn, refractory child? And her poor Carl? Who would protect him from Ludmilla's caprices and her domineering ways? How was it possible for a woman to be so domineering? Grandmaman Inez put the question to God. She could find no answer.

News had come at last. A battle had been fought at Ligny, and the Prussians had been beaten. Victoire felt blissfully happy. "Victory, the first victory," she cried out, hearing the news. Stanislas lost his temper. "Be silent. You're not to exult at the victory of our enemies. And if you do, keep your feelings to yourself."

Her eyes were cold with hate. "Don't dare tell me what to do. Joseph would never have spoken to me in that way."

"Funny," Stanislas snapped, "to hear you talk of your husband. I thought you had quite forgotten his existence."

Monsieur de Venelles looked sad. Was this victory the beginning of new wars? Could he wish to see France conquered? Could he wish to see her victorious?

Grandmaman Inez walked in the park with Bozena; baby Ferdinand slept under the old lime-trees under which his father and his grandfather had slept as children. An absent-minded Monsieur Venarius read Xenophon with Franz, and Victoire hid from the "enemies" in the most remote parts of the park. Monsieur de Venelles rode over the estate and quarrelled gently and good-naturedly with old Huberpeter, who, inspired by patriotic feelings, played military marches on his concertina, rather out of tune but with great enthusiasm.

Over the fields the sun glowed a dark red. Sometimes a thunder-storm painted the sky black. Sheets of lightning filled the air with a sinister white light, struck a tree here and there, shot down into the Morava like rockets from the air. Thunder beat against the old grey walls of the castle. On the plain of Waterloo another kind of thunder echoed in the sky, another kind of lightning struck men and horses. The battle was being fought, the great battle which was to change the face of the earth. A sick, beaten man fled to Paris. A tired-out man, forsaken, deserted by all his friends, changed from an idol to a usurper in the eyes of the masses, abdicated. Europe heaved a sigh of relief.

A ship sailed the sea, a ship whose name will never be forgotten—*Bellerophon*. For the last time in his life Napoleon trusted a king and a country. For the last time his trust was betrayed.

The papers wrote about the people's jubilation. In Wohan, in the villages and townlets, neither joy nor triumph was to be seen. The peasants went on working in the fields as they were doing in all the other countries. Emperors and kings come and go, the earth remains for ever and must be cultivated if the children of the men who died in battle are to live.

Bozena's eldest brother returned; the second lay buried somewhere in Belgium.

Joseph too came back, limping, leaning upon a stick. But it was no glorious wound he brought home. After the battle of Waterloo a kicking horse had broken his leg.

"Isn't it just like him?" grandmaman Inez said grimly to Monsieur Venarius. "Had he been wounded in battle, Victoire might have felt sorry for him and they might perhaps have made it up. But a broken leg, caused by a kicking horse." She smiled ruefully. "My poor Joseph, is he going to be a slightly ridiculous knight-errant all his life?"

Joseph did not complain, although he knew that the leg having been set badly, he would limp as long as he lived. He never talked about the war. Looking years older than his age, he silently sat in the sun, smoking his pipe. Once, when grandmaman Inez reproached him with neglecting Victoire,

he said, "I don't know what's happened to me, grandmaman Inez. Perhaps after having seen so many dead men one ceases to care much about anything. One learns to doubt about most things. I believe I love Victoire, but I'm not sure. I'm not even hurt that she treats me like a stranger and refuses to live with me. Nothing hurts, and nothing pleases me. Sometimes I think it would have been better not to have come back, like Bozena's brother."

He rode about with Stanislas and listened to him complaining of country life. He went to see Bozena's parents and told them about their dead son, who had served in his regiment. He sat for hours at a time watching baby Ferdinand; he played chess with Monsieur Venarius, and spent most of his evenings alone in the library. Grandmaman Inez grew impatient. Joseph could not remain at Wohan for ever, he must find some suitable position. He listened respectfully when she spoke about it, but he only shook his head and said, "Later on, grandmaman Inez; later on."

Seeing the look on his face, even grandmaman Inez did not dare to press him.

Marie Christine had written. It was her first real letter since she had left home; a long letter, telling them nothing. She hoped grandmaman Inez and her dear parents were well and also her brothers and sisters. She herself was in good health. She was living in Warsaw, in a beautiful palace with a lovely garden. But the garden was smaller than the park at Wohan. Warsaw was a fine town but not as beautiful as Vienna. The women here were very well dressed. She had been to several balls and parties. The new fashions suited her.

She did not ask after her parents or her brothers or Antoinette. She did not beg them to write. She did not even mention baby Ferdinand, although Stanislas had written to her when his son was born. And she did not write a single word about her husband.

"How heartless she is," Victoire said coldly, putting down the letter.

"How unhappy," Joseph said very quietly.

"Unhappy! You Herdegens don't know what it is to be unhappy."

He gazed at her with dull eyes. "Do you really think so, Victoire?"

"I know it. Do you imagine I'm happy here? Surrounded by strangers, by enemies. No one cares for me. Grandmaman Inez looks at me as if I were a noxious insect; Stanislas laughs at me, and Bozena is so stupid she doesn't count. And you . . ."

"And I?"

"You're the worst of all. You behave as if I did not exist. As if you had no wife, as if . . ." She broke off and stamped on the ground "I hate you."

Joseph got up slowly. Taking his stick from the table, he limped out of the room. Looking after him, Victoire burst into angry tears.

In the evening Joseph, more dispirited than ever, asked grandmaman Inez, "What am I to do? Victoire is unhappy. She hates me."

"Did she say so?" Joseph did not understand why grandmaman Inez looked animated and pleased. "Did she tell you that she hates you?"

"Yes, grandmaman Inez. Oughtn't I give her back her liberty, let her go back to France? If she is unhappy and hates me, wouldn't it be my duty?"

"You are even more stupid than I thought, my grandson. If she hates you, everything will come right."

Joseph stared at grandmaman Inez. Had the old lady taken leave of her senses? Was she becoming senile?

"Yes," said grandmaman Inez, fanning herself vigorously, "yes, my grandson, everything will come right. At least I need not worry about you and your wife any longer." She considered an instant. "You had better go to Vienna in a day or two. Your father wants to talk things over with you. You can return here in September."

She dismissed Joseph with a gracious gesture.

She was right as always. When Joseph left for Vienna, Victoire cried, and after a fortnight she followed him.

Grandmaman Inez praised her, saying, "It's very good

of you my child, to conquer yourself. God will help you to fulfil your duties as a wife."

Victoire, although cleverer and more quick-witted than Joseph, understood as little as he would have done the slightly malicious smile on grandmaman Inez's old face.

CHAPTER X

EUROPE had become peaceful, at least on the surface. What was bubbling beneath, what was threatening to burst into flames, was known only to the ministers of police of the different States and to those who fell into their hands. Vienna, liberated from the threat of another war and from the many foreign rulers and statesmen who had eaten and drunk so much, began to settle down again. Things were once more as they had been: the rich enjoyed themselves, the poor worked and often starved. A new genius had been discovered, a young poet called Franz Grillparzer, who, if God and the Emperor were gracious to him, might easily become a greater poet than Herr von Goethe. The strange music Herr von Beethoven composed, began to be appreciated, although elderly civil servants and officers on half pay declared it to be dangerous and demoralizing. The Congress and the shock of Napoleon's return were forgotten. The Viennese, happy again, felt that now peace had come to stay, life was worth living.

One man knew no peace—Joseph Herdegen. He had dreamt of a quiet family life with his wife, enjoying his home, his books and his work at the Public Office. But who, being married to Victoire, could hope for peace?

For about half a year she was, as even grandmaman Inez admitted, a model wife. She exaggerated virtue and domesticity as she always exaggerated everything. For half a year no one existed for her but Joseph. She furnished the old palace they had moved to, charmingly. In the evening she sat beside the stove with Joseph, listening patiently whilst he

read to her, learned books about finance and trade which his soul loved. She never admitted that she did not understand a word. Sometimes, to please her, he read to her poems by a young Englishman, a strange mysterious creature and a lord to boot, George Byron. She loved his verses and learnt parts of the *Bride of Abydos* by heart. "Poor Toinette," she said regretfully, "I'd like to send her the book. But it might be unwise, it might remind her of things better forgotten."

The palace being too large for them, one part of it was taken over by Stanislas and Bozena, who never stayed in town long and did not want a house to themselves. Bozena preferred to remain at Wohan with the baby, but Stanislas turned up at intervals of about two months, hungry for town life, for the only world where he belonged.

Arriving unexpectedly on a bleak March day, he found his angelic sister-in-law another woman. She stayed at home no longer; she had given up thinking of Joseph's happiness and comfort. She lived exclusively for a new fancy, bearing the name: Le Roi de Rome, Napoleon II. True, her new hero was but five years old, playing merrily in the gardens and halls of Schönbrunn, but Victoire claimed that the future Emperor of France ought to be taught to be a ruler even at this early age. When he was old enough to come to the throne, the ogre was sure to be dead and the Bourbons sure to have made themselves unpopular in France. A young Frenchman who had arrived at Vienna a few months ago—no one knew why—a Monsieur de Tourcy, spent every afternoon in Victoire's blue drawing-room. He brought friends—Frenchmen, Italians, even Austrians. He talked wildly about the Emperor, banished to St. Helena by *la perfide Albion*, of the future of the young Eagle; and Victoire, pouring coffee into thin China cups, her cheeks rosy, her eyes bright with excitement, felt that she was conspiring, holding in her slender white hands the threads of a net in which the ogre, Fouché, Talleyrand, the Prussians and the English, would all be caught some day.

Her name appeared again in police reports. "We have been informed that Countess Victoire Herdegen, née Derville, is frequenting suspect persons."

"She has a lover," Ludmilla said furiously to her son. "You've only been married two years and already she has taken a lover. Such a horrid little man, that Gaston de Tourcy."

Ludmilla, feminine to her finger-tips, had primitive ideas about life. If a woman was interested in anything there was always a man in the background.

"Nonsense," grandmaman Inez said crossly. "A woman who goes in for politics isn't a real woman. That type never has lovers. Victoire may be a little extravagant—that is Joseph's fault. Why has she not got a child? But she is absolutely faithful and decent."

Joseph said nothing. He disliked seeing his home transformed into what Franz called a miniature lunatic asylum, and regretted having lost, through no fault of his own, the tender loving wife who had made him so happy. Yet he too had his hobby horse. Had he not hated to show his feelings, he would have confessed that he also had discovered things which interested him as much as conspiracy interested his wife: Reform. Sleeping and waking Joseph was dreaming of Reform. Wherever he looked he discovered the need of reforms—justice, the prison-system, economy, were all crying out for reforms. Sitting alone in his study, he read and annotated with passionate interest the works of English reformers—John Howard on prisons, David Ricardo on economics. He had to study them in secret; after the "great betrayal" Victoire would not have an English book in the house, save Lord Byron's poems.

Sometimes when Joseph felt like talking to someone about his new ideas he went to the old Herdegen palace where he had spent his childhood. The house had become very quiet, since Franz was the only young Herdegen living at home. It seemed to Joseph as if the familiar furniture was fading, the wallpaper growing less bright and the mirrors beginning to get tarnished. How quiet were the passages and rooms in which two years ago young Herdegens had chatted and laughed!

There was a new picture hanging in the dining-room, a portrait of Princess Kramsin, Marie Christine. The inde-

fatigable Isabey, who had painted so many of the beauties and the statesmen at the Congress of Vienna, had also painted Marie Christine. She was standing on a balcony gazing out at an endless snowy plain. She wore an ermine cloak and a golden hoop in her hair. Marie Christine had sent the portrait by a courier of the Russian Embassy and had written: "Perhaps you'll hang it up at home. The prince hates it. Maybe you will like it. I should like to be at home if only as a picture."

Ludmilla had been delighted. "Marie Christine has grown still more beautiful," she had said. "Now she really looks like a snow-queen."

Carl Herdegen had stood a long time in silence before the portrait of his second daughter. When he turned away his kind eyes were suspiciously bright. Grandmaman Inez, after staring with wide open, frightened eyes at the beautiful woman in the ermine cloak, had done a strange thing. She had crossed herself. "Now I can imagine how a lost soul looks," she had said under her breath.

Joseph hated the portrait. How miserable, how unhappy Matzi must be, if even Isabey, the painter of sweetly smiling ladies, had been unable to hide the misery of her poor soul in his picture of a beautiful woman.

They never spoke of Marie Christine. Joseph had written to her several times without getting an answer. Sometimes Poles, coming to Vienna from Warsaw, talked about the beautiful Princess Kramsin, whose balls and parties were the most dazzling and the gayest in Warsaw. That was all they knew about her. Antoinette, on the other hand, wrote often. Quiet, affectionate letters reflecting her gentle nature. She told the family about her little daughter: "I wanted so much to call her Inez, but my good husband insisted upon her being called Louise, after the late queen. She has got blue-green eyes and golden hair like Matzi. She is not in the least like me; all the better for her." Antoinette's letters were full of questions. She wanted to know how grandmaman Inez was; wanted to hear about Aunt Marie Therèse in the convent of the Carmelites; once adding a sentence to this question which probably only Carl

Herdegen and Joseph understood: "I often think of her and feel sure she has chosen the better part." She asked after Joseph and Victoire, Stanislas and Bozena, little Franz and Monsieur Venarius, Monsieur de Venelles and the Sametils and, most of all, after Wohan. She wanted to know if the old lime-tree before her window was still alive; whether the chestnut-tree Marie Christine had planted ten years ago had grown; whether the blue liverleaves beneath the tall pine-trees in the wood were still the first out in spring. Grandmaman Inez, reading Antoinette's letters, looked pleased. "She is really a good child," she said. "I was right to persuade her to marry the Prussian and to submit to your will, my son. She would only have been unhappy with that poor fool of an Ypsilantis."

Joseph, reading between the lines, felt less happy about his twin. Alone at home on a stormy winter evening, a letter from his sister lying before him, he saw that he had been right. It was very quiet in his study. Only the flames in the fireplace crackled merrily. Victoire had gone to the theatre with Ludmilla and Stanislas. Looking at the small, neat writing, Joseph smiled. How like Toinette it was—no useless line, nor flourish, the space between the words always the same. He took up the letter.

"DEAREST BROTHER,

"I wrote to grandmaman Inez three days ago, but the welcome fact that a courier of the Legation is leaving for Vienna to-morrow tempts me to write to you, my dearest brother. Only to you, you understand what I mean? I am doing it for the first time since I left home.

"My room is icily cold, my good husband will not let me have a fire, not because he is stingy—you must not believe that—but because he believes in a spartan life. You cannot imagine, Joseph, how hideous the houses are I can see from my window. Alas, whenever I go out I get terribly homesick for my beloved Vienna. If only I could see once more St. Stephen's tower and in the distance the dear Wiener Wald, the hills so blue and soft in spring, so wonderfully pure and white in winter. If only I could hear people talking

in the gay soft dialect, so different from the harsh accents one hears here. I always feel happier when I'm talking to our good old Wetty, the maid from home—although she does nothing but complain of the Prussians and cries, and tells me how homesick she is.

"Dearest brother, she is not the only one. I can confess it to you, but only to you: I shall never, never feel at home here, even if God lets me live a hundred years, which I sincerely hope he won't. You must not jump to the conclusion, Joseph, that my good husband treats me badly. It would be a sin to say so. He . . . I don't know how to explain it, I think our clever Franz would say: he does not treat me at all. I am his wife, I have to keep house (they make a terrible fuss about it here, much more than we ever did at home), I've got to visit my parents-in-law and my husband's married sisters; I've got to be a good mother and, at least my husband hopes so, I'm to bear him many children. He has a lot to do and when he comes home he has nothing to say to me. The other people who come to our house are just the same. I can't find out what they care for. They're not interested in music, nor in pictures, nor in books, although many books are published in Berlin. I have been told that there exist *Salons* in the city, frequented by clever, well-read people. My good husband and his friends call them cranks and exalted fools. My husband does not permit me to know them, saying I'm too much of a blue-stocking already. Tell that, but nothing else, to dear old Monsieur Venarius; it will make him laugh, remembering what a bad pupil I used to be. But you see, what we called a more or less well-educated girl at home is called a blue-stocking here. Dear brother, I speak German and so do the others, but it is not the same language. I won't presume to say which is the better one. I only know I love our own, my home language best.

"I often think of Victoire; she too has to live in a foreign country; but somehow I can't feel very sorry for her. Surely one gets to feel at home in Austria after quite a short time.

"But what I think most of is Wohan. Just imagine, dearest Joseph, I often dream Wohan has disappeared for

ever. I return to it and there is nothing left but a desert—no castle, no park, no woods, not even the Morava. I wake with my heart beating like mad and tears running down my cheeks. Isn't it silly?

"I'm longing to show my little girl Wohan and Vienna, St. Stephen and our dear old house. Of course I shall have to wait; she is only three months old. My little Lully is a lovely baby, I can't make up my mind to call her Louise, and when baby and I are alone I call her Lully. I think she is more intelligent than most children are at her age. Sometimes when I get so homesick I can't help crying a little. She looks at me with Matzi's eyes as if she understood everything. My good husband was greatly annoyed at my not having given him a son. But I think I love little Lully all the more because I was the only one to welcome her.

"Now I'll tell you something funny. Can you imagine that they call me 'the beautiful Austrian' here? Hearing it the first time, I felt like laughing and said, 'Oh, no, my sister Marie Christine and my sisters-in-law, Bozena and Victoire, are beautiful. I was always the ugly one.'

"The ladies were struck by Bozena's name: how could a girl be called Bozena? When I told them she was Marie Christine's foster sister and a peasant girl, they looked at each other and I could see how horrified they were. They are terribly proud of their titles. I suppose we were, too, but in a different way, feeling we had to live up to them, and I always remember grandmaman Inez telling us children that in God's sight all men are equal.

"Does Matzi write home? Poor Matzi, how unhappy she must be in a strange country, married to that sinister, taciturn man.

"Stanislas has sent me a drawing that Monsieur Venarius made of baby Ferdinand. He looks absurdly Herdegenish with that tiny aquiline nose of his. But his eyes are so grave. I tried to remember who has such grave, deep eyes. At last I knew, Bozena's father, baby Ferdinand's grandfather. He looks exactly like the old man when he says, 'well, well.' Oh, if only I could hear him say, 'well, well' again; if only I could be a peasant girl working in the fields

at Wohan. I would not mind anything so long as I could be at home. Forgive me, dearest brother, my quill has run away with me and cantered off wildly together with my foolish heart. My good husband is hunting elk in East Prussia and I am all alone. Sitting in the desolate empty room I stretch out my arms after you all and long to be at home. Write soon, and don't show this letter to anyone. Of course I except Victoire. I don't want you to hide anything from your dear wife. I kiss you both very tenderly. Don't forget me.

Your loving sister,

TOINETTE

P.S.—My good husband does not like my name, he says it sounds French and is not suitable for a German wife and mother, so he has taken to calling me Antonia. I always forget that he is talking to me when he calls me by that hideous name, which annoys him greatly, but I really don't do it on purpose. Oh, Joseph, I want to come home."

Carl Herdegen died in March. He died as quietly, as considerately as he had lived. He gave no trouble to the family. He went to bed one day with what he called "a little cold" and was dead in a week. During his illness grandmaman Inez never left his room. Carl Herdegen seemed glad to see her beside him. Sometimes he asked for his children and Monsieur Venarius. Ludmilla hardly ever visited the sick room. She ran about the house crying and sobbing and telling all the people she met at the top of her voice, "He's dying! He's dying!" Her cry reached the peaceful room in which the sick man lay. Grandmaman Inez lost her temper. She ran out of the room and roughly seized her daughter-in-law's wrists.

"Ludmilla, an august guest is coming to our house, an angel of God, death. I want you to receive him with the calm dignity we owe him." Then she added—for although she was grandmaman Inez, she had never ceased being a woman—"You never thought your husband's life so important as to make such a fuss about his death."

She sat in the sick room, hardly ever saying a word, giving

Carl Herdegen the medicines which did him no good, calling the priest, telling her beads. After the dying man had received the sacraments, grandmaman Inez said gently, "Do not worry, my son. Our house will not become extinct. The family lives on in two sons."

Carl Herdegen tried to lift a weak hand. "Three sons, dear and honoured maman," he whispered. "Three sons."

Even in the presence of death grandmaman Inez felt mortally hurt. Why did men love stupid, bad women so much better than wise and good ones? Twice her son had opposed her will, and each time Ludmilla had been the cause—the first when he married her, the second and last when he tried to protect her and save her honour.

She remained silent. Carl Herdegen looked up imploringly. "Three sons, dearest maman. I entreat you. It's my last wish, my last prayer."

Swallowing hard, grandmaman Inez nodded. "Yes, my son, I am growing old. How else could I have forgotten our Franz?"

The dying man smiled gratefully and kissed the hard old hand caressing his own.

He had uttered his last request, had protected for the last time the woman he loved in spite of all. There was nothing left for him to do. He lay back in the pillows and died.

Grandmaman Inez made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and quietly left the room. She was sure that the kind and pure soul of her son would soon be happy in Paradise; nevertheless she felt as if part of her had just died. Carl ought to have survived her; he ought not to have left to her the hard task of having to think, to plan, to take care of his children and grandchildren. On that day she wanted to see no one except her old and faithful friend Monsieur Venarius who had once already stood beside her at the death-bed of a son.

Stanislas, arriving too late to see his father, gave way to his sorrow. Now that he had lost him he knew what the silent gentle man had been to him. He remembered how often he had hurt him, and his youth refused to understand that he could never make amends.

Joseph, hit harder than his brother, was more silent and still quieter than usual. He found no time for his own grief; he had to comfort Victoire who could not believe that a beloved human being could die. She revolted and raged against death. She accused the doctors of having let *mon père* die. Surely he might have been saved. At night she lay awake, staring at the ceiling with bleak, frightened eyes. "Death," she whispered, her voice faltering, "Joseph, you must never die. Promise me, you'll never die. How awful to think that he was alive only ten days ago. And he was so glad when I told him he was going to be a grandfather again and that he must love my baby best because I love him so much. And now . . . Oh, Joseph, he can never be glad again, can never smile again, never be kind to me again. Grandmaman Inez says he's in heaven. I don't know. Perhaps she's right. But heaven is so far away. Joseph, promise me never to die."

She clung to him weeping, and he promised it with a sad smile! He would have promised her everything she wanted. Gone was the worldly, elegant Victoire; the eager conspirator who thought she held in her slender white hands the threads of politics. There remained a frightened little girl who had seen death for the first time in her life and who was afraid.

Franz hid his grief, but he grew thin and pale and nearly grown-up in these sad days. He helped Joseph with all the sad services death demands, from which Stanislas shrunk, weeping.

Carl Herdegen had, as the Viennese called it, "a beautiful funeral." Joseph saw with amazement how many people followed the hearse. Not only relations and friends, but strangers—shabby, poor-looking men and women. They looked sad as if they had lost a good friend. After the funeral some of them talked to Joseph and he learnt how rich his father's life had been, rich in adventures of the soul; and could any adventure of the body be more exciting than one which touched other lives and changed them for the better? Joseph thought with a wistful smile, scoffing at himself, that his father had never talked of reforms and had only smiled

when his eldest son spoke of them. Now he knew why. In a small circle, small though much larger than his children had known, Carl Herdegen had accomplished many a reform without saying a word about it. "He was so kind," said a young man whom Carl Herdegen had saved from being imprisoned some years ago for stealing a loaf of bread. "He always had time for the poor." An old woman said, "Who will help us, now that he is dead?"

Joseph bowed his head. He had to take his father's place with his brothers and sisters—that he had always known—but he had never had an idea with how many others he would have to do it too. He got into the black coach where Stanislas, Franz and Monsieur Venarius were waiting. Stanislas was crying, Franz stared out of the window. Monsieur Venarius, looking at Joseph, nodded as if he had guessed his thoughts.

"He was a good man," the old tutor said. "That's the finest funeral oration and the best inscription for a gravestone a man can have, my dear Joseph. Let us hope we too shall deserve it one day."

The coach drove on. Joseph saw as through a veil houses, streets and passers-by. He sat bowed down like a man who has taken on a heavy burden, the heritage of his father.

Grandmaman Inez once again summoned a family council. Only her grandsons and Monsieur Venarius were allowed to be present. "Women always cry," she said. "We are going to talk about serious things."

She sat very straight in her big armchair, tiny in her black dress, holding a black fan. God alone knew whether she had wept and mourned for her dead son—God and perhaps Monsieur Venarius, but he would not betray her.

Soberly, calmly she talked of Carl Herdegen's will. Wohan went to the eldest son, as did the old palace in town. The fortune was divided between the three sons. Joseph noticed, without understanding, that she stressed the "three," and that Franz, who had been watching her, suddenly blushed.

"You are, my dear Joseph," grandmaman Inez said, "the

head of the family. We have to submit to your decisions. Should you wish it, I am ready to retire to the dowager's estate in Upper Austria where I shall spend my last days preparing myself for death."

Joseph felt shocked and distressed. Could it really be grandmaman Inez speaking these words? He was to be the head of the family and the others were to submit to his decisions? He . . . He gazed nervously at grandmaman Inez. Surely she must be feeling ill. But her next words reassured him. "You and Victoire will, of course, move into the palace," she said. "Stanislas will remain in Vienna with his family. We shall soon have to think of little Ferdinand's education, and the climate at Wohan is too cold for Monsieur Venarius. Yes, Stanislas and his family can take over your house. Franz will go on living here. He has all kinds of mad plans—he wants to study medicine. I don't know whether you will allow him to; I feel sure you dislike the idea as much as I do. As to you I shall try and procure you a post in accordance with your rank and your gifts. As soon as I have found it, you will give up your present one. You must never forget that you have become the head of the family. Up to now you were rather too soft, my dear Joseph, but now you have taken your dear father's place I hope you will imitate him and handle everything with his iron will, to which I always submitted, as was my duty as a mere woman."

Joseph nodded. Notwithstanding the pain at his heart he could hardly suppress a smile. No, grandmaman Inez, thank God, was not ill and *he* was not the head of the family. That was, now as always, the little shadowy black figure just putting a full stop to the sentence with her fan.

And Joseph Herdegen said in a voice strangely like his father's, only changing one word, the same sentence which had so often been spoken in the Herdegen palace, "Everything shall be exactly as you wish it, dear and honoured grandmaman Inez." And, as Carl Herdegen had always done, Joseph bowed slightly, and kissed grandmaman Inez's hand.

Part II

CHAPTER XI

THIS year the whole family, Joseph excepted, went to Wohan in May. Laetitia, Victoire's and Joseph's eldest child, had been ill during the winter and the doctor had advised her spending the spring in the country. As to the twins, Carl and Alois, they would be all the better for leaving town. Bozena, always ready to find a pretext for not staying on in Vienna, declared little Ferdinand to be in need of country air. Stanislas had tried to get out of it, but grandmaman Inez had said in an ominous tone: "A young man must sometimes live with his wife, my grandson," and Stanislas had not dared to rebel.

They were sitting in the garden, enjoying a lovely summer day. Grandmaman Inez was reading Antoinette's last letter, impatiently readjusting her glasses from time to time. She had taken to wearing them a few months ago and could not get accustomed to them. Bozena was playing on the lawn with Ferdinand and Laetitia; keeping an eye on the twins who were lying prone on their fat little bellies, trying to kick each other. Victoire lay on the grass, pulling down her skirt whenever grandmaman Inez looked her way. Sometimes she whispered something to Stanislas, who was chuckling over a book, very discreetly for it would never do to let grandmaman Inez know that her grandson was reading, in her presence too, so immoral a book as Lord Byron's *Don Juan*.

The old clock in the tower struck four. Grandmaman Inez looked up from her letter. "They ought to be here soon," she said.

The family was expecting Franz, who had made a tour with Monsieur Venarius through Germany, Italy and France. The grand tour was out of fashion, but grandmaman Inez had insisted upon it, hoping it would make Franz change his

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The family was expecting Franz, who had made a tour with Monsieur Venarius through Germany, Italy and France. The grand tour was out of fashion, but grandmaman Inez had insisted upon it, hoping it would make Franz change his

mind about certain ridiculous plans. She had been rather annoyed at the boy's spending six of ten months in Paris, although Monsieur Venarius had written long letters, assuring her that Franz was not leading a licentious life, but was, on the contrary, studying most diligently at the Sorbonne. What he was studying Monsieur Venarius forgot to write, knowing that grandmaman Inez thought the study of medicine not suitable for a young man of rank besides regarding it as sinful. If God wanted a man to live he would get well however ill he might be without the help of a physician, and if God wanted him to die the best physician could not prevent it.

Little Ferdinand gave a yell, and Victoire looked up.

"Letty again," she said half laughing, half annoyed. "Come here, you awful child. Do leave your cousin in peace. You've scratched his face."

The awful child did not go to her mother but to grandmaman Inez. Holding the old lady's silk frock in a dirty little hand, she told an endless, rather incomprehensible tale, not even looking at Victoire.

"You've brought her up well," Stanislas teased his sister-in-law.

Victoire shrugged resignedly. "Laetitia takes only her father seriously. Joseph can make her do whatever he likes. As for me, I simply don't exist.

"Joseph and grandmaman Inez," Bozena said, getting up slowly.

"That's different. For some reason or other Letty treats grandmaman Inez as an accomplice. The other day she stole one of my rings and brought it straight to grandmaman Inez. She really is a terrible child."

"And you are very proud of her, Victoire."

Victoire laughed. "Mademoiselle Autriche," she said. "She has grandmaman Inez's eyes, and Joseph's nose and the mouth of my French grandmother; and you've only got to look at her to know she's a little Austrian. Sometimes, when she thinks she's alone and sings to herself, I feel as if she was not my child at all, but a little fairy escaped from the Wiener Wald."

She looked at little Ferdinand who had wiped his eyes and was telling his cousin, "I've forgiven you, Letty."

"How can two cousins be so different?" Victoire said, still observing the two children. "Ferdinand is an angel, quiet, good, conscientious—yes, conscientious though he's only four. Joseph must have been like him as a child. And my Letty's an angel for one hour and a devil the next. She exaggerates everything."

"I wonder from whom she can have inherited these qualities," grandmaman Inez said a trifle maliciously.

"Madame Mère, I really don't deserve that. You see before you three great-grandchildren whom I gave you, two of them I shall go and suckle in half an hour's time. Am I not a virtuous wife and mother? What can you reproach me with, Madame Mère?"

Grandmaman Inez smiled. She was still holding Letty's hand. The child had found the soft spot in her old heart. Laetitia had never been afraid of her; she told her all her joys and all her sorrows, confidingly, not fearing a rebuke. Putting down Antoinette's letter, grandmaman Inez shook her head disapprovingly. "The interest you modern young women take in politics is extraordinary. Even our good Antoinette. She's expecting her fourth child and writes reams about the fate of the nations in Europe—long complicated tales I can make neither head nor tail of."

Stanislas laughed. "You are not the only one, grandmaman Inez."

"I have given up trying to understand this world of ours. We were all so sure that the Holy Alliance and the German League would give peace to Europe. Who on earth is still disturbing it?"

"Only the Carbonari in Italy, the Hetairosies in Greece, and the English who don't seem to like their new king. Only our students and the Prussian ones and some cranks in the German League. Prince Metternich calls them unimportant, but if you talk to Joseph about them, he'll have something else to say about them."

Grandmaman Inez threw an angry glance at Stanislas. "Your brother is frequenting very low society, my grandson.

The other day he brought home a young man who talked a lot of nonsense, and whose manners might have been better."

"Eduard Bauernfeld," said Victoire, naming a young Austrian playwright. "Joseph pretends he's a genius."

"Every commoner is a genius in Joseph's eyes," Stanislas said lazily. He picked up little Ferdinand and set him on his knee. "Are you going to be a genius when you grow up, my son?"

"Oh, no," the boy said, frightened by the strange words and believing it to mean something bad. "Oh no, papa."

He jumped from his father's knees, listened for a moment, then, running in the direction of the gate as fast as he could, he cried, "There they are."

The noise of trotting horses drew closer. The carriage which had fetched Franz and Monsieur Venarius from the last relay, stopped before the castle.

The twins, frightened, began to yell. Victoire picked them up and hurried to meet Franz, the children in her arms. Suddenly remembering how she had fled with him to Wohan years ago, she stopped dead. A shadow came on her face. France; the Empereur a prisoner on St. Helena; the Roi de Rome an Austrian arch-duke; and she . . . standing here, in her arms the children—the enemy's children. For a moment she became a prey to depression, to the strange mood that overwhelmed her from time to time, making her feel that everything was vain and futile—her whole life, the whole world. Forcing a smile, she walked on, slowly, wearily and saw Monsieur Venarius getting out of the carriage, leaning heavily upon Franz.

After grandmaman Inez and Monsieur Venarius had gone to bed, the young Herdegens met in Victoire's sitting-room.

"It's exactly like old times, isn't it?" Franz said, looking round with a smile, "when we used to have a party in the dead of night. Do you remember? You always tried to send me to bed, but I never went."

"Toinette isn't here," Bozena said softly.

Stanislas's face grew dark. He thought of Marie Christine

who was not here either, but whom no one except him seemed to miss.

"Let's have a look at you, Franz," Victoire said. "You've grown. You're taller than Stani and Joseph. And how elegant you are."

"He looks like a young English lord," Stanislas said. "If he wore a pointed beard he'd look exactly like a portrait by Vandyke."

"You've changed too," Franz said quickly. "Victoire has grown fat and Bozena lovelier still."

"She didn't have to suffer from the Herdegen disease—twins," Victoire said, slightly irritated.

"And Stani's terribly grown up. He's even got a wrinkle just over his nose."

"That's artificial. He sits pinching the skin between his fingers for hours. You don't yet know, Franz, that your brother is going to be a great statesman. He devours every paper he can get hold of. He knows exactly what's happening in every country. He even knows Prince Metternich's most secret thoughts."

Stanislas looked embarrassed. "You didn't expect me to remain Joseph's agent for ever, did you? I've talked it over with grandmaman Inez. She has grown more approachable, and she thinks I might still get into the diplomatic service. After all, I'm not an old man. I might, if . . ."

