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Book One

Chapter One

The play lasted for a very long time. Old Barbara went to the window several times to see if the coaches had already started leaving the theater. She was waiting for Mariane, her pretty mistress who was that night delighting the audience as a young officer in the epilogue—waiting for her with more impatience than usual, when she merely had a simple supper ready. For this time a surprise package had come in the mail from a wealthy young merchant named Norberg, to show that even when he was away, he was still thinking of his beloved. A trusty servant, companion, adviser, go-between and house-keeper, Barbara had every right to open the package. And this evening she could not resist, for the favors of this generous lover meant even more to her than they did to Mariane. To her great delight she found in the package not only fine muslin and elegant ribbons for Mariane, but for herself a length of cotton material, scarves and a roll of coins. She thought of the absent Norberg with great affection and gratitude, and eagerly resolved to praise him to Mariane, to remind her of what she owed him, and of his hopes and expectations that she would be faithful to him.

The muslin, brightened by the color of the half-unrolled ribbons, lay like a Christmas present on the table, and the light of the candles added a special luster to the gift. Everything was in place as she heard Mariane's footsteps on the stairs and she hastened to meet her. But how surprised she was when this female officer disregarded her affectionate greeting, and, pushing past her, rushed into the room, dropped the sword and plumed hat with unusual haste, walked restlessly up and down and never noticed the festive candles.

"What is it, my dear?" asked the old woman, puzzled. "For heaven's sake, girl, what's wrong? Look at these presents. Who could they be from but your loving friend? Norberg has sent you a length of muslin for a nightgown. He'll soon be here, and seems more eager and generous than usual."

Barbara was about to show Mariane the gifts that she too had received from him when Mariane, turning away from the gifts, cried out: "No! No! I don't want to hear any more about all this. I did what you wanted, so be it! When

Norberg comes back, I'll be his again, I'll be yours—do with me what you will. But until then, I want to be myself. If you had a thousand tongues, you couldn't change my mind. I am going to give all of myself to the one who loves me and whom I love. Don't make such faces! I am going to love him with everything I have as if it could last forever."

The old woman had counterarguments enough. But when the exchange began to get violent and bitter, Mariane jumped up and grabbed her. The old woman only laughed uproariously and said, "If I am to be sure of my life, I have to see to it that you are soon in a long dress again. Go and change! I hope that you will apologize, as a girl, for the harm you did me as a flighty officer: off with that coat and with everything underneath it. It's an uncomfortable costume, and dangerous for you, I see. The epaulettes have gone to your head."

Barbara tried to hold her but Mariane broke free. "Not so fast!" she said, "I'm expecting a visitor tonight."

"That's not good," the old woman replied. "Surely not that young, lovesick, unfledged merchant's son?" "Exactly! Him!" said Mariane.

"Magnanimity seems now to be your ruling passion," the old woman scornfully replied. "You exert yourself for those who are either immature or poor. It must be nice to be adored as an unselfish benefactress."

"Make fun of me if you like! I love him! I love him! Oh, how happy I am to say this, for the first time in my life. This is the passion I have acted on the stage and yet never really known. I will throw myself at him, embrace him as if I would hold him forever. I shall show him all my love and enjoy all of his!"

"Calm down! Calm down," said the old woman quietly. "I must interrupt your joy with the news that Norberg will be here in two weeks. Here is his letter, which came with the presents."

"The dawn may take my lover away, but I won't think about that now. Fourteen days! That's an eternity! Just think what can happen, what can change, in two weeks."

Wilhelm entered the room. How eagerly she rushed towards him! And how passionately he embraced that red uniform and the white satin vest. Who would dare to describe, who has the right to describe, the bliss of two lovers. The old womanservant went off muttering, and we, too, leave the happy couple to themselves.

Chapter Two

When Wilhelm greeted his mother the next morning, she told him that his father was very angry and would soon forbid those regular visits to the theater. "I, too, like to go to the theater sometimes," she continued, "but I am often annoyed at the way our domestic peace and quiet are disturbed by your wild addiction to this pleasure. Your father is always saying, 'What's the use of this? Why waste one's time in the theater?'"

"I've often heard him say that," said Wilhelm, "and I may have answered him too rudely; but for goodness' sake, Mother, why is everything useless that doesn't bring in money or enlarge our property? Didn't we have enough room in the old house? Was it necessary to build a new one? Doesn't my father spend a sizable amount of his profits every year in decorating these rooms? All these silk wallpapers and this English furniture, do we need all that? Couldn't we do with less? These striped walls, with their endless rows of flowers, their scrolls and baskets and figures, seem so unpleasant, like a stage curtain in our own house. It's different in a real theater where you know that the curtain will go up and reveal all sorts of things to entertain, enlighten and elevate us."

"Don't overdo it!" said his mother. "Your father likes to have his own fun of an evening. Moreover, he believes that it only distracts you, and in the end I'll be blamed when he gets cross. How often have I been reproached for giving you that wretched puppet theater for Christmas twelve years ago. It gave you that taste for the theater!"

"Don't blame the puppet theater, don't regret that token of your love and care for me. Those were my first happy moments in the new and empty house. I can still remember it, that moment of wonder: after we had received our usual presents, we were told to sit down in front of a door to an adjacent room, which then opened, not just to let us in or out, but for some unexpected festive event, with a great gate closed by a mystic curtain. We watched this from a distance and then, as we were dying to know what was twinkling and rattling behind the half-transparent curtain, we were told to draw up our chairs and to wait.

"So, we all sat quietly until a whistle blew, the curtain rolled up and revealed, in bright red, a view into a temple. Samuel, the High Priest, appeared with Jonathan, and their curious exchange of voices sounded very dignified. Then Saul came on the scene, annoyed by the pompous and heavily armored warrior who had challenged him and his followers to battle. I was glad when the dwarf-like son of Jesse leaped forward with his shepherd's crook, bag and slingshot and said, 'Almighty King and Master! Let no man's heart fail because of him. If Your Majesty will permit me, I will go and fight this mighty giant.' That was the end of the first act, and the audience was eager to see what would happen next. Everyone wished the music would stop. Then the curtain rose again. David was consecrating the giant's flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. The Philistine vented his scorn, stamped both feet, then fell down like a log and put the matter to a glorious end. And then the maidens sang: 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!' The head of the giant was carried in before the tiny victor and he won the hand of the king's daughter. But I, for all my delight, was annoyed by the fact that this lucky prince was fashioned like a dwarf, for 'little David' and 'big Goliath' had really been presented true to life. But Mother, where are those puppets now? I promised to show them to a friend who was amused by what I told him recently of these childhood games."

“I am not surprised that you remember these things so vividly, you were so interested in them from the beginning! I remember how you sneaked the text away from me and then learned the whole play by heart. I noticed that one evening, when you made a David and Goliath out of wax, let them talk to each other, gave the giant a whack, stuck his shapeless head onto a big pin and put it in little David’s hand. Your mother was so delighted at your good memory and the fine speeches, that she decided to give you the whole company of wooden puppets on the spot. Little did I know what trouble that would give me.”

“Don’t grieve over that,” Wilhelm replied. “Those playthings have given us both so many pleasant hours.” He then asked for the keys for the room where the puppets were kept, rushed off, found the puppets and for a moment was transported back to the time when he thought they were real, live creatures, when he thought he could bring them alive by his own lively voice and the movements of his own hands. He took them up to his room and guarded them carefully.

Chapter Three

If, as is often said, first love is the best that any heart can experience early or late, our hero must be considered thrice blest for being able to enjoy these supreme moments in full measure. Few of us are so favored, for in our early years our feelings often take us through a hard school and, after a few paltry indulgences, we must forgo our highest wishes and learn forever to do without what we once dreamed of as utter bliss.

It was on the wings of imagination that Wilhelm’s desire for this charming girl soared. He won her affection after a short acquaintance and soon found himself in possession of someone he both loved and worshipped. She had first appeared in the flattering light of a theatrical performance, and his own passion for the stage was closely connected with his first love for a woman. Being young, he could fully enjoy the offered pleasures which were sustained and intensified by the poetry of her world. And her own ambiguous situation, her fear that he might discover all too soon what her position was—this gave her a pleasing semblance of modesty and anxiety, which only enhanced his fondness for her. As she loved him so dearly, her uneasiness only increased her tenderness. In his arms she was the most adorable creature.

When he awoke from the first frenzy of joy, and thought about his life and his circumstances, everything seemed different—his duties more compelling, his pastimes more absorbing, his knowledge clearer, his talents much stronger, his purposes more definite. It was therefore easy for him to avoid his father’s reproaches, to pacify his mother, and to enjoy Mariane’s love undisturbed. He performed his daily tasks promptly, stopped going to the theater regularly and made sure to be pleasant at supper; but when everyone had gone to bed, he

put on his cloak, crept quietly into the garden and hurried straight to his beloved, his heart beating fast like that of a young lover in a play.

