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# THE YOUNG COSIMA

**BY**

**HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON**



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# THE YOUNG COSIMA

*By the same Author*

**MAURICE GUEST**
**THE GETTING OF WISDOM**
**THE FORTUNES OF RICHARD MAHONT**
**THE END OF A CHILDHOOD**

FOR

N.

## AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS STORY:

Franz LISZT (1811-1886) is conductor at the Court Theatre in Weimar, where he is living with the Princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein.

Hans von BULOW (1830-1894), pianist and conductor, one of Liszt's most talented pupils, and a protege of Wagner's, is principal piano-teacher at Stern's Conservatorium in Berlin.

Cosima (Cosette) LISZT (18 5 7-1930) and her elder sister Blandine, Liszt's daughters by Mme la Comtesse d'Agoult, a friend of his youth in Paris, have been placed in the care of Hans' mother in Berlin.

Richard WAGNER (1813-1883) is still an exile from Germany, owing to his political indiscretions in Dresden in 1848. He and his wife Minna occupy a little house (the *Asyl),* standing in the grounds of a large villa owned by his friends Otto and Mathilde Wesendonk, on the outskirts of Zurich.

# PART ONE

# I

ONE late November evening about the middle of last century, two men stepped out of a modest hotel in the heart of Berlin, and linking arms dropped into an easy walk. It was six o'clock and the streets were deserted, but for a chance pedestrian, or the rumble of an occasional *droschke* over the cobbles. And the two friends, who met after a separation, relished the quiet: for they had come out to talk rather than to cover the ground. Their pace changed from one minute to the next: now they pushed forward, now lingered on their steps; or even stopped short, the better to emphasise what was said.

Both wore tall beaver hats, heavy burnous-like cloaks, trousers strapped beneath the soles of their cloth boots. But in defiance of the fashion their faces were bare, and their hair hung in loose flowing locks, those of the elder man reaching to his shoulders. Well on in the forties and some twenty years the senior, he was also much the taller of the two, and very slight, with a pale complexion and fine, sharply-cut profile. His companion on the other hand had a face round as a girl's and as smooth, with blunt features, full lips, and large, heavy-lidded eyes.

They spoke French together, with differing accents. Only sometimes did the younger fall back on German for a word or phrase. And when he did, he used the familiar '*du*'

His voice was high-pitched, his face so mobile that it reflected, faithfully as a mirror, each passing thought or feeling.

At this moment he was ruminating anew on a recent and painful experience.

**Said** he: "It was the oddest thing. For I could have sworn I had them with me—these cold Berliners! There was none of that *woodenness* in the air, was there, that marks the unresponsive audience? No whispering, coughing, shuffling. And well played I'll swear it was: not a nuance missed or a figure slurred. (When I think of the pains I took with the brassl) But I shall never forget what I felt when that din broke out—even before I was off the fermata. Oh, I could have spat at them: this crowd of paunchy *Commer^ienrdte* and their womenkind, of pig-eschewing shopkeepers! I did ball my fists. But afterwards, in the greenroom—well, there was no help for it. Everything went black before *my* eyes. I knew no more."

Affectionately his arm was pressed. "Enough, enough! Don't excite yourself like this."

But not to be quelled, the speaker went on: "Of course, since then, I've come to see that the whole thing was a put-up job. Aimed not so much at that scurvy fellow the conductor, as at the Master and all his works. Oh, a *vil terrain, Maitre,* this Berlin—haven't you always said so? And will the prevailing race ever forget or forgive what *he* has been bold enough to say of them? I don't believe it." And with a despairing lift of the encumbering cloak: "Oh! the malice, the malice and hatred of mankind for what it cannot instantly grasp or fathom, that's what appals me. And to try to break through it is like butting one's head against a wall."

"Come, come, calm yourself. How often must I tell you that in giving way to your feelings as you do, you waste your strength. Reserve, be chary of them, till they are ripe to explode in a work of your own. For the rest, patience. Patience, courage, perseverance: these are our weapons. **They** will tell in the end."

Spinning round on his heel, the young man looked up

with shining eyes into his friend's face.

"Ah, why do I bother you with this old story? Forgive me. It is only that, you being you, one instinctively turns to you for comfort. *Cher, cher Maitre!* There's no one like you. Or so I thought. . . . But now, please, listen. For what I really wanted to tell you was something else. Something rather strange." And again quickening his pace: "Do you remember how that night when you left me at my door, we saw a light still burning in the flat? And can you not imagine how slowly I climbed the stairs, thinking I knew what awaited me? For my mother, fond as she is of me, makes no effort to conquer her antipathies. And I was dog-tired; and my head ached. But oh, the surprise, the joyful surprise! For when I entered the sitting-room I was met, not by the one I dreaded, but by your second self, *Maitre,* your walking image: at the moment, indeed, so extraordinarily like you did she look that it was almost as if you yourself came towards me. She had been sitting reading. Sitting waiting for *me.* Waiting to console me! It's no use trying to tell you what I felt. But I forgot all about my tiredness, my depression. And there we sat and talked—heavens! how we talked—*not* of what I must persist in calling my fiasco, but of the music itself. For she knows every note of this marvellous *Tannhduser* as well, no, better than I! And had followed and appreciated my reading of the overture down to the last demisemiquaver. Oh, it was a wonderful end to that wretched night."

"But . . . hm . . . quite alone, my friend? And at **such** an hour? For it must have been close on two o'clock. Where, pray, were the others?"

"Why,"—a little grittily—"sound asleep in their **beds I** suppose. Neither of *them* thought it worth her while to sit up for me. Only she had guessed what I should **be** feeling—your sympathy, *Maitre,* your intuition! Yes, **you**

have handfcd down to her not only your features, your way of speaking, the very tones of your voice; but all your innate goodness of heart as well. And so I was able to talk to her as frankly as now to you."

"Quite so. But——"

"What was more, through her you gave me back my faith in myself. Which is so necessary to me. Without which I can do nothing."

To this there was no response. A cold little silence fell. And as it went on lengthening, and deepening, the young man's heart sank.

"Dear Master," he said humbly, "do you . . . have I said anything to displease you?"

"Hardly that. It is only . . . You see one has to remember how strictly these daughters of mine have been brought up."

"Why, certainly. Yes. Of course." The skin on the young face felt suddenly too tight for it. "And if in any way I——Oh, let me say it again. There's nobody living, *Maitre,* whom I respect and honour as I do you. And every one and everything belonging to you."

Again there was no reply. The older man seemed lost in thought; and for a few seconds they all but stood still, in the bluish night-mists sent up by the river.

"Come," he said at length. "It's too damp to loiter. But now it is my turn to talk. And I mean to speak plainly. For as you know, boy, I love you like a son."

Here he paused to clear his throat. And when he went on, his voice sounded dry and thin.

"I must, I fear, touch on unpleasant subjects. Firstly, then, my motive for removing my daughters from Paris—I don't know, of course, how much you have been told of this. But a wish to have them near me, in the country I have made my home, was not my sole reason for the change. I

aimed at placing them beyond reach of an influence that I thought undesirable, highly undesirable for them, at their present stage of development. For I regret to say, flouting my wishes, they were becoming over-friendly with the very person from whom I was trying to shield them. And after all the thought and care I had expended on them, this behaviour on their part made and still makes me somewhat apprehensive. Agreeable young persons though they are, and I think not without intelligence, I fear it points to a levity of nature which augers ill for them."

Here a violent attempt was made to interrupt him. But he raised his hand. "No, no, hear me out." And went on: "Another reason was, had they remained in Paris, there might . . . no doubt *would* have been interference, and a purely malicious interference, with my plans for their future. Now it has always been my intention that my daughters should marry early and marry well; the rather peculiar circumstances of their birth demand it. And Berlin, and the conditions of life here, seemed to me to offer more favourable chances for their settlement than Paris. In the house and under the wing of *Madame votre mere,* guided by her tact, guarded by her watchful eye . . . But enough! From all this you will, I'm sure, see that J can permit no flightiness, no *inconvenances* on their part to cross my plans for their benefit: it behoves them, indeed to be even more cautious than other young women. When the time comes for them to take husbands, there must be nothing to gloss over or explain away."

Sharply the young man withdrew his arm. "Doctor! I sincerely hope that what you say in no wise reflects on my mother, and my mother's care?"

"Most certainly not. And that I trust *you,* boy, you very well know. Did I not say, when the scheme was first broached, that I had no objection to your continuing to

reside in the same house? I merely warn you that a . . . an incident of this kind must not occur again."

"My mother absolved. No blame on me. Then——Oh, but it's incredible—impossible!" In his indignation he could hardly get his words out.

"Now, now, listen to me. I will be frank with you. What you have told me to-night was not news to me. At the time it happened, your mother promptly and very properly laid the matter before me, complaining not only of my daughter's action on the night in question, but also of the uppish manner she was afterwards pleased to adopt. In replying, I authorised her to lecture the girl soundly for her lack of decorum, this forwardness towards one she barely knew. And since your mother was perturbed enough to use the word 'advances', I added that, when the time came *tot you* to marry, it would be easy to select a more advantageous *parti* than either of my daughters."