"If I died," Bozena interrupted him harshly. "And if His Excellency the future Ambassador married a suitable wife, who would be a good hostess and . . ."

"Don't, Bozi," Victoire said impatiently. "Do stop being an idiot. You know perfectly well that you look more aristocratic than any of us, except grandmaman Inez, of course."

"What's Joseph doing?" Franz asked hastily. "I thought he'd be here."

"Joseph," his wife replied, "has gone absolutely mad. His one idea it seems is to make himself disliked in high places. He goes about like a bloodhound, hunting for injustice and wrongs done to the common people. He's got a new hobby horse he's riding to death—the liberty of the Press. If it were not for grandmaman Inez, Joseph would

have been dismissed ages ago and we might be tilling the soil at Wohan. He brings home the strangest assortment of ill-mannered young men—though I must confess they are rather amusing and decidedly clever.”

“So your wish has come true, Victoire, and you’ve got a political salon?”

Blushing slightly, Victoire laughed. “Not the one I used to dream of, Franz. You know . . .”

He nodded. “Don’t hope for it any longer. France isn’t interested in the least in Napoleon II. France has become romantic; her ministers write poems, and every one is crazy about Chateaubriand. The women starve themselves because the great and wonderful Lamartine only sings the praises of ethereal creatures.” He sniffed disdainfully and lit his pipe.

“You’ve seen Toinette. Tell us about her,” Bozena said.

Franz frowned. “I’m not happy about Toinette,” he said. “I percussed her . . .”

“What did you do to her?” Stanislas cried aghast.

Franz laughed. “You poor barbarians, you don’t know how far medicine has progressed. I’ve been studying with Laennec in Paris. But you don’t even know who Laennec is.”

“No,” Victoire said. “Ought we to?”

“Yes. You might take the trouble to learn the names of men who prolong human life and who cure diseases, instead of slaughtering men wholesale in wars.”

“What’s wrong with Toinette?” Bozena asked anxiously.

“I percussed her. By the by I’ll percuss all of you, one never knows. As for Toinette, her lungs give a hollow sound. Three children in four years, none of them twins like Victoire’s, and a fourth coming, is too much for a delicate woman. But don’t tell grandmaman Inez I said so.”

“Is Toinette really ill?” Bozena looked worried.

“Not really ill and not really well, either. She can’t stand the climate—neither the real nor the spiritual one. Our good brother-in-law is a decent man, but a terrible, hopeless bore.”

“Like Joseph,” Victoire grew a fiery red at the slip of her tongue and had the grace to feel ashamed.

Franz looked at her reprovingly. “Compared to Wilhelm, my dear, your husband simply sparkles with wit. Toinette’s husband cares only for two things—his office and procreation. As if it were not much better if that family became extinct.”

“The way you talk, Franz!” Bozena was shocked.

“Don’t tell grandmaman Inez.”

Stanislas grinned. “You have become a scholar, Franz. You talk learnedly about things none of us understand. All the same, you’re still afraid of grandmaman Inez—as we all are,” he added with a sour smile.

“Not all,” Victoire boasted. “Laetitia is not afraid of grandmaman Inez—not the least little bit.”

“Victoire as a loving mother,” Franz teased her. “The amazon, the conspiratress turned maman.”

“Yes,” Victoire sighed. “I’ve become a cow since the twins were born.”

“But Toinette?” Bozena could think of nothing else.

“Toinette unfortunately has not become a cow. I wish she had. But it’s all that Prussian idiot’s fault. She’s got to buy books on the sly and read them secretly as if she were committing adultery . . . And as soon as Wilhelm goes off hunting Toinette rushes to a *Salon* where they have amateur theatricals and read poetry. Tell me, where did Toinette get her passion for Greece?”

“A childish memory, nothing else,” Victoire said hastily.

“Tell us about the children,” Stanislas said.

“Lully is charming, a real Herdegen, with Marie Christine’s eyes and Toinette’s sweet smile. As for the boys, they’re so small one can’t say much about them.” Franz put down his pipe. “Toinette’s enthusiasm for the Greeks is simply morbid,” he said. “I thought you’d be able to explain it.”

“The Greeks,” declared Stanislas, the statesman, “haven’t said their last word yet. Just now they’re being murdered by Ali Pasha, but wherever they can they fight back like devils.”

Franz stretched himself, yawning. “I’m tired. Let’s go to bed.”

"Just a moment," Stanislas said. "You once wrote you had heard of Matzi. Who told you about her? She never writes home."

"Marie Christine is imitating Victoire and conspiring."

"Marie Christine? I can't believe it."

"It's true nevertheless, Victoire. I heard about it from a fellow conspirator, a young Pole I met at Paris. Marie Christine has become a Polish patriot and hates the Russians. The young man raved about the beautiful Princess Kramsin and said that Poland would owe her a great deal when it had shaken off the Russian yoke."

"What does Matzi's husband say?"

"Nothing. At least the young Pole called him a sinister nonentity."

Stanislas frowned. "I do hope Matzi is careful. We know how the Russians treat conspirators."

Franz, too, looked grave. "The young Pole said Marie Christine did not seem to know what fear was. Sometimes she frightened him; she made him feel as if she was running to meet death."

"And maman? Can't she prevent Matzi doing something crazy?"

"Maman is living in Paris since her second marriage. She looks about twenty years younger than when I last saw her, and dresses beautifully. Our stepfather thinks her the loveliest woman in Paris."

"And grandmaman Nataly?"

"Grandmaman Nataly has become a patriot too, and abets Marie Christine. There, now I've told you all my news. I'm going to bed."

But he did not go after all. When Stanislas and Bozena had gone, he asked Victoire to make him a cup of tea. Whilst she was watching the kettle he watched her, saying abruptly, "What's the matter with all of you? You're so queer, so drowsy. Has the clock stopped since I left?"

"Hasn't it stopped everywhere?"

"No, my dear, it's running like mad. People are waking up. Even in Prussia. Not that I like the young Prussians with their German virtue, their eternal singing and gymnas-

tics, but they know what they want. They know it rather too well. Even in France, Victoire. Not at court, of course, but the common people and the students have changed a lot. In Italy too, I think. The great French revolution may have been the first, but it's certainly not the last."

"Joseph thinks so too." Victoire's voice faltered and her hand trembled as she filled the cups.

"Why so depressed? Are you afraid?"

"No. But everything seems so hopeless, so absolutely futile. When I was a child my parents and relations talked with bated breath of the guillotine. What did the guillotine accomplish? Nothing. The revolution gave birth to a genius. How did he end? On St. Helena. At the Congress every one talked of the new world, of the happiness of the nations. Are they any happier than they were? Isn't everything just as it was? Or even, at least according to Joseph and his friends, worse than ever?"

"No," Franz said decidedly. "Things are not worse. Formerly men did not even know they could be better, now they do. Believe me, that's worth quite a lot."

"Maybe. It doesn't interest me."

Franz gazed at her perplexedly. "You must be ill, Victoire. To-morrow I'll percuss you. It can't be right that only one of the family hasn't aged—grandmaman Inez."

That night only the children slept well at Castle Wohan. Franz had arrived like a gale, shaking them all up. Victoire lay awake with aching eyes, staring at the twins, sleeping peacefully beside her. She asked herself despondently: "What is the matter with me? Why does nothing interest me any longer? Why does the idea of having given life to three children frighten me, as if the gift I bestowed on them was an evil one? As if in years to come my children too would ask as I do, 'What's the good of it?' What is it that lives in me and won't let me rest, assuring me at the same time that nothing will ever change, that I need not try to do anything? Is it the weltschmerz, grandmaman Inez makes such fun of? Is it the heritage of our generation who saw too many horrors whilst it was very young?" She buried her

head in the pillows, to see nothing, to hear nothing, not to think, to sleep, to forget . . .

Sitting at the window, Stanislas looked out at the moonlit summer night. The wrinkle between his brows Victoire had laughed at, grew deeper. As always when he suffered he felt helpless. What had the young Pole said of Marie Christine? "As if she was running to meet death." He thought of the little girl with whom he had played at Wohan. When Matzi was angry she rode her pony like a little madwoman, making it jump walls and hedges; or she climbed trees even the boys did not dare to climb. Once Joseph had nervously called out to her "Take care. You'll fall and kill yourself, Matzi." And from the very top of the old oak a childish voice had called back, "That's what I want."

Now she was wanting it again. It was nothing to her to risk a life she hated. She is running to meet death, Stanislas thought, shuddering, seeing a slender white and gold figure running to meet a cruel death, bearing Constantine's Kalmuk features. Stanislas could not stand his own thoughts any longer. He went up to the bed. "Are you asleep, Bozena?" "What do you want?" she said drowsily.

"I can't sleep, Bozi. I keep thinking of Matzi all the time."

Bozena sat up. Her beautiful face was cold and hard. "Surely that's no reason for waking me."

"Bozi, I'm so unhappy about Matzi. You heard what Franz said."

"Marie Christine chose her lot. No one forced her to become Constantine's mistress."

Stanislas sat down on the edge of the bed. "Don't be so cruel, Bozi. Just think of our sister . . ."

"Your sister."

"Bozena, can't you forgive. Can't you forget?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I only know that I remember everything, every unkind word, every sneering glance, every"—she looked at him with a strange mixture of love and hate in her eyes—"unfaithfulness."

"Bozi, you're quite right to be angry with me, although, believe me, it was nothing real, just a tiny flirtation—a caprice . . . I never dreamt of taking it seriously."

"Like during that summer at Wohan when you were so terribly bored, and I was an amusing toy to play with."

"Bozena, you can't say I'm not kind to you. I never say an unkind word."

"Why should you? Besides you're afraid of grandmaman Inez. All the same I keep feeling your pride pushing me aside."

"It's not true, Bozi."

She smiled sarcastically. "Listen, Stanislas, I have become a great lady. You need not be ashamed of me any longer. My manners are perfect. I am well educated too. I had time for reading during the long solitary months when you were in town. Yet something in me remains alien to you and something in you remains alien to me. We are strangers who cannot understand each other. Why should I worry about Marie Christine, to whom I was only a peasant girl?"

He looked at her mournfully. "Do you hate us all?"

"Not all, not Franz. I was always his Bozi and I'm his Bozi still. And not Joseph, and not grandmaman Inez."

"Yet grandmaman Inez made us marry."

"Because she believed it to be right. Because grandmaman Inez acknowledges something greater than her pride. For her I was a soul to be saved. You too, poor Stanislas."

"At least you can be sorry for me, Bozi."

"As I'm sorry for little Ferdinand when he's hurt himself."

He looked at her. "You are very beautiful, Bozi. You'll make an excellent wife for a diplomat."

An ugly little laugh greeted his words. "Have you already forgotten Marie Christine? Are you again thinking of your career? My hate is stronger than your love."

He hung his head—just like little Ferdinand, when he's been naughty, Bozena thought.

"Do be kind, Bozi. I'm sad. I don't want to be sad, it hurts me. I don't want to see Matzi running to meet death."

"You shrink from seeing the truth, poor Stanislas. That's your worst fault. Perhaps you can't help it. Your class has never seen the truth, that's why you are all afraid of it. We children of the poor know it since our childhood. But . . ."

"What is the truth?"

"That life is hard and man is cruel."

She fell silent. In the serene night sounded the song of a nightingale.

"And all this," Stanislas said half imploringly, pointing to the open window, "all this beauty and all the beauty created by man—pictures and cathedrals, and music and poems . . . aren't they the truth too?"

Bozena looked bewildered. "I don't know."

His face grew dark. "Matzi always used to laugh at me because I got sentimental in spring. Poor, poor Matzi."

Bozena longed to put her arms round his neck, to comfort him, but she could not do it. Something stood between them like a wall. Not merely that he made love to other women—didn't all the young men they knew do it, except Joseph? Not merely that he stayed in town neglecting her for months at a time—dear God, he was so young, so fond of fun, she could forgive that. What separated them was the something alien in him she kept feeling, even at times when he was most tender, the cruel something she could give no name, but which was always there, standing between them, making her hard and resentful when she wanted to be kind. . . .

"Do let me sleep, Stanislas. I'm tired."

He threw her a wistful glance and returned to the window. Moonlight fell on the fruit trees, bearing white and rosy blooms; and on the lazily flowing Morava, it lit up with a soft milky white the whole beloved, familiar Moravian country. But Stanislas did not see it. He saw instead an endless snow-covered plain and Marie Christine on horseback, tearing along towards a far-away horizon where death stood, a Kalmuk-faced giant, awaiting her with wide-open arms.

Monsieur de Venelles spent the greater part of the night walking up and down his room. In the big armchair Franz had sat; Franz, just returned from Paris, the tender French

language still singing in his ears, bringing with him the perfume and the beauty of France. He had said as if it were quite unimportant, "I stayed a fortnight in Normandy, a fascinating country." Fascinating, as if it were not the loveliest part of the world; the dearest, the most blessed of all. Franz had said carelessly, "Notre Dame," and Monsieur de Venelles had seen the rugged old towers reaching towards the high Parisian sky and heard the deep voice of the bells calling him. How far away his country had seemed during all these many years. Then a man had come who had been there weeks, no, only days ago. A man carrying in his clothes the dust of Paris, a man who had, perhaps five days ago, trodden French earth. France had drawn close to her exiled son. He saw her, he felt her tender clinging arms, he smelt her sweet perfume. Did not French lilac smell sweeter than Austrian? Wasn't the French sky much bluer and higher than the sky here in Moravia? And the French, were they not different from the Moravians and Austrians he had grown fond of during the many years passed amongst them? Franz had brought books for Monsieur de Venelles. "The latest, so that you may know what France is thinking and writing."

Monsieur de Venelles gently stroked the volumes lying on his table. He opened them, reading at random, first in one book, then in the other. How wonderful the language was, soaring above all common and vulgar things, speaking as with angels' tongues. France herself seemed to have written these books, a reborn France, who had forgotten the nightmare of terror and endless wars. Monsieur de Venelles, suddenly feeling young again, smiled happily. He would go home, back to France. To-morrow he would tell grandmaman Inez. Bozena's eldest brother could take his place. Could he really? That raw boy? The blood rushed to Monsieur de Venelles's face; he felt he had been on the point of breaking faith with the fields he had cultivated for so many years; with the mighty forests. Young Sametil knew nothing about forestry. And what about his other old and tried friends—the Moravian tenants and peasants? He knew they would miss their *Mossé*. They had been kind to him

and sorry for the man who had lost his country. They had laughed good-naturedly at his struggles with their language and helped him as well as they could. Then, one terrible winter, when the cattle nearly froze to death in the stables and the peasants would have starved in their huts, had not the agent of Wohan, defying snowstorms and cold, brought them food, driving for hours in his sledge, getting through where it seemed impossible to pass? They had become real friends. The men and the women had taken him to their hearts like a brother who by chance had been born in another country and who spoke another language. In that cruel winter they had come to understand one another; whatever the language, birth, life and death, misery and help were the same everywhere. From that time on they called him "our *Mossi*" and he had felt honoured by the name.

Was all this to be as nothing in his eyes, only because a man had come back, carrying with him the perfume of France? Monsieur de Venelles walked faster and faster, as if trying to escape painful thoughts. Gradually his room grew less dark. Dawn came. He went out on the little balcony and, standing motionless, looked up at the red dome of morning. The dairy farm was waking up; cocks began to crow, greeting the new day. "Already Monsieur de Venelles could distinguish the stables, the fields, the woods and, far away, dotted on the immense plain, the tiny villages. Hidden by this morning glory, other pictures paled and grew indistinct. In the grey mists of the past disappeared the towers of Notre Dame and the coasts of Normandy. Monsieur de Venelles, rubbing his eyes like a man waking from a dream, dressed and left the castle. His work was waiting for him.

Grandmaman Inez, too, did not sleep. It had been a happy day: Antoinette's letter, Franz's return. How good it was to see one's great-grandchildren playing about one. How good to be sure that the family would not die out. Thank God, the grandchildren were at last growing up. Of course they still betrayed signs of childishness, like Joseph with his crazy ideas and Stanislas with his restless ambition—but all that would pass. I really might die now, grand-

maman Inez told herself. They can get along alone. What a blessing, Ludmilla's marrying again and not interfering any longer. Yes, I really might die. But first I've got to find a good tutor for little Ferdinand; our dear Venarius is getting old. I noticed it to-day. And the twins. Victoire is simply incapable of bringing up children. Just look at Lactitia, the dear little girl is as good as gold as long as she is with me. Decidedly I cannot leave the twins at the mercy of their childish parents. I must live on till they're ten or eleven. How old shall I be then? Eighty-six—not so very old after all. Yes, I shall certainly have to live so long.

Taking up her rosary, she prayed for her husband, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren; for her dead sons and Monsieur Venarius; and suddenly surprised herself thinking, "If Letty marries young, I might be a great-great-grandmother in about fourteen years." Sleepily she told herself that even then she would have to go on living, for her great-great-grandchildren's sake.

CHAPTER XII

JOSEPH walked home slowly. The small hours had come, the time when night and morning struggle with each other. In the west the sky was still an inky black; in the east it had begun to grow rosy. Bathed in this mysterious light, the city looked strange and threatening. Or did he only think so, remembering the conversations he had been listening to? Hearing these young men talk, one might have thought that to-morrow or at the latest the day after to-morrow a storm would spring up in Vienna and sweep away all the old and rotten things. Joseph asked himself what made him go again and again to these half-secret meetings? Was it so interesting to hear the word liberty in all its declensions? Or was he tickled at the idea that he, Joseph Herdegen, civil servant, passed the night with young dare-devil rebels? To-night a young man had turned up from Germany; he was on his

way to England. He had declaimed in a rather ridiculous manner, "England, mother of Parliaments!" and had explained, ramblingly, boringly, yet convincingly that only parliamentarism in all countries could save the world. "Liberty of speech, liberty of the Press."

Joseph had not joined unconditionally in the general enthusiasm. Victoire had once said impatiently, "Every new idea you get hold of is a field you have got to plough and harrow; by the time it is ready for sowing it has become obsolete. You'll never catch up, because there will always be a still newer idea before you have finished with the old one."

Maybe she was right. It was so terribly hard to judge, one had got to be just to both sides. These youngsters take it easy. For them everything which exists has to be destroyed. Our statesmen are either criminals or idiots in their eyes. They underrate the adversary and overrate themselves. They think the people are longing to die at the barricades. Life is hard for our generation. I believe it was never so hard before, nor will it ever be so hard again. The French revolution destroyed many of our beliefs; we know things can't go on as they are. Men must no longer be persecuted for having honest and decent opinions.

This idea called up another. Milan. . . . Strange things are happening there and in all Italy. Unrest, rebellion. And they want to send me there. "A good post for a young man of twenty-four," Prince Metternich told me during the audience yesterday. "The springboard for a still better one." I know why they offered me the post. They wanted to see if I would accept. I'm suspect. . . . Stanislas would have accepted at once. If only I could talk it over with someone. But grandmaman Inez can't understand, and Victoire doesn't care. If only Toinette were here.

By now the city was awake. Men were going to work. Joseph disliked the idea that they might think he was returning home after having drunk or gambled all the night. This feeling, he told himself, is peculiar to our generation. Those who came before us did not care in the least what the "common" people thought about them. But our generation

is bound to them in a strange way, either in love or in hatred. We can't ignore them any longer.

He had reached the Herdegen palace. The servants were not up yet; the rooms looked empty and desolate. Passing through them, Joseph felt very young and very lonely. It was like walking about in a dead world. We've forgotten to bury it, he thought. Or must we, born between the old and the new world, live in a kind of limbo—a world of unreality and ghosts? Are we the shadows of the dead and at the same time of the unborn? Are we nothing but the bridge over which our children will reach the new world? He smiled, thinking of little Laetitia and the twins. How beautiful, how happy, how uncomplicated their world would be.

Joseph's conviction that many things were wrong in his beloved country was soon to be confirmed. Mrs. Heimberger, the cook who had been in service with the family for twenty years, sent Jean the butler, to ask Joseph whether she could speak to him. She came, her eyes red with weeping, angry and frightened.

"What's wrong, dear Mrs. Heimberger?" Joseph asked.

"My boy," sobbed the cook; "my boy."

"Is Sebastian ill?" Joseph said anxiously, knowing how fond the cook was of her only son, a cabinet-maker's apprentice.

"If it was only that. God sends us illness and He knows why. But this is worse; he's been arrested."

"Arrested? Why on earth?"

"Because the fool did not keep his mouth shut; because he said out loud what he thought. That's forbidden." She blew her nose loudly, adding, "At least poor people aren't allowed to."

"What did the unfortunate boy say?"

"Yesterday," Mrs. Heimberger sat down on the edge of the chair Joseph had pulled out for her, "people were gossiping in the market-place. A man had seen a light on the hill the night before. You know the hill called the 'Spinning woman beneath the Cross'? They all put their heads

together and whispered, declaring that there had been an execution on the 'Spinning woman's hill' and a man said, 'Every one knows there's a gallows on that hill.' Another man said, 'The Emperor doesn't know anything about it, he's a good man. But that old devil, Prince Metternich, sends out his agents to arrest people and at night they get hung on the hill.'"

Joseph knew that all kinds of weird tales were told about the perfectly innocent hill, but he found it hard to believe that Sebastian, an intelligent, even a well-read boy, should believe all that nonsense.

"Of course he doesn't believe it," his mother said. "He made fun of the gossips, saying, 'Nonsense. Probably they have been hanging liberty on the gallows, as is the custom in this country.' He'd hardly said it when a nark dragged him away." She shook her head. "Our rulers must have a bad conscience, otherwise they would not fear every thoughtless word." Then, remembering she had come to ask a favour and not to accuse anyone, she continued, "If you would be so kind, Count Joseph . . . If you'd say a word for my boy. You know all the highborn gentlemen who get our sons arrested, being such a highborn gentleman yourself. . . ."

Joseph blushed. "Dear Mrs. Heimberger, I never had anyone arrested in all my life."

"I didn't mean that, of course. Only you knowing the old devil Metternich and the fine gentlemen of the police, and the old Countess being received in audience by the Emperor as often as she likes. I thought . . ." She began crying again.

"Don't cry, dear Mrs. Heimberger. I'll do my very best to have him set free. Don't worry."

"If you only would, Count Joseph."

"Please, do stop crying. I shall go out at once and see what I can do."

He put out his hand, pulling it back hastily as the old cook tried to kiss it.

"Don't, please. We're such very old friends. Do you remember how I used to steal cakes in your kitchen?"

Swallowing her tears, Mrs. Heimberger tried to smile. After having invoked God's blessing on Joseph's head, she left the room.

"Jean, my hat and coat, please. I'm going out."

Helping Joseph into the coat, Jean said, "Count Joseph, you ought not to run any more risks. You are not popular in high places."

Joseph smiled. "Who told you so?"

"Everyone seems to know it. It would be wiser not to take Sebastian's part. The boy's a fool. Must he say what he thinks? *We* don't do it."

"Do you think many agree with him?"

"Half the town, or even more. But the others are less foolish and keep their mouths shut."

Joseph remained silent. Did this man, this model servant, harbour the same treasonable thoughts as Sebastian? And all the others—more than half the town—the butler had said. What happens when ideas are forbidden expression, when they have got to glow under the embers of silence like a hidden spark? The picture haunted Joseph on his way to the Ministry of Justice. He gazed at the people, searchingly, suspiciously. What were they thinking about? For some reason or other they all seemed to look different to-day. Joseph's imagination saw hardness behind smiling masks, perhaps even hate. He was walking through a town he had ceased to know. How had it been in the Paris of 1780, before the storm sprang up? Did the wiser men notice something, or were those whose injustice had sowed the wind condemned to overlook the signs of the approaching whirlwind?

Leaning heavily on his stick, Joseph thought of the revolution, of the Jacobins, of . . . He smiled grimly: "Jacobin"—how quickly a man got that name. A liberal idea, the tiniest doubt in the infallibility of the government, stamped one as a Jacobin. Was the nightmare of the French revolution still so alive in men's minds, branded in indelible letters? Of course some people called men whom they wished to harm Jacobins, without really believing it. But others, less intelligent and more credulous, repeated it like a revelation

from on high. And these others were far more dangerous. If Gentz said "Jacobin" with his tongue in his cheek and a sneer on his face, with the sole aim of ruining an honest man, there might be a redress for the honest man, because Gentz knew he had told a lie; but if old Huberpeter and all the Huberpeters of the country called him a Jacobin, the man was lost.

Joseph had a bad day. He went, his limp getting worse and worse, from one ministry to the other, from one office to the other. Some laughed at him for taking sides with a cabinet-maker, others threw him a suspicious glance. Many told him with a malicious smile how amazed they were to see Count Joseph Herdegen interceding for a rebel. Joseph, who had inherited his father's simplicity, began by using arguments suitable to the occasion. He spoke of the right of man to express his thoughts, condemning the system which violated this right. The men he talked to looked at him as if he were addressing them in a foreign tongue. "You've made a regular speech, my young friend," a very powerful, very highborn gentleman said mockingly. "You'd better be careful, else you might wake up in the fortress of the Spielberg without knowing how you got there."

Joseph suddenly saw red. He was quiet and as a rule rather too circumspect for his age. But when he did lose his temper his one idea was to hit out.

"If justice and truth bring a man to the Spielberg, Your Excellency," he said, trembling with rage, "he will at least find better society there than at the Imperial Offices."

The very powerful and very highborn gentleman screwed up his eyes. "Tiens," he said with a smile, "our good friend Herdegen has joined the Jacobins. How amusing."

When the shadows began to grow longer, Joseph, raging and sick with disgust, had to admit to himself that the claims of justice seemed rather to hinder than to help his mission. Remembering that Sebastian's liberty, perhaps even his life, depended upon him, Joseph changed his tactics. He talked about a silly boy not knowing what he was saying, of the son of "our good old cook," who had been in the family ever since he was a baby. He cracked silly jokes about the dinners

which would be frightfully bad, as long as the cook wept for her son, and discovered that he had at last found the right words. A man fighting for justice was dismissed with suspicion and scorn; a young nobleman touched by the distress of an old cook gained sympathies and found understanding.

St. Stephen's clock was striking seven when Joseph found himself standing in front of the police prison, holding the magic piece of paper which meant a man's liberty. Feeling like a general after having gained a tremendous victory, Joseph took Sebastian home. His mother welcomed him with tears of joy, and, after thanking Joseph again and again, said to her son, "Now you'll keep your mouth shut, won't you, Sebastian?" nearly fainting with dismay on hearing the young man's answer, "Less than ever, mother."

Bursting into tears once more, she turned to Joseph, "You tell him not to be a fool and not to talk about things that are no business of his, Count Joseph."

Her dismay changed to terror upon hearing Count Joseph Herdegen, civil servant, officer on half pay, decorated in the campaign against the French, and head of the Herdegen family, say drily, "He's perfectly right. If truth and justice are at stake one must not keep one's mouth shut. I learnt that to-day."

Of course these words became known, and at the Imperial Offices many a head was shaken disapprovingly. "The Emperor," people said, "patronizes him because the Empress Marie Theresia was very fond of his grandmother. But somebody really ought to tell His Majesty that the young man is no better than a Jacobin."

Joseph minded neither the spiteful jests of his colleagues nor the icy reserve of his superiors, nor the strange half frightened, half mocking glances he met with in society. He discovered to his own amazement that he felt nothing but contempt for all these people. Why should he worry about men ever ready to change their opinions, men in whose eyes nothing was sacred except their own person and their ambition? They resembled moles, digging in the dark, heaping up in their mole-hills all the things liable to injure

others and to profit themselves. An honest man, a gentleman, calmly trod on the molehill without noticing it. Joseph smiled when he was told that the post in Milan had been given to another man, one more trustworthy than the rather too imaginative and cranky Count Joseph Herdegen. He smiled when the minister talked vaguely about the possibility of his being transferred to a small town, and said, "Even small towns, Your Excellency, stand in need of good and conscientious officials"—his rather arrogant smile adding—"like me." The spoken and the unspoken answer were not forgotten. The list recording Count Joseph Herdegen's misdeeds grew longer. All this was nothing to worry about. Joseph laughed it away. Things only threatened to grow unpleasant when grandmaman Inez told him, at breakfast on the first day of his leave at Wohan, that she wanted to talk to him in the ancestors' room. As children the small Herdegens had felt a superstitious fear of the "ancestors' room," a dark hall, looking out upon the burying-place of the family. On the walls hung the portraits of Herdegen ancestors, primitive ones, dating from the Middle Ages—a Bavarian ancestress, painted by Lucas Cranach, very fair, with a small, round ridiculous belly; an Italian one, beautiful, with an evil charm like Bronzino's Judith. There were knights and their wives, venerable old men and lovely young girls. Grandmaman Inez's portrait hung opposite the door—a Spanish Madonna, as the painter had seen her. The last portrait was maman Ludmilla, a charming shepherdess, blue ribbons fastening an immense hat under her round white chin, holding a crook, surrounded by very woolly, very fat and very silly-looking lambs.

"Sit down." Grandmaman Inez pointed at a specially uncomfortable chair.

The Herdegen children had called this chair the stool of repentance, and Joseph, remembering this, suppressed a smile.

"I have had news from Vienna," grandmaman Inez said, softly rapping on the table with her fan. "News concerning you. A friend has written to tell me that you are behaving in a manner liable to disgrace our name and our family. It

seems that you are associating with impossible people, and that your opinions are unworthy of a gentleman."

It was characteristic of grandmaman Inez that she ignored the part of the letter deploring the foolishness of the young man who was ruining his whole career.

Joseph said nothing. Here was not an adversary whom one could dispose of with a mocking smile. In the big arm-chair by the window sat an old woman he loved and admired, and she upbraided him. Grandmaman Inez fanned herself impatiently. "I see you have nothing to say for yourself, my grandson. True, what could you say?"

"A lot, grandmaman Inez, believe me."

"You're a young man, Joseph, a very young man. You have been led astray by high-sounding words and do not know that behind them hide robbery, murder, regicide. You have become a Jacobin."

"Every man," Joseph said, slightly irritated, "who does not agree with Metternich's ideas is looked upon as a Jacobin." He smiled. "Even you, grandmaman Inez, have been called a Jacobin."

"I? Who could have dared . . . ?"

"Old Huberpeter, when you forced Stani to marry Bozena."

"I never forced Stanislas to marry . . . It was your dear father's wish. He had to do his duty as a Christian. Besides, old Huberpeter is senile and half mad; he is still living in the last century. He's very old indeed."

Joseph gazed at grandmaman Inez. The pale light coming through the small window fell on the wrinkles in her hard old face. What a terrible lot of wrinkles, Joseph thought. Her face is like a field ploughed by life. How many tiny wrinkles there are beneath those eyes which have watched over grandmaman Inez's children and grandchildren and are still watching over her great-grandchildren.

Grandmaman Inez talked on. She spoke of God and the government, of man's immortal soul and the regicides, of her beloved Empress Marie Theresia who had ruled her people lovingly and wisely. Seeing that Joseph found no word of assent, she said sadly, "You do not want to understand

me. You want to disgrace us—you, my favourite grandson, who had given such fair promises for the future."

Joseph suddenly felt a passionate longing to make her understand. It was unbearable that the little old woman with the many wrinkles and the young black eyes, who had tried so hard to follow the precepts of the Gospel all her life, should think badly of him. The others did not matter, but grandmaman Inez . . . Desperately hunting for the right words, he unexpectedly found them. "Grandmaman Inez," he said in a low voice, "when I was a child you taught me a sentence I have never forgotten: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?'"

The fan gave a hard rap on the table; the young black eyes looked searchingly into his; a changed voice put a question. "Is . . . is the thing people are reproaching you with really God's truth in your eyes? A truth a man may not oppose without sinning against the Holy Ghost?"

"Yes, grandmaman Inez."

The white head sank on her breast. Grandmaman Inez no longer saw in Joseph the frivolous young man, greedy for sensations, a youth gone astray, but a man whom God had visited, and to whom he had given a greater knowledge than to others, thus making many men his enemies. Face to face with a sacred mystery, she humbly bowed her head. Lifting it again, her glance fell on a faded picture, the portrait of a man who had defied a queen for his faith's sake. An ancestor, who in Queen Elizabeth's times had feared neither torture nor death, holding his faith dearer than his life. He had died with others at Tyburn. Was Joseph, now looking at her with very young and very grave eyes, also God's rebel, a man despising human laws for the sake of divine ones?

"If it's that, my grandson," grandmaman Inez said softly, "you must forgive me for speaking of things I am not worthy to touch upon. Do your duty, whatever happens."

She got up and stood before Joseph, her white head bowed. "You've conquered, dear boy," she said.

Joseph felt a lump in his throat. Never had he seen grandmaman Inez looking like this. "No," he said quickly, "you

have conquered, grandmaman Inez—your teaching, your whole life have been victorious in my soul. Therefore . . ."

She smiled. Tiny new wrinkles sprung up beside the countless ones round her thin lips. Taking up the fan, she fanned herself gracefully, like a young woman. "You are not only a Jacobin but also a courtier, my grandson. Flattering an old woman like me." Her eyes turned again to the portrait on the wall. "He was a courtier too," she whispered. "No saint, rich, spoiled, of high rank. Yet he sacrificed all. If you feel his strength in you, my dear grandson, then . . ." She fell silent, and Joseph saw for the first time in his life tears in the black eyes.

The fan gently touched his shoulder. "Go to your wife, Joseph, and tell her to be proud of you."

Joseph silently kissed her hand. He still seemed to feel the fan touching his shoulder and thought childishly, "Grandmaman Inez has dubbed me a knight."

CHAPTER XIII

IN May 1821 Stanislas's second child was born, a healthy, plump girl with a turned-up nose, blue eyes and mousy, fair hair. Victoire, who had gone to have her first look at the baby, pressed her lips together and ran from the room. Meeting Joseph in the passage, she burst out laughing. "Poor Stani, little Therèse is the image of mother Sametil. Did you see her nose, Joseph, and her hair?"