"What did you bring?" asked Mariane one evening when he arrived with a parcel, which Barbara, hoping for a nice present, scrutinized closely. "You'll never guess," said Wilhelm.

Mariane was amazed (and Barbara dismayed) when what he unwrapped turned out to be a jumbled pile of miniature puppets. Mariane laughed as he untangled the wires and proudly displayed each figure. Barbara slunk off, displeased.

Not much is needed to amuse two lovers; they had a wonderful evening. The little band of puppets was paraded, every figure carefully examined and laughed over. Mariane did not like King Saul in his black velvet gown and gold crown: she thought him much too stiff and pedantic. She preferred Jonathan's smooth chin, his yellow and red costume and his turban; she moved him nicely by the wires and made him bow and declare his love. But she wouldn't pay any attention to the prophet Samuel, although Wilhelm proudly pointed to his breastplate and told her that the taffeta of his gown was from one of his grandmother's old dresses. David was too small for her, and Goliath too big. It was Jonathan she loved. Him she treated with particular delicacy, and in the end transferred her cherishing embraces from the puppet to Wilhelm. And so, once again, a little game became the preliminary for hours of bliss.

They were interrupted in their sweet dreams of love by a noise in the street. Mariane called to the old woman, who was busy as usual altering Mariane's costumes for the next play. Barbara reported that some merrymakers were just leaving the tavern nearby where they had been treating themselves to fresh oysters (which had just come in) and champagne.

"A pity we didn't think of that earlier," said Mariane. "We could have done ourselves a bit of good, too."

"It's not too late," Wilhelm replied, and gave Barbara a gold coin. "Go and get what we want; and you can have some with us."

The old woman hurried off, and in no time a well arranged collation was set out before the lovers. Barbara had to join them. They ate, drank—and were merry.

On such occasions there is never any lack of entertainment. Mariane took out her Jonathan, and the old woman steered the conversation to Wilhelm's favorite subject: "You once told us," she said, "about the first performance of your puppet theater one Christmas Eve. It was very amusing, and you were interrupted just when your ballet was about to begin. But now we have met with the distinguished cast that produced such splendid effects."

"Yes," said Mariane, "do tell us more, and what your feelings were at the time."

"It is always pleasant, my dear, to remember old times and our past, but harmless, mistakes. Especially when this occurs as we feel we have achieved a high point from which we can now look about and reflect on the path that

brought us to this lofty view. It is pleasant and satisfying to remember the obstacles that we sadly thought were insurmountable, and then compare what we, as mature persons, have now developed into, with what we were then, in our immaturity. I cannot tell you how happy I am now that I can talk to you about the past—now that I gaze out towards the joyous landscape that we shall travel hand in hand.”

“Well—how was that ballet?” interrupted the old woman. “I fear that it didn’t turn out as well as it should have.”

“Oh, yes, it did,” said Wilhelm. “It was just fine! Those marvelous leaps of the Moors, the shepherds and the dwarves—little men and women—have remained something like a dim memory through all my later life. The curtain came down, the door closed and we all went off to bed, dizzy and drunk with delight—but I couldn’t sleep. I wanted to know more, and was still so eager to ask questions that I didn’t want the nursemaid who put us to bed to leave.

“Next morning that magic structure had vanished, the mystic curtain was gone and you could once again move without hindrance from one room to the next. All the enchantment had disappeared and left no trace. My sisters and brothers ran about with their toys, but I crept around silent and alone. It seemed impossible that there should be just two doorposts where the night before there had been such wonders. No one, not even if he were looking for a lost love, could have been more unhappy than I seemed to be.”

His glance at Mariane, filled with joy, convinced her that he had no fear of ever being in such an unhappy state.

Chapter Four

“My only wish,” Wilhelm continued, “was to see a second performance. I talked to my mother, and when the moment seemed right, she tried to persuade my father; but all her efforts were fruitless. He insisted that if a pleasure was to have any value, it must be infrequent, and that young and old don’t appreciate the good things that come their way every day.

“We would have had to wait a long time, perhaps till the following Christmas, if the maker and secret director of the theater had not himself wanted to repeat the performance and in an epilogue introduced a clown he had just made.

“A young soldier from the artillery, who had all sorts of talents and especially great mechanical skill, had helped my father considerably in the building of our house and been handsomely rewarded for this; but he wanted to show his special gratitude to the family at Christmastime, and made us a present of this fully equipped theater which he had put together and painted in his free time. He was the one who, with the help of a servant, had animated the puppets and recited the various parts in different tones of voice. It was not hard for him to persuade my father, who gladly granted to a friend the

favor he as a matter of principle had refused his own children. So, the theater was set up again, some children invited from the neighborhood, and the play was repeated.

“The first time I had the joy of surprise and astonishment; at the second performance I was intensely curious and observant. This time I wanted to find out exactly how everything was done. I had decided on that first evening that it couldn’t be the puppets themselves that were speaking, I had even suspected that they could not move by themselves. But why it was all so agreeable, and why the puppets themselves seemed to speak and move, and where the lights were, and the people who operated all this—these mysteries disturbed me so much that I wanted to be both among the enchanted and the enchanters, somehow secretly to have a hand in it, and at the same time, as a spectator, be able to enjoy the pleasure of the illusion.

“The play came to an end, and preparations were being made for the epilogue. The audience stood up and chatted. I made my way to the door and from the clatter that was going on inside, realized that they were clearing up. I lifted the lower curtain, and looked through the framework. My mother noticed me and pulled me back; but I had already seen how my friends and foes, Saul and Goliath, and whoever all the others were, were being put away in a drawer. This was fresh nourishment for my half-satisfied curiosity. To my great astonishment I saw the lieutenant busy in this sanctuary. And as a result the clown in the epilogue, despite his heel-clattering, had no appeal for me. I was lost in thought, and after this discovery seemed both calmer and more restless than before. Having discovered something, I felt that I didn’t really know anything, and I was right: for what I lacked was a sense of the enterprise as a whole, and that after all is the most important thing.”

Chapter Five

“Children in well-established and well-organized homes feel rather like rats and mice: They seek out cracks and crannies to find their way to forbidden dainties. The furtive and intense fear with which they indulge in this search is one of the joys of childhood.

“I noticed more quickly than any of my sisters or brothers when a key was left in a lock. Much as I respected those closed doors, when I had to walk past them week after week or month after month, I would peek in unobserved when my mother opened that sanctuary to get something out, and I was quick to use the brief moments which the negligent housekeeper sometimes provided.

“As could be expected it was the pantry door that drew my sharpest attention. Few joys of anticipation matched those when my mother called me in to help her carry something and, whether by her kindness or my cunning, I managed to pick up some dried prunes. Those piles of wonderful things filled

my imagination with a sense of abundance, and the marvelous smell of all the spices had such a mouth-watering effect on me that I never failed to breathe in deeply when I was nearby. One Sunday morning this special key was left in the keyhole as my mother was caught unawares by the bells ringing for the church service and the rest of the house was wrapped in sabbath stillness. As soon as I noticed it, I crept gingerly along the wall, moved quietly to the door, opened it, and with one stride was in the midst of so many long-desired delights. I rapidly scrutinized all the chests, sacks, boxes, cases and jars and, wondering what to take, I finally picked up some of my beloved prunes, some dried apples and some preserved pomegranate skin, and was about to slip out with my loot when I noticed some boxes with wires and hooks hanging out of the lids, which had not been properly closed. I had an idea what these might be, fell upon them and discovered to my delight that here packed away was the whole world of my joys and my heroes. I tried to pick up the ones on top to look at them, and then those underneath, but soon I had tangled up all the wires and got very upset and frightened, especially since I heard the cook moving in the adjoining kitchen. I stuffed everything back as quickly as I could and closed the drawer, taking with me only a handwritten little book, the play of David and Goliath, which had been lying on top, and with my booty escaped to the attic.

“From this time on I spent every hour that I could have by myself in reading over and over ‘my’ play, learning it by heart, and imagining how wonderful it would be if with my own fingers I could bring the figures to life. I felt myself becoming David and Goliath. I absorbed the play by studying it wherever I could find a corner—in the attic, the stable or the garden—I took each part and memorized it thoroughly, except that I caught myself taking the parts of the main characters and imagining the others trotting along like attendants. The grandiose speeches of David, in which he challenged the boastful Goliath, filled my mind day and night; I muttered them to myself, but no one paid attention except my father who sometimes noticed one of my exclamations and secretly praised the good memory of his son, who seemed to have retained so much after so little listening. As a result I became bolder and one evening recited almost the whole play to my mother, making actors out of lumps of wax. She seemed surprised and wanted an explanation—and I confessed.