"That's not so. Never! though I sought the world over. Oh, it distracts me to know that I have displeased you, *Mattre,* or seemed ungrateful—ungrateful to you, to whom I owe everything! Who have been a second father to me. But it is even worse to hear that you trust me at her expense; ax *her* with indecorum, when the fault, the thoughtlessness —for it was no more—was mine alone. But then you don't enow her ... as I do. I've been her—their daily companion now for weeks. And I give you my word, two more highly-principled girls it would be hard to find.—No, I'm *not* blinded by their talents. I judge them solely by what they think and feel. And their feelings go deep." Here, with still more passionate emphasis: "For there's another thing about them you don't appreciate, if I may dare to say so—*cher, cher Mattre!*—and that is, the depth of their affection for you. One has only to mention your name to see their eyes light up. To be with you is their greatest happiness;

.rest disappointment not to hear from you; their
e fact that you permit them to write you but once
tight. Think, too, how patiently they endure their
n this dull and drab Berlin. Never a murmur crosses
lips; simply because it is the wish of you, their adored
er."

lere, his breath giving out, he came to a stop. He had
ed himself hot; and went on growing hotter, fearful lest
lad said too much.

or, once more, there was no immediate reply. And
:n it came, it was merely an ironic: "Well, welll *Ces oiselles* have certainly found their champion."

Jut that was all; and for the second time the young man
s uncomfortably aware that his eloquence had fallen flat.
shed, he too now held his tongue; staring a little sullenly
tore him. Hence he did not notice the long, appraising look his companion turned on him; and was unprepared for what followed.

"See here, Hans. I admit you have taken me by surprise —I mean by your whole-hearted defence of these *fillettes* of mine. From your mother's account of the incident, I inclined to think it a piece of gross impropriety on the part of the girl Cosette.—Knowing as I do that both their heads are running over with romantic ideas."

Angrily Hans clicked his tongue. "Then you have been misled. I apologise for my mother's inaccuracy." ("Well, well, we know what mothers are.") "I say it again, if impropriety there was it was mine. Mademoiselle Cosette is incapable of such a thing."

"So you begin to persuade me. May I ask what actually passed between you? Am I to believe you came to some sort of understanding?"

At this his hearer writhed; in an agony of indecision. "Well... well, I think you could hardly ... no, one could

really hardly——" And then, bubbling out: '\ admit we were both perhaps a little carried away, l nerves, she by her womanly compassion. I know say I couldn't picture the house without her—Wi them."

"And she?"

"No," stubbornly, "that I cannot remember." i

"And since then? Has nothing further——"

"Absolutely nothing! On my word of honour. surely cannot think I——At least not without first .

"True. I know you for the gentleman you are. N however, that you have allowed me to see the strength your feelings, and that Cosette was not alone responsible After all, my boy, one has to remember that she is 1 mother's daughter."

"For the last time, *Maitre*——"

"And, mind you, it is not my intention to over-ride their inclinations. That I shall never do. You perhaps do not know that the elder has already declined two eligible offers?"

"No, I didn't," murmured the young man darkly; uncertainty what all this was leading up to keeping him on the rack.

"Provided, of course, that their feelings are genuine, not mere jack-o'-lanterns. And that I find them, as here, duly reciprocated. But to prove this, time is needed."

(Time, yes, yes, time . . . hold to time! . . . as to **the** drowning man's straw.)

"As well as to convince me that such a marriage would be to the happiness of you both."

"Happiness? With me? With my want of character . . . my miserable insignificance?"

"What, back at your old trick of self-depreciation? I was hoping you had turned over a new leaf. Boy, I've **no** patience with your doubtings. You, with **your talents,**

your intelligence, and the good old name you bear."

"Name? What's a name? Mine is only a hindrance to me. With it, a man might till the ground, it seems, or run a bucket-shop; but show himself on the concert platform? —never!"

"Nonsense. Nor will I again remind you how dear you are to me. That I love you like a son."

"Oh, and I you, *Maitre,* I you! . . . only a thousand times more."

"Well, then. But it goes without saying that I shall first expect you to consolidate your position here. To take root, settle down, and work your hardest to gain the distinction you deserve. No giving up half-way, boy! And I'm confident you *can* do it—if you will. You need only to fight your tendency to discouragement, learn to endure a certain boredom with patience, tune your diapason a little more tactfully to other people's, and your future is assured. It is no unreasonable demand I make of you. But there! Let us leave it at that. In the meanwhile, of all we have said not a word to anyone. I, too, will keep silence." And with an affectionate squeeze of the arm that lay in his, he once more brisked up their drooping steps.

For still some time they continued to pace the night streets. And, once out of this backwash into which a few chance words had thrown them, their talk turned exclusively on the coming performance of his works, which had brought the composer to Berlin. But, though outwardly engaged to the full in forecasting the reception of these, the last word in modernism and daring, by those sticklebats, the critics, below the surface both men went on chewing the cud of the odd and unexpected outcome of their meeting. And when, after a warm embrace, they parted: Franz Liszt to climb the darkish stairs of his hotel, Hans von Bulow to make his way back to his mother's

apartment: each was thinking, not of the cause both had at heart, or yet of the girl whose fate they had been deciding, but of another woman. And the question put to himself by each as he went, and not without trepidation, was: what will *she* say?

## II

ON a fine frosty morning some four or five days later, Liszt, in dressing-gown and slippers, was mooning aimlessly about his study in Weimar. This was a large but darkish room. Not only was the ceiling low, but walls and windows were hung with a deep blue, which ate up the light. It was also heavily furnished. In his wanderings, he had to pick his steps between two writing-desks, a grand piano, a massive oval table backed by a sofa, and various music-cabinets; and more than once he fretfully pushed aside some lesser article with his foot. Above the sofa, and the sole picture in the room, was a print of Durer's *Melancholy;* and on this grim, gaunt figure sitting amid the wreckage of human attainment, his eye would sometimes rest as he passed.

Nervously he snapped his long, thin fingers, tossed back his mane of hair, which, uncovered, showed freely sprinkled with grey. Or he drew out his watch and glared at its large round face—as if, by so doing, he could hinder or hasten the passage of time—with an audible *"Tsca!"* at what he read there. Or again, crossing to a window and gazing down at the courtyard, he beat a tattoo on the panes. A litter of music-sheets strewed his desk. But the cups of the coffee-service on the oval table were still unused.

He was very hungry.

A man-servant entered with a sheaf of letters. These he did not offer to Liszt, but laid out in a row on the smaller of the writing-desks. Liszt played the incurious so long as the other was in the room. Alone again, he fell upon the letterbs—they were all for him—and hurriedly

scrutinised them. One, in a woman's hand, he tucked away in an inside pocket. A second, which bore a Swiss post-mark, he made to do the same with; then thought twice of it and refrained. But this particular letter continued to prick his curiosity; and once he went so far as to approach it with a paper-knife. Then conquered the impulse, and let it lie. Better not . . . better not.

Of the servant he had made a wordless inquiry by a temperamental lift of the brows; to be answered, with due respect, yet as man to man, by a similar lift and a regretful shake of the head. Audibly Liszt sighed. Meanwhile, on the minutes ticked, a quarter of an hour ran away, the best of the morning was in flight. Not till a considerable time after did the door re-open, now with a swing, a flourish; and the same attendant, deferentially inclining his head, announced: *"Madame la Princesse!"*

At these words the bored, exasperated Liszt of the past hour ceased to exist. Springing forward, all agility, eagerness, devotion, he bent low over the small, fattish hand presented for his kiss.

A maid had followed with a tray; and while both servants were busy setting out coffee, hot milk, a basket of rolls covered with a napkin, arranging cushions, drawing up footstools, nothing was said. No sooner, however, had the door closed behind them than Liszt re-took possession of the dimpled hands, and, having kissed each in turn, laid them together and kissed the two as one.

After which he said, in French: "My adored one, good morning! How have you rested?"

"Well, my friend. And you? I trust I have not kept you waiting. The fact is, I disposed of some trivial correspondence before rising."

"No matter! Where you are concerned even to wait is a pleasure; for can I not anticipate your coming? It is only

that the day is dark for me till you appear. But now you are here; and the sun, my sun, shines again/'

At this, a bare, massively-rounded arm emerged from its loose sleeve and was laid with a consoling pressure on his; as though to say, I know, I know. Then, taking their seats side by side on the sofa, they breakfasted, Liszt with gusto, the Princess, who had already broken her fast, more deliberately, sweetening her coffee through a lump of sugar held birdlike between her teeth. The crisp rolls, broken in fragments, they submerged in the hot liquid till soft enough to be chewed with ease.

Thereafter, two long black cigars were set alight; and puffing perfumed clouds the smokers leaned back on the sofa.

"And now, Monsieur Lazybones, for a full and true account of your doings in Berlin!"

Though an arch flash from two magnificent black eyes accompanied the words, something in them seemed to chafe Liszt. His thin lips contracted.

"Ah, forgive mel . . . like the saint you are. My letters, I know, were all too short. But even so I had to curtail my sleep to write them. Every moment of the day went in rehearsing with the orchestra, in visiting people of note who were likely to be of use."

"And all for naught. My poor, poor *Faineant!"*

Again the lips twitched. "My Carolyne . . . is that not rather strongly put? I assure you, *cberie,* I have no need to pose as a neglected genius. Throughout the concert the public showed itself duly enthusiastic. The critics alone held back."

"Did I not foresee it? Did I not warn you? Ah! had you only given me a free hand to prepare the ground for you when I was last in Berlin. But you were so stubborn, so opposed to my taking action—poor foolish *Faineant!* None

**the** less, I still hold that a *second* concert might have turned the scales. With a very little persuasion on your part, Stern could no doubt have been brought to see the need for it."

In Liszt's voice there was now a distinct undertone of irritation. "My angel! For whom do I crave success, if not for you? But to have ventured on another concert at this juncture would have been a fatal error. Berlin, that hotbed of what our young friend Hans so wittily calls *Mendelsvaterenkelism,* is not yet ripe for the music of the future. By trying to force the issue, we should have risked a fiasco. As for what my Tintamarro says, and so wisely, about breaking ground, touched as I am by her goodness I must once more beg her to let her poor old slowcoach go his own way. She is the heaven-stormer, he the snail; but even a snail arrives in the end."