Joseph nodded, smiling. He was glad to see Victoire laugh, and delighted because she talked kindly to him. He felt guilty towards her. The punishment for his misdeeds had overtaken him. True, he had not been dismissed shamefully like a simple mortal would have been, but he had lost his post at the Imperial Office and had been transferred to Krems, a small provincial town. They were going there in autumn. Of course grandmaman Inez might have said a word for him to the Emperor, but she claimed that a man

must be ready to suffer for his opinions. If he refused to do so and wanted a pleasant life into the bargain, he did not believe in his ideas, and she would never try and help a hypocrite. Joseph understood her point of view. He did not greatly mind being transferred to a small town. In Krems he would be *the* great man, and great men can realize their ideas. But Victoire—no balls, no concerts, no theatre, no parties. How was she going to bear it? For the moment she talked of nothing but exile, prison life in the wilderness, declaring the children would grow up utter barbarians, without education, manners or deportment. Unfortunately Stanislas had just heard that there was a chance of his getting a post at the London Embassy. Victoire was furious. "Of course that idiot Bozena, who knows nothing about politics or anything else will play the great lady. She'll meet the cleverest people on earth; she'll live in the finest city in the world." Half crazed with envy and anger, she chose grandmaman Inez of all people in the world to listen to her lamentations.

Grandmaman Inez gently fanned herself. "I seem to remember, my dear Victoire, your having told me you had met very interesting people in Vienna. What has happened to them?"

"They bore me," Victoire said passionately. "Really, Madame Mère, Joseph's rebel friends bore me to tears, and the others are no better. Tell me, Madame Mère, why is everything so terribly dull when one grows older?"

Grandmaman Inez shook her head. "I cannot tell you, my child. I was never bored in my life. A woman who knows what she owes God and her own soul has many sorrows and few joys, but she is never bored. Tell me, have you no duties?"

Victoire shrugged impatiently. "Poor women, Madame Mère, have duties. They must look after their children. But I . . . the twins are much happier with their nurse; and Laetitia does not like me—she only loves you, Madame Mère, Joseph and Ferdi."

"What about your duty to your husband?"

"Dear me, Madame Mère, what more do you want? I

have given him three children. I was, before he spoilt all his chances, a perfect hostess, a charming lady of the house. What am I to do with a poor fool who simply murders his career? With a man who never thinks of me and who only cares for the common people? Who rushes about like mad when some idiot or other gets arrested? Who wanders about in the most ghastly parts of the town, because he wants to know how the people live? I'm always frightened to death at the idea of his coming home covered with vermin. Sometimes he talks of nothing else for weeks, describing in all the horrid details how the poor live."

Grandmaman Inez gave no answer. Victoire, who had expected a scolding, was astonished, and thought, "Grandmaman Inez is really getting old at last, I ought not to annoy her."

She smiled, charmingly, tenderly, as she did when she was at her best. "Forgive me, Madame Mère. I'll try and be good."

Grandmaman Inez had not kept silent because she had grown old but because Joseph's mad ideas which, according to his superiors threatened the very existence of the State, had found a supporter in an old woman, who at seventy-seven had recognized that man has not only a soul, but also a body, which body, growing up in misery, squalor and want is liable to ruin the soul. At first grandmaman Inez had listened to Joseph because she admired his honesty; later on, during the long solitary hours which are the lot of the old, she had thought over her grandson's words, unable to believe them. Was it possible that some men were God's stepchildren, neglected and forgotten? Had not God, after creating the world, seen that it was good? Joseph objected that man had spoilt God's creation; but grandmaman Inez still doubted. She did so until on a Good Friday, leaving church with Joseph, she had said to him, "After having visited our Lord, I want to pay another visit with you, my grandson. Take me to the alleys and streets you are always talking about; to the people who starve and have no warm clothes in winter."

They had passed a whole afternoon in the poorest part of

Vienna. Driving home, Joseph saw grandmaman Inez weep for the second time: the slow, weary tears of an old woman. She had said, her voice trembling, "So all that really exists? All that abomination? In a Christian country? And we dare call ourselves followers of Him who was crucified? We, who let our brothers and sisters starve and their children grow up in misery and depravity?"

Grandmaman Inez was not a woman to content herself with tears of shame and compassion. She had always given alms as a matter of course, but now she went, with the same passionate zeal as Joseph, to all the influential people she knew, telling with her fan stressing every word, the high and the highest in the land what she thought about the misery of the poor, and also of the high and the highest in the land who did not remedy it. She even came to Joseph's "Jacobin parties," as the family called the Thursdays and Sundays in which enthusiastic young people met in Joseph's library to talk of reforms. Though she looked like a ghost from the last century, the young men were often amazed at her clever and sober judgment. She smiled indulgently—Joseph had never before seen her smile so kindly—at the vehement tirades of the very young; she silenced with a gesture of her fan too violent accusations of God and man. She was always ready to learn—she, grandmaman Inez, the infallible head of the family, against whose judgment there existed no appeal. Even Monsieur Venarius, who knew her better than anyone else, watched with a mixture of admiration and astonishment her immortal youth and her untiring eagerness in fighting for those things she had recognized as right.

"She is a wonderful woman," a young poet said. "She understands everything. And how energetic she is at her age! but it's absurd to talk of age in connection with her. She'll always be young."

Joseph sighed. Excepting Monsieur Venarius, he was the only one to notice that grandmaman Inez grew more and more hollow-checked; that her black eyes were sunk in their sockets; that she walked slowly, painfully, and sometimes did not leave her room for days. He was the only one who

once surprised her moaning when she had believed herself alone.

"Are you ill, dear grandmaman Inez?" he asked, feeling his hands grow cold with fear.

A mask of stone fell upon the distorted face. "It's nothing, my grandson, or rather just a little thing to remind me of death. A little pain on earth, so as to shorten my time in purgatory."

"Have you consulted a doctor?" Joseph was pale with anxiety.

She nodded.

"What did he say?"

Grandmaman Inez smiled grimly. "Many grand Latin words I did not understand. When I asked him to speak a language I knew, he told me I was not as young as I used to be, as if I did not know that already. Don't look so unhappy, Joseph. You are all grown up, you don't need me any more. I can say my *nunc dimittis* with an easy conscience." Her face grew dark. "Unfortunately I still cling to earthly things, my grandson. I should like to see my dear Laetitia grown up, and . . ." She sighed, her voice changed and she spoke a name she had not spoken for years. "I should like to know that Marie Christine has found peace."

For a moment she hid her face behind her fan. Then she said, a trifle impatiently, "Vain words. Let us talk about something else. Tell me about Krems."

Joseph, obeying her, knew that she would never again talk about herself, however affectionately he might beg her to do so.

It was a glorious summer. In the old park at Wohan children were playing, as Herdegen children had played for many centuries, on the lawn and in the shade of the old trees. Again, as he had done nearly half a century ago, Monsieur Venarius walked beside a pupil in the lime-tree avenue, more bent, his legs stiffer, but his brain as active as ever. Again he was teaching a child his first lessons of knowledge and wisdom. Monsieur Venarius would have quarrelled with the expression "first" for quiet little Ferdinand seemed

to have drawn knowledge from a secret source and more than once the old tutor looked at him in amazement. The boy knew all the flowers growing in the park, all the birds and animals living in the forest. He had his own rather strange sense of logic and judged human beings according to his own ideas. He worshipped grandmaman Inez, rather as a small heathen worships his idol. He listened to her with the same veneration and devotion he showed in church, listening to a sermon. He never doubted what she said; every word of hers was for him an article of faith. He felt the same love and veneration for his grandfather Sametil. Spending whole days on the farm, he followed him wherever he went, watching him sowing and ploughing, walking beside him as taciturn and grave as the old man himself. Sometimes grandfather Sametil stopped. "Look, Ferdinand," and showed him a mole-hill, a partridge nest or funny tadpoles in a pond. Sometimes he gave the boy a short, an extremely short instruction which Ferdinand passed on to his cousin Letty. The two children were inseparable. Even during Monsieur Venarius's peripatetic lessons the little girl did not budge from her cousin's side, often crying out whilst Ferdinand was racking his brain for an answer to Monsieur Venarius's questions, "I know, Monsieur Venarius. It must be so."

"How can you know?" Ferdinand felt rather hurt because the baby—she was a year younger than he—had found the right answer so quickly.

"I don't know. I only know I know."

Monsieur Venarius listened with a smile. Little Letty was a real woman, even at her tender age. She was quite right in saying she did not think herself, something seemed to think for her. Ferdinand, working his way painfully through the prickly bushes of contradictory thoughts, arrived panting at the goal which Letty had reached with one jump. The old tutor read Fénelon's *Telemach* to the children, as he had read it to Joseph and Stanislas years ago. Ferdinand grew excited about the hero's adventures, but Letty said disdainfully, "He's stupid. He really might have known without Mentor's help what was going to

happen." Laetitia was always ready to pass judgment on people and things. She was a passionate, clever and often unjust child. Not even grandmaman Inez was sacred to her. For her mother she felt a kindly superiority which greatly amused Victoire. She loved old Sametil because he was Ferdinand's grandfather. She rather envied her cousin this relation. How lovely to have a grandfather who milked cows, cultivated his own fields, stamping over them in heavy boots. Aunt Bozena shared some of this admiration, being so lucky as to be old Sametil's daughter. Stanislas was a merry and somewhat capricious playfellow. There was only one human being the little girl took seriously—her father. For her and Ferdinand Joseph was infallibility incarnate, adored and beloved; someone you longed for when he was gone and whose presence made you happy. Joseph often felt uncomfortable seeing two pairs of innocent eyes looking up to him with such absolute devotion. How was he to deserve this trust and love?

When he was transferred to Krems and Victoire kept lamenting his exile, Laetitia grew excited. In the Vienna dining-room hung an old engraving, bearing the inscription "Coriolanus goes into voluntary exile." Laetitia got Monsieur Venarius to tell her the story of Coriolanus and discovered her father's likeness to the noble-hearted Roman. He, too, had been wronged; he, too, was being exiled. With burning cheeks and flashing eyes she swore to avenge her father. She dreamt of going to battle like the British Queen Boadicea, of whom Monsieur Venarius had told her and Ferdinand, and of beating her father's enemies. She would destroy their armies on the battlefield, watch them being taken prisoners and dying, and laugh triumphantly. Then she would bring her beloved father back to the capital. The Romans would be standing before St. Stephen's cathedral—at this part, her dreams grew somewhat confused—cheering her father. The Emperor would ride up on a white horse, jump off, bow to the ground before her father, and implore him to rule in his place.

"Half angel, half devil," Victoire said of her daughter, and she was right. Laetitia could be terribly cruel and just

as terribly kind and ready to sacrifice herself. Once Joseph told her about the poor children who had not got enough to eat. She stared at him with wide-open, frightened eyes. "Can't you help them, father?"

"I do my best, Letty dear. But I can't do everything needed."

"If grandmaman Inez helped, and maman, and aunt Bozena, and uncle Stanislas, would it be any good?"

"Perhaps, just a little."

Laetitia thought it over, quickly, without losing much time in consideration, as was her wont. Then she went running to grandmaman Inez, to Victoire, to Stanislas, to Bozena, putting to all the same question. "If I'm not naughty for a whole month, if I don't tease the twins, if I never eat a sweet and if I always keep my things tidy, will you help the poor children?"

Grandmaman Inez, delighted by the kind heart of her favourite great-grandchild, promised Laetitia a sum which in the little girl's eyes was sufficient to feed all the poor children in the whole world. The others too agreed to help. For a whole month Laetitia was, as she herself said, "ghastly" good. Sometimes one saw her rush to the wilderness, as the children called a distant part of the park. She would not let her cousin come with her. "Oh, don't come, Ferdi; let me run away quickly. I've got to be naughty all by myself. God may see it; for after all he made me as I am. He'll understand."

Half an hour later she would return, calm, smiling and good. "I've been as naughty as I like in the sight of our dear God," she explained. "Now I can manage to be good again."

Bringing Joseph a large sum for "his poor children" at the end of the month, she sighed deeply. "There you are, father. Do you know it's awful to love one's neighbour?"

Joseph looked tenderly at the lovely, vivid little girl. He did not laugh at her strange words; he too knew how much it costs a man to love his neighbour.

Of course Laetitia was doubly naughty the following month; but grandmaman Inez would not hear a word against

her. "Laetitia has proved that she can control and sacrifice herself. That is a great thing, perhaps the greatest of all." She looked at Joseph, affectionate pride in her eyes, and Joseph blushed, knowing that the praise of his little daughter was also meant for him.

There was, besides her father, one more person Laetitia loved and adored, a very dear, though unknown family saint, Aunt Toinette. Two years ago Antoinette had sent her twin her portrait as a birthday present. The picture hung in Joseph's study and Laetitia had fallen in love with it, with all the passion of a chivalrous young heart for all that was sad and helpless. "Aunt Toinette looks like the Holy Virgin holding our dead Lord in her arms," little Laetitia had said, seeing the portrait. "Why is she so sad?" She had invented stories about Aunt Toinette who had been carried off by a monster who kept her a prisoner in his castle. One day Laetitia and Ferdinand would slay the monster and bring Aunt Toinette home.

The portrait was charming—a young woman amongst her children, and in the background, veiled by a soft mist, a Roman landscape. The woman was smiling, and it was that resigned piteous little smile that had made little Laetitia think of a Pietà. Grandmaman Inez, after gazing at the picture, had turned away, saying in a strange tone, "My little Antoinette," and had hurried to the chapel. Joseph sometimes surprised her standing before the picture and felt pained by the sad expression on the old face. He, too, had been frightened by the portrait. Of course, he had known that Antoinette could not accustom herself to her surroundings, though she had never complained. But could this unhappy woman really be Toinette, who had been so merry, so happy, long ago, at the time of the Congress? She is not really alive, Joseph thought very sadly. I can imagine her in the ugly house her husband built. She does her duty; she is a good mother; Toinette could not be otherwise. She is a good wife, obeying her husband's wishes—the husband who has never ceased to be a stranger, to be the Prussian count to her. But the real Toinette is dead, because she has got to be dead. Even if I see her again, she will not be Toinette,

the dear playfellow of our childhood, but a dead woman, whom I do not know. Joseph was mistaken. Once again the family was to see the old Toinette, a Toinette living with all the fervour and passion of an agonized, suffering heart; a Toinette, resurrected for the last time before returning, dead for ever, to the grave which duty had dug for her.

Summer was lovely and peaceful at Wohan. But somewhere in the world, in far-away Moldavia, a battle was being fought at Dragashan, on a sunny day in July. Somewhere in the world, in far-away Moldavia, between morning and night the hope of a nation died. Somewhere in the world, in far-away Moldavia, between sunrise and sunset, a gallant, liberty-loving, great heart broke.

The chancelleries of Europe became beehives, filled with humming voices. In Austria the voices were loudest and shrillest. Opinions clashed. What was the man? How was one to treat him? Some said, "he's a gallant fighter for liberty and the independence of Greece." "He's a rebel," said others. "He has trusted us," said the first. "He believes in Austria's generosity. He is our guest. Hospitality is sacred." "Russia is mighty," other voices warned. "We must not anger the Tsar. We need his friendship. Are we going to be foolish enough to annoy the mighty ruler of Russia, for one man's sake, even if that man is Prince Ypsilantis?" "Russia . . . remember not even Napoleon could conquer her. Alexander has expressed his wishes. We must obey them. . . ."

Prince Metternich shook his head impatiently. What does a man, even the noblest and best, signify compared with the welfare of the state? Perhaps he also thought, what a pity, an intelligent, a gallant young man. . . . If only he had been more careful. . . . If only he had sought refuge in another country. . . . Perhaps he thought, God knows I dislike the imperial fool who drove me half crazy during the Congress. . . . I wish I could. . . . Just to spite him. . . . Or. . . . But how could anyone know what Prince Metternich thought when he was alone with his soul?

Munkacs is a fortress in Hungary; from its towers one

can see the River Latorcza flowing past. Munkacs is a small town like so many others, yet its name will live on in history because a just man suffered here. May all remember him, the heroic Greek, Alexander Ypsilantis, who fought for his country's liberty and was shamefully betrayed by the rulers of the country where he sought refuge. Their shame will live as long as his glory.

Perhaps this idea might comfort posterity a long time hence; it certainly did not comfort the despairing woman who arrived at Wohan one evening whilst the family was sitting at supper. The servant reported that a post-chaise had just driven into the courtyard. Joseph, who had arrived from Vienna three days before, left the room. Reaching the door, he saw a woman in black come up the steps.

"Toinette!" he cried out, greatly astonished. "Toinette!" he led her to the dining-room.

Antoinette saw no one but grandmaman Inez. Standing before her with clasped hands, like a suppliant, she stammered, "Grandmaman Inez, I only heard it a few days ago. They have imprisoned him. But they must set him free again. Grandmaman Inez, you must see the Emperor. You must implore him. . . . On your knees if need be. He must not suffer. He must not remain a prisoner."

The children had just come in to say good-night. Laetitia, recognizing her dearest family saint, ran up to Antoinette. Holding her fast with her little arms, she lovingly kissed the pale face. "Aunt Toinette, dear Aunt Toinette, don't cry. Grandmaman Inez will make everything come right. Only don't cry, darling Aunt Toinette."

Antoinette clung to the child. She spoke more to little Laetitia than to anyone else in the room. "Haven't you heard, don't you know? Alexander Ypsilantis, he came here; he sought refuge in our country. And we . . . we imprisoned him in Munkacs."

A cold voice interrupted her incoherent words. "Does your husband know you are here, Antoinette?" grandmaman Inez asked.

"My husband? He's on one of his estates in East Prussia. I don't know whether he knows I've gone away."

Suddenly flaring up, she cried, "What do I care for him? For that stranger? Why do you ask after him, grandmaman Inez?"

Again the cold voice. "And your children, Antoinette? Surely the youngest still needs a mother's care."

"Dear Toinette," Bozena said softly, "you're tired out. Sit down, I'll get you . . ."

Antoinette looked at her sister-in-law as if she had only just noticed her. "Bozena . . ." Her voice sounded weak and bewildered. "Bozena, you . . ." Old memories seemed to stir in her brain. "Bozi, little Bozi, you know what being unhappy is. Help me to implore grandmaman Inez. You all help me."

Her unhappy eyes glanced from one to the other. Victoire looked more interested than compassionate. Stanislas frowned; these fool women never can understand politics. Little Ferdinand gazed curiously at his unknown aunt; one could see that he was trying to understand. Monsieur Venarius's face expressed deep concern and sympathy. He knew what happened when a human being dashed his heart against the rock of the State. Joseph had put his arm round his twin's shoulder. His hand, hanging down, felt Laetitia's little hand and, without seeing her face he knew, this little girl, my daughter, feels what I am feeling; she is sorrowing for Toinette's grief; she is angry, because she senses that a great wrong has been done, even if she cannot understand what the wrong is.

Grandmaman Inez lifted her fan. Words would have been vain, but the familiar gesture penetrated Antoinette's pain and perplexity. She grew calm and let Joseph help her out of her cloak. She sat down at the table and drank the milk Bozena put before her. She understood that supper must not be interrupted. Only her usually so gentle eyes remained strange and wild. Fear and misery seemed to look out of them and, from time to time, hatred for those who were quietly peeling peaches or munching sweets. Hatred for men and women who went on living as they had always lived, although a good and gallant man was languishing in prison. Antoinette's unhappy eyes asked: How can one

eat and drink, knowing what has happened? Joseph guessed her feelings. For the first time in her life Antoinette had come face to face with injustice and cruelty. She had known sorrow, the desolate emptiness of an unhappy marriage, but never this. She had believed, in the innocence of her still childish heart, that all men must feel as she did and long to fight against injustice and cruelty. She had not known what the disappointment of weary months and years had taught her twin brother, that men are not interested in the wrongs done to others, and only begin to care when they are hurt themselves.

Grandmaman Inez got up. "You must be tired, Antoinette. To-morrow we shall talk things over. Go to bed, my child."

She put her hand on the table. She was looking weary and depressed. Her black eyes, grown pale, as if a light behind the iris had suddenly gone out, gazed at her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They hurriedly glanced at Bozena, Stanislas and Victoire, and rested a long while on Joseph, Antoinette and little Laetitia. But she did not see them; she saw the portrait of their English ancestor who had died at Tyburn.

CHAPTER XIV

At last," Victoire said to Stanislas, "Wohan has got the ghost that every self-respecting ancestral castle must have."

Her eyes followed the slender figure in black walking quickly towards the Watteau meadow. Trotting after it like two small faithful dogs came Laetitia and Ferdinand.

Stanislas laughed nervously. "Who'd have imagined Antoinette could be so stubborn? Ever since she came here she's been assailing us all to save that fool of an Ypsilantis. Were they ever engaged? I was an exile here at that time and know nothing about it."

"They weren't even engaged," Victoire said rather cynically. "That's just it. He's remained an ideal for poor Toinette." She shrugged. "I'm really sorry for the poor thing. But what can we do? She's infecting the children with her madness, your Ferdinand as well as my Letty. You've just seen them trot after her, as if they wanted to defend her." She laughed, but her eyes remained serious. "My poor Letty! She won't have an easy life. Just fancy what she wanted to do yesterday. She and Ferdi were standing on the Watteau meadow where the gardener had been burning brushwood. I came through the arbour and they did not see me. Letty was trying to persuade your boy to put his hand in the fire. 'We'll offer the pain to God,' she was saying, 'then He will *have* to help Aunt Toinette. Come on, Ferdi, let's put our hands into the fire like the brave Roman we learnt about last week. You do remember, don't you?' 'Mutius Scaevola' your pedantic boy said. 'I don't care what his name is. Come along over there where the flames burn equally strong, so that it will hurt us both the same. Put your hand in the flames when I put in mine and say: Dear God, it's for Aunt Toinette. But now You *must* help her.'"

Stanislas smiled. "Little fools. I remember Monsieur Venarius telling me about Mutius Scaevola when I was small; but I must confess it did not impress me in the least. What did Ferdi say?"

"He said, 'I really don't see how it can do any good to Aunt Toinette if we get our hands burnt.'"

"There spoke the blood of the Samétils," Stanislas said with a wry smile.

"But my Letty," Victoire spoke half laughingly, yet unable to hide the pride she felt in her small daughter, "said, 'Every sacrifice helps. Hurry up, Ferdi, the flames are getting smaller.'"

"What happened then?"

"I came just in time to pull two little hands out of the flames. Of course I boxed their ears. Both cried because I had prevented them from offering a sacrifice for Aunt Toinette. Your boy cried noiselessly, quietly, but Letty was

furious. She hit out at me and wanted to bite and scratch. A strange child."

"This young generation is strange. It's quite different from what we were."

"You and I, maybe. But can't you see in Letty a mixture of grandmaman Inez and Joseph? And in your boy, of Joseph and grandfather Sametil?"

Stanislas sighed. "Perhaps you're right. I'll have my hands full when Ferdi grows up. I do wish Toinette hadn't come. She's so crazy-one never knows what she's going to do. And just now, a fortnight before I am leaving for London. She could ruin my whole career."

Victoire said nothing, but Stanislas saw the disdainful look she threw him. He flushed. "You've no earthly right to criticize me, Victoire. You're no better. You're making Joseph's life hell because he wants to live up to his ideals. Your one idea is to play a big part; you only care for yourself. What became of your enthusiasm for Napoleon? You hardly noticed the death of your hero."

"Because I've learnt that everything is futile. My life, your life, all our lives. We get born, we rush about like mad puppets on a stage, we die. Whatever we did, whatever we thought, whatever we suffered, everything was futile and in vain. Only one thing remains—let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." She got up. The familiar depression, the desolate sadness which so often tortured her, held her in its grip. "Everything bores me so terribly," she said. "I wish I was Toinette and could be really unhappy about something. I wish I was my little girl and believed Monsieur Venarius's beautiful fairy tales about justice and right and liberty. I wish . . ."

She fell silent. Leaving Stanislas sitting on the stone bench, she walked slowly towards the terrace.

Sitting in the stiff old Henri-Quatre chair with the straight back, in the bay window of her bedroom, grandmaman Inez looked mutely at Antoinette standing before her. Grandmaman Inez wanted to scold her, to tell her with all her old strictness and hardness that she was a bad wife who had

deserted husband and children for a stranger's sake. She wanted to lead her back to the narrow path with an iron hand—and could not do it. There was an inflexion in the young voice that she had loved passionately many, many years ago. How well she knew the gentle pleading, alternating with imperious demands. Unconsciously the old wrinkled hand touched the golden medallion she wore under her dress. Yes, this inflexible young creature who dared to defy her, was his true grandchild. He too had spoken that way, had acted that way, seeing only one thing. Many years ago when young Inez de Quereiro had not wanted to leave her home and her country, the voice had spoken so, at first pleadingly, imploringly; then, seeing that she was not to be persuaded, furiously, imperiously. She had said yes; she had left her parents and her country and been wonderfully happy for a few short years. How could she be hard on a woman who spoke to her with that voice?

"Antoinette," she said gently, "I have written to Vienna. I have humiliated myself, reminding the Emperor of the favour I had found in the eyes of the great Empress Marie Theresia, of your grandfather who died for his country. I have done all I could, my child."

Antoinette bowed her head. She knew how hard it had been for grandmaman Inez to write that letter. She wanted to feel grateful, but she couldn't. The familiar figures of her childhood had become mere shades, even Wohan she had loved so well and missed so terribly seemed unreal. She walked along the paths and over the meadows where she had played with her brothers and sisters, without seeing them. She saw only one picture, Alexander Ypsilantis, languishing in prison, cut off from life. She did not know whether she still loved him. Between the happy days of the Congress and to-day there lay so many desolate, lonely years, so much homesickness and longing, so much suppressed rebellion against her lot that the past had become a dream. Perhaps she did not love him, but only what he embodied for her: youth, liberty, mountains tinted by the gold of a southern sun, a blue sea, Greece; the country his words had conjured up for her, the home of the soul, to which she had so often

escaped during the first years of her marriage. Perhaps when she said: "Alexander Ypsilantis," she only meant "Happiness, joy, justice and liberty." Her childhood and her youth had passed. She had ceased caring for Wohan and for the family.

Even the present seemed to fade—her husband, her children, her life in a strange country. How could she explain this to grandmaman Inez, when she was not even able to understand it herself? No one could understand her. No, that was unjust; two children who followed her like faithful little dogs, to whom she could tell her grief, looked at her as if they understood. Sometimes, gazing into Laetitia's bright eyes, she remembered her eldest daughter, Lully, the quiet little girl who adored her mother and feared her severe father. But even this picture grew pale, hidden by the grim, grey walls of Munkacs.

"Victoire," grandmaman Inez said slowly, "has written to your husband and told him that I am very ill and that I wanted to see you. I could not write a lie. We must be grateful to Victoire for having sinned for your sake. Your husband cannot reproach you with your affection for me. He will not be angry with you when you return home."

Antoinette stared at grandmaman Inez with bleak eyes. "Home? I'm to go back? To leave the country where he is? To live once more with strangers who will never be anything else to me? No, I'm not going back. I'd rather jump into the Morava."

"Do not sin, Antoinette," grandmaman Inez said harshly. "We have never had a coward in the family. Don't be the first. Your life does not belong to you but to God, and after Him to your children. And a little to me, too, Antoinette."

"To you, grandmaman Inez—to you who forced me to marry!"

Grandmaman Inez's pale face grew paler still. The fan she was holding trembled slightly. But her voice was steady. "I acted according to my conscience. After the disgrace Marie Christine had brought upon the family it seemed a dispensation of Providence that Count Bredar still wanted to marry you. I never expected you to be happy with him,

but I did believe the children would compensate for everything else."

"The children?" Antoinette smiled sarcastically. "Are they my children? Lully, yes; girls are left to their mother, but the boys . . ."

Grandmaman Inez lifted her fan. "I do not wish to hear any intimate details. I am not going to meddle with your married life. But do not forget that marriage is a sacrament. You are profaning it."

Antoinette burst into tears. "You want to kill me. You all detest whatever is good and fine and noble. I hate you."

The fan descended on the table with a rap. "You are forgetting yourself, Antoinette."

Starting nervously, Antoinette felt sick and giddy. What had she said? What had she dared to say to grandmaman Inez? She stammered a few incoherent words.

"Go, my child," grandmaman Inez said wearily. "We shall have another talk later on. I am not as young as I was. Your wild words fatigue me."

Antoinette left the room with trembling knees. A glorious noon hovered over Wohan. From a great distance the sound of church bells sang in the air. The old trees rustled softly; golden brown bees hummed in their branches. In the pond white swans were gliding majestically over the shimmering water. A tiny breeze carried with it the sweet scent of the rose garden. Antoinette stood on the terrace. Wohan, how often had she seen it as she was seeing it now! Was it not again a homesick dream? No, Wohan was no dream; Wohan was real, was the only real thing in a world of unreality. Everything else had been a bad dream—her husband, her children, Berlin, a nightmare which had tortured her during an endless night. Now she was awake; she was a little girl again; the tower clock had just struck noon and her lesson with Monsieur Venarius was over. She would play in the garden till dinner. Two children came running along the lime-avenue. A white dress fluttered in the breeze, the sun shone on the blue of a boy's suit. Wasn't it Matzi and Stani running to meet her? Matzi and Stani who had once again played truants? She stretched out her hands. Laughing

with delight at the tender gesture, Ferdinand and Laetitia fell into her arms.

"Victoire," Joseph said ten days later, "you must tell Toinette. I simply can't do it. How can I explain to her that cold reason of State is mightier than mercy and humanity?"

A courier had come from Vienna, bringing in his leather portfolio a letter which was the death sentence for Antoinette's hopes.

"I can't tell her either, Joseph. I'm bad at telling bad news."

"Victoire, you know I never ask you to do anything for me. But now I beg you to do it."

Victoire looked at her husband. "Tell me the truth, Joseph, do I make you very unhappy?"

"Yes," Joseph said honestly, "very. But it doesn't matter. You are as you are, and I am as I am—it can't be helped. But just now we're not talking about our precious selves; just now only Antoinette matters."

"Have I become absolutely unimportant to you?"

Joseph sighed wearily. "Don't Victoire. You've made scenes enough all these years. Will you tell Toinette, or won't you?"

"I won't. Let Madame Mère . . ."

"Grandmaman Inez asked me to do it."

"Get Bozena to tell her. Antoinette is fonder of Bozena than of any of us."

She stretched herself lazily in the big four-poster. "Isn't it just like you, Joseph, to worry me so early in the morning? I'm still half asleep."

"The courier came in the night."

"I suppose you didn't even go to bed. You look like it."

"I sat with grandmaman Inez till four o'clock."

Victoire yawned. "How boring these funny kind of love affairs are. Let me sleep a little longer."

Joseph left the room deeply hurt. Opening the door, he ran into Laetitia, who hastily jumped away.

"Letty," Joseph said severely, "you've been listening at the door. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"You know, father, I never, never listen at doors. But for Aunt Toinette's sake I don't mind doing things I've got to be ashamed of. For Aunt Toinette's sake I'd commit so big a sin that I'd lose my soul for ever. What did you want maman to tell Aunt Toinette?"

"That her petition cannot be granted."

"Who won't grant it? The Emperor? Or Prince Metternich, of whom you talk such a lot?"

"Probably the Prince," Joseph said absently.

"Would the Emperor grant it and make Aunt Toinette happy?"

"Perhaps, Letty; if he could."

"An Emperor can do whatever he wants, can't he, father?"

Joseph saw Bozena walking towards the breakfast-room. He wanted to talk to her before the others appeared on the scene.

"Yes, of course," he said hastily, and left the child standing in the passage.

Letty ran into the garden to look for Ferdinand. Having found him, she took his arm and walked him up and down, talking incessantly all the while. Ferdinand shook his head once or twice; at last he nodded and followed his cousin into the house.

Monsieur Venarius wondered why the children were so good during their lesson. As a rule they hated geography; to-day they kept asking him pertinent questions: Where the Morava flowed to? Where one got to, if one walked along her banks? Where the Danube began? How far one had to walk before reaching the Danube and having reached it, how far it was to Vienna? How many miles? How long does it take to walk a mile?

Monsieur Venarius felt pleased, Ferdinand had always been a good pupil and now at last that madcap Letty seemed to grow sensible too. He praised her, and later in the day told grandmaman Inez that Letty would, if she wanted to, very soon surpass her less nimble-minded cousin. He declared

it with pride, feeling sure that his method of teaching was responsible for the miracle.

Bozena was amazed at the icy calm with which Antoinette listened to her faltering words. For the first time in her life this dearest friend and sister, this beloved play-fellow of her childhood, became a stranger to her, one of the members of the Herdegen family, a creature belonging to another world. She had feared a passionate outburst, hysterical weeping; expecting Antoinette to behave as she would have done. But Antoinette did not cry out, neither did she weep. She put her hands before her face for an instant and in this short time her features became hidden by the mask Bozena had so often seen on grandmaman Inez's, Joseph's and even Stanislas's face. Her frightened gaze fell upon a stony, dead face which had lost all its youth and freshness. Only the thin little hands could not keep quiet; with a restless movement they picked the small lace handkerchief to pieces. Antoinette stared at the tiny bits of lace and cambric in her hand as if she did not understand what had happened. Looking up, she saw Bozena's troubled face. She tried to smile. Bozena felt a shiver run along her spine; thus do the dead smile in their coffins.

She went up to Antoinette and wanted to take her in her arms, but Antoinette gently pushed her away.

"It's all right, Bozi," she said in a cold, dull voice. "Thank you for telling me. I know you hated doing it. Don't worry about me. Everything is all right." She suddenly began to laugh and her laughter was more painful to hear than sobs would have been. "I was a fool," Antoinette said, still in the same dull voice. "I believed there was justice in our world. I was a child, telling myself fairytales."

She looked round. They were standing on the terrace. "How queer," Antoinette said. "The whole world is dead, and yet the flowers go on blooming; the grass is green, and the sky blue." She nodded slightly, looking absent-mindedly at her sister-in-law. "Go Bozi. I want to be alone. Tell grandmaman Inez that I'm perfectly sane again. Tell her that I shall go back to my children in a few day's time, to

the poor little children who will have to live in such a world." For an instant she lost her self-control. Putting out her hand with a piteous gesture she whispered, "Bozi, Bozi, do you remember? We were little girls at Wohan. We played and laughed and dreamt of a happy future. What has become of us? Think of Matzi, think of Joseph whose life is ruined because he tries to do right, think of yourself—you're unhappy too. Think of grandmaman Inez who has always lived according to God's law and who will have to die to-day or to-morrow like any wicked woman. Bozi . . ." She choked and, turning away, she ran off in the direction of the wilderness. Bozena watched the slender, black figure disappearing behind the old beech-trees.