“Fortunately all this occurred just when the lieutenant had proposed to initiate me into the secrets of the performance. My mother told him about my unexpected talent, and the lieutenant managed to get permission to use some rooms on the top floor of the house, which were usually empty: one for the spectators and one for the actors, with the doorway between as proscenium. My father allowed his friend to do all this, pretended not to be aware of it, as he was convinced that one ought not to let children see how much one loves them, or else they will ever ask for more. One should appear stern while they are enjoying themselves, and sometimes spoil their pleasures so that they do not become too easily satisfied—and impertinent.”

Chapter Six

“The lieutenant set up the theater and looked after everything else. I had noticed him several times during the week coming into the house at an unusual hour, and suspected what was going on. My eagerness increased amazingly, as I knew I couldn’t take part in what was being prepared until the following Saturday. But at last the longed-for day arrived, and at five o’clock the lieutenant took me upstairs. Trembling with joy I entered the room and saw the puppets hanging on both sides of the stage, in the order they were to appear. I studied them carefully, and then climbed on the step which set me above the stage, so that I seemed suspended above this miniature world. With a sense of awe, I looked down between the boards, because I remembered how splendid it had all seemed from the outside, and realized that I was now being initiated into the inner mysteries. We made a trial run and everything worked beautifully.

“The next day, in a performance before a group of children we had invited, we managed well, except that in the heat of the moment I dropped my Jonathan and had to reach down with my hand to pick him up—an accident which destroyed the illusion, provoked much laughter, and upset me greatly. My father seemed pleased by this slip-up, for very wisely he kept his pride in my skill to himself and, when the play was over, rather concentrated on the mistakes, and said that it would have been nice if only this or that hadn’t gone wrong.

“I was deeply hurt and was miserable all evening, but by next morning had slept off my irritation and was now happy at the thought that, apart from one mishap, I had done very well. The applauding spectators had all agreed that though the lieutenant used coarse and refined tones of voice to good effect, his speech had on the whole been too artificial and stiff, whereas the new helper spoke his David and Jonathan to perfection. My mother praised especially the straightforward way in which I had summoned Goliath to battle and later presented the modest victor to the King.

“To my great joy, the theater remained set up and when spring arrived and we could do without a fire, I spent all my free time in my room playing with the puppets. Often enough I invited my brothers and sisters as well as friends; and if they didn’t want to come, I played alone, my imagination brooding over that little world, which soon began to take on a different shape.

“After I had several times performed that first play for which theater and actors had been set up, I began to lose interest in it. But among my grandfather’s books I found the collection of plays by Professor Gottsched called ‘The German Stage,’ and texts of several operas in German and Italian, in which I immersed myself, and, having counted up the characters at the beginning of the text, proceeded to perform the play. As a result King Saul in his black velvet robe now had to stand for some tyrant, or for Darius, or Cato. Usually it was not the whole play but only the fifth act, where the stabbing to death took place, that was performed.

“It was quite natural that the operas with their constant changes of scene and ever new adventures should appeal to me most. For they had everything—storms at sea, gods descending in clouds and, what I especially liked, thunder and lightning. Using cardboard, paper and paint, I provided an excellent night sky: The lightning was fearsome, though the thunder didn’t always work. But that didn’t matter much. There were also more opportunities to make use of my David and Goliath in the operas than in regular plays. I became more and more attached to that little room where so much pleasure had come my way; and I must admit that the smell of the larder, which still clung to the puppets, added considerably to my delight.

“The scenery for my theater was now pretty well complete, for I had always had a knack for using compasses, cutting up cardboard and making sketches. Now I was all the more disappointed that the limited number of available puppets should prevent me from performing more demanding plays.

“When I saw my sisters dressing and undressing their dolls, I had the idea of getting exchangeable clothes for my heroes. The costumes were taken off in small sections, and I recombined them as well as I could. I saved some money, bought ribbons and finery, begged bits of taffeta, and little by little assembled a whole collection of stage costumes, not forgetting hooped skirts for the ladies.

“I now had enough costumes for even the longest play and, one would have thought that other plays would surely follow. But what often happens with children happened to me. They think up grand schemes and make elaborate preparations, perhaps even a trial run, but ultimately nothing materializes. I made the same mistake. My greatest pleasure was in inventing and imagining. A play interested me only because of a particular scene, for which I immediately had new costumes made. As a result the original costumes got into a state of complete disorder, some had disappeared, so that we could not do even the first of our full-length plays again. I was living entirely in my imagination, trying out this or that, always planning, building a thousand castles in the air, but not realizing that I had destroyed the very foundations of this small world.”

During this long recital, Mariane had been at pains to conceal her sleepiness by mustering all her affection toward Wilhelm. Amusing as the whole business might seem in one sense, she found it all too simple, and Wilhelm’s commentary too ponderous. She would tenderly place her foot on his, and gave what appeared to be signs of attentiveness and approval. She drank from his glass, and Wilhelm was persuaded that not a word of his narration had been lost.

After a while he said: “Now it is your turn, Mariane, to tell me about the first joys of your childhood. We have been much too busy with the present to be concerned about the past. Tell me, how were you brought up and what early impressions do you remember?”

These questions might have been embarrassing for Mariane, if the old woman had not come to her aid. “Do you really believe,” she said sensibly, “that we took so much notice of what happened to us earlier in life, that we

have such pleasant things to tell as you have, and even if we did, that we could describe them so cleverly?"

"As if that were necessary!" Wilhelm exclaimed. "I love this tender, sweet, good, lovely girl so much that I would regret every moment of my life that I spent without her. Let me at least share, in my imagination, in your past life. Tell me all about it and I will tell you about mine. Let's use our imagination as much as possible, and try to recover those past times that were lost to our love."

"If you insist, we can certainly satisfy you on that score," said old Barbara. "But you tell us first how your love of the theater grew, how you rehearsed so that you are now quite a good performer. Surely there must have been some amusing incidents. It's not worth going to bed now; I have another bottle in reserve, and who knows when we shall be together again like this, so relaxed and content."

Mariane looked at her with a melancholy glance, but Wilhelm did not notice it and continued with his story.

Chapter Seven

"The distractions of youth began to take their toll of the solitary pleasures, especially when the circle of my friends grew larger. I was huntsman, foot-soldier, cavalryman, as our games demanded; but I always had a slight edge over the others, because I could provide the necessary properties for these occasions: The swords were mostly from my workshop, it was I who decorated and gilded the sleds, and some curious instinct made me transform our whole militia into Romans. We made helmets and topped them with paper plumes; we made shields, even suits of armor, and many a needle was broken by those of our servants who knew how to sew or make clothes. Some of my young comrades were now well armed, the rest were gradually, though not quite so elaborately, equipped, and soon we were a respectable army. We marched into courtyards and gardens, knocking against each other's shields and heads; there were occasional fights, but these were settled easily enough.

"These games, which much appealed to my friends, very soon ceased to please me. The sight of all those armed figures only intensified visions of knights and knighthood which, since I had taken to reading old romances, had recently been filling my mind.

"A translation of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* that I happened to find gave my rambling thoughts a definite direction. I could, of course, not read the whole poem, but there were passages in it that I soon knew by heart and whose images haunted me. Especially Clorinda, in all that she did, fascinated me. Her almost masculine femininity, the serenity of her being had a stronger effect on my developing mind than the artificial charms of Armida, however much I was captivated by her 'Bower of Bliss.'

“Time and again in the evening I walked on the balcony between the gables, looking out over the landscape that was illuminated by the last quivering gleam of the setting sun on the horizon, the first stars coming out. As darkness descended from every depth and corner and crickets chirped through the solemn stillness, I recited to myself the sad story of that final combat between Tancred and Clorinda.

“Although I was quite properly on the side of the Christians, my whole heart stood by the heathen Clorinda as she was about to set fire to the tower of the besiegers. And when at night Tancred came upon the supposed warrior, the combat began under cover of darkness and they fought so fiercely, I could never, without tears coming to my eyes, utter the words:

But now the measure of Clorinda’s days is full
The hour draws near, the hour when she must die.

My tears flowed freely as the unhappy lover plunged his sword into her breast, loosened her helmet, recognized who it was, and trembling, fetched water to baptize her. And how my heart overflowed when Tancred’s sword struck the tree in the enchanted wood, blood spurted out and a voice resounded in his ears, telling him that he had wounded Clorinda again, that he was destined unwittingly to harm everything he ever loved!