"God grant it, belovedl My heart yearns to see you valued at your true worth; honoured for what you are—the greatest of living composers! Your success is my life. What else have I to live for?"

Tenderly Liszt laid his arm round the plump shoulders. "I know, dear love, I know. And never for an instant do I forget what all this means to you. But, alas! it is not possible to cudgel the public into sharing our . . . your views. To attempt it would indeed be to waste our strength. Even to delay the ultimate victory. Patience, and patience alone will serve us."

"Ah, you and your patience! I have heard the word so often. Sometimes it seems to me but a pretty name for something much less pretty. I have not christened you 'dreamer' and 'idler' for nothing."

Liszt made no reply.

The Princess inhaled a mighty whiff, belched it forth in **a grey** cloud, and went on, with growing passion: "Ah! **if only *I*** were a man—were you, Franz Liszt, **with all** your

mighty gifts—instead of just a poor weak woman. (One, too, whose hands are doubly tied.) How I would set **the** world ablaze!—But this, my friend, let me tell you. I have got you *thus far* on the road to fame and glory, and nothing shall divert me from seeing that you go all the way. Had it not been for me—think, think of our walks in the poplar-allee at Eilsen, and how I then besought you to free yourself from the service of the public, to exhibit yourself no more on concert-platforms, but to devote your life, your genius, wholly to creative work. Was I not right? Am I not always right?"

"Ever and always," said Liszt; and withdrew his arm, on which she lay heavy.

With a gutteral expletive and a violent outward fling of hand and cigar, the Princess retorted: "Yes, yes, you say so, you say so; but there it remains. You accept my opinion, acknowledge my greater wisdom—and go your own way. Oh, there are times when I despair of you—despair!"

Liszt made no attempt to justify himself, and a brief but tense silence followed, in which he found that he was counting the seconds. Not till fully half a minute later did the Princess open fire afresh by a peremptory: "You mention Monsieur Hans. What was this you wrote me about the possibility of his relieving us of one of your daughters?"

"Cosette, I think I said."

"Cosette or the other, does it matter which?"

"Not greatly, perhaps. Still, it happens to be the younger for whom Hans has a *penchant."*

"But———But surely all that outrageous nonsense—on the girl's part—was put a stop to by Madame? **What** possessed you to re-open the subject?"

"My Carolyne, I———The fact is, it came up of itself, in the course of our talk. He spoke warmly of **her, I taxed**

him with his feelings, and the cat was out of the bag. And, that being so, my love, I found myself debating whether, all said and done, this might not prove the simplest way of getting Cosette settled. (For I fear both girls may give us trouble ere they are off our hands.) Of course, though, I made the reservation that everything depended on you. On your approval, or the reverse."

An enormous spike of ash dropped on the shelf of the Princess's bosom. She let it lie; her restless brain almost visibly at work again.

"Of course. And I shall give the matter my serious attention," said she, in a voice now freed of its contemptuous lightness. "It is for me to weigh the effect such a match would have *on jour* interests. Romantic fancies on the part of the young are soon got over. The point at issue is, would the connection benefit you? No doubt your Hans would prove a very *useful* son-in-law. He is devoted to you; and a closer tie would but deepen the sense of obligation. His name, too, might be an advantage. 'My son-in-law the Baron; my daughter, Baroness von Bulow.' Very pretty. But his position? His income? Surely these do not justify his taking a wife?"

"Not just yet. But, as you know, I am a firm believer in Hans' future. Besides, did it come to a definite engagement between them, I should be prepared to——"

"Oh no, my friend, you would *not!* Let us have none of that nonsense, if you please! Never will I consent to you stinting and denying yourself in order to indulge these girls in their whims. Every penny that remains over from your excessive, your indiscriminate charities, you need for yourself."

"My angel! But is there not a chance that their mother may now come forward and behave as she ought?"

"I doubt it," said the Princess, "I very much doubt it!"

and fiercely rapped the table with all five fingers of one hand.

" I , too, I too," Liszt hastened to agree. "And so at moments I begin to regret that we did not take *my* good old mother's practical advice."—For peace' sake he said 'we,' associated himself with her, in the flouting this advice had received.

"What? Have gone on exposing their young minds to that pernicious influence? Never would I have been a party to it I Not for all the *dots* in the world."

"Still, my Carolyne, these *have* to be found. And sooner than later. Of course, it is possible that, under compulsion, she——"

"Well, yes, there's that," broke in the Princess brightly. "Who knows! A nice little turn of the screw in the right direction . . . especially since Monsieur Hans has been pleased to select her favourite.—But now, my friend, for a much more serious question: the difference of faith. Would he be willing to embrace Mother Church? Is there any prospect of a conversion?"

To this Liszt replied without hesitation: "Not the least in the world."

"Then what of the children of such a marriage?" cried the Princess, flinging round in her seat to face him. "Is it not unthinkable that these poor little unborn souls should be foredoomed to perdition?"

Her distress was genuine. Feeling for her hand, Liszt spoke with greater firmness than he had yet shown. "My Carolyne! Once more I entreat you to have a little"—for the blunter term that leapt to his tongue he hastily substituted—"patience. (Yes, again the word you despise!) But, when a young man first shyly admits his feelings, it is impossible to damp him with questions of this kind. Or even to allude at all to the coming of children. *Noblesse*

*oblige*, my very dear love. But I give you my word, every point will be duly weighed—this most important one before any. As it is, the whole thing is still in the air. (I mentioned it in my letter to you, only because, as you know, I can keep nothing from you.) There is Hans' mother to be consulted; her consent and sanction to obtain. Till then, let us h . . . well, let us await events."

"Sanction? Consent? *Mon Dieu!* Could Madame de Bulow be anything but proud to call a child of Liszt's 'daughter'?—But now, my *Faineant*, if wait we must, let us at least do what so many, alas! in like crises omit. Let us lay the matter at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, and ask her help and guidance."

"With all my heart!" said Liszt, and drew a sigh of relief.

Rising, he pushed back the table, removed the footstools, assisted the Princess to her feet. Then, hand in hand, he looking tall and very slender beside his short, thick-set companion, they crossed the room and entered a tiny chamber dressed as a chapel. Here, loosening hands, they sank on two *prie-Dieu* set before an altar.—And soon not their hands only, their minds, too, were apart, each soaring away on the wings of prayers that left the immediate object of intercession far behind. Liszt's petitions were all for peace and harmony; for the tranquillity of mood in which alone his genius bore fruit. The Princess's . . . well, as her ardour grew, as she sighed and swayed, the tears coursing unchecked down her cheeks, he knew only too well where her prayers had led her. And as always at the sight of her distress, a ghost of the old passion revived in him: his heart swelled with pity; once more he felt capable of going through fire and water for her—her, the heaven-stormer, who yet could not storm the courts of human justice, or force the defences of ecclesiastical bigotry. All she had sacrificed and suffered for his sake rose before

him. His own eyes filled with tears; devoutly he added his prayers to hers.—And thus, in the end, their minds were one again.

Hardly had they returned to the study when there came a light tap at the door. In response to Liszt's bidding, a young girl entered.

"Good morning, beloved Mamma! Good morning, dear *Bon Grand!"*

With one accord both moved to greet her, arms and hands outstretched.

"Ah, my sweet Magne!"

"Good morning, Magnolette!"

She was about seventeen years old, and very lovely: merely by stepping over the threshold she seemed to light up the darkish, smoke-veiled room. But she also took from the two in it any claim they might have had to youth or attractiveness. By contrast, the Princess's dull skin, stained teeth and irregular features were doubly noticeable; and even Liszt, with his fine profile and ivory skin, became just a pale, tired, elderly man. In this young face the features, though still soft and childish, were exquisitely cut, the cheeks, each with a dimple in it, glowed rose-pink beneath a pair of dark expressive eyes. Dressed for the street, the little Princess wore a black-velvet suit tipped with ermine, a small black poke bonnet set off with sky-blue.

Clasped ecstatically to her mother's bosom, her own cool skin resting against the hot, tear-blistered cheek, she raised her level brows and shot a query at Liszt, much as he had previously done to the man-servant. He caught her meaning, and replied with a half rueful, half whimsical nod. And while listening docilely to instructions on the length and route of her morning walk, she stood with a loving, almost protective arm round her mother's shoulder.

"And not too far, my Magne, I beg of you! I will not have my sweet child saddened by this cheerless winter landscape."

"As you wish, dear Mamma. Though I do not find it cheerless. To me, bare trees are just as pretty as if they were in full leaf. Their shape stands out so clearly. When we come to a particularly fine one I pause and study it; and then, on getting home, do my best to draw it from memory."

"My little Durer!"

"Besides that, Scotty and I are always trying to guess where the first snowdrops will push up their spikes. Not *very* long now, *Maman,* and I shall be able to bring you your morning nosegay again. And you, too, dear *Ben Grand!"*

"Child," said Liszt—he alone could appreciate these girlish efforts to banish spleen—"I ask no sweeter flower than this." And cupping the young face in his hands, he looked long and fondly at it.

For the fraction of a second the Princess's lids ceased their normal movement, remained stonily fixed. Then she said, and with a certain tartness: "Come, my lovel We must not keep our good Anderson waiting."—Through the crack of the door the figure of the governess, in bonnet and mantle, could be seen standing in the corridor, her gloved hands primly folded on her waist.

"And now"—the door having closed again—"to work!"

Seating herself at the smaller writing-table, the Princess spread her flowing skirts, took up a paper-cutter, and prepared to deal with the letters laid out for her scrutiny.