Stanislas felt cross. He liked being surrounded by cheerful people. He did not want to suffer himself and did not want to see others suffer; it always made him feel guilty as if he ought to do something. Feeling uncomfortable and annoyed he hated the people who disturbed his peace of mind and became cynical. "Toinette creeps about like a ghost," he said impatiently to Victoire who was the only one he could talk to frankly. "Has she taken leave of her senses for ever? After all, more and better men than this fool of an Ypsilantis have been wronged."

"That ought not to be a comfort to you, Stani," Victoire said mockingly. "If one cry for help touches us, how much more ought a thousand cries to touch us?"

Stanislas threw her an angry look. "Don't Victoire. There are things which do not bear thinking of, if one does not want to go in for martyrdom oneself. How I hate these saints and martyrs! They will keep on spoiling one's life and making one feel a cad and a coward."

"You seem to be grandmaman Inez's grandson and Joseph's brother, after all," Victoire said in a curious tone.

"Worse luck. You can't imagine, my dear, how I fear perceiving once for all that I too am responsible for what happens in the world. I want to enjoy my life. I want to get on, and I'm always threatened by the possibility of becoming a decent human being."

"Poor Stani. But I don't think the danger is very great." "Who can tell? If only one could give up thinking. Thinking is the very devil. Come on, Victoire, let's go for a ride and forget all about it."

Grandmaman Inez, sitting at the window, saw them pass. As soon as they reached the plain they rode at full speed and grandmaman Inez, watching them till they disappeared, sighed slightly. She knew that Stanislas and Victoire were trying to dodge something they would never be able to escape—conscience. Let them ride ever so madly, let them set spurs to their horses, what they were trying to escape was quicker than they. Conscience overtook them and waited for them at their goal. Grandmaman Inez felt sad. Antoinette would have been astonished had she known how deeply, how painfully, the old woman suffered with her; how well she understood her restless, despairing young heart. Grandmaman Inez wanted to tell her, but she had been merciless towards herself for so long a time that she had become incapable of baring her soul. Besides, this new, cold, Antoinette seemed to shrink from every kind word and every caress.

Grandmaman Inez had sent for her. The two women, the old one and the young one, stood facing each other in silence. Grandmaman Inez had risen when Antoinette entered the room. She felt it only becoming to rise in the presence of a sorrow so nobly borne.

"Bozena will have told you, grandmaman Inez, that I am going back to my children in a day or two."

If she had only said "going home," my poor Antoinette, grandmaman Inez thought ruefully. But just because she did think it, she only said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Joseph will book a seat in the coach for you."

Silence again—a heavy, dangerous silence in which many dumb words struggled to be spoken. Grandmaman Inez looked at her granddaughter. How old is Antoinette? She asked herself. Twenty-six. She has no right to look like that: so resigned, so broken, so old . . .

"Toinette," she said.

Antoinette looked up with a start. Never had grand-

maman Inez called them by their pet names. If only she was not going to be kind, to show pity: that would be more than she could bear. But grandmaman Inez only repeated very softly, "Toinette," and added: "Suffering is good for man. Our Lord has bidden us to take up our cross and to follow Him." Her voice changed. "I hope your husband will find time to accompany you and the children next year. We have not seen him since your wedding."

Antoinette nodded. "I'll ask him to."

She brought away from this strangely laconic conversation a single comforting word: Toinette. But that word was worth more than the tenderest, most compassionate expressions. It was more comforting than Joseph's pity, Victoire's half-angry; half-sympathetic understanding, Stanislas's rather conventional phrases and Bozena's tears and kisses. It told her that as long as the hard old woman lived she would never be quite forsaken, that a human being understood her, a woman who had known the bitterness of life and had even now that night was drawing closer, not forgotten it.

The sun burnt down mercilessly on the dusty highway. Two pairs of small feet ached. Two pairs of small legs felt deadly lassitude. The children walked along hand in hand, just as they had left home in the early morning whilst the family was still asleep. They were bent on a pilgrimage to Vienna, to visit the good Emperor Franz, to ask him for the pardon Aunt Toinette wanted so badly. Laetitia had planned everything. She had asked grandmaman Inez to let them spend the morning with grandfather Sametil. "They won't notice anything's wrong before dinner," she had explained to Ferdinand. "By that time we'll nearly have got to Vienna."

At first the walk in the dewy, silver misted morning had been delightful. The sense of adventure had excited even Ferdinand. But after some time the sun grew hotter; Laetitia's curls hung damply into her burning face. Ferdinand, who, wishing to honour the Emperor, had put on a new pair of shoes, began to have sore feet.

"Do you think it's much farther?" Laetitia said, drawing a deep breath.

"Yes, Letty; much farther."

She stamped her foot. "Oh, why did you say that? You're so stupid. If you had said, 'Oh, no, Vienna is right behind that hill,' I would not have been tired any more. But now . . . Ferdi, I must sit down. I can't go on."

"Uncle Franz says one gets more tired if one sits down in between."

They walked along in silence. Ferdinand, glancing at Laetitia's little red, dust-stained face was horrified to see big tears coursing down her cheeks.

"You're crying, Letty?"

"Don't be silly," she said with an angry sob. "I'm not crying. And I'm not the least bit tired."

Ferdinand held the small, hot hand more tightly.

"We're sure to reach a brook soon. Then we can drink and bathe our feet."

"Ferdi," Laetitia asked in thin thread of a voice, "will the Emperor let us go to bed at once? And will he give us something to eat?"

"Of course, Letty, Don't you remember how big the imperial palace is? There must be no end of beds."

"We shall," Laetitia said, forgetting her fatigue and her aching feet, "fall on our knees before the Emperor and not get up till he has granted the pardon Aunt Toinette wants. After that, Ferdi, he'll order an imperial carriage for us and will give us a big paper with a red seal—the pardon. Four horses will draw the carriage and on the back seat a lackey will sit, holding on his knees a big basket full of good things to eat. We'll drive home. As soon as we reach the courtyard the coachman will crack his whip and everybody will come running out of the house. We'll get out and call 'Aunt Toinette, Aunt Toinette, we've brought home the pardon, look, here it is!'"

Her enthusiasm infected Ferdinand. "Yes, that's how it's going to be. And perhaps the Emperor will pardon all prisoners and set them free; perhaps there was no one to tell him how awful prison is, till we came."

"Perhaps . . . Ferdi, my sole is coming off."

Ferdinand looked with a worried expression at the thin white shoes which had never been meant for walking along the highroad.

"What a pity," Laetitia said, "That there are no knights left. If one of them rode past, he'd let us ride in front of him."

Ferdinand, observing her closely, nervously noticed that the small red face had grown deadly pale. Letty swayed and caught hold of him. "Ferd, how funny, I think I'm going to die. Everything is turning black."

He gently laid her down on the dusty grass of the roadside and fanned her with his hat. She opened her eyes and tried to sit up.

"Stay here, Letty," the boy said. "I'll go on alone. You're too small to walk so far."

"And if I really die, Ferdi—not just a bit as I did just now—I'll go on with you and see the Emperor for Aunt Toinette's sake. You must never turn back once you have started, that's what grandmaman Inez said the other day when I did not want to finish digging up my flower bed. You must never turn back."

She got up slowly and took her cousin's hand. "Come, Ferdi, let's go on."

They walked on, getting hotter and hotter, wearier and wearier. Every step hurt them, but not once did either of them think of giving in. Over there, in the distance, lay Vienna and there lived the Emperor who was going to grant the pardon Aunt Toinette wanted so badly. They simply must go on.

Once Laetitia cried out joyfully, "Look, Ferdi, a church tower! That's Vienna. We're there already. Come, let's run."

Alas, it was only the church tower of a cheerful little Moravian village, where, though they did not know it, their pilgrimage was to end. A kindly peasant woman took the dead tired, tottering children to her house, gave them milk and bread and put them to bed in the barn, laying them gently on the soft, sweetly-smelling hay.

"We only want to sleep for an hour," Ferdinand said. "Please, wake us up. We've got to go to Vienna."

The woman's husband, coming in to dinner, recognized the children and hurried to Wohan. Joseph came to fetch them. He woke them up and carried them to the carriage.

"Is it the imperial carriage?" Laetitia asked, still half asleep.

Joseph did not understand her question, but Ferdinand, wide awake and rather frightened, explained everything.

They reached Wohan at nightfall. The whole family was standing in the courtyard as Laetitia had dreamt. They had been waiting nervously, impatiently, for hours. Laetitia began to cry bitterly. She saw neither her grandmother nor her mother. Stumbling on her aching feet, she ran up to Antoinette and fell into her arms. "Aunt Toinette, dear Aunt Toinette," she sobbed, "we were going to Vienna, to speak to the Emperor. To bring home the pardon, you know, darling; justice and pardon. But father prevented us. We really wanted to go, Aunt Toinette, to bring you the pardon, the great mercy . . ."

Antoinette held the sobbing child fast. The stone mask slipped from her face. It was the old Antoinette who kissed Laetitia and Ferdinand, saying half laughing, half crying, "Little Letty, little Ferdi, you've given me more than you know; you've given me the mercy of being able to believe in humanity again."

Grandmaman Inez came up to the little group. Two red spots stood out on her pale cheeks. Her eyes were very bright. Laetitia felt afraid. What would grandmaman Inez say? "You taught me, grandmaman Inez," she whispered in a trembling voice, "never to turn back once I had started. We did not turn back, grandmaman Inez. We only wanted to sleep for an hour. We . . . We . . ."

Smiling, grandmaman Inez bent down to Laetitia and took Ferdinand's hand in her own. "You are good children," she said gravely. "We are grateful to you." She stood very straight, glad and proud, her eyes clinging to the old castle walls. She nodded to the castle of Wohan. "You may well be satisfied," she said mutely to the grey walls. "The young

generation you are sheltering is worthy of its ancestors. It is as gallant and faithful as they were. You will see it grow up and rejoice at it when I am resting in my grave."

Hand in hand with the two children who were still expecting a scolding and could not understand why grandmaman Inez was not angry, she slowly walked up the old grey stone steps.

CHAPTER XV

FOUR years suffice to turn tiny playful animals into small human beings and small human beings into bigger, self-confident creatures. The twins had ceased being something small crawling about on the floor, crying for food and yelling at the top of their voices. At Wohan they rode the little Shetland pony Uncle Stanislas had given them; and moaned and sighed as all the Herdegen children had moaned and sighed, when they saw Monsieur Venarius arrive with the big primer. To be exact, only Carl moaned, Alois loved his lessons. Not that he wanted to learn to read—he could not understand how letters could become words—but he loved the letters as letters. "T" was a gate through which all the smaller letters passed, "G" a hen, sheltering her chickens beneath her wings. Alois invented a story about every letter and eagerly told it to Monsieur Venarius. He was always eager about something. There was nothing in his small world to which he felt indifferent. He loved everybody and everything with a keenness which even now often filled his young life with pain. He cried when the children found a dead bird, deploring the sorrow of the mother bird and painting it in the darkest of hues. He was miserable when old Huberpeter died and still more miserable when a big gravestone was erected over his grave. "He'll think we don't want him to come back," he sobbed. After the funeral Joseph spent many nights sitting beside his little son, who, starting from sleep, began to weep." Poor, poor Huberpeter, the stone is so heavy."

Carl was absolutely different: playful, merry, capricious. He had Stanislas's charm, and Victoire loved him best of all her children. Perhaps because, like her, he too was incalculable. One never knew what he was going to do or to say. Unlike Alois, he was happiest when the family went to Vienna, which happened pretty often. Victoire declaring she would go melancholy mad if she remained at Krems more than two months at a time. Joseph let her "go on leave" as she called it, whenever she wanted to. As soon as she arrived, the sleepy old palace awoke to new life. Childish voices sounded in the stone passages and, sitting in her room, grandmaman Inez sometimes closed her eyes and dreamt of the time when her own children had played in the old house. She had begun to live in the past, wandering back the endless road leading to her far-away youth. Sometimes when people came into her room, she lifted her head and spoke to them in Spanish. It happened that she mistook one person for another, calling Victoire Ludmilla, talking of her dead sons as if they were just grown up. Reality and remembrance had fused. She often sat at the window, peering out anxiously waiting for news from her young husband fighting in the Netherlands. She sent for Monsieur Venarius and told him, "You must be stricter with Carl, Monsieur Venarius. I am afraid you are much too young for a tutor."

Returning from her dreams she looked round with bewildered eyes. She touched her own thin hands, gazed into the mirror and felt frightened at the old, old face looking back at her. Loneliness walled her in. The feeling of being forsaken filled her with dread. Even God seemed far away and harsh. Her sins separated her from Him, they had built a barrier between her and her Lord. Choking in the merciless grip of desolation, she heaved a sigh of relief when the last of the Herdegen children came home. She loved Joseph best of all her grandchildren, but she found pleasure and comfort in the society of the red-haired young man whose features reminded her of no Herdegen she had ever seen alive or in a portrait. She found help and consolation with the grandson who was not really her grandson and who

blushing to the roots of his hair, had said, when she forbade him to study medicine, "Grandmaman Inez, I must. And I've got a right to oppose you, because I'm not really your grandson."

A strange friendship grew up between the old woman and the young man. Perhaps Franz understood her better than anyone else; perhaps he had discovered that she, before whom two generations had trembled, was now in need of a prop. Perhaps he could grasp her loneliness because he himself was lonely, as men are whose cold, scientific mind smiles at the follies of others. Joseph, seeing injustice and inhumanity, suffered and wanted to help. Stanislas passed by with a cynical smile; what did not touch him was unimportant. Franz saw things as clearly as Joseph did, but he did not believe in human help. At least not if it was a question of right or wrong. Of course humanity would learn how to cure diseases and to prolong human life, but to make men better and happier . . . ? Who was to undertake the task? The young men he met at the university who talked so much and so loudly of liberty? Would not they, having once tasted power, become the same tyrants as the old men? Was not history like a wheel, ever returning to the same spot? Those who abused their power might change, but the wrong remained the same. Always the weak would be oppressed by the strong. Did it matter to what class the weak belonged?

Victoire was of his way of thinking, but her opinions were rather the fruit of a weary surfeit, of the haunting, paralyzing question: "What's the good of it?" Unlike her, Franz bore this cruel perception with stoical calm, living only for his studies and for an old woman. In the evening he sat with grandmaman Inez, telling her about things she did not understand in the least; but she loved his being there. In the dead and gloomy room a young voice spoke to her; she was no longer alone. As for Franz, he knew she was incapable of following his scientific speculations, but at least she was someone who listened, and sometimes a flash of understanding in the tired eyes seemed to thank him for his presence. At such moments he too forgot his loneliness.

Victoire threw herself into society as into a whirling stream. Once more the chandeliers in the Herdegen palace sent out their light; the old rooms were filled with voices, laughter, music and dancing. The tunes reached the upper floor, where grandmaman Inez lived, muted and soft like shadow-sounds from another world. This new world was more noisy than the old one had been; its pleasures had lost much of the old refinement; the dinners, bigger and more luxurious, differed from the small intimate ones where sparkling wit had sat at table. When the guests had left, a tired woman sighed, "Oh, how dull it was," and Victoire's restless steps echoed through the rooms and the long empty passages. Sometimes Franz, getting up early, found his sister-in-law in one of the sitting-rooms, still in evening dress, wearing all her jewels. She stopped him. "Are you going out already? Do stay and keep me company. I didn't go to bed. I can't sleep anyway. And even if I do go to sleep, there's always that ghastly waking up into a void."

"Why don't you look after your children?" Franz said crossly. He disliked his sister-in-law because she made Joseph unhappy. "Look after Letty."

"Letty despises me." Victoire's laugh was half mocking, half wistful. "She is a little woman already who watches me with a woman's eyes and can't understand how I can go away and leave her adored father alone."

"Neither can I."

Victoire laughed. "I'd prefer being married to a man, not an angel. And poor Joseph is an angel. He forgives me everything. I can't even take a lover because he would forgive that too. Not that I want to; it would only bore me."

"What a pity Bozena married Stanislas. He'd have been the right husband for you."

Victoire nodded. "I can imagine adoring a man who treated me badly, who had love-affairs, who only asked and never gave. Besides . . . Stanislas has been promoted again. Whereas Joseph . . ."

Franz lost his temper. "Joseph lives up to his ideals," he said angrily. "But of course you are unable to understand it. Even Letty understands it better than you do; even little

Alois. Yesterday Monsieur Venarius asked the boy in grandmaman Inez's presence, 'Tell me, what is good and what is bad?' The little man, strange that he should be your son, had the answer pat. 'Good is what hurts no one, and bad what hurts some one.'

"Joseph's son," Victoire smiled wryly. "I'm fonder of Carl. He's my child. That's why Madame Mère does not like him."

Franz grew grave. "Victoire, be kind to grandmaman Inez. We haven't much time left to be kind to her."

"Franz?"

Victoire's face changed. She looked young and frightened.

"You don't know, none of you know, what terrible pains grandmaman Inez is bearing with a smile. I've implored her to undergo an operation; she won't hear of it. She says God is the greatest physician. Perhaps she's right." Sudden anger overwhelmed him. "Of course none of you ever notices anything. You don't see how thin and small she has got. You don't notice her turning away to hide her pains. You never see anything. Of course, it's only grandmaman Inez who has devoted her whole life to you all, and who is dying before your eyes, dying a lingering and painful death without ever complaining. Sometimes I'd like to murder you all."

Victoire's violet eyes had filled with tears. "Franz, our Madame Mère? It can't be true. Say you've been exaggerating just to frighten me."

"I ought not to have told you. She doesn't want any of you to know. But be kind to her, Victoire, and, for her sake, be kind to Joseph."

"Letty," Victoire said half crying, "my poor little Letty. What will she do when Madame Mère, when her adored grandmaman Inez . . ."

"You're the strangest woman I know. As soon as one is perfectly sure you're absolutely callous, you turn round and . . . If that's the way women are made, I'm glad I haven't anything to do with them."

Victoire laughed shakily. "Don't be too sure, Franz. My dear, I do want to be kind to you all, also to *mon pauvre*

Joseph. But something prevents me. Perhaps the haunting question: what's the good of it? But now I shall really be good, for Madame Mère's sake."

Wiping her eyes, she hurriedly left the room. A few minutes later grandmaman Inez's favourite song sounded softly in the quiet house, "Frère Jaques, Frère Jaques, dormez-vous?"

Lying in her four-poster, the old woman lifted her head with a smile. She was not sleeping. The morning bells had called her to prayer long ago. They had awakened her to a new day full of pain but also full of gallant patience, of love and care for the family, for God's dear sake.

Victoire kept her promise. Early in the morning Joseph, still drowsy and much amazed, was roused by a servant. "The Countess and the children have arrived." He stared at the man incredulously. There were still balls at Vienna, concerts, theatres. What on earth was Victoire thinking of?"

She did not explain anything. She fell into his arms, her eyes full of tears. She kissed him tenderly, declaring she had missed him terribly. Besides the Viennese weather did not suit the twins. And she had discovered that she had always wronged Krems; it was a delightful little town, full of charming and clever people. She was never going away again. Except, of course, in summer to Wohan. Had he missed her?

He *had* missed her. The house had seemed empty and desolate, the house and his whole life, in which Victoire meant joy, sweetness, enchantment; all the wonderful things which are superfluous and yet so necessary. He did not know to whom he owed this new, tender and charming Victoire. He did not know that the background of his newly-found happiness was dark and sad, death. He only felt happy. How lovely that dear wife of his looked, sitting behind the teatable, pouring out the tea. How glorious the morning was when Victoire, who usually never got up before eleven, called him to breakfast.

Victoire enjoyed playing her new part. She was touched and amused by Joseph's bliss. She suddenly discovered that

she rather liked him, that she even admired him. Hidden beneath his kindness lay an unbending hardness, grandmaman Inez's hardness, only felt by those who tried to abuse their power. Victoire had never felt it, nevertheless it existed. During these spring days she learnt to love it. The new feeling frightened her. It meant acknowledging a duty, a responsibility she had always tried to escape. Now, looking at it closer, she saw it was something fine and good.

Laetitia watched this new mother with critical eyes. Was all this another mood of maman's? Or was it perhaps the real maman? The little girl grew bewildered and could not understand what had happened. Perhaps Ferdi would be able to explain it. Letty smiled, counting on her fingers the days which had to pass till they went to Wohan and she saw her cousin again. Sometimes Ferdi wrote to her, stiff childish letters:

"I am well, I hope you are well too. My dear parents are pleased with me. I speak English beautifully. I'm going to Eton next year and am looking forward to it. But it can't be finer than Wohan. Wohan is the most beautiful place in the whole world. And you'll always be my best friend, Letty."

Letty dreamt of a time when she and Ferdi would always be together. Of course, we'll marry. Ferdi is going to be a great man and I'll help him. We'll fetch dear Aunt Toinette home. Lully can stay with her father. She had decided upon this a few weeks ago, after having seen a drawing Aunt Toinette had made of her little daughter. Laetitia, studying the portrait, had said wistfully but frankly, "Lully is much prettier than I am. She's prettier than maman and Aunt Bozena. She's nearly as beautiful as our aunt, the snow-queen."

For the first time for many years all the grandchildren had come to Wohan. Even Antoinette had brought Lully and her second child, Wilhelm. The young Herdegen generation stared with amazement at the German cousins. Laetitia and Ferdinand and even the twins were well brought up—

a look of grandmaman Inez's or a word of Joseph's sufficed to call them to order—but compared with Lully and Wilhelm they were utter little barbarians. Lully never said a word without being addressed, and only sat down when a grown-up person told her to. She did not want to romp in the wilderness; she seemed afraid of her cousins and clung to her mother like a baby. This gentle, kind mother seemed to be the only person she was not afraid of. "Lully is stupid," Carl declared rashly in front of the little girl, and nearly died of astonishment when Ferdinand, quietly walking up to him, ferociously boxed his ears. Laetitia stared at her cousin for an instant, then she rushed away. Later on grandmaman Inez, strolling slowly in the grounds, discovered the little girl lying prone on the grass and sobbing as if her heart would break. Laetitia refused to say why she was crying, but grandmaman Inez having witnessed the scene with Ferdinand divined the wild jealousy of the passionate little heart. She herself tried in vain to gain Lully's confidence. The child, who looked at her with Marie Christine's eyes, made a curtsey when she addressed her, but could not be induced to remain alone with her. Once grandmaman Inez called Antoinette's little daughter Marie Christine, and Victoire turned away with a lump in her throat, seeing the expression on the old face. She has not forgotten Marie Christine, Victoire thought. She never speaks of her but she is still unhappy about her. Can't she bear to miss the only grandchild who never gave her pleasure, but only pain?

This year grandmaman Inez had reason to be pleased with her grandchildren. Even Stanislas had given up the London season and come to Wohan. He was more good-looking than ever. His face had grown graver and maturer. Bozena told Joseph that he cared for nothing but politics. She smiled wistfully, indulgently. "First it was other women, now it's politics." She had grown gentler and seemed happy. They got on well with each other. Stanislas told grandmaman Inez proudly that Bozena was greatly admired and made an excellent hostess. He also boasted shamelessly of little Ferdinand's perfect English and told all and sundry

how well the boy was getting on at Eton. His little daughter he preferred to ignore. Grandmaman Inez told herself she need not worry about Bozena and Stanislas. He would cover the family name with glory. Not like Joseph, who still managed to be in disgrace with the high and highest persons in the land and who would never be given an office. None the less, grandmaman Inez was prouder of him than of Stanislas.

Joseph spent many hours with grandmaman Inez. She talked to him as she had, after her husband's death, only talked to Monsieur Venarius. She unveiled to him the most sacred and beautiful thing in the world, a soul which had never ceased struggling with human weakness and had ever sought to do right. "I should have liked to live till Laetitia is grown up," she said. "I'm anxious about her. She reminds me of my own youth. But she is more generous than I was." She gazed at the young trees which had been planted a year ago. "The children and the trees," she said musingly, "will grow and thrive. But I shall not see it."

Sometimes a strange restlessness overcame her. She drove with Monsieur de Venelles to a part of the estate where a piece of ground was being made arable. "All the ground here," she said, "must bear corn and fruit. I ought to have seen to it long ago. Dear God, how much I have left undone." The thought worried her during the peaceful summer days. Seeing a barren field, she felt a pain at her heart. "Too little care," she whispered. "Had we cared better for the field, it might have brought a rich harvest."

She often thought of Marie Christine, reproaching herself. Had I loved the child better, had I patiently and gently cultivated the stony soil of her young heart, she might be a good and happy woman to-day. I have always been too hard. Wanting to tear out the weeds, I wounded the little hearts. I was a bad servant of my Lord, and others have to expiate my sins.

A second youth seemed to awake in the old woman; a youth longing to give joy to all before it was too late. She invented surprises for grandchildren and great-grandchildren; she gave more alms than ever. She deposited

money for Nepomuk, Bozena's youngest brother, who wanted to study medicine, and arranged for him to live in the Herdegen palace together with Franz. All her time was filled with thoughts for others, trying to help, trying to make them happy. Even the hours in the chapel were curtailed. "I have reached the eleventh hour," she said. "I must do what I have left undone for years. Whatever I did before is worthless, for I had not charity."

She had grown very weak. Franz daily carried her in his arms to the big cheerful room looking out on the terrace. Here she sat in her armchair all day long, waiting for grandchildren and great-grandchildren to come to her. Monsieur Venarius often kept her company. He, too, had aged greatly during the last months. He kept speaking of his country; he was homesick. Grandmaman Inez comforted her old friend. "When I'm dead, you will go home," she said. "Or do you think me too selfish if I ask you to stay here as long as I do? You have always lived with us. I should like to have you here when I go home."

He kissed the thin hand, saying he did not really want to go to Switzerland, it was just an old man's fancy.

"We have often quarrelled, my good Venarius," grandmaman Inez said, lifting her fan with a trembling hand. "You expected everything from human intellect and reason, and I expected it from God. Now that we have both grown very old, I ask myself, my good Venarius, whether you, who have had to live without God's help, have not done more good than I. I used to worry terribly about your soul. To-day I feel that God is much too great and too merciful not to recognize as His children all men who try to lead a good life and to help others, and that He will know when to let you see the truth."

The children were delighted with grandmaman Inez's gentleness.

"Are people always like that when they grow old?" Laetitia asked her father, adding, "If they are, I wish maman would hurry up and grow old."

Joseph smiled, then his face grew grave. How would his little daughter bear the death of her beloved grandmother?

Ought he not to prepare her for it? Was the great sorrow to overwhelm her unexpectedly?

"When kindness and goodness have ripened in a human soul like apples ripen on a tree," he said softly, "God reaps the soul and takes it home."

Laetitia stared at him with round, frightened eyes. "How awful. If only grandmaman Inez would get cross again. Then perhaps God would not reap her soul. I must try and be naughty."

But she could not be naughty. Even her childish heart felt the holy calm, the sacred expectation enfolding Wohan. Even the storms which, sweeping over the castle used to roar so wildly, seemed to divine something, they only whispered in the trees and sang a lullaby at night. The rose garden breathed its sweetest scents, and the pale stars of the jasmine glowed white like a pale image of their heavenly brothers. On a serene night in August grandmaman Inez died. She lay in the big four-poster where her children had been born and gazed, as she had gazed then, at the crucifix opposite her bed. She had received the sacraments; she had confessed her sins for the last time. Yet she had not found peace. Her grandchildren stood beside her bed. Victoire was crying bitterly. Bozena swallowed her tears. Antoinette looked enviously at the old woman who was going to throw off life like a worn-out garment. Franz held grandmaman Inez's hand; his cool fingers lay on her slowly-weakening pulse. Joseph knelt beside the bed, praying. Stanislas had turned away. He did not want to see death. Monsieur Venarius stood at the lower end of the bed, smiling at his old friend.

Grandmaman Inez lifted heavy lids. Her lips trembled. "I have left so much undone," she whispered. "I must . . . I must . . ." Her voice failed her; she fell silent, a sudden radiant smile on her face. "No, I need not. What I have left undone, God will do for me. He and you too, my children."

She was still smiling when Joseph gently closed her dead eyes.

The dawn had come. Through the open window the first

sunbeams were falling, a pale golden stripe, touching the quiet figure in the bed. Birds began to sing. From a distance human voices sounded in the morning air, people were going to work. God had reaped a soul. But life went on.

CHAPTER XVI

VICTOIRE sat close to the fire, an unread book in her hand. Staring moodily into the flames, she shuddered when the December storm made the windows rattle. Winter had come early; the snow lay deep in the streets of Vienna, tinkling sledge-bells sang gaily in the frosty air.

The twins came to say good-night. Victoire kept them with her longer than usual. Carl begged for sweets; munching them greedily he went to the piano, put some books on the stool so as to reach the keys, sat down and began to play the minuet from *Don Juan*. The tune tripped merrily through the room, all smiles and grace. Then he changed over to another melody—a heartbreaking, mournful piece by a new Polish composer, young Frederick Chopin. Victoire had played it to him a few days ago and the boy had fallen in love with it. His small fingers stumbled at the trills, but somehow he managed to express the desolation and utter hopelessness of the tune. Victoire gazed tenderly at her best-beloved child. As soon as Carl touched the keys, his face changed. The big eyes shone, the childish features became grave. If only he could always be so, Victoire thought wistfully. If only he would give up frightening us with his dark moods and sudden fits of rage. If only he had not inherited my unfortunate character.

Alois had taken up the book his mother had put on the small table. He was turning the leaves, softly, so as not to disturb his brother. Victoire glanced at him. Not exactly the best reading for a child, these verses by a poet called Heine, a young man, likely to be famous one day. She saw Alois smile and repeat a few words under his breath.

"What pleases you so much?" she asked carelessly. Alois lifted his tousled head. "There's a poem about carnations and stars and bees that reminds me of Wohan. Do read it maman," and he laid the book on her knees. Carl grew impatient. "Must you always jabber, Alois?" he cried angrily, letting his hands fall heavily on the keys. The piano shrieked wildly and Carl jumped from his stool. "There, now you've spoilt my pleasure, as usual."

Victoire knew she ought to scold Carl and defend Alois, but the culprit having got over his anger, climbed on her lap, stroked her hair, kissed her cheeks. She held him fast, not noticing that Alois, a pained look on his little round face, had put the book down with a sigh. Alois knew that most people liked him less than his brother. Not father, of course, but he had so little time; and Letty. Though of course Letty, being a young lady, was much too grown up to spend her time with children. That maman loved Carl best he quite understood, for he too loved his twin better than any one else. Carl was rather delicate and he had to defend him at the elementary school to which Joseph had insisted upon sending the boys. Strange to say the "dirty, vulgar" children, as Victoire angrily called them, liked Alois much better than his brother. They made fun of Carl, laughing, not always good-naturedly, at the "little Count." Carl hated his schoolfellows. "They smell bad," he complained to his mother. "They're rough and have loud, ugly voices."

The Empire clock on the mantelpiece struck eight.

"Go to bed, children," Victoire said, putting a last sweet into Carl's mouth. He swallowed it quickly and kissed her. Alois, standing at her knees, kissed her hand. The same thing occurred every evening, but to-night Victoire was struck by it. "Why don't you kiss me, Alois?" she asked the boy. "Don't you love me?"

The round little face flushed a deep red. "I do love you, maman; I love you awfully. But I thought you only wanted to kiss Carl." His face grew redder still, and he gave her a frightened look.

Victoire turned pale. "My silly boy," she said, putting both her arms round his neck. Somehow Laetitia and Alois

always made her feel guilty. "I'm neither a good mother nor a good wife," she thought wearily. "Alois just looked at me as Joseph does when I lose my temper with him. Why can't I love all my children equally? Why must I so often hurt poor Joseph? Why?"

"Go to bed," she repeated kindly. "Good night, my dear boys."

After the twins had gone, the silence got on Victoire's nerves. She hated being alone with her thoughts. Her slender fingers plucked impatiently at her black dress. If only she could leave off her mourning and go to parties again! For the last four years convention had forced her to stay at home.

A short time after grandmaman Inez's death, maman Ludmilla had died, and about a year ago Antoinette. Thinking of her lonely death, Victoire's face grew sad. There had been no grandmaman Inez standing beside Antoinette's sick-bed, as she had stood years ago beside Bozena's, forbidding her to die. She had died as a spent candle goes out—too weak to battle any longer against the wind. For days she had lain in her bed without speaking, her feverish eyes seeking something others did not see, perhaps Vienna, perhaps Wohan, perhaps another country where, framed in silvery olive trees, white temples gleam in the southern sun and a violet sea sends out tiny foaming waves to caress the shore. She was far away; so far that no voice could reach her. Perhaps a voice calling her by her old pet name might have penetrated the grey fog enveloping her; but the "Antonia" her deeply-distressed husband said again and again, sounded as strange to her as it had done the first time she had heard it. She did not know she was being called. The name meant nothing to her. She closed her eyes, feeling that she was free at last, that she was dying.

"I always expected it," Franz said when the sad news reached them. "Her lungs were delicate. Years ago they gave a hollow sound when I percussed them."

Joseph shook his head; of course no one dies of love—that is a poet's tale—but one can die of hopelessness, of a joyless life, of loneliness, paralysing all one's strength, of

having to live in an alien country whose chill makes one's blood freeze. He reproached himself. He had known how unhappy Toinette was, he ought to have done something. But what could he have done? The Prussian Count had not been unkind to his wife; he had only been a stranger with whom she had been forced to live. He went to Berlin for the funeral. When he returned he did not come alone, Lully came with him. She had implored him to take her away.

"I can't live here without mother," she sobbed. "I simply can't. My brothers and sisters will forget her very soon. And father has got the boys. He does not want me. Uncle Joseph, dear uncle Joseph. . . ."