“My imagination was so enthralled by this story, and everything that I had read in the poem began to form some kind of whole in my mind that I longed somehow to perform it on the stage. I wanted to play both Tancred and Rinaldo, and found two suits of armor that I had made which were quite suitable for these characters. One, made of dark-grey paper with scales, would do for the sober Tancred, the other, gold and silver, for the dazzling Rinaldo. Excited by the whole idea, I told my friends the entire story; they were thrilled, but wondered how all this could be performed, and by them.

“I easily dispelled their hesitation. I decided to take over a few rooms in the neighboring house of one of my friends, without considering that the old lady would on no account let us have them. And I had no clear notion of how to set up a stage, except that it must rest on beams, and we would use folding screens for scenery and a big sheet for the backdrop. But where the materials and tools to make all this were to come from, I had absolutely no idea.

“We found a good way to produce a forest by persuading a fellow who had been a servant in one of the households and was now a forester, to find us some young birches and spruces, which, as a matter of fact, arrived sooner than we had expected. Now the problem was how to put on the play before the trees withered. We sorely needed advice, for we had no room, no stage, no curtain—only the folding screens.

In this predicament we once again approached the lieutenant, giving him an elaborate account of all the splendor that was in the offing. Though he scarcely understood what we were really about, he did help us by pushing

together in the little room all the tables we could find, setting up the side walls on these and making a backdrop of green curtains; the trees were placed in a row.

“Evening came, the candles were lit, children and maidservants settled in their places, the company of warriors were all decked out in their costumes and the play was about to begin. Suddenly it dawned on us for the first time that we didn’t know what we were going to say. My imagination was so excited by the whole enterprise that I had completely forgotten that everyone should know what and when he had to speak. The others, so thrilled to be performing, hadn’t thought about it either. They imagined that all they had to do was to present themselves as heroes and that it would be easy to act and speak like the characters in the world I had told them about. Now they all stood in astonishment, wondering what was to happen next, and having from the beginning thought of myself as Tancred, I came on alone and began to recite some of Tancred’s words from the poem. But since the passage soon turned into a narration where I was referred to in the third person, and Godfrey was mentioned without actually appearing on the stage, I had to withdraw, much to the amusement of the spectators—a mishap which grieved me greatly. The whole show turned out to be a failure.

“The audience sat there waiting to see something; and as anyway we were all in our costumes, I pulled myself together and decided to play David and Goliath instead. My fellow actors had seen this at the puppet theater many times, some had even assisted me. We divided up the parts, everyone promised to do his best, and a funny little fellow painted a black beard on his chin so that he could come on as a clown if there was any unforeseen hitch in the performance. I did not like to do this, for I thought it would detract from the solemnity of the play. But I swore that once I was out of this fix, I would never again put on a play without a great deal more thought.”

Chapter Eight

Mariane, overcome by sleep, had put her head on her lover’s shoulder. He held her tight while he continued his narration; Barbara finished off in a leisurely fashion what remained of the wine.

“The embarrassment of having tried to perform a nonexistent play was soon forgotten. My passionate determination to turn any novel that I read, any story that I heard from my teachers, into a play was not to be diminished by even the most unsuitable subject matter. I was convinced that any story that appealed to me would be still more effective on the stage, where I could actually see it happening before my eyes. When we were taught world history at school, I reflected in great detail on the particular way in which a personage was stabbed or poisoned; my imagination leapt over exposition and

development, and hurried to the much more interesting fifth act. And so I actually started to compose a few plays from the ending and working back to the beginning. At the same time, both on my own impulse and at the instigation of like-minded friends, I read my way through a whole stack of plays—whatever happened to come to hand. I was at that happy age when one delights in all sorts of things, when plenty and variety satisfy. My judgment was warped in still another way: My preference was for plays in which I thought I would myself have particular success, and I read few plays where I did not feel this would be the case. My lively imagination, by which I could put myself into any part, misled me into thinking that I could successfully act them all. As I distributed the parts, I gave myself roles for which I was not at all suited and, if possible, gave myself more than one.

“When children play, they can make something out of anything: A stick becomes a gun, a piece of wood a sword, any old bundle a doll, and any corner a hut. This is how our little theater came about. Totally unaware of our limited abilities, we embarked on anything and everything; we never realized that we sometimes confused one character with another, and assumed that everyone would take us for what we claimed to be. The results were so ordinary and uninteresting that I don’t have even one amusing piece of silliness to report. First we performed the few plays that had only male characters. After that some of us dressed up as women, using what costumes we had. And finally we persuaded our sisters to join in. A few of our families thought that what we were doing was useful enough, and invited some friends. And our lieutenant did not leave us in the lurch. He showed us how to enter and exit, how to declaim, how to use gestures. But he got little thanks for his pains, for we were sure that we knew more about acting than he did.

“We started with tragedies, because we had heard—and believed it—that it is easier to write and perform a tragedy than to excel in comedy. We really felt in our element when we tried our hand at tragedy, representing high social station and nobility of character by a certain stiffness and affectation. We thought we really amounted to something. But we weren’t completely happy until we could rant, stamp our feet, and in rage and desperation, throw ourselves on the ground.

“It was not long before natural instincts began to stir in boys and girls, and the company divided up into little love affairs—plays within plays. In the wings, the couples held hands tenderly, idealizing each other in their beribboned finery, while the disappointed rivals, eaten up with envy and spite, embarked on all sorts of mischief.

“Yet, all this playacting, though it lacked both understanding and direction, was not without its usefulness. We trained our memory, exercised our bodies, achieved greater ease in speaking and greater refinement in behavior than children at that age usually acquire. Certainly, now, for me that time was a turning point, because as a result my whole being was directed towards the theater and from then on I knew no greater pleasure than reading, writing and performing plays.

“At school, lessons with my teachers continued, and since it had been decided that I should go in for commerce, I was assigned to work in a neighbor’s firm. But at the same time, my whole being rebelled violently against what I could only consider a base occupation. I wanted to devote myself entirely to the stage, there to find my happiness and satisfaction.

“I remember writing a poem, which must still be somewhere among my papers, in which the Muse of Tragedy and another female figure representing Commerce were struggling for possession of my worthy self. The whole idea is, of course, trivial and I don’t remember whether the verse was any good, but you should have seen it, if only to get an idea of the fear and horror, the love and passion that I put into it. How timid was my portrayal of the old housewife with her keys and distaff, spectacles on her nose, always busy and bustling, quarrelsome and domestic, petty and pompous! How pitiful my account of those who had to submit to her and perform their menial duties in the sweat of their brow.

“And how different the other figure! What a vision for an oppressed spirit! Noble of stature, she was in every ounce of her being and behavior the true daughter of freedom. Her sense of herself gave her dignity and pride. Her garments suited her perfectly, the wide folds of her dress moved like echoes of the graceful movements of a divine creature. What a contrast between the two! You can well imagine which way my inclination turned. And my muse had all the accoutrements—crowns and daggers, chains and masks—that our literary predecessors had given their muses. The altercation between these two females was heated, their speeches, in the usual black-and-white of a fourteen-year-old, suitably contrasted. The old woman talked like one who had to pick up and save every pin, and the other as though she were distributing kingdoms. The warnings and threats of the old woman were treated with scorn; I turned my back on the riches she promised me, and, naked and disinherited, I gave myself to the muse who lent me her golden veil to cover my nakedness.

“If only I could have imagined,” Wilhelm exclaimed as he pressed Mariane close to him, “that another and more lovely goddess would confirm me in my resolve and accompany me on my path—my poem would have turned out much better and achieved a far more interesting ending! But life in your arms is no poem—it is reality. Let us savor the sweet joy in full consciousness.”

His voice was so loud and his grasp so tight that Mariane suddenly woke up. She tried to conceal her embarrassment by carressing him, for she had not heard one single word of the last part of his narration; it is to be hoped that in the future our hero will find more attentive listeners for his favorite stories.

Chapter Nine

And so Wilhelm spent his nights in the intimate pleasures of love and his days in anticipation of further hours of bliss. Earlier, when he had set his desire and hopes on winning Mariane, he had begun to feel a different person. Now that

he was joined to her, the satisfaction of his desires became a pleasant habitual occupation. His heart strove to ennoble the object of his affections, and his mind to lift them both on to a higher plane. He was always thinking of her when for a short time she was not with him. She had been important to him before—now she was indispensable, because he was bound to her by every fiber of his being, and his mind felt, in all its unclouded innocence, that she was half—more than half—of himself. He was grateful, and absolutely devoted, to her.