This was always an anxious moment for Liszt . . . till he knew what she was going to find in them.—For nothing in the world, though, would he have deprived her, whose pleasures were so few, of what was the most exciting moment in her day. Herself a voluminous correspondent,

she had a childish love of breaking seals and slitting envelopes; must always be the first to read each fresh tribute to his genius, to tabulate each step upward taken by his fame. Or, on the other hand, the first to bear the brunt of an unexpected blow. And on this particular morning his anxiousness turned to a real anxiety. For, now that it was too late, he saw that in pocketing a certain letter he had omitted, by re-arrangement of the others, to fill its place: a gap yawned in the neat row. For an instant his lids, too, remained fixed; and he held his breath.

But his blunder passed unnoticed. The Princess had at once pounced upon the letter from Zurich, with a: "Here's Richard! Well, what now, I wonder?"' And, weighing it unopened between her fingers: "Will it be more calls on your purse, my poor *Faineant?* Or grumbles because, though he himself put off your visit, he now feels aggrieved at your absence?"

On spreading out the sheet, however, she became absorbed; and Lis2t, to whom this letter meant more than all the rest, sat nervously tapping the table, striving to guess the contents from her face.

It lengthened; her eyes grew round. *"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu,* what an escape!"

"An escape? My angel. . . I beg of you. . . ."

"Yes, for once, my friend, it contains neither demands for money, nor abuse of your angelic goodness. Nor, what is almost worse, pages black with stupid theories. He is ill, ill and confined to bed again—and with what? Erysipelas! Oh, my Franz! let us fall on our knees and give thanks that you did *not* carry out your plan. St. Anthony's Fire! Think, think only of our Magne!"

"I do, my own, I do. But what exactly does he say?"

To this there was no reply. Lost in visions of her lovely child defaced by flaming skin and bloodshot eyes,

the Princess continued to voice her horror and relief.

Liszt found himself forced to interpose: "But after all, my Carolyne, I *did not* go."

"No; and you will be kind enough to give me your word that you will not even consider a meeting—till every chance of infection is past."

"I will. I do. Set your mind at rest. Though I think you exaggerate the risks. But now, if I might . . . if you would allow me. . . ."

And at length the sheet was in his own hands. He devoured it, exclaiming aloud to himself as he did so. "Of all the unfortunates! My poor friend! What a dispensation!"

But the rest of the letters called for attention. And before they were finished with, Liszt was glancing uneasily at his watch.

"It grows late."

"Yes, yes, it is time . . . time for me to leave you, to hand you over to indifferent people who cause you nothing but worry and trouble. Oh, how little I am really able to do for you!"

"Say, rather, how much. For, behind the scenes, my Tintamarro will continue to lend me her invaluable aid. She will reply to various of these letters for me, will she not? And afterwards proceed with her study of Buddhism; that she may coach her poor, lazy, stupid *Faineant* on the subject, and keep him from appearing the cretin he actually is."

But his thoughts were not with his words. As he spoke he was collecting and sorting the scattered sheets of manuscript; and the Princess was quick to catch the regretful, tender glances thrown at his broken work.

Going over to his side, she looked to see what he had been at.

"What, again only these songs? Still nothing **fresh to** show me?"

"But, my love, it is absolutely essential for me to **revise** them before Schlesinger reprints. And I gave him my word, when in Berlin, to do so without delay."

"Schlesinger! Without delay! But did you not promise *me* last summer—and Monsieur Kaulbach through me—that, in return for his portrait of our Magne, you **would** compose a symphony on his *Battle of the Huns?* At the **end** of August, you said, directly your *Psalm* was finished; **and** this—this is December!"

"My adored angel!" cried Liszt, now thoroughly roused. "There is, there *can* be but one answer to your reproaches: I have not been in the mood. Must I again remind you that one does not sit down to write music as one indites a letter or edits a bill? The mood, the mood, the mood is needed—is the only thing that matters! Without it, one is powerless. And if, after all this time, you do not understand, I am sorry for you—deeply sorry. But help or alter it I cannot!" And with a single rapid gesture he swept up the remaining sheets.

The Princess made no reply; but her great eyes—"Griffin's eyes" was Liszt's name for them: the eyes of a suffering animal, or the malignantly-enchanted beast of fairy lore—slowly filled and overflowed, the tears forming runnels down her cheeks. Liszt observed them unmoved. In moments of irritation, this fluent weeping seemed to him little more than an outlet for a superabundant energy, which could find no other vent. Or, yet again, he thought it sprang from a wild impatience if, in the lesser things of life, the weeper could not instantly enforce her will; the one great issue on which her heart was set, a union hallowed by the Church, being consistently denied her. Yes! to such **a** prosaic reading of her tears had seven years' intimacy brought him. Then however, as always, in a rush of

contrition for these disloyal thoughts, he redoubled his tenderness. Putting his arms round her he kissed and comforted her, promising everything she asked. While she murmured that, in all she said or did, she thought only of his honour and glory.

But at length he was free. Hastily summoning his man, he withdrew to his bedroom. From it, as the clocks struck eleven, he emerged, conventionally, even elegantly clad, to face the thousand and one calls on his strength, his judgment, his expediency, that would be made from now to the day's end. Yet to present to the world the serene, almost indifferent front that had gained for him the sobriquet of "Olympian," and formed a w?ll behind which no one, not even the two men he loved best, was permitted to pass.

## III

MEANWHILE Hans Guido von Bulow, guilty and morose, was trying to egg himself on to the confession that lay before him.

For a week now, ever since his heart-to-heart talk with Liszt in the night streets, he had lived on tenterhooks. Yet had still not found the courage to end the strain. When he got home from work of an afternoon, his nerves jangling like loose wires from listening to pupils' drumsticks belabour the keys (he, to whom even a false phrasing was agony; whose Johannine Gospel ran: "In the beginning was Rhythm!")—with hours such as these behind him, it was sheerly impossible to face the interview he dreaded.

He had had ample time to repent of his hastiness. Had he not been so quick to let fly at a seeming injustice; had he swallowed the hated *'inconvenable,'* instead of puffing himself out over it like a turkey-cock, he wouldn't now be in this dilemma.

It could not have happened more inopportunely either. His appointment at Stern's Conservatorium was for a year, a trial year, only. It rested with him to make it **a** permanency; a job for which he needed all his strength. Again, the fact that he was at last in receipt of a fixed salary (small as it was) meant that a new and hitherto unknown air of content reigned—in the roomier, more up-to-date apartment made possible by the addition to the family of the Demoiselles Liszt. While the effect on the narrow home-circle of these two lively, charming girls could hardly be overestimated. Now, thanks to his own hot-headedness, he **had** put everything in jeopardy.

But it was no use cursing. A spitfire he was and always would be.

And there was also another side to it. If such a marriage really met the Master's wishes; or if, by means of it, he could even partially repay the many favours Liszt had done him, there was no unpleasantness he ought not to be willing to face. Of all living creatures Liszt was dearest to him.—Just for a little while, perhaps, his heart had been divided; though, did he look back, *that* seemed more like a sickness than a friendship, a green sickness. And since then time and distance had done their work. Especially distance.—With Liszt there were no such shadows. Both as man and genius he stood supreme. Had not his like for understanding and generosity. His hand was continually outstretched, his slender purse open. And for all his own personal troubles—the struggle to get a hearing for his works, the laming uncertainty of his private life—he never failed to rejoice over one's successes, or to encourage one after a fall.—Yes, for Liszt he would have gone to the scaffold. The difference being that this would ensure a speedy end. What *he* had to look forward to was a kind of lingering death.—Thus he meditated, a small, slim figure, set on small, neat feet.

Arrived at his mother's flat, he let himself into a corridor cumbered with chests and presses, and so dark that even those familiar with it had to grope their way. Here he took off the round sealskin cap that had topped his round young face, fumbled for a peg for it and his ulster, then turned to creep noiselessly along the passage to his own room. For at the first breath of home air his good resolutions crumbled.

But a door by the entry stood ajar, and from behind it a voice cried: "Is that you, Hans?"

Stopping dead, like a thief caught in the act, and bracing himself by a childish habit he had retained, of thrusting his

tongue between his teeth and so giving greater length to his short chin, Hans pushed open the door of the living-room and went in to greet his mother.

Under the lamp that overhung the central table, in a straight-backed wooden chair, the Baroness von Bulow sat reading, her book held close to her eyes. She did not turn at her son's entrance, but, laying the book down, put a marker between the leaves and shut it. Then, just as deliberately, took off her spectacles, folded them, and inserted them with a click in a case which dangled from a chain at her waist: all without vouchsafing him a glance.

She was offended: well Hans knew the signs; and had done, ever since he could remember. For a little chap in frills and knickers, there had been no escape. Now, he tried to foil her by a spurious liveliness. Swooping down on her he laid his arm round her shoulders, kissed her cheek, asked tenderly after her migraine, her doings that day, and launched out in a jocular and superficial account of his own: smothered her, as it were, in words.

But Frau von Bulow was not diverted, or imposed on. She sat mute, irresponsive, her long narrow features wearing an expression of resigned patience. And the first time he stopped for breath, she lifted her hand and pointed with one finger to a chair.

"Sit down."

With a silent prayer to a deity he had ceased to believe in, he obeyed (nowadays he was at least permitted to sit) his loose, tremulous, piano hands spread before him on the table.

From their blunt nails and spatulate tips the Baroness looked away in distaste. Her own fingers were pointed, her nails long. Then, slowly raising her eyes to his, she said: "And now, my son, you will perhaps be good enough to tell me what the matter is."

Still he bilked it. "The matter, Mother? You mean... ?"

"What I say. You cannot deceive *me.* Ever since *Maitre* Liszt was here, you have had something on your mind. Now what have you and he been brewing together?"