Antoinette's voice and Marie Christine's eyes. . . . For Joseph both his sisters lived on in the young girl, the sister of whom death had robbed him and the sister whom life had taken. His brother-in-law agreed. Louise could stay with her Austrian relations for a few months, till she had got over her mother's death. That had been a year ago. Every time her father wrote, recalling her home, the quiet little thing who crept about the house in her black dress like a small ghost, lost all self-control, crying desperately, begging so hard to be allowed to stay on, that Victoire and Joseph were touched and persuaded their brother-in-law to leave Lully with them a little longer.

"It's uncanny," Stanislas, who came for a flying visit in summer, said. "Matzi's eyes in the face of that silent, humble little thing. Looking out of the face of a girl who thinks only of doing her duty and of not being in the way."

She certainly was in no one's way. Whenever a dull task had to be accomplished, whenever there was shopping to do for Victoire or Laetitia; or some one had to stay at home to keep the twins company, Lully did it, with a smile, without ever complaining. Even Victoire could not resist her gentle kindness, which reminded her of Antoinette. Only one member of the family longed for Lully's departure—Laetitia. But only Victoire guessed the reason.

To-day both girls had spent the day with a friend. Joseph was to bring them home. They ought to be back by

now, Victoire thought impatiently. Joseph knows how I hate being alone. I'm getting old, she thought, with a wry smile. To-day I overheard my maid calling me "the old Countess." Of course, now that Letty's nearly grown up, she's the "young Countess." Joseph and I are the eldest of the family; I have taken grandmaman Inez's place up to a certain point. . . . How strange the first winter was without her! I always expected to hear her soft steps or to be called to her room. . . . I never knew a dead woman who was so alive. She is living on, here and at Wohan. Without knowing it, instinctively we are still living according to her wishes. Even Ferdinand and Letty. Of course I'll never be able to really take her place. I'll . . ."

The door was opened. Joseph came in with the two girls. Laetitia seemed greatly excited, her cheeks were burning and her eyes shone. "Maman," she cried. "Poland has risen against the Russians. They have driven Constantine out of the country. Poland is free."

Joseph nodded slowly. "Yes, the news came to-night. Somehow it was all over the town already." He looked worried: "How the mere word 'revolution' kindles men's minds. I seemed to see the flames burning in Poland on all the faces that passed me. It was the same in June, when the revolution broke out in France; and in August, when Belgium rose."

Victoire had turned pale. In the peaceful, beautifully furnished room, voices, dead and forgotten for years, seemed to be whispering. Frightened voices, telling of ghastly happenings, of overcrowded prisons, of murderers entering and slaughtering helpless prisoners, of the guillotine, of heads carried on pikes through the streets. Even after they had reached safety in other countries, the voices had only dared to speak in whispers of all these things, as if an enemy was standing behind every back, trying to catch the spoken words; as if walls, bushes and trees might turn traitors. When had all this happened? Dear God, not a hundred, not even fifty years ago, and already the flames were bursting forth again in all parts of the world—in France, Belgium, Poland, Italy . . .

She hardly heard Laetitia's eager young voice. "Nepomuk is right. Liberty and justice must be victorious."

Victoire suddenly thought of the twins who had played in this room only an hour ago. What was awaiting them in the years to come? Laetitia's voice recalled her from fearful dreams. "You really must not believe everything that young fool Nepomuk tells you," she said harshly. She hated Bozena's brother, who lived in the palace and helped the twins with their lessons. It annoyed her that Joseph treated the "clod-hopper" like a younger brother; that Franz professed to admire his medical genius; that Nepomuk dared to have an opinion of his own, and was not ready to bow down to his benefactors. She knew she was unjust; knew she was going against grandmaman Inez's last wishes; but she could not help herself.

Laetitia fell silent, looking sulky and hurt. Why did she always have to rub maman the wrong way? Lully's gentle voice said, "Aunt Marie Christine will be happy."

Marie Christine was a pale, half-forgotten figure for all of them except Lully, who had never seen her. But the little girl had been told again and again about Marie Christine, mother's beautiful sister, who lived in Poland, and whom mother longed to see again. Lully had never been tired of hearing about the mystery woman who had been called the snow-queen and who never wrote to anyone.

"Yes," Joseph said shortly. Lully's words had reminded him of his sister. He had heard about her from strangers. Princess Kramsin was playing a leading part in Polish society. No one in Warsaw hated the Russians more than she did. No one knew so well how to gain new friends for Poland's emancipation. She often went to Paris, ostensibly to "buy clothes," but the initiated knew that Marie Christine did not spend her time at dressmakers but closeted with cabinet ministers and other influential men. Yes, Marie Christine would be happy. For how long? Would Poland be able to defend her newly-recovered liberty? Which Power would dare to aid her, to resist Russia, Russia and England who would most probably remain neutral? Politics have no morals, Joseph thought sadly.

The girls went to dress for dinner. Joseph looked at Victoire. "How pale you are" he said anxiously. "Aren't you well?"

"I'm frightened—frightened to death. Tell me that nothing dreadful is going to happen here; that nothing can happen."

He sighed. "Who sows the wind, reaps the whirlwind. They won't believe it here. He tried to jest. It hurt him to see her frightened. "Since when have you learnt to be afraid? You used to be a regular Amazon."

She threw him a bewildered glance. "Was I really? Perhaps before the boys were born. What is to become of them if . . ." The old imperious Victoire awoke to life. "We women of the whole world must always tremble for our children. That we owe to you—the men. We want peace and safety for our children. When are we going to have them?"

"When other mothers must no longer watch their children starve."

She began to cry. "Perhaps you are right; perhaps I'm too hard, too selfish, Joseph. I'll try not to be." She smiled shamefacedly. "How often have I promised it, *mon pauvre* Joseph? Tell me, how often? But I'll really try. The boys . . . grandmaman Inez . . ." She swallowed hard, unable to speak. Joseph took her in his arms. Both were silent, thinking of the old woman who, as long as they lived and remembered her, would not die.

In winter Laetitia and Lully came out. Victoire had wanted to give the traditional big ball, but Laetitia had begged so hard for a reception with "really famous men" that her mother gave in. The two girls, dressed alike in pink silk, their hair done in the latest fashion, were standing in Victoire's bedroom. She gazed searchingly at her daughter, trying in vain to find a likeness to her own vanished youth. The black eyes reminded her of grandmaman Inez; the rather thin, very red lips of her French grandmother; the shy smile Victoire had often seen as a bride on Carl Herdegen's kind face. A real Herdegen, Victoire thought,

slightly annoyed. The only thing she has inherited from me is the figure. Lully, too, is a real Herdègen. Luckily there's nothing to remind one of her Prussian father; she might be Marie Christine's daughter—at least as far as looks go. "Hold yourself straight, Letty," she said impatiently; "and for goodness' sake don't get too eager and enthusiastic to-night." She smiled at Lully. "No need to tell *you* how to behave." She sent the girls away and turned to her mirror. I'm still a handsome woman, she told herself. But there's something lacking in my face. Something Bozena has got, and Joseph too—kindness, understanding. Leaning her head on her hand, she stared at her image. I only looked bored, she concluded. But then everything is dull. How different life looked to me when I married! How I could hate and love as a girl and as a young woman. Now I don't really care about anything, except the boys, of course. Our whole world has changed. It has become terribly bourgeois. There's nothing left of the old splendour, the old light-hearted lavishness. Everything seems to have grown drab.

Walking through the drawing-rooms, she gazed at the new lighting. It certainly saved a lot of trouble. One just turned a tap, put a match to the chandelier, and everything was all right. But if it saved trouble, it gave an ugly light which did not adorn as the wax candles had done. It makes everything look cheap, Victoire thought crossly. The streets have ceased looking romantic at night since we gave up having servants with torches running in front of our carriages. The world is getting greyer and uglier. The women are less lovely and the men less courteous. She entered the red room, where she received her guests. How funny, she mused. There I am, sitting in grandmaman Inez's armchair, and the girls curtsy to me as I used to curtsy to the old ladies. I've been put on the shelf. She hurriedly forced a smile, the guests were beginning to arrive. The first was an old friend from the days of her Napoleon craze—Judith Crenneville, accompanied by her two sons, taciturn Louis and vivacious Franz. It amused Victoire to observe that Franz Crenneville behaved as charmingly to her as to

the young girls. Of course, his father, the general, is a martinet, she thought; and good old Judith keeps up a sort of court ceremonial at home.

Laetitia had wanted to invite Johann Strauss, but the great man had been engaged. She had to rest content with his rival, the composer and musician Joseph Lanner who had become famous during the last few years. At first she had been disappointed; but when her father told her that two famous poets were coming, Eduard Bauernfeld and the still more famous Franz Grillparzer, and yet another, a mystery-man all Vienna gossiped about, she had felt happy again. She greeted her mother's friend who had just been making spiteful and rather pointed remarks about the "girls of this generation," and added eagerly, "Mr. Lanner has arrived with his violin. I've already talked to him, and he has promised to do our portraits in music."

"How can he do portraits on the violin?" Franz Crenneville asked.

"You'll see. Mr. Bauernfeld told father about it the other day. He's in the music-room with"—her voice grew reverent—"Mr. Grillparzer."

"Rather a mixed company," Judith Crenneville said, with a mocking smile.

Victoire tried to vindicate herself. "Letty wanted a reception with lots and lots of famous people."

Judith Crenneville smiled wryly. "Times have changed."

"Who," Victoire asked, lifting her lorgnette to her short-sighted eyes, "is the tall, severe-looking man who is talking to your father, Laetitia?"

Laetitia clapped her hands joyfully. "So he did come after all!"

Judith Crenneville frowned. Young girls really ought not to show so much eagerness.

"Count Auersperg," Laetitia said, smiling.

"Why does his coming please you so much?" Judith Crenneville asked. "He's not in the least amusing. I wonder at his coming here, he's a regular recluse. His relations are worried to death about him. He won't marry, and one always meets him with impossible people."

Laetitia blushed and remained silent. She knew what very few people in Vienna knew, that Count Auersperg was the mystery man whose revolutionary poems, published under the pen name of Anastasius Grün, delighted Viennese youth and drove the police half crazy. She had been told the secret by Eduard Bauernfeld and had been longing to meet the man who had, up to now, so successfully evaded the secret police.

Later in the evening she tried hard not to admit to herself that the mystery man disappointed her. Had he not been a revolutionary poet she would have called him intolerably dull. He did not dance; he hid in a corner; he did not even look like a poet, but rather like an honest farmer who has come to town for the first time. But then father admired him, so he must be all right.

Joseph came up to his daughter. "Happy, Letty?"

"Ye-es. Only the famous people are exactly like all the others. I thought they would say clever things, but Mr. Grillparzer only told me how well pink suits me; and Mr. Bauernfeld teased me as he always does, and Anton Auersperg only said 'Good evening!'"

Joseph smiled. "You must not expect too much, little Letty."

"If I can't expect poets and champions of liberty to be great men, I'd rather die," she said passionately. "Good and clever people simply must be perfect."

Watching her with a troubled face as she ran away to greet a friend, Joseph sighed. On this day of all days Letty ought not to have felt disappointed. She ought to laugh. to be merry, to dance. He often felt anxious about his favourite child. Would little Letty have to know frustrated hopes and bitter disappointments, such as had fallen to his lot? He thought of his life in the small town. What had he accomplished? Perhaps he had helped a few lame dogs; perhaps he had prevented some wrongs. But what did that signify in a world ruled by injustice and tyranny? The individual could do so little. But was it better when individuals banded together like the young people did here? Somehow, men fused into masses lost their best qualities. Bru-

tality, greed for power, and cruelty, kept in check in the individual's case by education, religion, tradition, became unleashed in the masses and demanded power. Good instincts never united—only bad ones. And nearly always when a man rose above the masses and acquired power, he was lost, becoming a traitor to the cause he had fought for, as well as a traitor to his own better self.

The sound of a violin roused Joseph from his brown study. He walked towards the music-room and saw Joseph Lanner standing on a small platform, surrounded by those who wanted to be portrayed by him.

The composer bowed to Victoire. "First of all our gracious hostess."

He took up his bow. A delicate little fanfare, a gallant, joyful call of youth and spring, sounded through the room, turning to a Mozart minuet and ending with a few melancholy bars of a Chopin nocturne. Joseph gave a start. Was it possible the composer could see behind a smiling mask and find the soul as soon as his bow touched the strings? He had really portrayed Victoire, young, passionate, adventure-loving Victoire, gay, society-loving Victoire, and Victoire as she was to-day, hiding disillusionment and weariness behind a smile.

The composer had promised twelve portraits. He had just finished the last and was about to put away his violin when the twins, suddenly appearing in the music-room, ran up to the platform. They ought to have been in bed, but the music must have awakened them. They were rather fantastically dressed, wearing their best suits over their nightgowns, and slippers on their bare feet. "We want our portraits done," they begged, and Carl added, "I also compose music. If you'd like to hear it, Mr. Lanner, I'll play you a piece of mine on the piano." Joseph Lanner smiled at the excited boy, then he looked at Alois, who said shyly, "I can neither compose nor play, but if you like I'll write a poem for you."

Nodding to Carl, the musician took up his violin once more. Youth sang and danced in a madcap frolic on the strings, followed by dark, chaotic, mournful sounds. The

end was a solemn *largo*, a thing of beauty and peace. "That's you," Lanner said to Carl, and Victoire threw him a grateful look.

"And I?" Alois asked wistfully. "Aren't you going to do my portrait? Don't you want me to write a poem for you?"

Joseph Lanner gazed at the boy. His merry face grew grave. He lifted his bow. Not once during the whole evening had the violin sung so tenderly, so sweetly, so blissfully. Then the tune changed, it grew feverish, wild. Lully, standing beside Laetitia, felt a shiver run along her spine. "Do you know what it makes me think of?" she asked her cousin. "Of . . ." She fell silent with a start. One of the violin strings had broken with a shrill cry.

After this Joseph Lanner, as if desiring to banish the memory of the shrilling, breaking string, played his gayest waltzes. The young people danced, and even the older ones could not resist the enticement of the rhythm. Victoire, returning to her seat after a dance, looked up at Joseph. "Something in this country is immortal," she said in a whisper. "Lovely, kindly joy. Whatever happens, new magicians come to life to awaken it from sleep with music; pictures; poems."

Joseph nodded absent-mindedly. He did not want to spoil her pleasure; he had not heard the gay waltzes but only the noise of the breaking string—harshly, mercilessly putting a premature end to the portrait of his son Alois.

CHAPTER XVII

THEY arrived at Wohan on a crystal-clear September morning, walking wearily, dragging heavy feet, their eyes full of sadness and fear. Both were tall, young, slender and dark-haired. Walking side by side along the same dolorous path, crushed by the same misery, no one could

have guessed which of them was the peasant and which the nobleman.

Victoire, having risen early after one of her sleepless nights, saw them at the gate. The elder of the two bowed and said slowly, in French, "Madame, Princess Kramsin sent us here," adding in a hopeless tone, "Warsaw has been taken by the Russians."

Victoire understood. Ever since February Poland had been fighting against stronger Russian forces. One never knew what really happened. Both armies in turn reported decisive victories. When cholera broke out in the Russian army, and the Commander-in-Chief as well as Constantine died, it looked as if nature herself had taken sides with the Poles. But a second, even more dangerous epidemic was raging in Poland; mutual distrust. In August a revolt broke out in Warsaw; the mob murdered its own countrymen, believing them traitors. Perhaps also, as others said, because a part of the masses had been bought over by the Russians. Whilst Poles were killing Poles, the Russian forces crossed the Vistula. During these months of stress and indecision letters from Marie Christine kept coming, asking for money, bandages, medicine, food. When Joseph wrote imploring her to come home, she only answered, "I'm not a traitor."

Then the letters stopped. News from Poland became more and more contradictory and confused. When the Russian troops were permitted to march through Prussia, people felt that Poland was lost. They felt it; they talked about it, sometimes. Not with great interest. Once again there was war in Europe, but far away, not touching one's own country, one's own life. The papers wrote about the dead and the prisoners; but who really grasped the fact that the dead and the prisoners (God have mercy on those who fall into Russian hands!) were human beings? They were men at war; they were, according to the paper's opinions, rebels or heroes—but never what they really were: torn flesh, crushed limbs, prisoners tortured by brutal enemies.

Seeing the two Poles standing at the gate, dust-stained, weary and sorrowful, Victoire suddenly got an inkling of reality. There were hundreds and thousands like these two.

The young peasant was wounded; through a hastily-improvised bandage blood was oozing. Victoire saw the drops turning to a ghastly sea of blood in which a nation's liberty was drowned. The second Pole, he had introduced himself as "Casimir Derbrunsky," went on talking in the bleak, toneless voice of a sleep-walker who does not know that he is awake. "Princess Kramsin . . . seeing that all was lost, we decided to flee . . . But where were we to go? Who would take us in? Which country would dare defy Tsar Nicolas? . . . Princess Kramsin told us to come here. . . ."

"And the Princess?" Victoire said.

"The Princess," the young Pole spoke in a reverential tone, as if speaking of a saint, "we implored her to come with us. . . . She only laughed. Never did I see her as gallant, as gay and as lovely as during the two terrible days on which Warsaw was shelled. The Princess . . ." He turned deadly pale, reeled, and would have fallen had not the young peasant caught him with his unhurt arm. As soon as he could walk again, Victoire took them to the house.

In the evening Derbrunsky had recovered and was sitting on the terrace with Victoire and Joseph. The young peasant, lying in bed with a high temperature, was being nursed by Laetitia and Lully.

It was a lovely evening. The sky, high and wonderfully clear, was a blue dome over the Morava. Shooting stars lit up the darkness. The country was resting after the harvest. The great plain seemed to breathe gently in its sleep.

"Dear God," the young Pole said, looking down on the dark plain, "that such things still exist, peace and quiet. We had forgotten it. Our real life came to an end in the October night when Wysocky and Zalewsky called on us to fight. What month is it?"

"September," Joseph said.

"September? What became of spring and summer this year? I don't know. We counted time by battles. Our harvest consisted of the dead. It was a fine crop," he added grimly.

The girls came. "He's gone to sleep," Lully said softly,

"It was awful," Laetitia said, "that we could not talk to him."

Derbrunsky pulled up chairs for the girls. His movements were supple and graceful; it was easier to imagine him in a ballroom than on a battlefield. "Thank you, Mesdemoiselles," he said. "Poor Ladislas deserves all you can do for him. He's a hero. He did not want to flee. I had to force him to come with me. Even if he does not understand your words, he'll understand your kindness." He looked up with a wistful smile. "Walking along the endless roads I thought of many things. Once we were resting in a forest; I remembered the tale of the wandering Jew my old nurse used to tell me, and it seemed to me that the wandering Jew takes on many shapes and lives in many countries whose language and customs are alien to him. A dear friend of mine fought with Alexander Ypsilantis. He had to flee, to cross the Atlantic. He is living in America, a wandering Jew of liberty. To-day the wandering Jew speaks Polish and has become flotsam and jetsam on many a coast."

"The Greeks are free," Laetitia said, trying to find something to which to cling.

"Because the Great Powers thought it wise to weaken Turkey. Our case is different. Nobody will help us." He lifted his head defiantly. "All the better. When we are free again—and we shall be—we shall not owe a thing to anyone." Again he gazed at the sleeping plain. "One day," he said, and it sounded like a prayer, "this star-lit sky will shine over a liberated Poland. We who have fought and conquered shall never forget that the people fought with us. We shall build up a free and just state. Poland will show Europe how to rule. As to our enemies. . . ." He stopped abruptly, looking round with a nervous shiver. From the top of the old pine-tree beneath the terrace sounded the hoarse cry of a screech-owl. Victoire involuntarily put her hands to her ears. It sounded like the laugh of an evil spirit.

Laetitia spent the first sleepless night of her young life. The words the Polish refugee had spoken, the delirious moaning of the young peasant, his helpless look when he

asked for something and they did not understand, had produced a great impression upon her. She had been enthusiastic about liberty and justice because her adored father had taught her in his gentle, quiet way that they were the best things in life and very dear to God. But there had always been so many other things in her life—books. How wonderful it was when father brought home new books—poetry books one had to hide to prevent Alois taking them away and forgetting to give them back, the fascinating novels by Sir Walter Scott . . . And music—Beethoven and Schubert and the waltzes by Johann Strauss and Joseph Lanner. What fun it was to dance to them half the night. . . . And summer at Wohan, which she loved as all Herdegen children had loved it—Corpus Christi day on the estate, the blessing of the fields, devout mornings in Advent, kneeling in St. Stephen's Cathedral, lit up by tiny wax candles, praying for the coming of the Lord. And, greatest of all joys, the thrill when a letter came from Cambridge, the kind of long, chatty letter only Ferdinand wrote; the unspeakable bliss when that dearest cousin and friend passed his holidays at Wohan . . . This year she had been less happy than usual and the wilderness had often seen her rage and her tears, because Ferdinand seemed to care more for Lully than for her . . .

Another lovely thing was the long, slow walks with father. He treated her like a woman—of course she was one—but the others always forgot that she was grown up. Father talked to her as he did to no one else. Nepomuk, too, was part of her life, Aunt Bozena's youngest brother, who spoke such a lot about tyrants who must be overthrown and claimed a most interesting if dangerous creed: that it was not necessary to believe all the catechism taught. And grandfather Sametil, so quiet, so taciturn and so kind; and Monsieur de Venelles who had known the poor Queen and could sing old French songs, and the remembrance of dear Monsieur Venarius who had died last year and had left her a very wise, if rather too serious book, the *Pensées de Pascal*.

What an awful lot of things there were in her life! There was Uncle Stanislas, handsome and beautifully dressed,

who always knew what the governments of all countries were going to do; and lovely Aunt Bozi, so kind and so reserved . . . And maman . . . Perhaps maman was the greatest problem in one's life. Kind and capricious, gentle and impatient, sometimes as gay as one was oneself, sometimes so terribly depressed that she seemed quite old . . . and dear Aunt Toinette who had died of a broken heart . . .

And now—the Polish refugees. Refugee, a strange word full of fear and pain. Refugees, fleeing from their country, marching along an endless road, their weary feet raising thick grey dust, carrying with them hopelessness and fear. Oh, dear God, what an endless procession, men and women, coming from all sides. Who is driving them away from their homes? Who is forcing them into exile? Is it that cruel thing father calls tyranny? Why does no one help the people wearily dragging their feet on the road leading to alien countries? Oh, endless dusty road along which they walk, starving, half dead with thirst. Can't we dig wells from which they can drink? Can't we bandage their wounds and bid them welcome? Ought not all men and women, the young and the old, to become one mighty army fighting tyranny?

Lully was fast asleep in the bed opposite. She did not see the endless, dusty road. Happy Lully. Laetitia shivered. Something heavy seemed to lie on her heart. She could hardly breathe. How long a sleepless night can be! Her eyes glanced at the wall where grandmaman Inez's portrait hung. Although it was too dark to see anything, she knew the black eyes were looking at her and the thin-lipped mouth was asking rather impatiently, "What are you worrying about, Laetitia? Life is so simple. Keep God's commandments and everything will come right. Love God best and your neighbour as yourself. Everything else, my little Laetitia, is an extravagant fantasy, only fit for dreamers and fools."

Laetitia, suddenly growing calm, folded her hands. "Dear God, help all refugees and punish all wicked men. But, please, do it soon."

Smiling, her eyes still wet, she fell asleep, lulled by the

gentle autumn rain which had driven the stars away and was rapping at the window with cold fingers.

Two weeks later Stanislas arrived at Wohan, having spent a few hectic days in Vienna. He too had learnt, as Joseph had done years ago, how it felt to go from one ministry to the other, begging for audiences, trying to persuade the high and highest in the land, watching them listening amiably and smiling regretfully as soon as one stopped talking. Stanislas felt as if they took the smile from a coat-hanger and put it on before saying, "Dear Count Herdegen . . ." or, "My dear young friend, I'm so sorry, nothing would please me more . . . But we cannot intervene . . . It's most regrettable, really most regrettable: such a lovely, clever young woman . . . I can remember the Princess as a young girl, during the Congress . . ."

Day by day Stanislas's handsome face grew harder and grimmer. Even Joseph's tame Jacobins could not have talked about the Austrian tyrants with greater hate than did the first Secretary of His Imperial Majesty at the Court of St. James. In the evening the brothers sat in the deserted palace, in the small green drawing-room which had once been one of Ludmilla's whims. Looking into the tarnished mirror, Joseph noticed that his hair was beginning to turn grey. Notwithstanding many sleepless nights, worry and sorrow, Stanislas looked much younger.

"Siberia," Stanislas said, his voice trembling with hate. "Imagine it, Joseph. Our Matzi in Siberia. A delicate, spoiled woman . . ." He put his hand to his forehead. "Up to now I always agreed with Metternich. His policy seemed the only possible one. Russia is a gigantic country and the Tsar is the most powerful ruler on earth. We must remain on good terms with him. Policy! We always knew whose friendship we were seeking. We always knew—that kind of thing cannot remain hidden—how our Imperial friend and patron rules his country. We knew what happened to those luckless conspirators the Dekabrist. But we, at least I, only begin to grasp things when they concern us."

"It's a quality you share with many others, Stani."

Stanislas hardly heard Joseph's words. "Siberia," he repeated. "Our little Matzi. And we can't do a thing for her." He gazed at his brother. "You've aged in the last few years, Joseph. To-day I know why. You dashed yourself against the walls of egotism and ignorance. I always thought you a bit mad; now I see that you are only decent. Maybe it's the same." He sat down. "I've got a little Irish friend in London who is haunted by the idea of becoming good; she says it must be so frightfully uncomfortable."

Joseph laughed, glad that Stanislas was forgetting his sorrow at least for a while. "I thought you had become a model husband, Stani?"

Stanislas sighed. "Bozena is an angel, a beautiful angel. But she loves the boy best. She adores him. We . . . somehow we never quite manage to get close, you know what I mean. Something in her still hates me . . . The funny thing is that the same something dislikes little Therèse, although the child has not inherited a single Herdegen trait. Between you and me, Joseph, my daughter is awful; she's so vulgar."

"That child?"

"Yes. Grandmaman Inez might perhaps have made a lady of her. The worst is the brat is neither an Austrian nor a Moravian like Father Sametil, who is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met. Do you know, my daughter reminds me of the Bredar boys?" He laughed, then, growing serious, "Can you imagine that I still miss grandmaman Inez? What a fine woman she was. She never compromised; never gave in. Maybe that was Matzi's misfortune."

Again his thoughts had returned to Marie Christine. He talked about her endlessly—Marie Christine as a child; as a young girl; Marie Christine, banished to Siberia. Franz, returning home tired out, said impatiently, "What's the good of talking? The Tsar has banished many men and women, and many have been executed, yet life goes on." He lit his pipe. "One gets terribly matter-of-fact in my profession. Perhaps sooner or later medicine will discover that everything depends on some organ or other, perhaps

the glands or something else. Then we'll know why one man is a criminal and another a saint. Maybe the milt influences character, or the bile . . ."

Stanislas looked shocked. "You're simply disgusting. People say you're an excellent physician, but as a human being you have become intolerable."

"Because I'm not like you, Stani, the last of the cavaliers; or like Joseph, a Don Quixote without a sword? I can't help believing that every discovery we physicians make is much more important than all your politics."

"Have you really got a brass plate with 'Count Franz Herdegen, Doctor,' on it?" Stanislas asked.

"Yes, only without the Count, because the poor people would not dare to consult me, expecting my fee to be too high."

The brothers laughed. Even Joseph thought it funny for a Herdegen to earn money as a physician.

The next day Joseph went back to Krems and Stanislas made a last effort to save Marie Christine. Having accomplished nothing, he took his seat in the post-chaise that went to Bohemia. He did not know why he wanted to go to Wohan—perhaps Marie Christine's memory called him; perhaps he wanted to talk to the young Pole who had known her. Casimir Derbrunsky was ready to talk for hours of Princess Kramsin's gallantry and the utter barbarism of the Russians. The girls often came and listened; Laetitia with glowing cheeks and shining eyes, Lully silent and shy.

Stanislas observed his nieces and the twins he had not seen for years. So these were the Herdegens who would come after him and Joseph. Carl reminded him of his own childhood—a capricious, spoilt, charming boy. Alois was Joseph's son, without his father's patience and matter-of-factness. Stanislas remembered with a smile the verses he had written and hidden as a boy. Alois did not hide his, he gave them to those he loved. The girls were less interesting: Laetitia was too gushing—but then that was the fashion nowadays—and Lully too silent.

He got on badly with Victoire. She was either cross and nervous or mocking and cynical. Stanislas, accustomed to

Bozena's gentle serenity, thought his sister-in-law odious. When she talked of Marie Christine, she shrugged. "After all, she chose her lot. Besides she will enjoy being a lovely martyr." She laughed at his indignation. "Policy," she said. "What does the individual matter? Nothing. That's as it ought to be. We are a powerful country; but even a powerful country stands in need of still more powerful friends."

"We?" Stanislas said angrily. "Since when do you say 'we,' Victoire? I can remember a time when you could not bear to live with an Autrichien."

She stared at him, her eyes wide with amazement. "How funny. I'd quite forgotten it. Perhaps because my boy," she corrected herself quickly, "my boys are Autrichiens." She laughed. "Why worry about it? Is it worth while to worry about anything? We are not asked whether we want to be born, nor whether we want to die. I only reproach fate with a single thing: that everything is so frightfully dull."

"Maman," Letty cried, "how can one find life dull when it's so awfully exciting?"

Victoire threw her a look of dislike. Whenever Letty reminded her of her own youth, she came close to hating the girl. "Don't be impertinent, Letty," she said harshly.

The girl flushed. How could maman treat her like that in front of Uncle Stanislas? After all, she wasn't a child any longer. She felt she hated her mother, and it hurt her to hate. She hastily turned away to hide the tears in her eyes. A grey veil fell on her bright world. Perhaps maman was right after all; perhaps nothing mattered; nothing was worth living for . . . She slowly left the room. Stanislas gazed after her. "Just like Joseph," he said in a tone of cold dislike. "Aren't you satisfied with making him unhappy? Can't you spare the children?"

Victoire smiled mockingly. "What does it matter?"

Then suddenly her face became transfigured, young, tender, and happy. Soft sounds came from the music-room, Carl was playing a Mozart sonata.

CHAPTER XVIII

How terribly quiet it was. Only when the March wind threw itself against the window a sound of tinkling glass was audible. The street in front of the house was pitch dark. The good town of Krems economized on lighting. To-day was full-moon, so the lamps could have a rest. That dark clouds hid the moon was irrelevant; the calendar said: "full-moon," and the lamplighters had to act accordingly.

Victoire, sitting by the fire, asked herself wearily how many years had passed since Joseph had become the head of the family. Ever since the news of the Emperor's death had come this morning from Vienna, she kept thinking of it and of grandmaman Inez who somehow seemed connected with it. Victoire remembered the Congress, the first years of her married life. Looking into the brightly-burning flames, she tried to recapture the past, the light-hearted world which had, in the midst of dancing and feasting, tried to create a new Europe. She tried to see herself as she had been—young, slender, obstinate, eager—and was reminded of Laetitia whom she had angrily sent to bed an hour ago. The girl had a knack of annoying her. Poor Letty, Victoire thought with a rueful smile, I really ought to be kinder. I know so well why she is being so odious just now, why she has taken to politics, why she plays the blue-stocking. Poor little girl. Victoire's thoughts returned to the past. What had changed the happy world of her youth? She did not know; she only felt with a certain misgiving, a certain fear, that something new had come to the front; something relentless, that could not be stopped. Perhaps it was embodied by the young men who were Joseph's friends. The men one could no longer ignore with an amused smile at their tirades and their bad manners. Victoire sensed the underground struggle between two powers, the old represented by the Emperor and his ministers and the new, awaking to life in offices, the studies of poets, the workshops, the market-place. Victoire felt vaguely that this second power was the future. Perhaps it had already become the present,

too. But did a present exist? Was not that the brand impressed upon this generation—the lack of the present, that peaceful rest between past and future?

Glancing round the room, her gaze fell upon grandmaman Inez's old armchair. Grandmaman Inez had never known such thoughts. For her the day, the hour, bringing with it a duty to be done, had been the only important thing. One of her grandchildren, the only one who was like her, had no reason for inheriting her qualities. Thinking of Franz, Victoire smiled. A pedant, but a happy one, knowing nothing but his own world of medicine and science, a matter-of-fact dreamer, whose longing never went beyond the realm of human diseases. The strange boy had become a strange man. Once Victoire had asked him if he was going to marry. He had shook his head. "I don't want to give my children a name they have no right to bear." Perhaps he would have conquered these scruples had Lully had eyes for anyone but her cousin. Victoire frowned. Lully was a darling, but it had been an evil day when they took the orphan into their house. Poor Letty.

A tiny glowing mound in the fireplace turned black and collapsed. Victoire started. Was it an omen? The Emperor's death would have unfortunate results for Joseph. He was as unpopular with his superiors as ever. The Emperor had always taken his part, for grandmaman Inez's sake; perhaps also because he felt the State could afford a few liberal, humane officials. Now the Emperor was dead, and Prince Metternich was still alive—Metternich who disliked Joseph and whom she had offended mortally. When the Prince of Reichstadt had died, she had ordered her Court mourning in Paris. Of course it became known, and was talked about in Society. At a reception Prince Metternich had asked her mockingly, "Do you get all your clothes in Paris, Countess?" She had, once again, lost her temper, and replied, "Only the mourning clothes, Your Grace. You see, I do not believe in buying mourning for a murdered man from his murderer." Of course, Joseph would be the one to suffer for her imprudent words. He would probably lose the small office he had in Krems; they would have to retire to

Wohan and play at lords of the manor. What a blessing the twins were so young; Metternich would not be able to harm them. Victoire missed the twins, who were living with Franz in the Herdegen palace and going to the Benedictine grammar school. To-morrow Joseph, returning from Vienna, would bring her news of them. It was always the same; the monks complained of Carl who, an unforgivable sin in pious eyes, already had a fondness for pretty girls and whose temper could only be called fiendish. The one thing capable of taming him was music. Alois was growing up a second, more impulsive Joseph. He brought home excellent reports and fat black note-books full of poems, written during the term, treating in rather curious rhymes of freedom and human dignity, of the fact that all men were brothers and equal in God's sight. Letty was the only one to whom he gave the poems to read. Alois was as his grandfather Carl had been, touchingly, childishly pious. Victoire knew he was the only one of her children to pray in the old chapel at Wohan; Carl had no time for prayers, and in Letty's life there were so many gods that she never thought of God.