Mariane, too, was able to deceive herself for a while, because she shared his feeling of intense joy, despite the cold reproaches that sometimes passed over her heart and from which she was never entirely free even in his embraces and the exhilaration of his love. When she was alone and had descended from the heights to which his passion had transported her back into a true sense of her position, she was indeed to be pitied. Her natural frivolity sustained her as long as she lived thoughtlessly, not realizing or even knowing the situation she was really in, she would take this or that incident as just part of a total picture, and cheerfully alternate between pleasure and displeasure, humiliation and pride, deprivation and momentary abundance, accepting necessity and habituation as a justifiable law of living, and shaking off any feeling of unpleasantness from one moment to the next. But now, when for moments this poor girl felt herself transported to a better world and looked down from all this sunshine and joy to the drab emptiness of her ordinary life, aware of the wretchedness of not being able to inspire love and respect as well as arousing desire, and therefore no better off than she was before, she found nothing in herself to help her rise above this state of mind, for her mind was empty and her heart had no resistance. The sadder she felt, the more she clung to her passion for her beloved, which grew stronger from day to day, as the danger of losing him loomed ever larger.

But Wilhelm soared happily in loftier regions. For him, too, a new world had opened up, a world with vistas of endless delight. The full measure of his initial joy was succeeded by a clear realization of what had obscurely moved him before: “She is yours! She has given herself to you who loved, sought and adored her—given herself in faith and trust to you, and not to someone who is ungrateful.” He talked to himself, no matter where he was. His heart was full to the brim and he recited to himself the loftiest of sentiments in the most grandiloquent phrases. Fate, he decided, was extending its helping hand to him, through Mariane, to draw him out of that stifling, draggle-tailed middle-class existence he had so long desired to escape. It seemed to him the easiest thing in the world to leave his family and his father’s house. He was young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, eager to seek happiness and contentment anywhere, and elated by love. That his future lay in the theater had now become quite clear to him, and the high goal that he envisioned for himself seemed nearer to realization as he aspired to the hand of Mariane. In self-satisfied modesty he saw in himself the great actor, the founder of a future

National Theater that he heard various people pining for. Everything that had been dormant in the recesses of his heart suddenly came alive. From all these thoughts and aspirations he painted, with colors from the palette of love, a picture against a misty background; the fact that the figures in the picture were not easily distinguishable made the general effect all the more pleasing.

Chapter Ten

He now sat at home, rummaging amongst his papers and preparing for his departure. What smacked of earlier intentions was put aside, for he did not want to take anything with him on his journey into the wide world that might arouse unpleasant memories. Only works embodying good taste, poets and critics, were admitted as trusty friends to the company of the Elect. Up to now he had not spent much time on critics, and so he looked through his books in search of enlightenment but found that the theoretical works were still mostly uncut. He had acquired many such works in the full conviction that they would be essential to him; yet, with the best will in the world, he had never succeeded in getting further than halfway into any of them. But he had zealously read model texts, and tried his hand at writing in those styles he had become familiar with.

Werner came in, and seeing his friend busied with his manuscripts, said: "Are you poring over those things again? I bet you don't intend to finish any of them. You'll just look through them again and again — and then start something new."

"It is not the business of a pupil to finish a thing. He should try his hand at everything."

"But surely he should finish them as best he can."

"But you can also consider it promising if a young man does not continue with something that he feels is clumsily done, and refuses to spend more time and effort on something that can never have any value."

"I know that you were never concerned with bringing something to completion; you were always tired of it before it was half done. When you were directing our puppet theater, new costumes always had to be made for our little company and new sets constructed. First one tragedy was to be performed, then another, and the most you ever put on was the fifth act where everything got confusing and people stabbed each other."

"Since you are talking about those days, tell me: Who was responsible for taking apart the costumes we had fitted to our puppets, and setting up a large and useless wardrobe? Wasn't it you who was always trying to sell us some new ribbon or other, and you who encouraged this hobby of mine to your own advantage?"

Werner laughed, and said: "I still remember with delight how I profited from your theatrical forays, like suppliers from the wars. While you were

preparing to deliver Jerusalem, I made a handsome profit, much as the Venetians did on a similar occasion. I think there is nothing in life more sensible than making profit out of the follies of others.”

“I would think it a nobler pleasure to cure people of their follies.”

“That might be a fruitless undertaking, judging from the people I know. It takes some effort to be smart and become rich, and that usually happens at the cost of others.”

“I have just found that poem I wrote called ‘The Youth at the Crossroads,’” said Wilhelm, pulling out a copybook. “That *was* finished, such as it was.”

“Throw it out! Burn it!” said Werner. “As a piece of artistic invention it was not remarkable. It irritated me at the time and displeased your father. The verses were pretty enough but the whole presentation was absolutely wrong. I well remember your personification of commerce as a miserable, shrivelled-up old witch. You must have filched that portrait from some old junk shop. At the time you had no idea what the world of business is really like. The mind of a true businessman is more wide-ranging than that of all other men—has to be so. What an overview we gain by the orderly fashion in which we conduct business. It permits us to survey the whole without being confused by the parts. What tremendous advantages accrue to the businessman by double bookkeeping. This is one of the finest inventions of the human mind, and every serious manager should introduce it into his business.”

“Forgive me,” said Wilhelm with a smile, “but you are treating form as though it were substance, and in all your adding up and balancing of accounts you usually ignore the true sum total of life.”

“Unfortunately, my friend, you don’t seem to understand that in this case form and substance are identical, in that the one cannot exist without the other. Order and clarity increase the desire to save and to acquire. A man who doesn’t keep good accounts, who doesn’t reckon up what he owes, easily finds himself in a foggy state, whereas a good manager knows no greater pleasure than watching his fortunes mounting daily. A setback may be an unpleasant surprise for him, but it does not scare him; he can balance this out with the gains he has made elsewhere. I am convinced, my friend, that if you could only acquire some lively interest in our affairs, you would convince yourself that many faculties of the mind are freely involved in such matters.”

“Maybe the journey I am about to undertake will make me change my opinions!”

“Surely it will. Believe me, all you need is to see for yourself some big enterprise, and you will feel yourself one of us. And when you come back you will be glad to join those who know how, by speculating and the transmission of goods, to acquire part of the money and prosperity that must always circulate in the world. Just look at the natural and artificial products of every country and see how, now the one, now the other, have become necessities. What a pleasant exercise of careful ingenuity it is to find out what is most wanted at a given moment and is therefore bound to be in short supply and difficult to

get. You can quickly and easily provide everyone with what is needed by building up stocks in advance, and reaping the advantages of wide circulation. That, it seems to me, should appeal greatly to anyone who has a head on his shoulders.”

Wilhelm seemed not to disapprove, and so Werner went on: “First visit a few big trading centers, a few seaports, and you will certainly be fascinated. When you see how many people are occupied, and how many things come in and go out, you will surely enjoy seeing them pass through your own hands. You will see the smallest commodity in relation to trade in general, and as a result you will not consider anything insignificant because everything increases the circulation from which your life too receives its nourishment.”

Werner, who had sharpened his own mind by his contact with Wilhelm, had come to think of his trade and business activities in terms of spiritual elevation, and always believed that he did so with greater justification than his otherwise sensible and respected friend who placed such high value, indeed the whole weight of his soul, on what seemed to Werner the most unreal thing in the world. He sometimes thought that such false enthusiasm could not fail to be overcome and this good fellow be brought back on to the right path. And so, with such hopes, he continued: “The mighty of this world have seized the earth and live in luxury and splendor. Every small corner of this earth is already taken possession of, every property firmly established. Official positions do not bring in much in remuneration. What other regular occupation, what more reasonable means of aggrandizement is there than trade? The princes of this world control the rivers, roads and harbors and make good profits from what goes through them or past them. Why shouldn’t we also relish the opportunity of extracting by our labors custom duties on those articles made indispensable by the requirements and caprices of men and women? And I can assure you that if you would but engage your poetic imagination, you could establish *my* Goddess as the undoubted victor over yours. She bears the olive branch rather than the sword, has no daggers and chains, but she does distribute crowns to her favorites, which, it can be said without demeaning that other woman in your poem, are of pure gold from mountain streams and gleaming with pearls fetched from the depths of the ocean by her always industrious helpers.”

Wilhelm was somewhat peeved by this outburst, but concealed his irritation, for he remembered that Werner used to listen to his speeches without losing his composure. He was also reasonable enough to be pleased when people spoke so warmly about their occupations—but they should not demean his own, which he had espoused with such fervor.