*"Brewing,* Mother?"—very hotly. (Who had 'brewed,' he'd like to know, if not she, with her sly and secret letters.)

"Brewing.—For I do not trust Liszt. Distinguished, agreeable personage though he be, he is tarred with a French brush. He follows underhand ways; is given to intrigue."

"Mother! What next! That's unjust and untrue." But, even as he exclaimed, there flitted through his mind a similar charge levelled at Liszt by, it was said, no other than Chopin.

At this unpleasant memory his irritation got the better of him. He struck the table with his fist. "Oh, it's unbearable! Am I *never* to be allowed any private life? Not even my thoughts may I keep to myself?"

"Am I not your mother?"

"And am I not a man?—a grown man? Let me be, let me alone. But that's just what you can't or won't do.—No, no, Mother, forgive me! I didn't mean it—or mean to wound you." For at his words her rather prominent eyes had filled with tears.

"My son, it is your silence that wounds me. I can only assume that you no longer think me worthy of your confidence. There are others, now, who take my place."

"No, no, *Maman!"* he said again. "Indeed that is not so. Do you really believe I would put anyone before *you?* . . . who have done so much for me?"

"Then speak. As it is, I sit here a prey to my fears. Can it be that you are tiring already of a settled life? That you contemplate starting anew on your rounds as travelling showman?"

Hans flushed, both at the sting her words held, and their subtle implication. "Oh, how little faith you have in me.

"Or, worse still, have you let yourself be inveigled into another scandalous attack on some revered artist?"

"I have not; I give you my word I haven't. Though I must remind you again that those whose judgment I prize thought *very* differently of my criticism of 'the Sontag.'"

"The more shame to them."

"Mother! I beg of you—oh, for God's sake," he whipped out violently, "don't let us re-open that subject. Never shall we see eye to eye on it. Besides, it has nothing whatever to do with the present matter."

*"So.* Then there *is* something."

"Well . . . yes . . . there is."

A brief silence followed; in which she sat and watched him lick his dry lips, pass his tongue right round outside them—a habit she had never been able to break him of. Oh, it galled her, and to the marrow, to see him sitting there so puny, so insignificant, so obviously afraid: everything a son of hers ought not to be.

Wildly Hans racked his brain for an opening. Did he make Liszt responsible for what had happened, it would prejudice her still further against the little group of musical futurists under whose banner he marched: as it was, she nursed the stubborn conviction that he was but a tool in their hands. While to lay the motor impulse at his own door, so much as hint at an inclination, meant that her motherly jealousy, always a-glow, would at once break into flame.

But prolong the pause he dare not. Stammeringly he began to tell of the night Liszt and he had walked **and** talked; careful to stress the fact that, owing to the excitement of meeting, and their anxiety about the concert, they had both been a trifle overwrought. "Impossible **now,**

*Maman,* to say how the idea originated, or from whom it came, but" (ha! now he had it) "it suddenly occurred to us —to us both—what a tremendous lift it would give me in my work, my career, were I able to claim a nearer relationship to him than that of merely pupil to master." But she would n Cease your roundabouts."

"Oh, Mother . . " despairingly. Then, in exasperation: "Well, if you insist on me putting it into words . . . has not the Master daughters?" Even yet he did not trust himself to particularise.

For a second 01 two that dragged like an hour, she said nothing; just sat and fixed him, with eyes that bored like gimlets. Then, over her face swept the change he feared and hated: as a small boy, shaking in his shoes, this was the moment when he believed she was about to fell him to the ground, or herself to fall senseless in a fit. That day was past; but it still made him shake, affected him almost like an obscene sight, to watch the onset of her anger. (Oh, for the *Tarnhelm!)*

*"Do* you mean to tell me that, in spite of . . . after all his assurances, his fine words . . . oh! the falsity——" But here, conscious that she was saying too much, she hurriedly substituted: "Do you mean to say you have the effrontery, the barefaced effrontery, to ask me to receive one of these girls as my daughter? The offspring of a discreditable, a notorious liaison? Oh, *now* I understand why they were foisted upon me. Now I see! If *this* was not treachery. . . !"

Two dull red spots burnt on her cheeks; her hands shook aimlessly above the surface of the table.

His own hands trembled in sympathy. In vain he tried to calm her. "Mother, I beg of you! Well, at least lower your voice." And very gently: "After all,

you know, you did consent to take them into your house."

But this was a false move.

"And why? Why did I have to? It was no wish or will of mine. Solely because you, my son, the head of the family and twenty-five years old, are still incapable of earning a decent income." She spoke with such violence and rapidity that she had no time to swallow. Saliva showed at the corners of her mouth.

"I know, I know. It is all my fault."

"Fault? Speak truth and say your weakness. Which these, your so-called friends, are only too quick to recognise and make use of. Their design is, so to rope you in, so to bind you to them, that never again will you be free. Your crazy flight to Zurich—ah! there was the disaster. Ever since that wretched man got you into his clutches, you have not been able to call your soul your own."

Liszt, the good, the great, Hans could hear blasphemed unmoved; but at a bare mention of the other he was up in arms.

"For God's sake, leave Richard out of it! He knows no more of this than the child unborn."

"If only you had never set eyes on him! A rebel against his King, a fugitive slinking from justice, through and through vicious and perverted—what company for a son of *mine* to keep, to stoop to keep! *Alle Bulow'n ehrlichl*—it seems you have forgotten the very existence of our device. But no: what am I saying? Are you not merely following in your father's footsteps? Did he not rejoice in besmirching everything I valued or revered?—Oh, is it not enough that I have had to give up all the hopes and ambitions I nursed for you? To tread my doubts underfoot and consent to your adopting a profession unworthy of our name? To live to see a Bulow, and my only son, on public platforms, hacking round the country as a *fahrender Kunstler?*

Was it not enough I ask, without having this further ignominy thrust upon me?"

Flinch as he might inwardly, Hans said not a word: just sat there, his lips tight-bitten, his brows contracted, staring stupidly before him. From experience he knew that the onslaught on his nerves was nearly over. Now for his feelings.

And, as he foresaw, she went on: "Ob, Hans, my son, did I love you less, I should feel less deeply the many and bitter disappointments you have caused me. But you are all I have . . . all that is left me from the wreck of my life. Your sister will, must marry, and go to a home of her own. But you, child of my tears and prayers, you I believed would be true to me, make up to me for what I have suffered and sacrificed, shake off the evil influence that holds you, be the solace of my declining years."

Still he did not speak.

Foiled anew, she struck a more business-like note.

"Besides, let us look at this . . . this ridiculous, this offensive proposal from another angle. It is not the *misalliance* alone that distracts me. At the present time even the most propitious marriage would be a drag and a hindrance to you, who are just beginning to be known here, to get your head above water. Were you fool enough, at this juncture, to load yourself up with a wife and family, you would jeopardise, if not fatally injure such prospects as you have; and *in* all probability remain the poorly-paid drudge you are to-day."

But she could not get at him: again only the measured tick of the hanging-clock broke the stillness. Until she added: "I will not say what I might;" and went on: "But there was once a time when I hoped that, should the question of a marriage for you arise. . . Ahl it was in a very different quarter that my hopes then lay."

At this he came to life, and waved his hand at her, palm-outwards, as though to ward off a troublesome insect. "Mother, *please!* Don't go back on that,"

"Be easy, Hans." And as a Parthian shot: "No, no, my son, you would need to be more of a success than you are, for *that* connection to be smiled on. But now listen. You have not said, nor will I inquire, how deeply you are compromised. The vaguer the better—for me. For I insist on your leaving this matter entirely in my hands. Those concerned will find, to their cost, that they have a woman of the world to deal with; in place of a weak and amiable young man, who is incapable of standing up for himself. Go back to your work, my child, and leave it to your mother, to extricate you from the trap into which you have fallen."

Limply Hans went along the passage to his room. In passing a closed door he heard the sound of voices, the high light pleasant French voices, that had done so much to relieve the tension of a house where two people lived on each other's nerves—by devouring each other's nerves.

Sitting down at his desk he pushed the papers that littered it aside, and laid his head on his arms. He was exhausted. Such scenes took it out of him like nothing else. Already, too, behind his eyes the slow thrib-throb had begun that heralded *his* migraine. By to-morrow, he'd lay a wager, both he and she would have fallen to their common enemy; and the air would be electric in another way.

Meanwhile, he had the unpleasant task of writing and telling the Master—well, as much as he in decency could of what had passed. Did it only come easier to him to wound those he cared for. Had he only been less torn between the two of them. For there was some truth in

what his mother said; here and there, indeed, she had put his own misgivings into words. And, for all her anger, she had been generous, not once reminding him of the drain he had been on her purse, the many times she had come to his aid. Especially in those forlorn days when, his studies with Liszt at an end, he was struggling to get a footing on the concert-platform; those wretched months in Vienna and Pesth when, in face of hostile coteries and critics, he had played to half-empty halls, with a deficit on every performance. Never had he then applied to her for help in vain. And it bore doubly hard on her; for she did not share his belief in his own powers, or in the high cause for which he stood.

Yes, he was regularly torn in two.