The last flame went out, the last glowing mound collapsed. Why, Victoire asked herself with the old feeling of depression that hardly ever left her nowadays, do the flames burn if they have to become ashes? Why do we live if the end is death and being forgotten? She put the question to the dark night peering in between the window curtains and got no answer; she put it to grandmaman Inez's portrait on the mantelpiece, which answered severely, "For God and the family's sake," and to the little miniature of Joseph standing on her writing table from which she received the reply, "For the good of the next generation, perhaps." This "perhaps" had to satisfy her.

In the streets of Vienna people were standing together in groups, talking about the great event—the death of the Emperor. Elderly men regretted it, saying with the dry resignation of people who have seen and experienced many things, "There's hardly ever a change for the better. After all, the old Emperor was a good man." The young men

sang the praises of the new Emperor. "You'll see, things will get better. Ferdinand is a younger man. The old people have had their innings, Metternich and his own; now it's our turn." They told pathetic stories of the new Emperor, illustrating how much he loved the people, how ready he was to defend the rights of the commoner against the despotism and arrogance of the aristocracy. He was going to right all the wrongs; he would give them a constitution; he . . . he . . .

Inns and coffee-houses were crowded. Pipe smoke built a wall between the tables. Whenever the door was opened the raw March air flowed in and tore the veil, revealing excited red faces, shining eyes and hopeful looks. Every one saw in his dreams the shining light of the Promised Land flaming over the Imperial Palace. "Ferdinand will make everything come right."

Not even the fact that a whole army of informers were abroad, and that many who gave too loud an expression to their joy were arrested, could damp the high spirits of the Viennese. Something had happened, that was the great thing. At all times the masses, imprisoned in the monotony of their drab lives, long for something to happen, frequently not noticing in their pleasure at the sensation that the something is happening to them.

Franz, who had spent the evening with his teacher, the famous surgeon Rokitansky, walked home hurriedly. Forcing his way through the crowd, hearing the loud, excited voices, he shook his head, feeling slightly disgusted. He hated extravagant feelings, thinking them morbid, the hardest sentence a physician could pass. He had not been Monsieur Venarius's pupil for nothing. The old Swiss had planted in the boy's mind an unshakable belief in pure reason. Franz was thinking. The tiniest discovery of my teacher is more important than all dead and living monarchs put together, but would these crowds who, five days ago, cried "*Vivat Francis*" and are now crying "*Vivat Ferdinand*," even look up if one told them of a discovery which cures a disease hitherto believed incurable?

At home he found the twins in the green drawing-room,

drinking tea in honour of the day. Alois ran to meet his uncle. "Father has come home," he said. "But he went out again at once. I wanted to go with him. I'd love to be in the streets to-night."

"Why?"

"I want to hear the people talk; to know what they say, now that better times are coming."

Carl laughed. "Isn't he an idiot? He's been boring me all the evening with his 'better times coming!' And half an hour ago, when we saw the police arresting a few rowdies, he wanted to rush out and deliver them."

Alois ignored his brother's words. "Now," he said joyfully, his violet eyes—Victoire's eyes—shining, "Father will at last be able to carry out all the reforms he has been fighting for for years."

"What makes you think so?"

"The new Emperor isn't an old man. He'll appoint younger men—people like Anton Auersperg and his friends. As soon as the censorship is abolished . . ."

"Words," Franz said crossly. "Empty words. Men have always said as soon as this or that is abolished . . . And then they go and invent something new which is still worse . . ." Suddenly remembering that he was supposed to look after the twins, he said severely, "Why aren't you in bed? It's late."

"I was much too excited," Alois said. "Besides, Carl has been playing the piano for hours."

"I've composed something." Carl's voice had grown as eager as that of his brother. "May I play it to you, uncle?"

The twins had taken possession of the green drawing-room. Behind glass panes the gilded backs of Alois's beloved books shone brightly; and Carl's grand piano, a present on his fifteenth birthday, stood close to the window. Lifting the piano lid, Carl said: "Do listen; it's the story of a life."

Listening to the boy's playing, Franz was reminded of a spring day at Wohan, everything was in bloom, everything glistened and sang. The sky was blue, there was nothing but joy on earth. Carl's idea of life, he thought.

Then he suddenly looked up with a start. The merry, happy tune changed, killed by a shrill, disharmonious measure. Hopeless sorrow sobbed and moaned. Slowly the tune changed again, becoming a song of unearthly bliss and peace. Franz stared at his nephew. "Where did you get the end from?"

The naughtiest, laziest pupil of the grammar school looked up with a bewildered smile. "I really can't tell you. I just got it."

Oh, shade of our teacher, Franz thought, what about your doctrine of pure reason? Neither reason nor medicine can explain how this boy, this young rascal, can have found the apotheosis of a perfect life and expressed it in music. He thought of the reception given for Letty's coming out and the musical portrait Joseph Lanner had done of Alois, and suddenly the man of science felt his hands grow cold as he remembered the shrill cry of the breaking string.

Wohan was a name of importance in all Herdegen lives, ever new and ever returning like the burden of a song. Many generations had sought rest and peace at Wohan. After a long, often too long, life old men and women had come here, walking slowly on the terrace on dreary autumn evenings, dreaming of a lost world and gazing at the familiar beauty of their old home. For centuries children had romped on the lawn. Children, dressed in the funny stiff clothes of long ago, had demurely played at shuttlecock; children, wearing the charming loose dresses of the Empire had run about wildly, playing blind man's buff, for at that time children were allowed to romp in the country. Growing up, these children had walked slowly on the gravel paths, dreaming their dreams, full of hope and longing for the big world. They had left Wohan, always returning—at least for a short time. All of them, statesmen, diplomats, officers and civil servants, daughters of the house who had married into foreign countries, recovered their old selves in the castle, the park, the well-known avenues and asked themselves with wistful surprise, "Was I really like that?" Grown old, they had come back for good, their dreams

dead, their hearts disillusioned and embittered, or gentle, full of kindly resignation, watching with a smile their grandchildren playing on the lawn. In all these lives the song of the Morava had sounded, the rustling of the big trees, the singing of the blackbirds, the trills of the nightingales, the roaring of the winter storms, sweeping over the endless plain. Here at Wohan everything fused, the life of the ancestors whose portraits hung on the walls, one's own life and the future of the children. There had never been a Herdegen who had not loved Wohan, whose real home it had not been, a refuge and sanctuary, whose gates shut out life's merciless cruelty.

Again a Herdegen sought refuge at Wohan—Joseph, who had been dismissed, with many courteous words, but still dismissed. He came alone. Victoire and the girls were to stay in Vienna till summer. The Morava, swollen by spring rains ran high with foaming waves; wind tore at the bushes, and the old trees bowed their heads, moaning under its onslaught. In the night the big willow before the keeper's lodge had been felled by the storm. Joseph, bending down to have a last look at the old friend of his childhood, saw that the tree had been absolutely rotten inside. Leaning on his stick he fell into a reverie. How many things which look strong on the outside, are rotten inside, in our country? Our rulers know why they dread storms, why their sole desire is quiet.

Walking towards the castle, he met Monsieur de Venelles. Joseph stared at him: why, he's become an old man! How strange! I always see him as I saw him when he came to our house at Vienna. Of course, that was long ago. Father is dead; grandmaman Inez is dead; and maman, and Toinette, who was so sorry for the refugee. And Marie Christine who wrote to me during the last days of Poland: "One doesn't run away, one fights," might just as well be dead. She has been thrust out of the world of the quick. Yes, he has grown an old man. How hard it must be to live in an alien country when one is old.

Yet Monsieur de Venelles looked quite contented. He was well-dressed and well-groomed, perhaps a little old-

fashioned, his grey hair worn in a pigtail. He had not expected Joseph, but he was much too discreet to question him. He only nodded when Joseph said, "I've come back for good, Monsieur de Venelles. I'm going to help you manage the estate, to be a squire and occupy myself with pigs and cows, the dairy, the fields and forestry instead of politics."

Monsieur de Venelles, who had seen so much in his long life, did not think Joseph's fate a tragic one. He said, with a muted tone of irony, that he hoped the sons would accomplish what the father had not been able to do. Anyhow he was getting old and Wohan needed a younger man. Joseph would discover soon that there was little time for regrets and bitter thoughts.

He did his best to help Joseph over the first weeks by making him stick to his work. They rode all over the estate, walked through the woods, talked to tenants and gamekeepers. In the chief gamekeeper's cottage Joseph met a young man he did not recognize at once—the husband of the gamekeeper's daughter. Only when the young man began to talk in broken Bohemian, Joseph knew who he was—the silent Polish refugee whom Marie Christine had sent with Casimir Derbrunsky to Wohan, years ago. The two Poles had remained at the castle for some months. Then Derbrunsky could not bear the quiet of the country any longer. He wanted to go to Paris; he had not given up hoping against hope. He dreamt of a new conspiracy, of aid to be found in other countries. Paris, so people said, felt great sympathy with the Poles; the French were glad to help the refugees. Maybe, after all, one never knew. . . . Then perhaps one would be able to go home. Not to have to live in a strange country any longer, amongst men whose ways were as queer as their language.

Stanislas had given them money and letters of introduction. At Christmas and New Year letters came from Derbrunsky—charming letters full of good wishes for the family and of gratitude for the hospitality the two men had enjoyed, ending always with the same sentence, "Ladislas kisses the ladies' hands."

Then the letters stopped coming and the two Poles were not heard of any more. And now one of them stood before Joseph, wearing the green livery of the gamekeeper's assistant, and told him that he had married four weeks ago and was living with his parents-in-law. Monsieur de Venelles had given him the post. Joseph sat down on a stone, nursing his lame leg. "Where is your friend, Monsieur Derbrunsky?"

The merry face grew troubled. "Still in Paris. He can't make up his mind to go away. He's terribly poor; he's got to give dancing lessons."

Slowly, searching for the right words, Ladislav told Joseph about their life in Paris. At first they had been welcomed with open arms, the heroic Poles who had fought for their country's emancipation and had been conquered by the barbarous Russians. All vied with one another in helping the refugees and being kind to them. But there were so many of them and the Parisians had their own worries. What at first they had given lavishly, gladly, became a troublesome duty, a bore every one wanted to shake off. France reproached the aliens with taking everything for granted. Some people said they were terribly lazy, others that they were not grateful enough. Yet others were shocked at their pretensions; why, they even wanted to be treated as equals! After all, who had forced them to rebel? They ought to have thought before acting. Why should France feed and house and clothe all these foreigners? Their eternal talk of Poland, liberty and the Russian criminals gradually became unbearable. France ought to remember that letting the refugees live here and treating them so well was not likely to further friendship with Russia. And Russia was very powerful. Was it wise to risk her friendship for the sake of a small band of rebels? Of course, France, the country of the Great Revolution, did not deliver up refugees, not even if a certain ambassador gave the Minister of Foreign Affairs an unmistakable hint. But no one had the right to expect her to ask the Poles to stay here and feel at home.

Ladislav spoke of Derbrunsky and their friends. They grew poorer and poorer; they spent days looking for work.

"Work," Ladislav said angrily. "What could my master do?" They stuck to each other, sharing poverty and the few, very few, pieces of luck that came their way—when Ladislav found work with a builder, or when a young poet, suddenly turning out to be an athlete, worked on a farm and was paid in kind. But even when things went well, Ladislav never felt at home. The big city frightened him, he longed for the countryside. The people who spoke so quickly in a strange tongue and who looked at him with a good-naturedly supercilious smile made him feel uncomfortable. He grew thin and pale and often thought of Wohan, where he had been happy, where the people had understood him, and where pretty Marie, the gamekeeper's daughter, had been kind to him. He was doubly homesick, for Poland and for Wohan. Derbrunsky, the faithful friend, seeing him a prey to melancholy, had sent him to Moravia, to Wohan.

"Now," Ladislav finished his rather long-winded tale. "I am happy. What I earn I send my poor master. I don't want anything. Marie looks after me."

That evening Joseph did not, as was his wont, think of himself and his own disappointment. It had become unimportant. Whatever happened to him, never would he have to beg at strange doors, never go up the steps of a strange house, never eat the bitter, patronisingly-given bread of the alien. "We bored them," Ladislav had said. "We bored them terribly." Was it possible to pass in fewer words a sentence on humanity? On men who were bored by the suffering and misery of others? Whose kindness blunted so quickly, who saw only troublesome beggars in the refugees and never human beings? He seemed to see the doors, at first wide open to let the strangers in, closed, locked and bolted. What an appalling, heart-breaking picture—the closed door, shut upon riches or at least comfort, upon a home which the others had lost for ever! Once a young man of his "rebel circle," had rather grandiloquently spoken of a world-conscience. Remembering it, Joseph smiled sarcastically. There had been One who had tried to awaken it; One who had taught "Love thy neighbour as thyself." That

had been nearly two thousand years ago. From how many pulpits are these words spoken? In how many schools do the children learn them? And who of us really lives up to them? We are a wicked and heartless generation. Dear God, what will have to happen, what horrors, what inhuman cruelty, what acts of barbarism, in order to awake the world conscience? He shuddered, but like grandmaman Inez he never lost hope. Even if we don't live to see it come to pass, even if our children don't, one day, when bestial inhumanity and insane greed for power will fill the whole civilized world with horror, its conscience will awake. Woe to them who rouse it!

Wohan was buzzing like a beehive, preparing for the first wedding celebrated in the old chapel for more than a hundred years. Stanislas had come from London, bored and decidedly annoyed by the idea that he, still a young man, was going to be a father-in-law. Everything, Joseph thought, came too early for Stanislas, everything except his brilliant career. Joseph knew that the high and highest in the land sometimes compared the two Herdegen brothers. "Stanislas," they declared was "one of our cleverest and most reliable diplomats; a young man who will most likely soon be one of His Majesty's youngest ambassadors." As to Joseph, even the most lenient of them could only say, "An honourable man. What a pity that he has been led astray by these dangerous modern ideas."

Stanislas who, after a short stay in Berlin, had returned to London, tried with a certain amount of success to look like an Englishman. He had also adopted some qualities from the country he loved and admired. Talking politics he grew matter-of-fact, losing his unbridled passionate ways, and his hasty judgments. He claimed that in politics the great thing was not only to consider to-day and to-morrow, but at least twenty years hence. He told the family about the little Queen Victoria who had been crowned two months ago.

"A sweet little girl," he said. "No danger to the country. She'll always do what her Ministers tell her.

People say she has an uncanny gift of choosing the right men."

Joseph smiled. "A gift monarchs usually lack." He knew all about it. The brothers had ridden over the fields; now they sat in the shade of an old beech-tree, their horses lazily nibbling grass on the big meadow. "The estate looks all right," Stanislas said. "You seem to manage it well." His voice grew kinder. "Have you settled down during the last year, Joseph, or . . ."

"I had to. What else was I to do?"

"I'd rather die than live without taking part in the life of countries and nations."

"It seems a heart-breaking game to me, Stani, as soon as you consider the unfortunate chess-men. You decide and they suffer."

Stanislas nodded, suddenly grown sombre. "I too felt like that once, you know, when Matzi . . . At that time I saw the chess-men, as you call them, for the first time and was horrified to discover that they were creatures of flesh and blood. After that," he shrugged, "perhaps people who go in for politics cannot afford a conscience. Perhaps they must see everything from a perspective that makes the individuals look like tiny specks on the horizon."

Joseph shook his head. "There will never be peace till every individual, every single human life, has become important."

Stanislas gazed at him searchingly. "We have been hearing all kinds of strange things in England. They say all is not well in Austria and Prussia. What do you know about it?"

"I've spent the whole of last year in the country. What do you expect me to know?"

"You ought to be more careful—I don't mean you yourself, but that boy of yours. I had a talk with Alois the other day. He'll get into a terrible mess with his ideas of liberty, brotherhood, equality. At his age one is easily influenced. You ought to be stricter."

"Sixteen," Joseph said musingly. "When we were young, one was a man at sixteen."

"Ferdinand," Stanislas said proudly—for he loved his son even more than he loved politics—"also has new-fangled ideas. But he's not like Alois; he's a matter-of-fact idealist, and that kind always gets what it wants."

"And Therèse?"

"A terrible child. Thank goodness she's going to school in Paris next term. I simply can't get over her being my child and Bozi's too."

Lifting his head, he gazed at the meadow. "It's a lovely country. Of course one can only live in London, but one can only be really at home here. When I'm old, Joseph, I'll come and stay with you at Wohan. We'll sit in the sun and smoke and watch the children."

"The grandchildren," Joseph said maliciously.

Stanislas shuddered. "Grandchildren! How truly awful! To think I was the first to have a son and that I'll be the first to have grandchildren. And I'm not even forty." He jumped up quickly, as if to make sure of his youth. "Hanover," he said abruptly, "what a pity Hanover has not stayed united to Britain. It would be a good counter-balance. I don't trust the Hohenzollerns."

Riding home he talked of nothing but the cleverness and wisdom of the English and the absolute idiocy of all other policies, not excepting those of his own country.

Victoire sat in the ancestors' room, because it was the coolest in the house. Not that she minded the heat, but the two guests from Berlin suffered acutely from it and showed it without the least shame. Being unable to stand their lamentations any longer, Victoire had taken them to the ancestors' room and was desperately trying to make conversation. She could hardly believe that the stiff young man with the harsh voice was Toinette's son and the plain girl Lully's sister.

The Prussian Count had died a year ago and young Wilhelm had come to Lully's wedding, being as he said, the head of the family and desiring to be acquainted with his brother-in-law. He had passed a few days at Vienna before coming to Wohan, and delighted in comparing the Austrian

capital with Berlin. He said so frequently, "Of course at Berlin everything is better organized and much more efficient," that the twins, who had taken a violent dislike to him, amused themselves by singing this sentence as a duet, not exactly contributing to the harmony of the family gathering. The young man had inherited his father's estate in East Prussia. "My brother Max will act as my agent. I shall be a civil servant, of course." He criticized everything he saw. Joseph, listening with an amused smile, asked, "Tell me, dear nephew, how old are you?"

"Nineteen. A year younger than my sister Louise."

Joseph smiled indulgently. "Of course one always knows everything best at nineteen. Here, too; only our boys don't brag about it."

Wilhelm blushed an ugly red. "Dear uncle, I may be young, nevertheless, I am the head of the family. Besides I believe in always speaking the truth. I know it's considered bad form in Austria, but in Prussia . . . That's the reason why I simply must tell you how the cottages you have built for the farm-hands, dirty Moravians at that, shock me. Why, even I could live in one of them. What's the good of pampering the rabble?"

When these unfortunate words were spoken, Alois and Laetitia had furiously attacked their cousin, at first with words, then, maddened by his arrogance, Laetitia had boxed his ears in a most unladylike manner. Joseph, proud of the cottages, had only said, "Letty!" in a gentle tone. Victoire, sitting with the brother and sister, remembered the little scene and envied her daughter. She, of course, was bound by the rules of hospitality and forced to suffer the young fool. Being what Wilhelm called "a false Frenchwoman" she smiled at him and said, "How right you are. I always thought so too. Do tell me more about it."

Grandmaman Inez would have died of horror had she seen the betrothed go for a walk without a chaperon. Having reached the Watteau meadow, Lully and Ferdinand sat down on the stone bench. Lully, bliss incarnate, as Laetitia called her, was more beautiful than ever. Stanis-

las could hardly bear to look at her, because she reminded him so much of Marie Christine; and Joseph, watching her graceful movements and her sweet smile, felt as if Toinette, the young Toinette, had come home. Lully, who had loved Ferdinand for years, could hardly believe in her happiness. She could not understand why this clever, beautiful and noble young man—she devoured novels and loved fine words—had chosen her, rather than her clever, brilliant, amusing cousin. She looked up at her hero and wished he was immortal. She had never forgotten the terrible day on which the one person she had loved, her mother, had left her. Ever since, a black shadow had threatened her happiness—death. To-day, sitting hand in hand with Ferdinand amongst roses and humming bees, she did not think of the shadow. To-morrow, she thought blissfully, is our wedding day. We'll be together always. How happy I shall try to make him!

She was silent, dreaming with open eyes, and Ferdinand did not disturb her. He loved her gentleness, her kindness and, being twenty-one, he also loved her passionate admiration.

She was not like Letty, who was always criticizing and contradicting, who stuck to her own opinions; who was, it was terrible only to think it, but true nevertheless, an unwomanly girl. Of course one could talk to her about many things that other girls and women knew nothing about. His face grew dark. Why did he have to remember his father's words, when he had asked permission to marry Lully?

"She's charming, my boy. A darling—and so good. But are you sure she won't bore you? There is nothing worse than a dull wife. Better think it over."

How awful to remember these words on the day before the wedding. He knew why he had done so. They had talked of their honeymoon in Switzerland, and he had said, "We'll also go to Yverdon and look over the school where Pestalozzi was head master for so long a time. I might get some useful data for my work at the Ministry of Education. What a pity that great man's dead."

Lully had gazed at him, her lovely eyes suddenly dull. "Who was Pestalozzi?"

Seeing his face change, she had said hastily, "I'm so stupid, Ferdi, I don't know anything. Don't be angry."

He had kissed the beautiful wet eyes and forgotten that the wife of an official at the Ministry of Education really ought to know all about the great pedagogue. Just for a second it had flashed through his brain: Letty would have known; Letty knows everything I care about. He had banished the thought. Now it had returned. But only for a short while. Lully was too lovely, the summer day too bright, too fine for serious ideas. Perhaps, Ferdinand admitted to himself, father is right and I am an insufferable prig.

They sat on, hand in hand. Just as Carl and Ludmilla had sat here in the first weeks of their marriage, dreaming of a happiness that never came true. They had looked down on the plain and the shining Morava and had laughed softly at grandmaman Inez riding with Huberpeter and at what she had said to them at breakfast. "Summer passes, and so does love. God alone remains for ever. Try and do the work He has given you."

Laetitia was rushing about like mad, helping with the preparations for the wedding. She did not keep quiet for a minute. She ran from one floor to the other, from the house to the greenhouse, as if she were fleeing from something. Joseph, frightened at her pallor and the black shadows under her eyes, begged her to rest; to-morrow would be a tiring day. But Victoire had laughed and found still more work for Letty. The girl looked at her queerly, and, suddenly bending down, kissed her hand. That's just like maman, she thought. Unjust, hard, capricious, but if ever one feels absolutely forsaken and thinks no one can understand one, she turns round and is touchingly kind, full of understanding, never saying a word that might hurt. Sometimes even her father's tender care was unbearable. Maman did not look at one with troubled eyes; maman gave one something to do. Maman knew, of course she knew. Yesterday she had come upon Laetitia in the wilderness. The girl had hastily

hidden her wet handkerchief and had said hoarsely, "I got a gnat in my eye. That's why I look as if I have been crying."

Maman had nodded without looking at her. "I know, it hurts. But the pain passes. Everything passes, Letty, believe me." Turning, she had tenderly gazed at her daughter. "You are getting more and more like grandmaman Inez. Not only in looks. You know, Letty, Madame Mère was a wonderful woman. One hardly ever meets her self-control nowadays. I say hardly, because I think my little daughter has inherited it." She had put her arms round the girl. "Poor little Letty, don't give in. I know all about it. You've got to be plucky, my dear. We Herdegens don't show our feelings like ill-bred people." She had kissed Laetitia and said in a changed tone. "Do you think we've really got enough cake for to-morrow? Do be a dear and find out."

That had been yesterday. But yesterday had been better than to-day. Yesterday there were still two days till that terrible 20th of August. To-day there was only one: no, it was late—only half a day. Letty grew pale and shivered in spite of the heat. She ran out of the house. In the courtyard Joseph and Stanislas were just getting off their horses. Laetitia patted the animals and fished some sugar out of her pocket. Stanislas went up to her. "Alois is hunting for you," he said. "Something's gone wrong. But you're probably too busy. There are so many things to do in life, Letty; so many that quite a lot of them aren't half as important as one thinks."

If he had to be a father-in-law, Stanislas would much rather have had Letty as a daughter-in-law.

She looked up. "I know, Uncle Stani. There are lots of things in life."

Turning away, she walked towards the wilderness. Alois would not come here. The whole family knew that the wilderness belonged to Laetitia and one was not to go there without her permission. Long ago, so long that Laetitia hardly remembered it, little Letty had come here to be naughty, alone with God, who understood. To-day big

Laetitia, the clever young lady, the modern girl, as she saw herself, came here again to find consolation. She sat down on the old moss-grown stone and stared straight before her. So many things, she whispered, Uncle Stani's right. Of course there are many things left worth living for. Father, sometimes maman; Alois and, very rarely, that young devil, Carl. And a constitution for our country, and the abolition of censorship, and pictures, and Beethoven's music, and . . . and . . . Despondently, hopelessly, she tried to find more things that could fill an empty life. But in vain. Into a black abyss of despair and hopelessness plunged the people she loved, the constitution, the abolition of censorship, music and books. Nothing remained but Ferdinand who was going to marry Lully to-morrow, who was lost to her for ever. She cried bitterly, shaken by sobs, leaning against a slender birch-tree which grandpapa Ferdinand had planted with his bride a short time before he was killed in battle. She did not know that the birch tree had also seen grandmaman Inez's sorrow in those far-away days, when she had been left alone with her three children and Monsieur Venarius, and had taken up her broken life to live it according to God's will.

The small organ on which the schoolteacher from the next townlet had played a piece by a young composer, Felix Mendelssohn from Leipzig, wheezed an instant and became mute. Bozena had listened to the music, a lump in her throat: "A calm sea and a happy voyage," how fervently she wished it for her beloved son and her young niece! The quiet happiness, the homely joys she had never tasted. She had learnt to live in an alien world, to speak its language, to conform to its customs. She could tell herself proudly that she was an ideal wife for an ambitious diplomat. She knew Stanislas was grateful to her and fond of her. All the same, she had never lost the feeling of loneliness, of cold which makes exiles in a strange country suddenly shiver, however blue the sky and however warm the sun is. Even at Wohan, which she loved as much as any Herdegen, she never could shake off a slight feeling of sadness. Her

father's farm had been sold a few years ago. Nepomuk, who had finished his studies, was a practising physician in Vienna and did not want to return to the land. The other brothers had turned out more or less black sheep. They too had gone to town, one of them had even emigrated to America. Her sisters had married farmers. They were shy and awkward when Bozena came to see them, and she too felt more shyness than affection when they were together.

The chapel doors flew open. Slowly, ceremoniously, as Stanislas had wished, the wedding procession moved along the sun-bathed path. Seeing Bozena wipe her eyes, Stanislas said impatiently to Victoire, "Why do women always cry at weddings? Even you did, and God knows, you've no reason to. Of course, if poor Bozi thought of our wedding . . ." Turning, he addressed Joseph. "Do you remember how grandmaman Inez explained my duties as a husband to me? And how I was exiled to Wohan? All on account of the boy who has just been married?"

Victoire and Bozena looked at each other with a smile. They both felt with a certain amount of surprise that they had suddenly become only "the parents." How time passed. Hadn't it been yesterday that they had played here with the children, and had long after struggled with the painful puzzle called life?

Laetitia came, escorted by Wilhelm. She wore a pink dress and kept smiling. The Prussian cousin tried to be pleasant. "I'm sure you will be the next to get married," he said.

Laetitia gave a slight start, but the smile remained glued to her face. "Perhaps," she said; "perhaps."

Franz had not come to the wedding. He had excused himself with some medical congress or other. He had wished Lully luck in a strange new-fashioned way, by telegraph—an invention that could transmit messages from a great distance in only a few minutes' time. True, the telegram, having come by messenger from the neighbouring town, had taken several hours to reach Wohan. Nevertheless, it had been most exciting to receive the small folded-up paper.

The twins were the last to leave the chapel. Carl was

quieter than usual. "I must get every single thing by Mendelssohn," he said. "Did you notice the three bars in the second piece? You could see the ship skimming over a calm sea." He softly hummed the tune. Alois nodded. He was glad that Carl was in a good temper. For some time even his patient affection had hardly been able to bear his twin's moods. Grandmaman Inez would have declared the boy possessed by a devil and have had him exorcized.

"If he was only wild," Victoire said to her husband. "But this awful pride, this stressing of his own grandeur, just because he happens to be a Herdegen . . . And his fiendish temper. You'll see, Joseph, he'll do something dreadful one day."

Joseph tried to put in a word for his first-born. "No one can be kinder and more charming than he. After all he's only a hobbledehoy."

"He's nearly seventeen," Victoire said impatiently. "I'm sure you were different at his age, Joseph. Even Stani can't have been quite so bad."

Joseph smiled, thinking that the young, the quite young Victoire must have been something like it. In a feminine way, of course. He was glad that he had kept his thoughts to himself, remembering how Victoire dreaded finding her own faults in the boy.

Carl had not been able to pass his examinations. He laughed when Joseph gently chided him. "I really don't need to know all that silly stuff," he said. "School bores me; it's dead and has nothing to do with real life. Don't trouble to scold me, father. I'm not going to study, because I can't see what's the good of it."

At the time Joseph had been glad that Victoire had not been present. She would have recognized on the boy's lips her own eternal "What's the good of it?" and have been terribly pained.

The wedding feast was over. Shouting and throwing flowers, the twins and little Therèse ran after the coach which was taking Ferdinand and Lully to Vienna. Gradually the noise of the wheels died away. From the terrace

the family watched the black speck growing smaller and smaller till it disappeared altogether.

"Youth," Stanislas said half crossly, half wistfully, "drives away and leaves us alone."

"You're right, Stani," Victoire said musingly. "We're left alone. We've become the 'old people.'"

Joseph smiled tenderly at her. "Life goes on, darling. That's the one thing that matters. 'We old people'"—he gaily stressed the words Victoire had spoken with so great a bitterness—"remain alone. Youth rides on, beginning where we stopped. It will do what we have left undone. Don't be sad, dearest; life goes on."

CHAPTER XIX

THE guests had left. Laetitia had gone to England with Stanislas and Bozena. A great quiet fell upon Wohan, broken only by Carl's piano. Alois buried himself in his books. He wanted to skip a class and spend the year thus gained in England, the land of liberty, which seemed paradise to him. He tried to take Laetitia's place with his father. They walked together in the woods; they rode with Monsieur de Venelles over the estate; they sat on the terrace in the evening, listening to Carl's playing. Joseph felt he was only now getting to know his son. Sometimes the unbounded adoration of the young eyes frightened him, and he grew worried at the unlimited faith the young soul had in humanity. Alois would never be able to compromise, and, alas, the times they lived in demanded compromises if one did not want to risk being crushed by the Juggernaut called the State. Joseph began to hate the State. It seemed to him a new Moloch to whom human sacrifices were offered, as if only young flesh and blood could give the senile, agonizing system a new lease of life. What was this State? Joseph, less intolerant than his son, conceded to its rulers a sincere belief in their divine rights. They had not

yet forgotten the horror of the wild storm which had shaken France. They were convinced that only order and an autocratic system could give the people prosperity and happiness. But looking closer, who were the men who formed the great one's train? Who was, for the man-in-the-street, the counterpart of Prince Metternich, this strange man, whose acts may have been dictated by the ferocious hatred of a hypercivilized being for all things primitive, vulgar and noisy?

Small men took his place—grocers, porters in the pay of the police; envious neighbours who grudged one another every pitiful bit of luck; waiters in the coffee-houses, earning a little pocket-money by repeating the guests' careless talk to the police. This was the State: at the top of the pyramid civilized, well-bred, but narrow-minded men, lower down the broad layer of informers, belonging to all classes, men who denounced others out of envy, dislike, spite or just for the pleasure of harming a fellow-man.

Alois refused to believe it. In his eyes every man of the people was a saint, a persecuted martyr, for whom one had to take up the cudgels. He eagerly discussed his views with his father, and Joseph often noticed that in spite of all affection his son thought him old-fashioned, reactionary, sometimes nearly senile. None the less, they became good friends during these days, for there were some things which angered and inspired the "reactionary" father as much as the liberty-loving son.

On the south side of the castle the leaves of the old chestnut-trees turned yellow, flooding the rooms with golden light. The first speckled chestnuts fell to the ground with a soft thud. On the endless plain the fields were waiting for the reapers. In the dark foliage the first apples shone red. Blue smoke rose up, trailing a transparent veil. The nights were still sultry. The moon hung in the sky like an enormous red ball. The Morava flowed lazily between her banks.

Then everything changed. A cold wind sprang up in the north. Rain began to fall. In the evening the river sent

up a grey mist. The dew grew stronger, glistening till noon-
 on meadows and lawns. Shots rang in the woods.

Carl woke from his dreams. He neglected his piano and
 went shooting, forcing Alois, who hated it, to accompany
 him. During these early autumn days the devil in him seemed
 to have grown stronger. The beaters trembled before him.

"Dear God," Victoire said. "If only school had begun.
 Another fortnight! I can't bear it much longer. Now that
 he walks about with a gun he's become absolutely inhuman."

Joseph tried to soothe her. She shook her head. "I'm
 frightened," she said. "I'm terribly frightened. I don't
 don't know why. I can't rest till evening brings both the
 boys home." She smiled sadly. "Do you remember, Joseph,
 what a darling he was as a small boy? So affectionate, so
 good. What has happened to him? What evil spirit lives
 in him and spurs him on?"

"Youth," Joseph said indulgently.

"No; youth is wild, passionate, intolerant, but generous.
 But Carl . . . Monsieur de Venelles has been complaining
 about the way the boy treats the farm-hands. As if they
 were not human. And Carl laughs at me when I scold him."

She gave a start. A shot rang out.

Joseph laughed good-naturedly. "When people go shoot-
 ing, darling, and the wood is quite close, you're apt to hear
 shots. It's good for Carl to walk about for hours; it uses
 up what Franz calls his superfluous energy."

"Oh, these children!" Victoire made a face. "They're
 nothing but worry and trouble. There's Letty with her un-
 happy love-affair and Carl with the devil in him and Alois
 with his crazy ideas and his absurdly soft heart . . ." She
 smiled. "And you, *mon bon* Joseph, with your everlasting
 kindness and gentleness."