“And since you take such an interest in human affairs,” Werner exclaimed, “what a spectacle it will be for you to see what joy accompanies bold enterprises for those who take part in them! What could be more pleasing than the sight of a ship returning from a successful journey, a trawler returning early with a good catch! Everyone is excited—relatives, friends, associates, even

complete strangers—when the shipbound sailor leaps joyfully on land even before his boat touches it, feeling free once more and ready to entrust to solid land what he has extracted from the treacherous water. Profit is not just a matter of figures, my friend—Fortune is the sovereign goddess of all living things, and, to experience her favors fully, one must *live* and see people who exert their powers and enjoy their senses.”

Chapter Eleven

It is high time that we become better acquainted with the fathers of these two friends. They were two very different temperaments but of one mind in that they regarded commerce as the noblest of all occupations and were attentive to every advantage to be gained by speculation. Wilhelm's father had, on the death of his own father, sold a valuable collection of paintings, drawings, etchings and antiques, had remodelled and refurnished his house from the ground up, all in the newest taste. He used what remained of his capital in various profitable ways, investing a considerable part of it in the business of Werner's father, who was respected for his initiative and for his speculative ventures, which usually turned out to his advantage. What he desired above all else was to impart to his son Wilhelm the qualities that he himself lacked, and to leave to his children those possessions which he particularly valued. He had indeed a certain penchant for sumptuousness, for what was impressive and yet had real lasting value. Everything had to be solid and massive in his house—plentiful provisions, heavy silver, costly china—but there were few guests, for every party turned into a celebration which, owing to cost and inconvenience, could not be repeated very often. His household was characterized by calm and monotony, and any change or innovation was always in those things which gave no one any pleasure.

Old Werner led a totally different life in his dark and gloomy house. Once he had finished his day's work at his decrepit old desk in his poky office, all he wanted to do was to eat well and, if possible, drink even better. He did not like to enjoy good things by himself, and so he wanted, beside his close family, to have all his friends, even strangers who had any sort of connection with his business, at his table. The chairs were very old but every day he invited someone to sit on them. The guests were so much attracted by the good quality of the food that they never noticed that it was served in very ordinary dishes. His cellar did not contain much wine, but when a bottle was finished it was usually replaced by a better one.

This is how they lived, these two fathers who often consulted each other on business matters, and this very day they had decided to send Wilhelm on a commercial journey.

“Let him see the world,” said old Meister, “and at the same time do business for us in various places. There is nothing better one can do for a young man

than introduce him early to his future career. Your son profited so much from his expedition and conducted his affairs so well, that I am curious to see how my son makes out, but I fear he will need more money than yours did." He had a high opinion of his son's ability, and so, in saying this, had hoped that the other would contradict him and emphasize Wilhelm's excellent qualities. But he was mistaken, for old Werner, who in practical matters trusted no one that he had not himself tested, calmly added: "One should try everything. We could send him on the same route and give him instructions to follow. There are debts to be collected, old acquaintanceships to be renewed and new ones to be made. He could also help to advance the venture I talked to you about recently, for we can do little unless we gather exact information on the spot."

"Let him get ready then, and leave as soon as possible," said Wilhelm's father. "But where shall we get a suitable horse for him?"

"We won't have to look far for that. There is a shopkeeper in H . . . who still owes us money, a good fellow who has offered me a horse in lieu of payment. My son has seen it; it seems to be perfectly acceptable."

"Well, let him go and get it. If he takes the postchaise he can be back in good time the day after tomorrow, and in the meantime we can get his bag ready and the letters he is to deliver, so that he could leave early next week."

They called Wilhelm and told him of their decision. He was absolutely delighted that the means to achieve his purpose were being provided for him without his having to find them for himself. He was so passionately convinced that he was doing the right thing in escaping from the burden of his present form of life by embarking on a new and nobler course that he did not have the least pangs of conscience or anxiety: Indeed, he felt that this deception was somehow sanctioned by Heaven. He was sure that his parents and relations would eventually approve the step he was about to take. He perceived in this concatenation of circumstances the guiding hand of Fate.

How time dragged till nightfall, when he would be able to see his beloved again! He sat in his room, thinking over his travel plans, like a crafty thief or magician in prison, easing his feet out of the shackles that bind him in order to persuade himself that liberation is not only possible, but nearer than his imperceptive goalers imagine. But at last the longed-for hour arrived, he left the house and, shaking off all sense of oppression, he walked through the quiet streets, raising his hands to Heaven on the open square, disembarrassed, discarding everything, imagining himself in Mariane's arms, then alongside her in the bright lights of the theater, transported in a welter of hopes and anticipations, until the voice of the night watchman sounding the hours reminded him that he was still on this earth.

She met him on the stairs, and how beautiful, how lovely, she was. She was wearing her new white negligé, and he thought she had never looked so charming. For the first time she wore the gift of her absent lover in the arms of her present one, showering him passionately with natural affection and studied caresses, and — need we ask whether he was blissfully happy? He told her what

had happened, and gave her a general idea of his plans and desires. He would look for somewhere to live and then send for her; he hoped she would not refuse him her hand in marriage. The poor girl said nothing, suppressing her tears and clasping him to her breast. He interpreted her silence favorably, though he would have liked an answer, especially since he had recently asked her in all modesty, and in the gentlest terms, whether he was not about to become a father, to which she had only replied with a sigh, and a kiss.

Chapter Twelve

Next morning Mariane awoke once more in a sad state. She felt very much alone, did not want to begin the day, stayed in bed, and wept. The old woman sat by her and tried to talk to her and console her, but she did not succeed in healing this wounded heart so quickly. The moment was fast approaching which the poor girl had been dreading as if it were to be her last. Can one imagine a more anxious state than that she was in? The man she really loved was leaving, an unwelcome admirer was due to arrive any moment and it would be a real calamity if, which was perfectly possible, they were to encounter each other.

"Don't get upset, my dear, don't spoil your pretty eyes by weeping," said Barbara. "Is it such a misfortune to have two lovers? Even if you only love the one, you can always be grateful to the other who, by the way he looks after you, deserves to be called a friend."

But Mariane tearfully replied: "My dear Wilhelm sensed somehow that we would part; a dream told him what I had so carefully tried to conceal from him. He was sleeping so peacefully beside me, when suddenly I heard him murmuring barely audibly. I was frightened, and woke him up. How tenderly, how lovingly, how passionately he embraced me. 'Oh Mariane!' he said, 'What a frightful situation you rescued me from! How can I thank you for freeing me from such hell? I was dreaming that I was far away from you in some strange part of the country, but your image hovered before me and I saw you standing on a beautiful hilltop in the sunlight. How charming you looked! But it didn't last long: your image floated down from the hill, down and down, and I stretched out my arms to you, yet couldn't reach you. You were slipping towards a big lake at the foot of the hill, more of a swamp than a lake, when suddenly some man took your hand. He seemed to be wanting to lead you back up, but in fact led you off to the side, trying to drag you towards him. I called out, since I myself couldn't reach you, to warn you. When I tried to move, the ground held me fast, and when I could move, the water blocked me and even my cries were stifled in my anxious breast.'—That's what the poor fellow told me as he was recovering from his fright on my breast, happy at finding such a terrifying dream dispelled by blissful reality."

The old woman did her best in her own sober prose to bring Mariane from her flights of poetry down to everyday reality, using the tricks of birdcatchers,

who imitate on a tin whistle the song of those they wish to catch in their nets. So she praised Wilhelm—his figure, his eyes, his affection—and the unfortunate Mariane listened with approval, then got up, dressed and seemed calmer. “I don’t want to worry or offend you, or rob you of your happiness, my child,” the old woman said, ingratiatingly. “Don’t you understand what I have in mind? Don’t you know that I have always been more concerned for you than for myself? Just tell me what you want to do, and we’ll see how to bring it about.”

“How can I do anything?” Mariane replied. “I am miserable, and shall be miserable for the rest of my life. I love him, he loves me, and yet I see that I must part from him and don’t know how I can survive this. Norberg will come. We owe our whole existence to him. We cannot do without him. Wilhelm’s means are very limited. He cannot do anything for me.”

“Yes indeed, he is unfortunately one of those lovers who have nothing to give but their heart and are therefore the most demanding.”

“Don’t make fun of him! Unfortunately he intends to leave home, go on the stage, and offer me his hand.”

“We already have four empty hands between us, you and me.”

“I have no choice,” Mariane went on. “So why don’t *you* decide? Push me this way or that, but let me tell you one thing: I most likely carry a pledge within me that should bind us even closer together. Think of that, and decide: whom should I leave and whom should I follow?”

The old woman fell silent, then said: “Why do young people always think in terms of irreconcilable opposites? What could be more natural than to combine pleasure and profit? Why not love the one, and let the other pay? It’s only a question of our being smart enough to keep them apart.”

“Do as you like,” said Mariane. “I can’t think anymore. But I’ll do what you want.”