Somebody had once said of him—stop! now he had it, and not the words only, but the time and place of their saying. (That last thrust of hers must have jogged his memory.) It was during his happy student-days in Weimar. With a party of friends he had travelled to Jena, where he and old Jussef J. were performing together (Mendelssohn, if you please! No one would get Mendelssohn from him now. Or not without a rumpus.) And after the concert they had driven slowly home—two carriage-loads of them, the ladies muffled in furs, the drivers humped up half-asleep on their boxes—under a glorious full moon. It was so light that you could see to read your watch; distinguish each twig in the shadow-lattice cast by the naked trees on the white road. The beauty of the night and the success of the concert had gone to their heads, loosening their tongues. Fraulein Armgart (little Armgart!) who sat facing him burst into song (Mendelssohn again, but even M. was bearable in such surroundings); while Frau Bettina recited the lovely lines beginning *Fullest wieder Busch und Thai!* Armgart was her airiest, most provocative self; and he and she had

laughed, and jested, and crossed swords, though about what he no longer knew. But well he remembered how she had suddenly flashed out at him: "Hans, you lazybones, you never *can* make up your mind. I believe you'd always rather have it done for you." Remembered, too, how Frau von Arnim, in her deep, rich voice, had struck a blow for him. "Lazy is not the word, child. I think what hampers Monsieur Hans is his ability to see two sides of a thing at once."

Well, that was just what he was doing now. And shrinking equally from one and the other. From offending the Master, or antagonising his mother—anew.

From experience he knew what this would mean. For when, reasoning and entreaties alike having proved useless, he had flung up his hated study of the law and fled to Zurich; after that, for many a month, he might as well not have had a mother. She had refused to see him or to write to him, even to read his imploring letters; and all Liszt's exquisite tact and patience were needed to bring about a reconciliation. He really couldn't go through that martyrdom again.

Besides, it was not Liszt's voice, but hers—her claims, pleas, arguments—that now went on sounding in his ears. And the longer he sat and turned her words over, the more force they gathered. Until he ended by seeing the project through her eyes, as unfair, untimely, and perhaps even, as she asserted, not wholly disinterested.—For, to pass to himself, the idea of marriage had never crossed his mind. He didn't think he was the marrying sort. Quite certainly not when, as here, a variety of obstacles blocked the way. A single one would have been enough for him! Again, much as he admired Liszt's daughters, there was often a something about them—a curiously quizzing glance, or a polite silence—that rendered him subtly uneasy. On the

whole, he felt more at home with the Master himself than with either of these two young girls.

But why go on manufacturing excuses? They were no longer required: the matter had been taken out of his hands. And even a withdrawal on his part need not necessarily mean estrangement from Liszt. For let him give his mother her due: in all her dealings with the outside world, with every one in short but him, she showed both tact and adroitness. He believed he might safely leave it to her to free him, without offence, from his rash and foolish undertaking.

## IV

"OH, this Berlin! How I hate it . . . hateiti" I "Then why lie thinking about it? Go on reading."

But Blandine, curled up on a sofa that was too short for her, made no move to pick up her book from the floor.

"It's too dark; I can't see—*you'll* ruin your eyes, Cosettel And you know what a fuss they make if we want the lamp before it's time."

"The fuss was because you went to fetch it. Madame particularly asked us not to enter the kitchen."

"Oh, I know," sighed Blandine, and clasped her hands behind her head. "There's always something we mustn't do. And I suppose always will be."

"Mionny! What talk!" And pushing dictionaries and notebooks from her, Cosette leant back in her chair. "Do try and make the best of things, *cherie.* Grumbling won't help."

"What a wiseacre you are, Cos! Anyone would think you were years older than me, instead of younger."

"Besides after all, you know, you need never have come to Berlin. You had your chances to stay away,'' said Cosette mischievously.

Blandine broke into a fluty laugh. "You and my chances! Pray, Mademoiselle Liszt, do you refer to the 'cracker of knuckles,' or to him of the trumpet tones and pot-belly?" And here Blandine blew out her cheeks and put her thumbs in imaginary armholes, in imitation of a stout and pompous man.

Cosette gave way, and their united, rather high-pitched

laughter rang through the house. (Till Hans Guido, who sat at his desk seeking a sting-ray epithet with which to wound an enemy, found himself wondering uneasily: what *can* they be so merry about? Whom are they laughing at now?)

' 'Frankly, Cos, *do* you see me going to the altar with either of those worthies?"

"Equally frankly, I don't. And yet, Mionny . . . if Papa thought them suitable. . ."

"My good Cosimette! I adore Papa, yes, just as much as you do. And shall always respect his wishes—when they *are* his! But . . . Well, you know quite well, my dear, whose choice these gentlemen were. Besides, I'm tired to death of being treated as a child, now I'm turned twenty. All our lives we've been bandied about more like things than people. Now, I intend to show them that I have a mind of my own."

Cosette made no reply, and she went on: "I'm quite aware, and so are you, Cos, why we were sent here; but I've not the least intention of marrying a German. I'm going back to Paris. Grandmamma will be only too glad to have me. And Mamma, too."

"They'll never consent to that."

"Then I shall take French leave!"

This tickled them both, and again their gay laughter trilled out, Cosette adding admiringly: "Yes, I believe you would."

Dusk was turning to dark in the long, narrow, heavily curtained room; it was the time of day for confidences; and Blandine, having pummelled and re-arranged a stiff" horsehair bolster, went on: "What I *can't* understand, Cos, is why, in those last months in Paris, they allowed us to see Mamma so often, and then, just as we were beginning really to know her, dragged us away. Without a word of

excuse either. I suppose the truth is, a certain person begrudges our being even moderately happy."

But this flicked Cosette in a tender place.

"Do please remember, Mionny, that in criticising her, you criticise Papa as well. And that's unpardonable. How it would wound him, too, could he hear you!"

"My dear Cosette. As soon as Papa comes in question, your imagination runs away with you. For one thing he's so busy; he has a hundred more important things to think of than us and our feelings. And you know very well there are others who mean a great deal more to him than we ever shall. I sometimes wonder if, in his heart, he doesn't find us rather a nuisance."

"Mionny! I won't listen to you. Papa is everything in the world to us . . . is all we have."

*"Is* he?"

Into her voice Blandine threw a meaning that tied her sister's tongue.

Turning her head to peer at Cosette, and cupping her chin in her hand, she said coaxingly: "I wish you'd tell me something, Cos. Are you really serious when you . . . do you really and truly mean it when you talk of staying here? For good?"

Still Cosette said nothing.

"Well! I didn't expect you would. You're very close, you know; you never speak out. But at least tell me this, my lamb; *do* you think you would be happy?"

"I think so."

"I wonder!" said Blandine meditatively.

"Besides, happiness isn't the only thing in life."

"It ought to be; at our age. Mind you, it's not that I don't like Monsieur Hans. I do. I think he's a dear little man —quite often. But, as a husband, Cos? Besides, it's not only him. What about Madame, and having her always with you?"

"I wouldn't. I'd see to it that we lived by ourselves."

"Upon my word, I believe you would!" cried Blandine, admiring in her turn. "And if *you* once make up your mind, Cos. . . Oh, I might have known you had something up your sleeve. Go on, confess, tell me more, you little schemer, you!"

"No, *please,* dear, that sounds horrible. As if I were planning something sly and tricky. And I'm not in the least 'close.' There's nothing to tell. Or nothing fresh. Ever since we came here I've felt sorry for Hans; and I've gone on growing sorrier, that's all. As things are, he hasn't a chance. No matter how hard he works, he never hears a word of encouragement. Instead of life being made easier for him, he's nagged and badgered. If he's ever to succeed, he has got to break loose. And that's what I mean to help him to. For you know Papa says Hans has more genius than any of them—yes, even than Raff!—and that if he only settles down in earnest to compose, he'll do great things. And then, how splendidly he fights for Papa's works. For this reason alone, nothing I could do would be too much."

"Well, that's Hans, and that's Papa. But where do you come in, my Cosimette?"

"Oh, haven't I made you understand? Listen, Mionny. Do you remember a sermon we once heard preached, by Abbe Gabriel? Perhaps you won't; for it's so long ago. Well, in it he said that the life of a true woman ought to consist wholly of self-sacrifice, she herself stand for the 'sacrificial offering.' I never forgot that; the words seemed to burn themselves into me. At the time it was Papa I dreamed of dedicating myself to—I was so young then, I dfdn't understand. Now, I know Papa doesn't need me; but poor Hans does; and if I can help him, and through him the greatest of all Causes—why, it seems to me a chance I dare not miss."

Had Blandine been less nice, she might here have scratched her head.

"Well, of course, *chirie"* she said after a moment, "if that's how you look at it. You always were a better person and certainly a much better Christian than I. But—but Hans is so poor. You wouldn't have many comforts."

"I'm not afraid of being poor. Besides, I might find a way to earn some money, too."

"Papa would never consent to that!"—And then, very tentatively: "But you do like Hans just a little for his own sake, don't you?"

"Of course I do. Though . . ."

But at this moment heavy steps came down the passage, the door of the room was thrown unceremoniously open, and a stout servant, her sleeves rolled above the elbows of her brawny arms, carried in the lamp, which she planked down amidst Cosette's books and papers. Its flame lit up two deeply-flushed young faces; set glittering two shapely heads, wound round with coils and plaits of flaxen hair.

"There you are! Now you'll be able to get on with your studies. I told Madame you'd be itching to."

And so it was. Cosette pulled her dictionary back to her, and Blandine redeemed her book. For, with the coming of the light, the thread of their talk was broken.

But the book, which was dull, had not grown in interest, and once more Blandine lay idle, watching Cosette at work on her Italian composition; and thinking over what had passed.—People say we look alike, and I suppose we do (except that Cos's hair is much, much brighter than mine.) But how different we actually are, inside. The things she imagines about Papal . . . hardly one of them's true. Supposing it were like that with Hans?—I wonder how fond she really is of him. Well, at least fond enough to turn German for his sake! Of course Papa's almost a German.

now, after living so long in Weimar; and what Papa is, Cos must be, too. Poor Cos! For it won't help. Papa has Princess Marie, who's much more like his own daughter than we are. (So much prettier, too.) Perhaps Cos thinks by marrying Hans she may be useful to Papa. Or wants to win his approval by egging Hans on. Or perhaps she's only taking him because Papa's so fond of him. Who knows! But, *mon Dieul* to look forward to spending the rest of her life in this hideous Berlin, in one of these dark, stuffy flats, with Hans always busy (and nervous, and ill) and no income to speak of. How *can* she! Why, rather than not go back to Paris I'd marry one of the two we've been laughing at, yes, I would!