"Don't worry too much, my dear. After all they're
 your children; there must be some good in them. Besides
 they've all inherited your charm and your gift for gaining
 love."

She gazed at him. "Do you really still think so, Joseph,
 after more than twenty years of marriage?"

"I do."

He kissed her black curls, noticing a few white hairs at
 the temples. They must have come during the last months.
 Seeing them, Lactitia would have said, "We always think
 maman notices nothing; maman does not care for us and
 does not worry about our troubles. Yet she knows every-
 thing. She only says nothing, because—she's maman."

On a lovely blue autumn afternoon the shot which Vic-
 toire had been dreading, rang out. A beater came running
 to the castle, pale, breathless, scared. "Something has
 happened, Count Alois . . ."

"Is he dead?" Victoire asked, shaking all over.

"No, no. They're bringing him home. The gamekeeper
 thinks it's not serious . . . But . . ."

Victoire did not dare ask what had happened. The soft
 blue day had suddenly turned black. How strange that she
 had been calm and at peace this morning; the autumnal
 beauty of Wohan had made her feel glad.

As soon as the small procession reached the castle, Alois
 called out, "It's all right, maman. Don't be frightened. The
 shot only grazed my arm. Really."

Seeing him very pale, his arm bandaged, his eyes very
 bright, she felt as if her heart ceased beating. Joy, because
 he was alive, overwhelmed her, but also fear, fear for her
 other son who walked beside the stretcher like a beaten dog,
 his face distorted, his head bowed, his knees trembling.

"Where's father?" Carl said hoarsely, after Alois had
 been put to bed and his arm properly bandaged.

Alois tried to lift his head.

"Don't be an idiot, Carl. I'm alive. The whole thing is
 not worth talking about. Accidents will happen. You'll be
 more careful another time."

"So you *really* did it?" Victoire stared at Carl, hate in
 her eyes.

He gave a start. His mother had never spoken to him in
 that tone. Limping steps sounded in the passage. Joseph,
 informed by one of the beaters, had ridden home from the
 farm. Carl looked up and rushed out of the room.

"Father . . ."

Victoire had followed him. "Don't be frightened," she said. "It's only a flesh wound. I've sent for the doctor."

Joseph nodded. He entered the twin's room, to make sure that Alois was safe, and came out again. He felt that Carl needed him more than the invalid. "Come," he said shortly, and Carl followed him to his study. Joseph sat down heavily. The boy stood in front of him trying to say something. Suddenly he fell on his knees before his father. "I'm Cain," he sobbed despairingly. "I've killed my brother."

"Get up," Joseph said sharply. "Alois is alive. Leave out the pathos. Tell me what happened."

"I'm a murderer," Carl cried. "Yes, I am. I wanted to kill."

"You wanted to kill your brother?"

"No, no; yes, yes . . ."

"Speak up. I can't understand."

"I didn't want to kill Alois," Carl sobbed. "But I did want to kill a man. As soon as Alois was hit I remembered what I had been taught: that all men are brothers. The other man . . . I'm Cain, I wanted to kill my brother."

"Stop crying and tell me what happened."

"You know, father, or perhaps you don't know, that I can't stand Jan, the second gamekeeper's son. He's impudent; he always tries to annoy me, he . . ." Carl shuddered violently. "Oh, my God, there I am again; accusing others, excusing myself, as if I were not the guilty one."

"What about Jan?"

"We three were standing together and I was scolding Jan because he had made me miss a hare. He answered back and I saw red. I raised my gun. Seeing it, Alois threw himself in front of Jan, but I had already touched the trigger." Carl fell silent, staring at his father with scared eyes. "Father, Alois fell to the ground, blood gushed from his wound . . . I'll never forget it as long as I live. My hand had pulled the trigger . . . But for God's mercy, Alois would be dead, or Jan, and I'd be a murderer. But I am . . . I wanted to kill. Father . . ."

It was a cry for help. Despairing young eyes looked at

Joseph, a child's voice called him, he heard the plaint of a child, suddenly confronted with something terrifying, the evil in his own soul.

"Sit down," Joseph said wearily. "Let's talk sense. I'm not going to reproach you, you're doing it yourself. But tell me, my boy, how could you?"

Carl sank in the chair his father pushed towards him.

"I don't know, father. Something evil lives in me, like a wild beast that breaks out again and again. I always knew it. But I can't tame the beast. Tell me, father, before I really become a murderer, who can tame it?"

"I don't know, my poor boy. Perhaps only you yourself; perhaps . . ." Joseph broke off abruptly. He knew no answer to Carl's question.

In the heavy silence a vague memory flashed through the boy's brain, the picture of an old woman who had been very hard upon him whenever he had given way to his temper. He had often not understood her words, but the impression of her personality had remained with him, and suddenly confronted him now. He looked at the picture on the wall opposite his father's writing-table, the portrait of a very old woman with a hard thin-lipped mouth and kind eyes.

"What . . ." he stammered, "what would grandmaman Inez have said?"

Joseph gave a slight start. In this distressing minute in which he had failed his son, he too had conjured up the past and together with it the old woman who had influenced and ruled them all. He had longed for her presence; she would have been the only one capable of finding the right words for this unhappy child.

Speaking very slowly, as if waiting for a dead voice to prompt him, he said, "She would have told you to expiate your sin, my boy. To do penance for it. She would have told you to fight your pride with charity, your hatred with love, to ask God for help."

"God? Yes, that's what the Fathers are always telling me. But I thought God was only something for old people and perhaps for little children." He grew eager. "Expiate;

do penance. Father, do you think if I do, I shall get rid of the stone lying on my heart? I can hardly breathe, it's so heavy."

Joseph's voice sounded at his son's ear, but it seemed to him as if the words he spoke were not his own. Knowing his own weakness, hating to judge others, *he* would never have spoken so harshly. "It does not matter in the least whether a stone is lying on your heart, nor whether you can breathe or not. Try and understand that your feelings are absolutely unimportant. Leave off trying to dramatize yourself. Only when you have learnt to forget yourself and to live for others, will your evil deed be expiated. Not before."

The words had come out of the past, spoken by a woman who had known no mercy on herself. Frightened and yet comforted, Joseph felt once again that grandmaman Inez was not really dead; she lived on in him and in all of them; she would live on in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and in their children too. Even an earthly immortality had been granted to the old woman.

Carl said nothing. He kissed his father's hand—a thing he never did—and left the room.

Looking after him, Joseph leant his head on his hand and sighed. Had he spoken the right words or had he touched a wound with rough and clumsy fingers, hurting instead of healing? He did not know.

Alois made a rapid recovery. After ten days he was allowed to get up, and after another week he was perfectly well again. It was as if the shot had not hit him but Carl. The boy grew pale and thin. Perhaps not only from remorse, but because he, with a vague idea of expiation, hardly ate anything and spent his days roving in the woods, alone with his painful thoughts. In vain did Alois try to belittle the whole unfortunate affair; in vain Joseph begged his son not to exaggerate things; in vain Monsieur de Venelles took the boy riding, and Victoire tried to comfort him. A terrible fear had been awakened in Carl's brain. "I did it once," he confided to his brother. "What's to prevent my doing

it again? Can't you understand? You know I never was afraid of anything. Now I'm afraid of myself."

During long lonely hours spent in the wood, during sleepless nights, standing at the window and watching black shadows creep along the castle walls, he tormented himself with the question: Who really knows the evil living in him? Who knows when he will become a murderer? Clumsily, childishly, he tried to discover the impulses of his ego. He began asking himself. Why am I doing this, or not doing that? Keeping a watch on his deeds, words and thoughts. In the handsome, fashionably-dressed youth the soul of one of his Spanish ancestors seemed to have come alive, of a man who after a life of debauch and sin, had mortified his body in a Trappist cell, trying to find peace. A man who, examining his conscience, probing it to its depths, had found nothing but sin, depravity and misery.

Victoire, at her wits' end, wrote to Franz asking him to Wohan. She hoped he would be able to cure the boy. Franz did his best; he spoke to Carl for hours—although he hated talking—of the danger of youth which ferments like grape juice, of biological facts, of the necessity for an active, healthy life. He talked himself hoarse and had to admit that his nephew listened attentively but that reason alone seemed unable to cure him. Thinking of Monsieur Venarius, Franz said to Joseph, "That boy of yours is enough to drive one crazy. Can there really exist something which reason cannot grasp?" He laughed. "Grandmaman Inez would enjoy my perplexity. I seem to hear her say: 'You can cure bodies, my dear Franz; a good and praiseworthy work, pleasing to God. But as for the soul . . .'"

After all, it was Franz who by chance showed Carl the path leading to peace. Speaking at random, he mentioned the Brothers of Mercy. "Awfully good fellows," he said. "You can't imagine how hard they work and how many people they help."

Carl began to question him. Dryly, without any enthusiasm, the man of science spoke of these others who saw in men of all races, nations and religions, brothers whom they had to help and wanted to help.

In the evening Carl sat down at the piano for the first time since that terrible day in September. Victoire caught her breath. What would the boy play? What would his choice betray? After a few introductory bars, Victoire gave a sigh of relief. The wonderful tune of Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata rang out. Never had Carl played as he was playing the adagio, this tender smile with wet eyes, this firm faith in immortality, standing beside a grave, this gleam of hope and peace in a world torn by unrest.

Victoire wiped her eyes. She caught hold of Joseph's hand and held it tight with the pathetic childish gesture he loved so well.

He pressed it tenderly, whispering, "We've got our boy back."

But Victoire, wiser than he, shook her head. "We've lost him, But," she grew embarrassed and added in a whisper, "He's found his soul."

Carl had not only found his soul but together with it life in all its beauty. A new beauty and a new life. The books he had hated, the studies which had bored him, took on a new importance; he could use them to help others. He promised his parents to pass his examinations, to work hard. "But when I've finished you'll let me become a Brother of Mercy, won't you?" he pleaded with all his old charm and his old coaxing tenderness.

Victoire was angry. She had hoped for something else, for a sensible, reasonable Carl who would marry young and by a brilliant career confer honour on the family. Of course it was fine and admirable to see a man living for others, obeying a strict rule; but it was something one would rather admire in other people's sons. For a short while, listening to Carl playing the adagio, she had a kind of presentiment and had felt as if her favourite child no longer belonged to her. Then she had forgotten it, perhaps because she wanted to forget it.

"I do hate people to exaggerate things," she said to Joseph. "What he wants to do is simply absurd."

"Not absurd. He's running away from himself. Isn't it

better, darling, if he uses all his passion and all his wildness for serving others?"

"Perhaps. But *our son*?" She smiled. "Do understand me. It would be so funny if one of our boys became a saint, and terribly uncomfortable. Imagine him trying to convert us, Joseph! He would not have much trouble converting you, my dear; but Letty and me . . . You ought not to allow it. We'll lose him for good. He might just as well be dead. I want both my boys. I also want—don't despise me—your sons to carry on the family name."

"We've got Alois."

"Yes, thank God. Nevertheless, you must not allow Carl to enter the novitiate."

"I don't want to," he admitted. "But when he begged so hard, I remembered the many things I had left undone, because I had been too weak, too cowardly, perhaps also because others prevented me. I also remembered grandmaman Inez saying as she lay dying 'What I have left undone, God will do for me; God and you all.' After that I could not say no."

Victoire silently bowed her head. The old castle was asleep. The twins had gone to bed long ago. In Monsieur de Venelles's rooms in the other wing the lights had just gone out. The autumn wind swept over the house and in the valley the Morava was softly crooning her deathless song.

CHAPTER XX

JOSEPH," Victoire said to her husband one evening, "I'm really growing old. To-day I surprised myself trying to walk upstairs with a light step! Imagine it, the good old stairs I used to run up two steps at a time."

He laughed.

"I should say it was the stairs' fault and not your venerable age, Victoire. The house is growing old. It ought to be restored."

"Leave that to our grandchildren." Her face grew dark, "—if ever we have any."

They were spending the winter in Vienna. Laetitia, whose short visit to London had turned into a three years' stay, was coming home for Christmas. The twins had passed their last examination; Carl was to enter the novitiate in spring. Victoire hoped the winter season might make the boy change his mind. If he enjoyed society, if he met a pretty girl . . . She had not given up hoping.

The family had to admit that the converted son was, quite against his will, still more insupportable than the unconverted one had been. It is admirable if a proud man forces himself to be humble, but was it really necessary for Carl to get up when the old servant served him at table, make a bow, embarrassing the old man, and, sitting down again, serve himself? Was it really necessary for him to clean his room himself, giving the maid more trouble than if he had not touched anything? Must he, who had grown a lot during the last year, insist upon wearing the old clothes he had outgrown? Victoire, who hated all things which betrayed one's inner life, was driven half crazy by Carl's "whims." But not even his "conversion" had succeeded in robbing him of his charm, and she could not remain annoyed long. She even forgave him that he made her get up at seven, so as to be in time for mass, which was again said daily in the Herdegen palace. At least his madness, as Victoire called his most sacred convictions, was not dangerous. Alois, good, hard-working Alois gave her more reason for worrying. He was studying at the University of Vienna, not only philosophy—but life in the raw. And life had become much more dangerous and full of snares during the last years. There had been unrest in Europe the whole time, but one hardly noticed it as long as one's own country was spared. Now all countries were drawing closer to one another. The railway had diminished all distances. Already the black sooty engines appeared here and there. Joseph had even gone by train from Budweis in Bohemia to Kerschbaum in Austria. Laetitia too had written often about the queer, new-fashioned means of communication. Reading her letters,

Joseph had frowned. "The railway is really not meant for women. It's much too dangerous, besides being bad for the nerves. The terrible speed even makes men feel giddy."

None the less, there was something to be said for the railway. Letters came quickly and more regularly. Of course postage was very expensive and only rich people sent their letters by train. Victoire, who used to delight in all modern things, rather disliked this side of the railway because unpleasant news reached one sooner. Perhaps also because the post brought to the Herdegen palace many small, carefully-sealed parcels, addressed to Alois, who hastily grabbed them and carried them to his room.

"In Alois's study," Joseph used to say with good-natured mockery, "there are enough banned books and pamphlets to get us all arrested." He smiled, but his smile hid anxiety. He knew the danger threatening his son, knew that the old man who still ruled the country and who was more powerful than the Emperor, had not grown more liberal, more tolerant with age. The shining light of the Promised Land that the Viennese had seen flaming over the Imperial palace when the Emperor Ferdinand had succeeded to the throne, had faded long ago. Prince Metternich's old hand had grown harder, its grasp more merciless still. Perhaps because many of the civil servants had grown so strangely negligent, so blind to what was going on. Some people even pretended that they themselves smuggled banned books and pamphlets into the country. The government had other troubles too—in Italy the Carbonari, in Bohemia the discontented guilds, and, perhaps the worst, the most reckless of all adversaries, the Hungarians. In the opinion of those who knew how to read the signs of the time, Kossuth was more dangerous than Mazzini, who, half-saint, half-politician carried with him Italian youth.

All the writings of these politicians and agitators were kept in the little green drawing-room, which had become Alois's study. On the open piano lay naked and unashamed the impertinent songs of Monsieur Beranger, the French rebel, which Alois sang loudly and very much out of tune in the venerable old passages of the palace.

Joseph knew that these songs of rebellion were being hummed and sung all over the town. In this lovely gay country where all things tempted one to tarry and enjoy the present, where Johann Strauss's waltzes were much more likely to entice men and women to dance, than military marches to make them long for marching and war, where the air was softer than beyond the Prussian frontier, where the roses glowed redder and the scent of the lime-trees and the acacias was sweeter, where a whole nation, welding countless races, embodied a passionate joy of living—everything took more time than in other countries. Men who have learnt the worth of life, and who love it, do not throw it away as carelessly as others who fear it and whose love of death is stronger than all else. Nevertheless, there was something which made these merry, often frivolous people hard and stubborn—injustice. They laughed at big words and often disposed with a joke of a thing which their German neighbours discussed endlessly; they knew that even monarchs and noblemen were but human and tolerated their weaknesses. But one thing no one could attack without having to face a suddenly hostile country—justice. Unfortunately their rulers had forgotten this, or did not want to remember it.

Joseph often mused on these things whilst Alois talked about liberty with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes. He liked speaking about them with Ferdinand, who, though no less keen than his younger cousin, was more reasonable and understood him better.

Ferdinand and Lully lived in the left wing of the palace. Victoire called it, with a wry sigh, "the lovers' wing." Had Letty lived there, she often thought, that part of the house would not have been so quiet. Lully did not go to balls and hated receptions and parties. She sat at home, waiting for her husband to come back. Her rather too thin white hands embroidered white and red roses, or held up thin silk threads along which tiny beads ran. Sometimes, when Ferdinand was late, she folded them anxiously, praying that nothing might happen to him in the whirlpool of the great city. Every morning when Ferdinand kissed her good-bye, she

felt fear tugging at her heart. Would she see him again? Every evening brought relief: he had come, he was alive and well, he loved her. Her fears could rest till the next morning.

Perhaps it was the ever-present shadow of death which she had seen too young, that made Lully's eyes so big and so bright. Perhaps it was the fear of the ghost which had haunted her girlhood that made her movements so noiseless, her voice so soft, her gestures so pathetic. Perhaps it was the vague perception of the passing of all earthly happiness, that fanned the flame of her love for Ferdinand day by day and made her treasure every hour; every minute spent alone with him.

Victoire often came to see her. Both women sat together in silence and Lully only grew animated when her aunt spoke of Ferdinand. Sometimes Victoire was frightened at the passionate love devouring the younger woman. She felt guilty in her presence because she was glad there were no children. She wanted Alois's son to be the first Herdegen of the younger generation. As soon as that son was born, Lully could have as many babies as she liked. At present there seemed little chance of seeing her wishes realized. Alois was in love with politics, with liberty and the rights of man and did not care for girls. He had "more important things" to think of.

Letty came home the day before Christmas Eve. A strange, beautifully dressed, rather arrogant Letty, who, looking at Victoire, said wonderingly, "Why you haven't aged at all, maman. How do you manage to keep so young?"

Laetitia had grown older. She treated the twins like children and had a habit of smiling indulgently. She was, as Victoire impatiently admitted to Joseph, an odious, affected little goose.

During the first days she called everything "incredibly obsolete," declaring, "In England we would never . . ." She had dared the adventure of travelling without a maid. Her parents would never have permitted it, but Laetitia had left them in ignorance of her decision and neither Bozena nor Stanislas could cope with her obstinacy.

"Weren't you frightened to death?" asked Lully, who did not even go out alone.

"Frightened?" Laetitia shrugged, and Joseph noticed with a smile that she had inherited Victoire's gesture. "Why on earth should I be frightened?"

"A young girl, quite alone . . . risking all the dangers of a long journey . . ."

"There are no highwaymen nowadays."

"I know. But a man might have tried to talk to you."

Laetitia laughed. "Several men did. Most respectfully. And it certainly did me no harm." She gazed at her mother. "You are quite modern. In England sloping shoulders are all the fashion. Like the young queen."

She had brought home a lot of books. Mostly novels by a new author called Charles Dickens, who had become popular in England.

"Every one is reading him," she said. "Of course some people think him vulgar. He doesn't write about society but about pickpockets and common people. His books are terribly pathetic, even men cry over them. In England people cry a lot over the poor. It's the fashion. Even the Tories are interested in them." She grew eager, forgetting to be affected. "Just imagine, Father, I sat next to Mr. Disraeli at dinner the other day. You know, the author who's an M.P. A wonderful man, good-looking, witty. Ferdinand swears he'll go far."

"A Tory," Alois said disdainfully.

Laetitia threw him a pitiful glance. "I've met others more to your taste," she said sarcastically. "The other day I was shown such a queer man, John Frost. You know, father, the Chartist. The Chartists want every man to have a vote. Just imagine every grocer, every lamplighter, every farm hand having a vote—all the people who can't even read or write! The Chartists also want every man to have the right to be sent to Parliament."

Joseph nodded. "A dangerous idea. It might do good; on the other hand it might do a lot of harm."

"It would do good," Alois cried. "After all, who is most interested in who rules and how? The poor. The others can

always manage to get their way, with the help of their titles or their money."

"Can you imagine that some people even want the vote for women," Laetitia said with a laugh. "Of course only a few, most of them cranks and old maids."

"How absurd!" Victoire exclaimed, rather shocked. "A clever woman gets her way without the vote, and why on earth should a stupid one have it?"

Even Alois, the rebel, was horrified at the idea.

"It will never come true," Laetitia comforted the family. "I only told you about it to make you understand what's going on in England. That's why everything here seems so old-fashioned to me."

Victoire smiled at her husband. "We are old-fashioned. Poor Letty, you will just have to bear with us poor mortals who do not live in London."

She had spoken gaily, but now the smile died on her face. For an instant she had seen the real Laetitia, looking at Ferdinand and Lully, with despair and mad envy in her eyes. Just for an instant, then the girl went on talking, smiling, being arrogant and affected. Victoire shivered. Nothing had changed since that August day, three years ago, when Laetitia had left for England—nothing.

She got up nervously and sat on the arm of Joseph's chair. He looked up at her and took her hand.

Laetitia's hard laugh rang out. "Maman, father, you really *do* belong to another century. A pair of lovers after more than twenty-five years of marriage!" She kept on laughing, but Victoire had seen her big black eyes fill with tears.

During this winter of 1841 the old Herdegen palace awoke once more to a new life. For Laetitia's sake Victoire gave parties and balls, inviting society and also "intellectual" Vienna, although she was bored by it. All admired the young lady from England who had listened to debates in Parliament, had talked to British statesmen and knew as much about foreign and home politics as a diplomat. She opposed her admiration for England to the

admiration that the young, and also some of the older intellectuals felt for Prussia. She quarrelled violently with her father's old friend, Bauernfeld, who was never weary of praising Germany, and declared one could not judge a nation by its great men, but only by its common people. If you did this, you had to admit that England surpassed in wisdom, humaneness and decency, hysterical, liberty-shrieking Germany, which was even worse than Austria with all her senile ministers. Joseph felt proud of his clever daughter, laughing at her daring words and lack of reverence. He did not notice, what Victoire's sharper, anxious eyes saw, that Laetitia was talking only for one person, and that she kept looking at one person only to see whether he agreed with her—Ferdinand.

Laetitia did not care only for politics but also for dancing. She danced as eagerly as she talked, but she was only happy when she had succeeded in tempting Ferdinand to leave his part of the house and his books. Victoire had never known her daughter to be so vain. Laetitia flew into a rage if the dressmaker had not sewn on a ribbon exactly as she wanted it, if a hairdresser did not pin a curl the right way. Her clothes were much too smart for her age, and she wore, in spite of custom and good form, diamonds in her hair and round her slender neck; heirlooms that she coaxed Victoire into lending her. "I'm not a young girl any longer, who may only wear pearls," she said. "I'm an old maid."

Victoire, sensing the bitterness hidden behind her words, pinned the diamond's in Laetitia's hair and fastened the clasp of the diamond chain.

These were hectic days. Sometimes Victoire thought that not only she but also the old house had had enough of parties and had grown weary. It had seen so many hopes sprout under its roof, and so few ripen. It knew, even better than its inhabitants, the vanity of all things.

Victoire felt relieved when Lent made an end of dancing. But soon new worries took the place of the old. At first Ferdinand had thought Laetitia odious, vulgar and affected. Now he suddenly discovered something he had forgotten,

how well one could chat with her. There were long walks on the city-walls, strolls in the peaceful evenings of early spring. A gentle wind wafted the scent of damp earth, tiny buds showed on trees and bushes, sparrows twittered softly. In the twilight the pale glimmer of lamps and the muted noise of the city seemed very far away. They were alone together, they were young, they understood each other so well. Sometimes a spring shower made them step hastily under a doorway. They waited for the rain to stop, laughing, merry as children, then suddenly growing silent in the dark. They drank in the fresh clean air and gave a start when the church bells, ringing for *angelus*, recalled them to reality. Ferdinand made the sign of the Cross. Laetitia watched him with a feeling of dismay. The gesture always seemed to erect a wall between him and her. She knew that Ferdinand, as pious as his grandfather Sametil and his other grandfather, Carl Herdegen, was whispering, "Lead us not into temptation" and felt that this prayer was not only addressed to God, but also to her. She remembered Lully, whose eyes had grown bigger and brighter and whose cheeks had become more hollow during the last weeks, and felt ashamed.

Silently, taking great care not to touch each other they walked home. Victoire, who suffered from insomnia, noticed with a pain at her heart that Laetitia did not put out her light till morning.

"You must talk to her and make her understand how wrong it is," she said to Joseph. "You must speak with authority, as a father."

Joseph smiled ruefully. "Nobody ever believed in my paternal authority. This is a thing only grandmaman Inez could set right. I'm unfortunate enough to see both sides."

"There will be an awful scandal."

"I don't mind the scandal. But poor Lully. And Letty too. I don't believe she could be happy, knowing she had ruined another woman's life."

Then one day, he did talk to his daughter after all. Not that he touched upon the subject both were thinking of. He only said, "Do you know what is the height of meanness

and vulgarity? To rob a defenceless person of what she holds dearest in the world."

Laetitia flushed. "I would not mind doing it," she said defiantly.

"You could not do it, because you're grandmaman Inez's great-granddaughter and a Herdegen. The Herdegens never fought against a weaker adversary."

Laetitia kept silent. A picture flashed through her brain, a picture hanging in the dining-room. She had loved it as a child. "Coriolanus goes into voluntary exile." She saw the weeping mother, the sobbing wife and Coriolanus' transfigured noble face, and behind that face the hard old features of the Herdegen family-divinity, grandmaman Inez. She also saw a slender sad woman for whom she and Ferdinand had once set out to gain the pardon she longed for. How endless, how hot, how dusty the road had been, along which two children had walked hand in hand. How endless, how hot, how dusty the road will be, she must wander along alone, always alone, to the dark goal men call death. Looking up she saw her father watching her with affectionate, sad eyes. She smiled.

"Coriolanus goes into voluntary exile," she said.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You wouldn't understand, it's just a memory. Oh, yes, father, I wanted to tell you that I'm going back to London next week. You," she forced a smile and added in the gay arrogant tone they had grown to know so well, "are much too old fashioned for me."

She left Vienna a week later. After Easter Carl entered the novitiate.

"You're the only one I've got now," Victoire said putting her arms round Alois's neck.

Alois smiled absently. He was thinking of other things, of the wonderful poems by the young Hungarian poet, Lenau, of the beautiful new world that was coming, the happiness of all nations, united in brotherly love and peace. And also of the evening he was going to spend with his friends. Victoire noticed it. She felt sad. How empty the world had become. The children had left her, what was the good of

living? Feeling sick at heart she watched Alois run out of the room. Joseph, coming in, took her in his arms. Turning round she looked at him "*Mon ami*," she said softly, "You're right, I've still got you. I'm not really alone." She leant against him. "Do you remember" she said, "the fountain in the market-place?" She smiled tremulously. "The young ones go forward. We, *mon ami*, will go back to the years of our youth. No matter that they have passed away. We are going back together," Her face grew wistful. "Yes, we are together," she repeated, "But Letty, my poor little Letty . . ."

Bending forward in the box, Victoire looked down upon the audience in the Imperial Theatre. Men and women were applauding vehemently. Even in the Imperial box, where Archduke Ludwig was sitting, there was subdued applause. Behind her, Ferdinand clapped his hands again and again. Joseph looked grave. Seeing his face, Victoire nodded. "Yes," she said. "Something's rotten in our State. Your friend Bauernfeld is far from being a Beaumarchais, but somehow I am reminded of the first performance of his *Figaro*. At the time the public applauded just as enthusiastically as it is doing to-day, not guessing that it was seeing the beginning of the end."

"You're right. The whole farce is nothing but an attack on the system. I wish it had been made with a little more sympathy, a little more pity. It's so easy to condemn and so hard to do better."

Victoire got up. "Let's go home. I don't want to see the last act."

"I'm afraid the carriage won't be here yet."

"Never mind, let's walk."

Leaving Ferdinand and Lully in the box, they went out into the November night. A thin grey mist floated in the street. People walking through it looked curiously distorted, like caricatures. Some were tiny like dwarfs, others seemed to tower over the house-tops like giants. Victoire took Joseph's arm. A heavy cart rumbled past. She shuddered. "I never heard the rumbling myself, but others told me about it, the

rumbling of the tumbrels carrying men and women to the guillotine." She pointed at a little group at the end of the street. Enveloped in mist, it had a spectral look. The men were talking loudly, gesticulating wildly. Victoire stopped. "Let's wait till these people have gone past. I'm frightened."

"Afraid of our good Viennese, Victoire?"

"They aren't the same people we used to know. Something has changed them, has made them evil, hostile, treacherous."

"Oppression," Joseph said harshly.

Victoire looked round nervously. Noticing it, Joseph laughed.

"You can see for yourself what has changed the people. I only said what was true, and already you looked round to see whether an informer was listening. That's the worst of our system, no man can trust another, every enmity is transferred to politics. The porter I did not tip enough, the acquaintance I hurt by a thoughtless word, turns informer."

Victoire sighed. "And he says so many thoughtless words."

Joseph, knowing the path his wife's thoughts had travelled, smiled. "Alois. Poor Victoire, you worry too much. After all, he's grown up and ought to know what he's doing."

"Nobody who believes as he does in man's goodness and decency knows what he's doing. Sometimes I long for the boy to do something mean, so that he'd see what men are capable of." She laughed at herself. "A funny wish, isn't it? Instead of my being proud of my clean, decent boy. But how is he ever going to know the world and life, if he always keeps to abstract things? The others, your old and his new friends, only wish to change the system because they want to rule in their turn. I don't blame them. Why not? But what has that to do with liberty and justice—the gods our boy worships?"

"My dear, you're only angry because he doesn't marry."

"Maybe. I should love to be a grandmother, it must make one feel so good and calm. I can see myself as a second grandmaman Inez, not so wise or so detached of course. Besides, you're forgetting, Joseph, that the family is on the way to become extinct. Lully will probably never have

children. Our saintly son has renounced the world, the flesh and the devil. It would be a pity if there were no Herdegens to carry on."

They had reached the house and went into Victoire's sitting-room, where the fire was burning brightly. Pulling off her gloves she sat down and warmed her hands at the flames. "How empty and quiet the house is," she said. "Alois is sitting with his friends, liberating the nations, in words. Carl is somewhere in Galicia, nursing sick people who most probably won't even say 'thank you,' when they're well again. Letty is having a good time in London or in the country. And we two . . . Tell me, *mon ami*, are all people lonely when they grow old?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he said wearily. He knew Victoire's plaints by heart. She never ceased feeling that her world, the good old world in which she had been young, was withdrawing itself, fading away. And there seemed to be no room for her in the new one. The children, who might have served as a bridge between the two, had failed her. From time to time Joseph tried to make Alois understand that a champion of the people need not necessarily be absolutely callous, unkind and uninterested at home. Alois only looked at him with an utter lack of comprehension. "What does maman want? She's rich, she's got everything. Nobody oppresses her. Nobody persecutes her. My life belongs to the poor and the downtrodden. I have no time left for the rich and the upper classes."

He stayed on in the old house without sharing his parent's life. The father he had once adored was in his eyes a tired-out man, whose great age—Joseph was fifty—had made a black reactionary of him. Joseph smiled and never reminded his son that the senile reactionary had sacrificed his post, his career and all his chances to his beliefs. That there had been a time when he had been just as unpopular with the high and the highest in the land as young Count Alois Herdegen, who did not seem to fit any post. Nevertheless, he got on better with Alois than Victoire did. The boy feared his mother's half-mocking, half-despairing "What's the good of it?" He was a great man amongst his friends and could

not bear his words to be disposed of with a shrug and a compassionate smile. At times he came near hating Victoire. She knew it and it hurt her.

"Everything comes too late for me," she told Joseph after a scene with her son. "When we were young, I respected you, but did not love you. And now that I've learnt to love you, I'm forty-eight. And Alois? I always preferred Carl, and Alois, knowing it, was bitterly hurt. To-day, when I'm ready to do anything in the world just to hear him say a kind word to me, when I'm frightened out of my wits for his sake, he dislikes me. What is the good of it all?"

She hated Alois's friends who took the boy away from her and endangered him. She hated the government which threatened her son's liberty and life. She also hated the enemies of the government, because they too could harm her son. Her whole life was filled with hatred and fear.

At Wohan life grew less complex. Here grandmaman Inez's spirit lived on, partly embodied by Monsieur de Venelles who had hardly changed in the last ten years. He was homesick no longer. Far away, bathed in a light that was not of this earth lay the land of his youth, lost as his youth was. France had driven him forth, she had not wanted him. He had forgiven her, but she would never again be to him what this country, which had given him a home, had become. When Joseph was in town he managed the estate, strictly obeying grandmaman Inez's wishes and rules. They were easy to obey, he said, as they were based on the commandments. Victoire liked riding with him over the estate, visiting the tenants and farmhands, setting things right. The people of Wohan who had long ago grown accustomed to the Spaniard with the black eyes and the inevitable fan, now began to grow accustomed to the Frenchwoman with the vivacious gestures, the sudden fits of temper and the charming smile. Finding something to do, Victoire rarely asked: "What's the good?" Here in Wohan everything was natural and very simple. No bathos hid the importance of great things, making them cheap and trite. Here she was face to face with the eternal things of human life, birth and death. And in between, poverty, worry, pain, sorrow and

pitiful small pleasures. She nursed and cherished these small pleasures, just as she nursed and cherished the roses in the rose-garden, telling a rather shocked Monsieur de Venelles that these "luxuries" were even more important than necessary things. Perhaps she fought so obstinately for this idea, because Alois laughed at her for playing Providence, declaring that as long as this system existed, nothing one did was of any use. The worse off people were, the better. Only thus could the great change come.

In this summer of 1846 Wohan was wrapped in deep and gentle quiet, a quiet full of sadness but also full of peace. Once again the old castle was waiting with reverence and piety for an august guest, death. Lully had come here in May and all knew she would never leave Wohan again. She knew it too.

"I only want one more summer," she whispered to Franz who had turned up for a short visit. "You're a good doctor, uncle Franz. Can you give me just this one summer?"