“The Director’s stubborn insistence on maintaining the good morals of his actors can be used to our advantage. Both your lovers are accustomed to go to work secretly and cautiously. I’ll arrange time and place, but you play the part I assign you. Who knows what circumstances might not assist us. If only Norberg would come now when Wilhelm is away! And who is to prevent you from thinking of the one when you are in the arms of the other? I hope you have a son. He shall have a rich father.”

Such thoughts did not encourage Mariane for long, for she could not reconcile her feelings or her conviction with her present situation, the misery of which she longed to forget, but a thousand small matters reminded her of it at every turn.

Chapter Thirteen

In the meantime Wilhelm had completed his short journey and delivered his letter of recommendation to the wife of the business associate to whom he had been sent, for the husband was not at home. She was not able to give much of

an answer to his questions, because she was much perturbed and the whole house was in a state of confusion.

However, she did not take long to inform him confidentially of something that could not be kept secret, namely that her stepdaughter had gone off with an actor, a creature who had recently left a small theatrical company, stayed for a while in this place, and given French lessons. The girl's father, beside himself with distress and irritation, had run to the authorities to have the fugitives pursued. The wife expressed her anger at the girl and her scorn of the lover with such vigor that nothing remained to be said in favor of either of them, and she vociferously bewailed the scandal that had befallen the family; she put Wilhelm in considerable embarrassment at finding his future, secret plans reviled and rejected by this sibyl, as if by some prophetic voice. But he was even more deeply affected by the deep sorrow and the half-uttered words of the father when he returned, and told his wife about his expedition to the authorities. He was unable to conceal his distraction and bewilderment; he read the letter and had the horse fetched for Wilhelm.

Wilhelm fully intended to mount his horse and leave this house where, under the circumstances, he could not possibly feel at ease, but the good man would not let the son of someone to whom he was so indebted leave without showing him due hospitality, and put him up for the night.

So our friend partook of a sad supper, spent a restless night, and left hurriedly next morning, to escape these people who by their tales and utterances had unwittingly so tormented him.

He was riding slowly and pensively down the street, when he saw a group of armed men crossing a field. From their long, baggy coats, wide lapels, shapeless hats and clumsy firearms, and their stolid gait and relaxed posture, he recognized them as a detachment of the local militia. They halted beneath an old oak tree, put down their flintlocks and settled comfortably on the grass to smoke a pipe. Wilhelm joined them and got into conversation with a young man who rode up on a horse. And so he had once again to hear the familiar story of the two fugitives, but this time laced with comments that were not especially favorable either to the young people or the parents. He also learned that the militiamen had come to take the young people, who had been stopped and apprehended in the neighboring town, into safe custody. Soon they saw a wagon drawing up, which was guarded in a fashion more ridiculous than terrifying. An unofficial looking town clerk rode ahead and exchanged compliments at the town limits with an actuary on the other side (the same young man that Wilhelm had been talking to), punctiliously and accompanied by fantastic gestures such as a magician and a spirit, the one inside and the other outside the magic circle, might well use during some ominous nocturnal operations.

Meanwhile all eyes were fixed on the farm-wagon; and the poor fugitives, who were sitting together on bundles of straw and gazing at each other lovingly and almost unaware of the bystanders, were observed with sympathy. It

so happened that they had had to be transported in this unsuitable way from the last village, because the old coach in which the girl had been placed had broken down. As a result she asked to be with her friend, who, because they believed him guilty of a capital crime, had been made to walk beside the coach, in heavy chains. The sight of this loving pair was made even more appealing by these chains, especially since the young man handled them gracefully as he repeatedly kissed his beloved's hands.

"We are very unhappy," she cried out, "but not so guilty as we may seem. This is how cruel people reward true love, and parents utterly neglectful of their children's happiness tear them away from the joy that is theirs after so much sadness."

The bystanders expressed their sympathy in various ways while the authorities went through their ceremonial actions. The wagon moved on, and Wilhelm, very concerned about the fate of the lovers, hurried ahead on a foot-path to make the acquaintance of the magistrate before the others arrived. But just before he reached the courthouse where everyone was busily preparing for the arrival of the fugitives, the actuary caught up with him and gave him a detailed account of all that had happened, and expansively praised his horse which he had got from some Jew the day before—which prevented any further conversation.

The unfortunate couple had been set down in the adjoining garden at the side of the building, and then led quietly into the courthouse. Wilhelm expressed to the actuary his appreciation of this consideration, though the actuary had simply wanted to play a trick on the people assembled in front of the courthouse by depriving them of the pleasing spectacle of a humiliated townswoman.

The magistrate was not especially fond of such unusual cases as this, because he usually made some mistake or other and, for all his good will, earned a harsh reproof from the government. He walked stolidly toward the courtroom where the actuary, Wilhelm and some of the respected citizens joined him.

The girl was the first to be led into the room. She showed respect as she came in, and a true sense of what she was. The way she was dressed and the nature of her behavior showed that she was indeed a self-respecting girl, and she began, without being asked, to talk about her situation in a seemly manner.

The actuary told her to be silent and held his pen over his opened sheaf of paper. The magistrate settled himself, looked at the actuary, cleared his throat, and then asked the girl what her name was, and how old she was.

"Well, sir," she replied, "it seems very odd that you ask for my name and my age, since you know very well who I am and that I am of the same age as your eldest son. I will gladly tell you without beating about the bush what you wish to know from me, and what you are required to find out.

"Since my father's second marriage I have not been at all well treated at home. I could have made several attractive matches if my stepmother had not

ruined everything by worrying about my dowry. And when I became acquainted with young Melina, I fell in love with him, and since we foresaw the obstacles that would be placed in our way, we decided to seek together the happiness in the world at large that seemed not likely to be granted to us at home. I have taken nothing with me that was not my own. We did not run off like thieves and robbers. And my friend has not deserved to be dragged around in chains and fetters. Our prince is just; he will not approve of such harshness. If we are guilty, we are not guilty in a way to justify such treatment.”

The old magistrate became doubly—and trebly—embarrassed at this. The prince’s reprimands were already buzzing in his head, and the girl’s fluent speech had completely wrecked his ideas on how to write up the case. His distress grew even worse when she repeatedly refused to say anything more and steadfastly insisted on what she had already maintained.

“I am not a criminal,” she said. “Yet, I was in shame brought here on bundles of straw. But there is a higher justice that will restore our honor.”

The actuary had in the meantime been writing down what she said and whispered to the magistrate that he should just continue. A formal protocol could easily be drawn up later. The old man was encouraged by this and began to enquire in plain terms and conventional dry phrases about the sweet secrets of love.

Wilhelm turned red at this, and the charming criminal herself blushed with shame. She maintained silence until her embarrassment finally gave her courage to speak. “Be assured,” she declared, “that I would not flinch at telling the truth, even if it meant discrediting myself, but in this case, when the truth does me honor, why should I hesitate and refuse to speak? Yes indeed, from the moment that I was convinced of his affection and loyalty, I thought of him as my husband. I gladly gave him everything that love demands and a heart that is sure of itself cannot deny. Do with me what you will. If I hesitated for a moment to confess all this, the reason was simply that I feared some evil consequences for my beloved.”

Having heard her confession, Wilhelm formed a high opinion of the girl’s character, whereas the officials treated her as a brazen hussy, and the good burghers in the courtroom were thankful that nothing like this had happened in their families—or at least was not public knowledge.

Wilhelm pictured his Mariane being thus brought to judgment, put even finer words in her mouth, and let her appear even more heartfelt in her sincerity and nobler in her confession. He was seized by the most passionate desire to help these two young lovers, and not concealing this, he quietly urged the magistrate to bring matters to a speedy conclusion, for everything was as clear as daylight and needed no further investigation. This helped, in the sense that the girl was told to step down; but the young man was ordered to come in, once they had removed his chains at the door. He seemed more concerned about his fate than she. His answers were more composed, and although in some ways he seemed less heroic than the girl, he made a good impression by

the precision and orderliness of his statements. After his examination, which coincided in every point with hers except that, to spare the girl, he resolutely denied what she had already admitted, she was brought in again, and there followed a scene which entirely won them Wilhelm's affection. For what usually happens only in plays and novels, was now played out before his very eyes in this wretched courtroom—generosity of each toward the other, the strength of love in misfortune.

"Is it then true," he said to himself, "that bashful affection, which shuns the light of day and only displays itself in extreme seclusion and deep secrecy, when it is dragged out into the open by hostile circumstance, reveals itself to be stronger, bolder, more courageous than the most raging, grandiloquent of passions?"