But, if I go, and Cos stays here, we shall probably never be much together again.

This was a sobering thought: even though backed by a swift vision of the gay, colourful life Blandine planned for her own. For, thus far, from those dim, early days when they had shared each childish joy, or run hand in hand out of hearing of bitter words and passionate quarrels, they had never been parted; and, because of this, because they had each other, not even the lack of a real home, with a real father and mother at the head of it; not the iron rule of an ancient duenna; or the exile that had punished the ripening intimacy with their lovely but forbidden mother, had been wholly unbearable.

Now, an end was coming to this dual life; and one day hundreds of miles would divide them. To her, Blandine, the thought was like the threatened loss of a limb. Who could have believed Cosette would take it so coolly? But something new and strange was at work in her, making her hardish and unlike herself.

But as here again steps sounded on the passage-oilcloth, Blandine dashed the back of her hand over her lids; **and** at

a light but firm knock at the door, both she and Cosette sprang to their feet.

"May I come in, young ladies?" Steps and voice were Madame de Bulow's.

Like well-drilled automata the two replied as one.

"Please, do!"

"But certainly, Madame!"

Her full skirts swaying, keys and chains a-jingle, Frau von Bulow advanced to the table: and in doing so ran a searching eye over Cosette's papers and Blandine's book.

Permission to enter had been asked in a suffering tone; and in suffering fashion one hand was now raised to the cap-dressed head.

The girls knew the symptoms; and were not surprised when, in the same languid voice, their owner said: "I bring you what I fear will be disappointing news. An attack of migraine, which has been hanging over me since the morning, has now descended."

In their best company manner, they commiserated and condoled.

"How deeply grieved I am to hear that, Madame!"

"These headaches! How terrible for you!"

"And so I regret to say I shall be unable to accompany you to the concert this evening."

Once more, in strict conformity with their training, the sisters hastened to make light of their own wishes.

"But naturally, Madame!"

"Pray, do not incommode yourself!"

"It does not matter."

"Not in the least!"

Oh! this French pomade. What would not one sometimes give for a little German sincerity, mused the Baroness. (Although, before the advent of Liszt's daughters, no more ardent devotee of French culture had existed than she, who

had brought **her** own children up to French as their second mother-tongue.)

Till now she had addressed herself solely to Blandine, markedly ignoring Cosette. But this was not unusual, for, in Madame de Billow's presence, Cosette had a way of dropping into the background. Now, however, she surprised them both by stepping foward.

"Would it not, Madame, for once be permissible for us to attend a concert alone? We could take a cab from door to door. Or, if you would prefer it, Marie might escort us there and fetch us afterwards ... like other girls of our age."

"And I assure you, you could rely on our discretion," added Blandine. For she knew how much Cosette had been looking forward to this concert, and suspected the Baroness of knowing it, too.

Now it was Cosette whom Frau von Bulow fixed; narrowing her short-sighted eyes. "Under no consideration, quite impossible!" she said curtly. "These 'other girls,' to whom you refer, are in a very different position. They live in their own homes, and their parents decide for them what is *convenable* and what not. Whereas I— It may be as well, young ladies, to remind you again that, in all I do, I am guided wholly by your father's instructions. If the rules he lays down appear to you too strict, it is to him you must apply for relaxation. Without his consent, I can make no changes."

With this, the reference to her father having effectually silenced Cosette, Frau von Bulow bade them good-night and withdrew.

Alone again, the sisters exchanged a long, meaning look, then fell, half laughing, half tearfully, each on the other's neck; and, in this position, holding fast, even did a few jigging dance-steps about the room. Out of sheer desperation. For the evening that yawned before them would be

a faithful copy of the dull afternoon. When Madame had her headaches even the servant went on tiptoe, and not a key of the piano might be struck. Hans, lucky Hans, would of course vanish to the concert. There was nothing for it, so back they went, one to her preparation of Signor Fabrucci's lesson, one to her *History of Europe.*

But Cosette's face, as she bent over her pen, wore an expression which, thought Blandine, made her look more like Papa than ever. And led not only to the mental comment: 'If Madame doesn't want her to marry Hans, she's going the wrong way to work,' but also, in the unfinished reflection: Tor, if once Cos gets her back up . . .' added yet another motive to those already told over to account for Cosette's choice of a husband.

## V

"THAT'S it, that's it! You've got it!"

The piano stood free in the middle of the room; and, while he taught, Hans was in perpetual motion, dodging from tail to keyboard, and from side to side of the instrument. This restlessness on his part was a good sign: if a lesson went well, he was usually to be found on his feet. Only by the dullards did he remain sitting; and then it was his mind that took exercise, in a search for labels with which, below his breath, to behang them.

But the girl at the piano was Cosima Liszt; and, his eyes alight, now mounting on his toes to follow a mounting phrase; now accompanying a flight of staccato octaves with the jerks of two umbrella-spread hands; or, in his absorption, picking the leaves off a plant on his mother's flower-table: so Hans Guido bore outward witness to his inner satisfaction.

A very different Hans this, from the shrinking son or youthfully adoring disciple. Here, on his own ground, he was not only the master, but a master.

The movement at an end, he leant his folded arms on the sidepiece of the music-stand, and curling one leg round the other repeated: "You've got it! To perfection. And I'll tell you why. It's because you're able to *hear* yourself play; to get outside yourself and listen to what you are doing. Also, you're not afraid to follow your instinct. As most of my other boobs of pupils are, once they've been made to use their brains. Because I require them first to break up what they're going to learn, pull it to pieces, decompose it, note

by note if need be, and certainly phrase by phrase; because of this, they never succeed in putting it together again, but go on dishing it up in fragments. They haven't the gift of rising above the spadework, forgetting it, giving instinct the last word. In short, they can't stop *thinking.* As you do. As you have."

His dear, ugly face, how it lights up when he talks, thought Cosette, who sat attentive, a little smile on her lips.

"I said a gift," Hans went on; and uncurled his legs, to curl them the other way round; "but in your case it would be more exact to call it an inheritance. For it's here that the Master's supreme genius comes out. When *he* sits down to the piano, of all the intense mental study, the reading between the lines that has gone before, not a hint, not a trace! His playing has the freshness and spontaneity of an improvisation. And his ability to express his inmost self—his emotions, his sensual perceptions—is incomparable. No other has ever had his power of materialising the spiritual."

At this praise of her father, Cosette's modest half-smile spread until her whole face smiled.

"And you, Mademoiselle, are his daughter." Hans turned on his heel and took a few quick steps about the room. "And my sole disagreement, the one bone I have to pick with the Master is his refusal to let you make use of your talent. One does not cork up diamonds in a bottle! There is room and to spare for another artist of your sex on the concert-platform. Beside our inimitable, our immovable Clara!"

"My father looks back with horror on his own early experiences. He wishes to save me—us—from anything of the kind."

"Yes, yes. And humanly speaking, of course, I under-

stand him. But as an artist it irks me.—But forgive me, I mustn't try to influence you against his will."

"That you couldn't," said Cosette. And with a proud little toss of her head: "What my father thinks right and proper will always be good enough for me."

"Well, that's as it should be." But aware of a much more cogent reason than hers, for Liszt's determination to keep his daughters out of the limelight, Hans added: "All the same, I think it's rather wonderful of you to take it as you do."

"Wonderful? Oh, no. You forget I love my father," said Cosette warmly; and her kindling eye and rising colour lent her a prettiness she could not always claim. Her face was overlong, the features were rather too pronounced. Together with so much else, she had inherited Liszt's large, jutting nose and wide, straight-cut mouth. But she had not the full, round eye and sturdy chin which, in his case, held the balance. Her eyes were a trifle too closely set, her chin was womanly. But she was tall and very slender; and her head, with its coronal of golden hair, sat so well on her slim neck that it had gained her the nickname of 'the swan\

"I say wonderful and I mean it," Hans went on, growing heated in his turn. "And not about this alone. When I see how patiently you and Mademoiselle Blandine endure life here—this unspeakably dull life which is all we have to offer you. From Paris to Berlin!—and never a grumble. Or when I watch you, morning after morning, vainly scanning the post for a letter from Weimar—why, there isn't one girl in a thousand who would put up with it. What I can't understand is why you don't write and complain to your father of his silence, tell him how unhappy it makes you."

Again Cosette flushed, this time too darkly for comfort. "Oh, no, I couldn't do that. The more I want a thing, the

less able I am to ask for it; or even to speak of it. I find it easier to go without."

"At that rate, there must be a good deal at work in you under the surface."

"There is," said Cosette; and laughed, a trifle mischievously. Much more than *you* dream of, Monsieur le BaronI she added to herself; and, narrowing her eyes, looked hard at him, he standing there in rather stupid, young-man fashion, his arms folded, a large square hand spread out on either arm. Handsome he certainly was not. A great dome of forehead overhung an insignificant nose and chin; lank black hair dangled round two thin and very sallow cheeks. The large dark-grey eyes inclined to be prominent, the upper lip was disproportionately long. Yet, in spite of its plainness, there was something about the face that made a strong appeal to Cosette; and once again she thought to herself: much, much more, Hans Guido von Bulow!

"Is one . . . permitted to ask . . ."

"One is not." And getting up from the piano she closed the volume of Beethoven. "Besides, it would be a waste of your precious time. I'm sure you've none to spare."