He tried to reassure her. "You'll live to see many a summer yet, if you take good care of yourself, if . . ."

She interrupted him. "Don't. I know the truth, and so do you. I only want to . . ." She smiled and said gently, "I believe I shall be granted this last summer. Don't look grieved, uncle Franz. I'm not frightened in the least. I know death so well. I've been afraid of it for others so many years. Now that it is coming for me, I don't fear it."

Day after day she lay on the terrace gazing at the garden below. She recognized the coming and going of the months by the blossoms on bushes and trees, the deep red glow of the hawthorn, the purple blossoms of the lilac bushes, the white stars of the jasmine, the sweet scent of the acacias. When the elder bushes stood in bloom, she sighed. "Midsummer is coming. But that's not autumn yet. Only when the berries of the mountain-ash grow red, I'll . . ."

"I simply can't believe that Lully is going to die," Victoire said to her husband. "Can a shadow die? And she has never been anything but a little shadow. Two people have been her whole world, Toinette and Ferdinand. Oh I know, she was sweet and kind to everyone, without

effort, hardly knowing it. Sometimes I feel as if she was only the incarnation of Toinette's longing for home, allowed to have become a human being for a brief space of time."

Joseph said nothing. This gentle dying touched him profoundly. He felt as if he were losing Toinette for a second time—and not only Toinette. In the hollow-cheeked little face, Marie Christine's eyes shone feverishly, seeming to grow bigger day by day, reminding him of this other sister of whom he did not even know whether she was living or dead. The endless country where a single man's will ruled, had devoured her. Stanislas had tried in vain to get news of Marie Christine through diplomatic channels. An icy silence had been the answer to his questions. Franz had gone to Warsaw once and had visited Prince Kramsin. The Russian was as taciturn as at the time of the Vienna Congress. At last Franz had asked point-blank after Marie Christine. Kramsin had stared at him coldly. "There was a Princess Kramsin once. She rebelled against my master and Tsar. She is dead to me."

"Hearing him speak," matter-of-fact Franz had told the family, "I felt a cold shiver run along my spine. The taciturn man with the cold eyes, which are so pale that they look white, with the well-formed cruel hands became for me the incarnation of gigantic Russia, of the country where oppressed men silently bear the yoke and where in the deserts of Siberia every cry for help dies away in infinite space."

"Dante's hell," Victoire had whispered awe-struck.

That had been years ago. Many days had passed, many months, many years, but neither days, nor months, nor years had brought news of Marie Christine. Perhaps she was dead, perhaps she was alive and longing for death to deliver her at last.

And now at Wohan her eyes were dying in another face. After Lully's death nothing would remain of the snow-queen but the picture Isabey had painted.

The trees were bent with the load of apples and pears. The first bats fluttered round the old castle walls. Thin blue mist rose from the Morava, draping itself like flags on the turrets. Half hidden amongst the pale green foliage the

berries of the mountain-ash glowed red. Summer was over. Together with summer the little shadow left them. The tender little shadow who had lived only for two people, the incarnation of Toinette's longing for home and country. Together with Lully, Toinette died a second time—and perhaps also Marie Christine.

Death, that she had been so familiar with, was merciful to Lully. She did not suffer, a gentle autumn wind blew out the tiny flickering flame. In the night Lully died the first frost covered the earth. In the morning the meadows gleamed white and the asters sadly hung their black heads. Victoire, standing at the window, looked out at the red dawn. Turning round, she said to Joseph, "She's had her summer and has gone away before winter came. Happy Lully." Joseph knew that Victoire envied the dead girl who had died young and did not have to fear old age, the cold, the loneliness and the desolation of human winter.

Victoire remained at Wohan all the winter. She was tired and shrank from the big noisy city. Besides she feared seeing Alois becoming more and more estranged, carried away by the flood of the times. Here at Wohan, she could hold fast to her illusions and tell herself that her son would come back to her. Sometimes, after long dreamy hours spent by the fire she would look up with a start. "Where on earth are the twins, it's getting dark"; and wait anxiously for quick young steps running along the passage.

The wind made the windows rattle. Victoire looked round. The room was empty, the passages were empty, no young steps came running. The silence got on her nerves. Suddenly she seemed to hear loud voices, yells, cries, shots. She gave a start. My God, they're shooting in the capital . . . The revolution has broken out . . . Alois . . .

Unable to bear the strain any longer, she ran along the dark passage to Joseph's study. Opening the door she saw, hanging on the opposite wall, the picture of a boyishly slender young woman with big black eyes, grandmaman Inez. Joseph was calculating something, drawing plans. Poor fool, Victoire thought, he wants to change a tiny bit

of world in Wohan and they're shooting in the capital. Shooting at defenceless men and women, it's always the wrong people who get hit. The tumbrels are rumbling through the streets, carrying innocent people to the guillotine. The world has gone mad.

She stood motionless in the door. Joseph, absorbed by his work, had not noticed her. Only grandmaman Inez seemed to smile at her, a little mockingly, knowingly.

Joseph lifted his head. Victoire ran up to him. "I'm frightened, I'm terribly frightened."

He took her arm and drew her to the old sofa, sitting down beside her. "There's no reason for being afraid. This last year has been much quieter."

"The quiet before the storm breaks."

They sat in silence for a while, Joseph tenderly stroking her hair. Gradually she grew calmer. "You're an angel," she said with a smile. "I really can't understand how you can bear with my moods."

"I love you," he said in a low voice, looking embarrassed and uncomfortable.

She laughed. "*Mon bon* Joseph, do you know you said it just now, as you used to say it in the little drawing-room whilst Toinette played the chaperon? Now we are sitting here all alone and have grown old. We have got three children, yet we are left out in the cold. My hair is turning grey. Every day I discover new wrinkles in my face. And you are getting a small, oh quite a small, paunch. And the top of your head is growing bald. You're getting to be the old count and I love you."

She lay in his arms, laughing and crying. Victoire smiled up at grandmaman Inez's portrait. "Poor grandmaman Inez, there was one joy she never knew, to sit together with her husband and to ask him: 'Do you remember?'"

Talking of days gone by, they did not hear the winter wind moan, nor the angry roar of the Morava, nor the deep threatening underground thunder in the capital, nor the crash of rotten planks falling, stirring up clouds of dust and burying for ever the world in which they had been young.

In March Laetitia arrived at Wohan. They had not known she was coming. "I felt homesick" she said half apologetically. "After all, one can't always live in a strange country."

Victoire smiled. She knew why England, the most wonderful, the most progressive country in the world had suddenly become a strange land. Laetitia had grown gentler, less sure of herself. Victoire was surprised to see how well she got on with her daughter.

"You'll be bored to death at Wohan," she said. "After London and the gay life you've been leading."

"Is it possible to be bored at Wohan? Sometimes when I saw things I disliked, I thought of Wohan and that everything was different and better here. I don't want to go to parties or to dance. I want to stay quiet and wait . . ." She blushed a deep red.

"You spent two days in Vienna, Letty. Whom did you see?"

"Uncle Franz. Of course he had no time to spare for me, and if he did find time he only talked about a marvellous medical discovery which I did not understand. And Alois who is madder than ever, and Nepomuk who is just as bad. And Ferdinand."

Getting up she walked to the window. Speaking over her shoulder she said, "I wish the year of mourning was over. I'm not as young as I was, maman. I'll be thirty-one soon. Why should we wait any longer?"

Victoire saw the little shadow who, only a short time ago, had walked hand in hand with Ferdinand in the grounds of Wohan and sat at the window in Vienna, waiting for her husband. Laetitia did not see it. She had forgotten Lully. Lully meant nothing to her but the year of mourning, the endless year, separating her from Ferdinand. Victoire was shocked at her daughter's callousness. But perhaps she had to be egoistic, perhaps this was life's egoism, the egoism of an old family which did not want to become extinct.

Laetitia had not inherited the doubts and questions which killed her mother's joys. She knew exactly what she wanted. She was different from her parents, harder, more purpose-

ful. She was, Victoire made a face, remembering that she too had once been called so, a modern girl. She had put away all childish enthusiasm and dreams. She saw humanity as it really was, she expected no heroism, no saintliness. . . . Like grandmaman Inez she only saw the next thing that had to be done.

Laetitia came and sat beside her mother. "I'm nearly thirty-one," she repeated. "I want to have children. Why must I wait so long?"

She stroked Victoire's hair. "You'll be such a charming grandmother," she said.

Victoire tried to speak about conventions, the many people who would be shocked, but seeing that Laetitia could not understand her, she fell silent. She knew she would give in. Who was she to fight against life?

Ferdinand and Laetitia married in May and settled down in the Herdegen palace. The old home was renovated, Laetitia made an English house of it—gay, light, comfortable, a little bourgeois Victoire thought. Only the green drawing-room remained as it was, Alois could not be persuaded to give up his beloved old lumber.

Alois had changed. He was quieter, his endless tirades about liberty and the rights of man became rarer. He began spending his evenings at home with Laetitia and Ferdinand. Formerly he had disliked Ferdinand's lack of enthusiasm, his reasonings, his "grocer's calculations." Now he discovered hidden behind the calm exterior and the sarcastic smile that the eldest Herdegen of the young generation had inherited from Stanislas, a strong sense of justice, kindness and energy. Alois dreamt of liberating the people; for him the people were good and noble, as nature had meant man to be. Ferdinand did not dream, but he helped where he could. He would fight for months for the tiniest reform in the elementary schools. He knew the people, who to Alois were abstract ideals, and knew too that they were neither better nor worse than the "upper classes," that Alois hated, only poorer, more in need of help. Grave young officials met at the young Herdegens', men not to be influenced by slogans which they thought absurd, vulgar and trite, men who knew

that behind sentimental and grandiloquent words a good and noble cause was hidden.

This winter Victoire felt happier than she had felt for a long time. She saw Laetitia's happiness and rejoiced in it. She felt that her son was coming closer to her and was glad, although she guessed that not love and tenderness made him seek her company, but a great and bitter disillusionment, the worst an idealist can suffer: to see things as they really are.

Alois never talked about it. He never mentioned the countless trifles which had shown him that his dearest friends and comrades were very human, intent on profit, full of petty envy and vanity. Only once, talking to his father he betrayed himself. They had been sitting for a long while in Joseph's study, neither of them saying a word. Many months later Joseph remembered that evening. The soft green light of the lamp, which made Alois's face look very white, and threw a pale gleam on grandmaman Inez's portrait hanging on the wall and on Carl's standing on the mantelpiece. Alois lounged on the big sofa, smoking his pipe. In the deep silence only the ticking of the old clock and the scraping of Joseph's quill were audible. Gazing at Carl's portrait Alois said abruptly. "He's a lucky fellow. He never doubts."

Joseph hastily lifted his head. The young voice had been full of pain.

"What about you?" he asked.

Alois sat up, his lips were trembling. "What is a man to do, father, who has ceased to believe in his old faith and cannot find a new one?"

Joseph felt a return of the shyness which so often overwhelmed him when he was talking to his children, the fear of saying something wrong, of hurting them, influencing them badly. He said nothing.

Alois sat waiting for an answer. His pleading eyes got on Joseph's nerves. He suddenly felt tired to death.

"What is a man to do?" Alois repeated.

Joseph looked away from the tortured young face and his glance fell on the portrait on the wall.

"You were too small when grandmaman Inez died to remember her," he said. "It's a pity. She could have answered your question."

Alois turned towards the portrait. "You all talk about her as if she were still alive," he said wonderingly. "Why?"

Joseph felt slightly bewildered. Why did the old woman still seem to live amongst them, why was her influence still so strong, after all these years? Why did her grandchildren and also her elder great-grandchildren who remembered her, say so often, "grandmaman Inez would . . . grandmaman Inez would not . . ."?

"Perhaps because she was so terribly genuine, a woman who always acted according to her faith." He spoke under his breath, more to himself than to his son, but Alois had heard him.

"Did she never feel doubts—whatever people who shared her faith did?"

Joseph suppressed a smile. How silly grandmaman Inez would have thought this question. What had poor weak human beings to do with a faith anchored in the sea of eternity? He shook his head. "She was wise and kept men and faith apart." He remained silent for a moment. Then he said in a low voice, "When she died, she regretted bitterly all she had left undone. Her only consolation was that God would do it for her, not only God, my boy, but we too, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

Alois kept silent but Joseph saw that he was touched.

"I'd like you to fulfil her wish, my boy. I myself have done so little that I want your help. Carl has taken up his burden. Won't you too remain true to your faith and fight on, even if your comrades in arms and the people you are fighting for disappoint you?"

He stopped abruptly, cold fear tugging at his heart. Had he interfered with another man's life? He thought of Victoire. Had he wronged her, exposing her son to new dangers, just when Alois might have become "sensible" as she called it?

Alois smiled a little wistfully. He got up slowly. Standing very straight before grandmaman Inez's portrait, looking into

the black Spanish eyes, he made Joseph think of a young squire of the Middle Ages, keeping his vigil in the chapel on the eve of being dubbed a knight. The rather too-soft mouth had grown firm, the chin looked obstinate and hard. Alois bowed to the portrait. He had forgotten his father. "Your great-grandson, grandmaman Inez, will keep faith, whatever may come."

In the pale green light of the shaded lamp the young face looked livid, like the face of a dead man.

CHAPTER XXI

His Majesty's youngest Ambassador, Stanislas Herdegen, forgetting his newly-acquired dignity, ran like mad along the big avenue leading to the castle, nearly upsetting Franz, who was returning home after having visited one of his village patients. Franz's holidays were a standing joke with the family, he passed them curing tenants and peasants, who, frightened out of their wits, reluctantly opened their doors to the "mad Count." For mad he must be, else he would never throw open all the windows and carry away the good old medicines great-grandmother had taught grandmother to brew.

Stanislas stopped, panting. Franz stared at him.

"What's up, Stani? Whom is His Excellency running away from?"

Laughing and still struggling for breath, Stanislas sat down on a stone. "From my son-in-law. I couldn't stand his conversation any longer. I've been agreeing with everything he said for the last half hour, just to please Therèse." He sighed deeply. "Too much family is a ghastly thing. My dear daughter and her husband, Nepomuk and his wife. Ferdinand and Letty are all right, although I shudder when I look at Letty and think that I can't escape being a grandfather soon. As to my son-in-law, that terrible Wilhelm . . . To think that I've got to be grateful to him for ridding me

of Therèse. God knows I'd never have found a husband for her."

"Too much inbreeding." Franz lit his pipe and puffed at it.

"Inbreeding? Nonsense. Mother Sametil's granddaughter has married old Bredar's son. Do you call that inbreeding? Or can you pretend that Therèse has a single family-trait, or Wilhelm has inherited a single quality from Toinette?"

Franz smiled, unable to contradict his brother. Therèse really was the image of her late maternal grandmother, noisy, excitable, a younger replica of the fat woman. He gazed at Stanislas who had hardly aged during the last ten years—grey hair suited him. He was still the handsome young diplomat with whom all the women fell in love and who achieved even more by his charm and his fascinating ways than by his cleverness. Franz, grown stouter and heavy-limbed, said reproachfully, "You'll never grow older, Stani."

Stanislas frowned, his face suddenly moody and morose. "I shall, now."

"Why now? You're as vain as a woman. Only because you'll be a grandfather soon?"

"No, because . . . because I'm retiring in a few months time."

"Retiring? Why, for goodness sake?"

"Because they want to send me to St. Petersburg. Oh, I know what you're going to say. A wonderful bit of luck, the youngest ambassador sent to one of the most important posts. But I cannot accept it."

"Why?" Franz looked dumfounded.

"I hate the Russians," Stanislas said passionately. "Not so much the simple barbarians, the people, as the so-called upper classes, whose barbarism is only hidden by a thin veneer of civilization. You know what I mean, the kind of people who don't wash but only use scent. Besides . . . I can't forget."

"Forget?"

"Look to your left, old man. There, that green spot is

the wilderness. It's quite overgrown. Letty would not let it be cleared. Can you see the red chestnut-tree in bloom? Matzi and I planted it as children. I'm not a sentimentalist like Joseph, but when I come to Wohan the first thing I do is to pay a visit to the chestnut-tree. That's the reason why . . ." He laughed sarcastically. "We've all got our weaknesses, that's mine. I can't forget Matzi. That's why I'm going to retire. We'll stay on in England. As long as my figure doesn't go back on me, I shall dance through the season—the charming Austrian Count with whom Her Majesty likes dancing—and hunt. I'll probably be bored to death and grow more and more cantankerous every day. And Bozi will forgive me, as she has always forgiven me everything, poor lovely angel that she is. And one day they'll bring me home in the train and bury me in the family vault, if there are any family vaults left by then."

Franz gazed searchingly at his brother. "Why do you say that, Stani?"

"Even a diplomat gets to hear things. I wish I could emigrate to a South-Sea island, where there are no economic problems." He grew animated. "Mind I know that the people who are filling the world with unrest, the small tenants, the peasants, the workers are perfectly right. Nevertheless, I wish I had lived two hundred years ago when the rich had no conscience and the poor no sense. As to our governments, England excepted . . ."

Franz laughed. "Grandmaman Inez used to say the world ought to be ruled by women. I, on the other hand, would like to see it ruled by scholars and scientists. They would know what to do."

"People like you and my brother-in-law, Nepomuk?"

"Like Nepomuk, yes. I know, Stani, your idiotic pride still sees in him the peasant boy, whose studies were paid for by grandmaman Inez. But I can assure you that peasant boy's name will live on when the Herdegens have been forgotten."

"Maybe." Stanislas yawned.

Two children came out of the wilderness, a small girl and a boy. Stanislas grew pale.

"Look, Franz, the wilderness has come alive again. Children are playing under its old trees, the grandchildren of dear old father Sametil, and the Jewish banker. Isn't it strange?"

"The Jewish banker . . ."

"Oh Lord, don't preach again. I didn't intend saying a word against him. I'd much rather have Rachel as a daughter than my poor awful Therèse. Besides I must admit that her children look much more aristocratic than Therèse does."

The children had seen him and began to run towards them. Stanislas hastily smoothed his hair and pulled down his jacket. Franz watched him with amusement. Stani's old vanity was not dead yet, he wanted to be at his best, even for the children. They both adored him, as long ago, Letty and the twins had adored their handsome uncle, who invented such lovely games and told such exciting stories of far away countries, of long journeys by train and adventurous voyages.

Little Inez, it was strange that the name lived on in the Sametil and not in the Herdegen family, threw herself into Stanislas's arms. Her soft brown eyes shone, her round cheeks were rosy with excitement.

"Oh uncle Stani, we've found a bird's nest. Just imagine, three tiny blackbirds. Come, we'll show it to you."

Stanislas, nearly as eager as the children, asked "In the big willow? There always used to be a nest there."

Little Inez caught hold of his right, little Franz of his left hand. "Come on, uncle Stani. Don't wait."

They were in a terrible hurry and His Excellency, the ambassador, ran down the steep path with them, just as eager and merry as little Stani had run, hand-in-hand with Matzi, to the wilderness, because he had discovered a bird's nest.

Franz gazed after them. They disappeared in the green entanglement of tree tops and branches, over which rose Marie Christine's chestnut-tree, a patch of red against the blue sky.

In France the third Republic had been proclaimed. A

good-natured man had fled his capital, unable to grasp what his people really wanted. England, asylum of all refugees, welcomed Mr. Smith without stressing the fact that but a few days ago he had been called King Louis Philippe of France.

In Vienna the government drew the reins tighter. The old men in the cabinet knew the trick by heart. Perhaps the highest in the land would have preferred another way of dealing with his subjects, but his ministers would not listen to him. Again informers swarmed through the city, men were arrested, books and pamphlets banned. The censor's office worked day and night. Officials were forbidden even to mention Milan . . . But no censor, no authority, no decree and no order could prevent tongues wagging. At first the daring words were but a whisper, then, growing louder and louder, they clamoured in a shout: "Metternich must go!" The pale blue March sky became the dome of a gigantic cathedral where the Viennese prayed strange prayers for liberty to strange gods. In inns and market places, in squares and before St. Stephen's cathedral the crowds stood about, full of excitement, of joy, of fear, waiting for the great events whose approach they sensed.

"Thousands have signed the petition," men whispered. "We demand a constitution, the liberty of the Press and the resignation of old Metternich."

"What will happen if he does go," a sceptic wanted to know.

"When he's gone . . ." Many voices enlightened him, describing a paradise on earth whose gates were guarded by Prince Metternich and perhaps, by the Archdukes.

Alois had forgotten all his doubts. He was carried away by the general expectation and confidence. Blissfully he believed in the possibility of a bloodless revolution. Truth and justice would be victorious without any blood being shed. A wonderful State would be built up, ruled by brotherly love, a model for all other countries, a new, a rejuvenated, a really great Austria.

He was standing in the court of the Guild-House, amongst students, artisans and workers, listening to a young man

reading aloud a speech by Kossuth. He felt as if he were dreaming. Was it possible that such sincere, outspoken, courageous words could be said out loud in this city? Had the miracle occurred already?

He followed the crowds marching towards the State Office, feeling joyfully that he belonged to it. They all wanted, all demanded the same thing. Never before had he loved his fellow-men so much. He saw exalted, transfigured faces and their strange beauty seemed unearthly to him.

He did not hear a nervous whisper running along the crowd.

"The soldiers have been called out!"

Noon had come. The sun had pierced the clouds. Church bells were ringing gaily. Alois understood their song: Liberty. Justice. Happiness for all. Listening to the heavenly voices, singing in the warm spring air, he did not hear the tramp of cantering horses nor the heavy steps of marching men.

The first shot rang out in the Strauch Road. Alois, wedged in the crowd, could hardly turn his head. He felt more than he saw that behind him a man fell to the ground. The one thing he saw clearly was a bright red spot.

Horror overwhelmed him. They're shooting at us, shooting at men who only demand their right. The soldiers are shooting . . .

He saw the faces around him. What had become of their unearthly beauty? Distorted by hate, they had changed to grotesque masks of indignation, fear, and amazement. Hair clinging to damp foreheads, wide open staring eyes, clenched fists, hands madly clawing the air. Open mouths uttered shrill cries, fused to a single cry, a terrible roar as of hunted wild beasts.

The soldiers advanced. Short commands sounded in the narrow road. A second volley rang out, a third, followed by shrieks and moans. Then a fourth, the last shot Alois Herdegen heard.

The soldiers quickly restored order, mopping up the streets, the market-places and squares. Beneath the pale blue spring sky dead men lay, a last unanswered question on their

livid faces, staring up to the white wind-driven clouds overhead.

Victoire did not cry when strangers brought home her dead son. She did not say a word, she only nodded silently. She had known what was going to happen, for years she had heard the shot which had hit Alois.

She sat in the green drawing-room, holding her son's cold hand. She gazed at him as if she had never seen him before, her eyes were glued to the young dead face.

She did not know what happened that night. She did not hear the cheers, the shouts of joy, the wild yells that filled the town when the Viennese knew that Prince Metternich had resigned. Neither did she hear hurrying steps in the young Herdegen wing, nor the moans sounding from Laetitia's rooms, nor when twilight came, the first weak cry of a new-born child.

Joseph came into the room. He looked pale and deadly tired. Kneeling down beside the sofa he prayed silently. Then getting up, he said very gently, very softly, "Victoire, Letty has a son."

Victoire looked at him, her thoughts running on other things. "Letty . . . oh, of course . . ." Her face grew distorted. "Why was the child born? They will kill it as they killed my son."

"My son too, Victoire."

She ignored his words. Turning to the sofa, she lifted the cold, dead hand. "Look, Joseph, this hand only wanted to give, to help. It never hurt any one. Look at it."

She fell silent again. Without a tear she sat beside her son's body, as motionless as if she herself were dead. Late in the night she roused herself. Through the windows she saw the illumination with which the Viennese were celebrating their victory. All their demands had been granted: a national guard, freedom of the Press, a constitution. An old man whom many people had laughed at, had said angrily when his ministers and generals had advised him to let them bring out the cannon: "I'm not going to let you fire on my Viennese."

The dead were forgotten. The whole town was bright with light and colour and laughter. The dead lay in dark rooms. The town shouted itself hoarse. The dead were mute.

Victoire gave a start. "Joseph, I can't stay here and he must not stay here either, in the town which has killed him. I want to take him home to Wohan."

She had her way. Joseph came with her. They went part of the way by train. They sat side by side, silent and sad. The train rumbled through pouring rain. On both sides the slopes were still covered with dirty snow. Joseph stared out of the window. How fast things flew by, nearly as fast as the years of a man's life. And what was the journey's end? Was it not always the same as it was to-day—the grave?

Victoire's face frightened him. He had never seen her look like that. She seemed very far away, she had become estranged to him and to every one since that afternoon—how long ago was it, three days or three years?—when strangers had brought Alois home. She had not said good-bye to Letty; she had not even seen Letty's son.

Despairingly he sought for comforting words. "He died happy, Victoire. He saw the victory of the cause he had fought for."

"How can you know what he was thinking just before he was hit? Perhaps he saw others die. Perhaps he suddenly dreaded the people for whom he had fought. Perhaps, lying on the ground and feeling death drawing close, he asked himself what was the good of it?"

Joseph lifted his head. "Don't Victoire, please. I . . . I can't bear it."

She stared at him in amazement. "You're crying? You can cry! I can't, I can only hate. Hate with a wild hate the men who have taken him away from me, and those others, for whom he died. They too have robbed me of my boy. And I can't revenge him. I can kill neither the one nor the other."

She grew silent again. The train rumbled on. Gently evening fell on the earth. Black shadows stretched themselves fantastically on fields and hills, running past the

window. Victoire's figure had become a blurred spot. Joseph shivered, a feeling of deadly loneliness caught him by the throat. He felt afraid of life, afraid of death. "Victoire!"

He had only whispered her name, but it had sounded like a cry for help.

She looked up. "*Mon pauvre Joseph, mon pauvre ami.* You too . . . I'd quite forgotten you." She put out her hand for his. "Come closer. How cold you are. You must not die too, *mon ami.*"

She leant against his shoulder and he put his arm round her. "Joseph, can't you find anything at all to comfort me? No word, no memory?"

He held her tight. "You must not hate, Victoire darling. It hurts too much. You must not say the others have robbed you of him. He died as honourable men die, for his faith. He did what grandmaman Inez asked us to do, he did what we had left undone."

She lifted her head. "Grandmaman Inez . . . yes, she lived on in him. And died a second time together with him. During the last year he often reminded me of her. Now . . ." She clung to his hand. "Do you think, Joseph, that the little one, the tiny one, Letty's son, will continue what we—no, what grandmaman Inez, you and Alois—have begun? The poor little mite." Her voice broke. "I did not even see him."

She lay weeping in his arms. The train rumbled through the night. In the distance the moon, peeping between the clouds, lit up a broad silver band, the Morava. Soon they would be at home.

The months passed gently at Wohan. Alois's grave in the Watteau meadow, where in Ludmilla's youth the swing had hung between trees and a nude Eros had aimed his arrow at a nude woman, was covered with violets and pale lilac wallflowers. In June the big rose trees glowed like a flame and red rose leaves fell on the black earth. Gradually the peace of this quiet grave crept into Victoire's heart. She had aged, her nose looked long and pointed in the hollow-checked face. She wore her white hair low on her forehead,

her violet eyes had faded. Nevertheless, Joseph still thought her more beautiful than any other woman. She loved his admiration, although she pretended to laugh at it.

"Looking in the mirror to-day," she said, "I discovered that now my nose has grown so long, I'm getting to look like grandmaman Inez. I'm glad, for now I'm grandmaman Victoire for little Joseph." Tapping her hand with her first finger, she counted. "How old am I really? When we married I was seventeen. I must be fifty-one. I might as well be a hundred. I've experienced so much. Or does every generation believe it has seen and suffered more than the others?"

She was standing in the rose garden, grafting a dog rose. It had become a passion with her. "When I die," she said, "I want to leave Wohan full of roses for those who come after us. Look at the Malmaison roses, Joseph. I had them sent from France as a bride. At first they could not stand the climate, now they bloom as if they had always lived here."

Joseph smiled. "You too could not feel at home, do you remember? How often you told me you hated the Austrichiens."

"What a lot of nonsense I must have talked in my youth. French—Autrichiens—what does it matter? Only the human being is important." She sighed. "If only all people could understand that. I'm frightened when the postman brings the paper."

At Wohan sunny peaceful days followed one another, but out in the world every day was a flaring torch, burning up life and property. Laetitia wrote from the capital.

"Systems and cabinets change more quickly than low tide and high tide. No one knows which saint to invoke. Father's old friends are frightened to death at their own heroism. They prophesy a rising of the people, a second French revolution. One often sees the German flag. I hate seeing it, remembering what the poet Heine wrote, that the German flag always carried new crass stupidities in its train. I often think no one knows what he really

wants. Excepting the Hungarians, perhaps. But that too, is a painful affair. I'm not coming to Wohan yet. I should die of nervousness if I knew Ferdinand was here alone. And he insists upon staying, he won't even go for a holiday, hoping to use the general muddle to attain some reforms for his beloved elementary schools . . ."

October brought new horrors. Vienna was besieged like a town in a hostile country, it was conquered like an enemy. Joseph managed to get to the capital. It looked like a camp. Its walls enclosed fear, the murderous, destructive fear men feel when distrusting one another. Had the comrade of yesterday not turned into an enemy to-day, ready to betray, so as to save himself? Under Metternich men had been imprisoned, now they were shot. Many fled. Laetitia, always ready to help persecuted men to escape, was often reminded of the two Poles who had come to Wohan as refugees, years ago. Once more refugees were forced to leave their homes and their countries and to live in alien lands. Once more they were at first treated as honoured guests, made much of as long as they were a sensation, only to become a nuisance that every country wanted to get rid of.

Laetitia was Victoire's daughter, ready to risk everything for strangers, doing it with a smile. But she was more matter-of-fact than her mother. She calculated, planned, used her brains. Happiness had made her kinder and more generous. Sometimes, seeing her alone with Ferdinand and the baby, Joseph discovered in her qualities which reminded him of Toinette. She talked about Carl who had spent a few days in Vienna: "I really believe he's the happiest of us all. He never wants anything for himself, and he loves all men, the good and the bad, the wise and the stupid."

She never spoke of Alois, but going into the green drawing-room, Joseph noticed that nothing had been changed. When he talked to Letty about it, she said shyly. "I'm not quite as heartless as you all think. When my boy is older he's to have the room. I should like him to breathe in a little of Alois's kindness and pass it on to others."

In the nursery grandmaman Inez's portrait hung over the

cot. The black Spanish eyes looked gravely down upon the tiny boy, and the hand holding the fan seemed to protect him. Standing beside the bed Joseph gazed at the grandson who bore his name. The child woke up. Black eyes looked up at the grandfather, Letty's eyes, grandmaman Inez's eyes. A feeling of reverence overcame Joseph. The chain is not broken yet, a new Herdegen will give the world what we did not give, a new Herdegen will serve his country and humanity—one wise with the knowledge that his ancestors have garnered and wise with the knowledge of his own times. The child's black eyes and the eyes of the portrait looked at each other, it was as if they were talking together in a silent language, known to them alone.

In the first half of December Ferdinand and Laetitia came to Wohan with little Joseph. They brought the news of the Emperor's abdication and spoke hopefully of young Francis Joseph and of peace in Austria. Laetitia talked quickly, eagerly, Joseph listened with a smile. From the children's words rose all his own hopes and dreams. Thus had men talked when Ferdinand came to the throne. They too had seen the shining light of the Promised Land flaming over the Imperial palace. The light had faded away. Now it was shining once more for the youth of to-day.

He gazed at Laetitia and Ferdinand. Laetitia was lovely, looking much younger than her thirty-three years, glowing with happiness. Ferdinand was much quieter and graver than his wife but just as full of hope. The young generation . . . how different it was from what he and Victoire and his sisters had been. Also different from Carl . . . and Alois . . . During this last terrible year even Victoire had not been able to mourn for his death. How could he, who had always lived in a dream-world have borne the collapse of all his hopes? And Carl? Carl had saved himself, he was nearly as safe as his dead brother.

Victoire, listening to Laetitia's words, smiled half mockingly, half wistfully. The eternal hope of a happy new world seemed to her pathetic but also silly. How often had these hopes been voiced in the old castle, how often had men,

grown old, admitted with a resigned smile, or full of hopeless anger that they had been mistaken? That the old wrong lived on in a new shape. What was the good of worrying, working, suffering, hoping, longing, loving and hating if everything was in vain? What was the good?

Laetitia made a hasty movement and the baby on her lap began to cry.

"Give him to me," Joseph said.

Laetitia laid the kicking, crying child in his arms.

"Go, you naughty brat, go to grandpapa Joseph."

The child in his arms, Joseph looked at his wife. He saw the expression on her face and could guess her thoughts. He read the question which had spoilt her life, on her lips, and feared with a superstitious dread that she was going to voice it. He did not want to hear it here, in the peaceful quiet of his study, not here where grandmaman Inez's portrait looked down upon them, not now when he was holding the warm little new life in his arms. He looked at Victoire and his eyes implored her to keep silent.

"Life," he said, lifting the youngest Herdegen over his head and smiling to hear him gurgle and chuckle, "goes on. That is all we know, and all we need know. That is hope and fulfilment and faith. Life goes on."

His grave tone put a stop to Laetitia's chatter. She looked at Ferdinand and her eyes said, "Yes, life goes on, for you and me and the child. How good that it does."

Victoire shivered. Suddenly she felt terribly lonely amongst these people who believed in something she could not believe in. The last tie between them and her seemed to snap. Perhaps it had to be so. Perhaps those who deny life must be isolated so as not to infect others with their deadly disease. Perhaps . . .

The baby in Joseph's arms turned his head and looked at Victoire. The big black eyes were very grave, the big black eyes Victoire knew so well. Grandmaman Inez. It flashed through her brain . . . she is not dead, she has survived Alois, she lives on in baby Joseph, in all of us, she and her strictness and kindness and unalterable faith. She loved and understood us all, she would understand me too . . .

She smiled at the baby. Then she looked at Joseph, very tenderly, very fondly. She suddenly felt old, old enough to give up her own ideas and to speak a lie for love's sake.

"Yes, *mon ami*," she said gently, "You are right as always. Life goes on and that is good."