Much to his relief the whole affair was settled very quickly. The young people were placed in minimum confinement, and if it had been possible he would have returned the girl to her parents that very evening. For he decided to act as a mediator and help to bring about a happy and respectable union of these two young people. So he asked permission of the magistrate to talk with Melina alone, which was granted him without further ado.

Chapter Fourteen

Their conversation soon became quite friendly and lively. For when Wilhelm told the downcast youth about his acquaintance with the girl's parents, when he had offered to act as intermediary and expressed the fondest hopes, the mournful and troubled spirit of the prisoner revived, he felt he was free again, reconciled with his parents-in-law—and the conversation moved on to considerations of what they should live on and where.

"But that should not be a problem for you," said Wilhelm, "for you both seem by nature well equipped to achieve success in the profession you have chosen. A good figure, a melodious voice, a heart full of feeling—what more do actors need? If I could help you with some introductions, I would be very happy to do so."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Melina, "but I could hardly make use of them, because I shall most likely not return to the theater."

"That would be a great mistake," said Wilhelm, after a pause to recover from his surprise, for he had assumed that, once freed with his young wife, the actor would resume his work in the theater. This seemed to him as natural and necessary as water to a frog. He had not doubted this for a moment, and so was astonished to find that he was mistaken.

"No, I do not intend to return to acting," said the young man. "I would rather find some occupation like other townsfolk have, whatever it may be—if only I can find it." "I cannot say I approve of such a strange decision," said Wilhelm. "For it is never a good idea to change the life one has chosen, except for a

really good reason. Also I cannot think of any profession that is as attractive and offers such agreeable prospects as that of an actor.” “That shows that you have never been one yourself,” said Melina; to which Wilhelm replied: “But sir—rarely is a man satisfied with the conditions in which he finds himself! He is always wishing he had those of his neighbor, and the neighbor is equally eager to change his.” “But there is a difference between bad and worse,” said Melina. “It is experience, not impatience, that makes me decide as I have. Is there any livelihood in the whole world more meager, insecure and tedious? One might just as well be a beggar in the street. What one has to put up with from the jealousy of colleagues, the favoritism of managers, and the fickleness of the public! You have to be really thick-skinned, like a bear on a chain, beaten with a stick in the company of dogs and apes, to dance to the bagpipes before children and riff-raff.”

Wilhelm was having all sorts of thoughts that he did not dare voice to this worthy fellow. What he did say had a certain detachment about it, whereas Melina talked more and more volubly and openly. “Shouldn’t every theater manager beseech the town council to allow more money to circulate for four weeks during the annual trade fair? I have often felt sorry for our manager, for he is quite a good fellow, even though at times he has given me cause for dissatisfaction. A good actor profits him, but the bad ones he can’t get rid of, and if he tries to make his takes more or less keep pace with his expenses, that’s too much for the public, the theater is empty and, so as not to fold entirely, we have to play at a loss. No, sir, if, as you say, you want to take our part, then I beg you to talk seriously to her parents and get them to provide for us here and find me some small job as a copyist or tax collector. Then I shall feel happy.”

After some further exchange between them Wilhelm went off, with the promise that he would go to her parents early next day and see what he could do. Once he was alone, he vented his feelings in a series of exclamatory outbursts: “O, unhappy Melina, the misery that oppresses you, lies not in your profession but in yourself! What man in the whole world would not find his situation intolerable if he chooses a craft, an art, indeed any form of life, without experiencing an inner calling? Whoever is born with a talent, or to a talent, must surely find in that the most pleasing of occupations! Everything on this earth has its difficult sides! Only some inner drive—pleasure—love—can help us overcome obstacles, prepare a path, and lift us out of the narrow circle in which others tread out their anguished, miserable existences! The stage is for you, Melina, just a set of boards, and your roles are nothing more than school assignments! You view the spectators as they see themselves—part of the daily grind! It would be just the same for you if you were sitting over ledgers at a desk, recording interest payments and worming our arrears from people. You never feel that sense of a conglomerate, inflammable whole that can only be created, comprehended and executed by the mind. You have never felt that there is a brighter spark in man which, if it receives no nourishment, if it is

not allowed to ignite, becomes covered ever more deeply by the ashes of daily needs and indifference, and yet is never entirely extinguished—or only very late. You don't feel any strength within you to ignite it, no riches in your heart to give it sustenance. You are driven by hunger, inconveniences upset you, and you are quite unaware that such adversaries lurk in every human soul, no matter what it is engaged in, and that only by joyfulness of spirit and evenness of purpose can they be vanquished. You do well to long for the limitations of some vulgar occupation, for how could you fulfil the obligations of one that demands courage and spirit! Transfer your sentiments to any soldier, any statesman, any priest, and he too would complain with equal justification about the miseries of his station. Have there not been men, so deprived of any feeling for life, that they considered all human life worthless, a pitiable existence of dust? If the examples of active men were always present to your mind, if your bosom were inflamed by a desire to participate, if your whole being were enveloped in some feeling that came from your inmost self, if the sounds of your voice, the words of your mouth were pleasing to listen to, if you felt that strength of self, you would surely look for places and opportunities where you might feel your own strength in other people."

With such fine words and thoughts our hero undressed and went to bed with a feeling of inmost satisfaction. In his mind a whole romance began to develop around what he would do next day in the place of this unworthy fellow. Pleasant fantasies led him to sleep and delivered him up to dreams which received him with open arms and surrounded him with images of heaven.

Next morning he awoke and began thinking of the business at hand. He returned to the house of the girl's parents, who received him with some surprise. In a few simple words he told them what he had to propose, and encountered both more and less opposition than he had expected. For what had happened, had happened; and although people with firm and strict opinions usually tend to voice vigorous disapproval of what has already irrevocably taken place, and thereby increase their misfortune, the fact that it *has* already happened works on them irresistibly and what had seemed unthinkable has become part of their everyday experience. It was therefore soon settled that Melina should marry their daughter, but that, because of her behavior, she should receive no dowry, and leave the inheritance she had from an aunt in her father's hands for a few years, receiving only a modest interest from it. This second point—the matter of financial provision for her—encountered considerable difficulties. For they did not wish to set eyes on their errant child, nor materially advance this union of a vagrant with a member of a highly respectable family (which even counted a Superintendent among its members), and as for an official position for the husband—there was little prospect of that. Both parents were vigorously opposed to it, and though Wilhelm spoke strongly in favor of the idea (because he agreed that this man, of whom he had no high opinion, was not worthy to return to the delights of the stage), he could not, despite all his arguments, move them in his direction. If he had only

known their true motives he would not even have tried to persuade them. The father wanted to keep his daughter at home, and hated the young man because his own wife had cast a favorable eye on him, and that meant that she would never have welcomed a rival in her stepdaughter. And so Melina was obliged to leave in a few days with his young bride (who wanted more than he to see the world and be seen by it) in order to find a position in some other theatrical company.

Chapter Fifteen

Happy youth, happy those first gropings for love, when we converse readily with ourselves, delighting in echoes of our own conversation and satisfied when our invisible partner merely repeats the last syllables of what we have just uttered!

Wilhelm was in this state during the first days of his love for Mariane—and even more so later, when he began to shower her with all the wealth of his feelings and to regard himself as a beggar living from what she gave him in return. And as a landscape is always, or indeed only, pleasing when the sun shines upon it, so everything that surrounded her, everything she touched, was beautified and glorified by her presence.

He would often stand in the wings, once he had been allowed this privilege by the manager, and although the illusion disappeared from this perspective, the far greater magic of love began to operate. He would stand for hours alongside the grubby cart on which the lights were fixed, breathing in the smell of tallow, and looking to see his beloved who, when she finally came on stage, would gaze at him lovingly and transport him into a realm of bliss amidst the skeletal framework of slats and crossbeams. The stuffed lambkins, glittering cloth waterfalls, cardboard rosebushes and thatched cottages with only one side to them aroused in him pleasing poetic images of a distant pastoral world. Even the dancers, so ugly at close quarters, did not displease him, for they were on one and the same stage with his dearly beloved. The love needed to bring life to rosebushes, myrtle groves and moonlight can certainly also endow woodchips and paper snippers with a degree of real live existence. Such seasoning is so potent that it can give flavor to the blandest or most distasteful concoction.

Some such seasoning was needed to make the usual state of Mariane's dressing room, and even sometimes her own appearance, palatable to him. For he had been brought up in a superior middle-class household, where cleanliness and order were the very air he breathed; and since he had inherited something of his father's love of finery, he had, even as a boy, arranged his room like a small kingdom. The curtains of his bed were gathered in folds and fastened with tassels, the way one imagines thrones to be. He had put a rug in the middle of the room, and a coverlet, of finer quality, on his table, with his books

(continued...)