He snatched a glance at his watch. "Wrong. I've still ten minutes." But he retreated a step as he spoke. For, *in* face of Cosette standing, who was so much taller than he, he invariably felt his self-assurance dwindle.

"Well, then, let me ask *you* something. What has been the matter . . . lately? Has anything happened to . . . to make you change your mind?"

Now, it was his turn to redden. "By that you mean?"

"I think you know," said Cosette softly.

"Yes, unfair of me, I do. Well, yes, I admit, there have been things. Unsuspected by you."

"I think I can make a guess. Your mother, isn't it?"

He nodded. "Amongst others. Which I need hardly

trouble you with. But when my mother came to hear of my talk with your father (you know what a poor hand I am at keeping a secret) she was very put about, and set herself to prove what a gross folly it was for me to think of marrying, when I can barely earn enough to keep myself. Oh, and much else besides. Which I don't care to go back on. But the upshot was, she made the whole thing seem impossible and absurd."

"She always does," said Cosette in a low voice.

"I know. And I ought to be used to it, for I've had this attitude of hers to fight all my life. But in the present case I must confess she convinced me. What she said seemed and unfortunately still seems only too true."

Had Cosette spoken out, she would, with a change of pronoun, have repeated her last words. But the time for complete frankness had not yet come.

Instead, she said gently: "Oh, please, please, don't believe it!—don't let her *make* you believe it. Of course I know I'm still very young. But there are some things I'm a better judge of than she is. And I'm quite old enough to know my own mind. That hasn't changed, and never will. Before I ever knew you, I used to hope I should once have a chance of thanking you for all you have done for Papa. Now, there's more—more than just gratitude, I mean. I can see that you yourself have it in you to do great things. But you need a different atmosphere. It's so depressing here. And all sorts of trifles are put before your work, and thought more important. You never get any encouragement either. And though I'm very inexperienced, yet I do feel an artist needs *somebody* to believe in him, before he can trust himself to believe in himself.—You're surprised at what you call my lack of ambition. It may be that the real stuff isn't in me. But if you will only let me work for you, and with you, it would make up for everything." Her

voice had sunk rather than risen, but was full of entreaty.

Forgetting his missing inches, Hans stepped forward and took her hand.

"Cosette! If anyone could convince me, if anyone could help me, it would be you. Oh, if it were only not for my infernal poverty—God! if I were not so poor."

"But I've never been rich, or had money to spend. Besides . . . well, Papa has always led us to expect . . ."

"I know, I know. But I couldn't—it would be simply hell to find myself dependent on him. Or on you through him."

"Now you're being proud. Would you really let the question of a little money stand in the way? I mean of all you and I might be able to do if we were together?"

He felt for her other hand; and they stood there, linked, yet apart.

"And so it really means that you are willing—would have the courage to share my miserable, pauper existence? You, *Erlkfinig's* daughter?"

"Not only willing. I ask it as a favour. And just because I *am* my father's daughter. Doesn't he love you like a son?"

"Oh, that's merely *Bon Grand's* divine goodness!"

To this, roughly and curtly flung out, she found nothing to say; and there was a pause, in which they stood looking into each other's eyes. Till suddenly hers filled with tears, and her lips began to tremble. That did for him, to whom, at the best of times, tears were a kind of outrage. And to see this proud girl robbed of her dignity, and by him, made him want to turn and run from the room. But he conquered the impulse; and, instead, jerkily and awkwardly raised her hand to his lips.

"Cosette, I give in, capitulate, you win the day—for I can see it's no use trying to stand out against you. And, indeed, I should be a craven and a poltroon to refuse the gift the

gods offer me. The marvellous gift. No! for once, I'll dare fate. Forget everything that weighs me down, ties me to earth, and do my best to fly . . . even if only with your wings!" And at the smile of relief that broke through her tears, he added, with a staunch shake of the hands lying in his: "I promise you, there shall be no more doubts and scruples, no more black, creeping thoughts. From now on, we belong to each other. And before I sleep to-night, I'll write to your father and tell him so."

And he was as good as his word—though the sleep he looked for did not follow. For the letter, at which he wrote and re-wrote, making and throwing aside copy after copy, was by no means done with, even when finished. His brain went on labouring at it long after he had blown out his candle, trying to find still more telling proofs of his willingness, still more scathing terms for his self-contempt, which should, at one and the same time, satisfy Liszt, yet let his own pride go free.

## VI

T will all right, I know it will. If only *we* stand
I firm."

Nowadays they were not often alone together. Liszt and Madame de Bulow surpassed each other as sticklers for convention; and poor Hans was early banished from the flat. But whenever she had the chance, Cosette tried to breathe some of her own confidence into him. And he needed it; for he was distracted and humiliated by the right even strangers were assuming to have a finger in his private life.

From first to last—and it had still a year and a half to run—the betrothal that resulted from his letter to Liszt was used as a kind of whipping-boy, on which those connected with the young pair *let* out their loves, hates and secret fears. A single voice was raised against the delay, urging: "Marry, and hang the consequencesl Long engagements are an iniquity." But this came from Zurich, and was the advice of one who, having practised what he preached, had ever since worn a millstone round his neck. Hence, the words evoked only a mild amusement in those concerned.

The Princess naturally broke the seal of Hans' letter. And having read it, with brows that went first up, then down, she passed it to Liszt with an enigmatic smile, and a: "See here, see here, what our little Bulow is planning!" Anxious to agree with what, from the smile, he believed to be her sentiments, Liszt duly drew his brows together and gave vent to more than one impatient exclamation.

*"Tscba!* That girl againl This is all her doing."

But afterwards, behind the closed door of the narrow, scantily-furnished room that served him for a bedroom, he took the letter from his pocket and re-read it.

Now that he was free to be himself, his heart went out to the writer. He alone could guess what it had cost Hans to put some of these admissions on paper; he alone find a way through the tangled weft of motives that underlay them, or appreciate the lad's chivalrous efforts to obscure the part Cosette had played. All in all, no easy task. A three-months' silence had to be explained away, reasons found for the breaking of it; renewed assurances given that the writer had in no wise presumed on a daily companionship, or overstepped the limits set him. And, along with this, entreaties not to put his seeming backwardness down to reluctance. His feelings for Mademoiselle Cosette had never wavered. And surely they had by now been well tried? A preamble which led up to the main and bitterest point of any: his poverty, his lack of success on the concert-platform, his obligations to his mother. Together with the wry confession that, though he should work for twenty-three out of the twenty-four hours, he would still be unable to support a wife. And then, in the midst of these agonies, the sudden outburst, the cry from the heart: "Oh, *Maitre, cher Maitre,* I not only love your daughter. It's the thought of being more nearly related to you that fills me with happiness."

"Poor lad! Poor Hans."

But even as he said it, Liszt's thoughts were slipping. From Hans to himself. For in reading he had lighted on phrases that had a horridly familiar ring. "She allows me to love her"—whose words were these? Allows me to love her! Yes, hard as it was to believe it, only a few short years ago this had been his own state of mind, his own humble posture. And, in rapturous anticipation of a life-

time's service, he had felt himself a darling of the gods,—Or yet again Hans' ardent vow: "Never would I hesitate to sacrifice myself for her happiness." This, too, drove its dart into him. But in another way. Sacrifice? With time, the very word had grown abhorrent to him. It was sacrifice here, sacrifice there; one gave another, and round and round you spun, in a vicious circle. And the end of it all? Why, that the one who had given up most, been the chief victim, grew to be the atlas-burden that bent your back, bowed your head. And day by day, hour by hour, you struggled under it, until . . . no, no! down with such treacherous thoughts, they were unworthy of him.

Only, for God's sake, no sacrifices.

A gusty April bree2e ran through the many tall trees that grew near the house. He glanced up at the sound, and as quickly looked away again. He was tired; and from his heart resented the fresh calls he foresaw on his scanty leisure, his already rifled attention. He had believed this affair of Cosette's shelved; or at any rate pushed forward into a comfortably vague future. Now, thanks to the girl's self-will, the whole weary business was *to* begin again.

As a father, he supposed, he was a failure, too. At least, he could feel tenderer of anyone than of his daughters. Daniel, with his brilliant talents, might yet add new lustre to the name of Liszt. But these two young females seemed born only to plague him. As long as they were children, **he** had successfully wiped them from his mind by seeing as little as possible of them; and throughout their girlhood the news of them he had valued most was that they **were** grown tame and docile. Tame and docile, indeed! Here was one turning up her nose at excellent husbands; **the** other running mad after a man without means and **hampered by filial** ties. No one could say he had not done his duty by them. The fortune accumulated in his early golden **tours**

through Europe had served to educate and provide for them; and out of it must come his contribution to their marriage portions. He himself lived as a poor man, depending wholly on his meagre salary as *Kapellmeister;* the works which he had retired from the concert-platform to compose still lying in great part unpublished in his desk.

But the appeal that would need to be made to her mother's generosity, in the matter of Cosette's *dot,* was not the worst of it. It was Carolyne and Carolyne's attitude he feared. Against anyone or anything that deflected his thoughts from her, she bore an undying grudge. And from now on Cosette and Cosette's marriage would come in for their full share of it. But this was a mere nothing compared with her jealousy of the woman who had preceded her in his affections. And the renewing of a contact long since broken would be the signal for a fresh and violent outbreak. So that in all she said and did, in the advice she gave him or the advice she withheld, allowance would have to be made for this rankest of emotions.

Again, in the background lurked yet another figure: that of Hans' mother. And in her case, too, he foresaw difficulties unending. Great God!—was he never to be free of women?

To begin with, he took his old mother into confidence. And Frau Anna, living alone in her tiny, top-floor Paris flat, wiped her eyes—it was a rare thing nowadays to hear direct from Franz: letters from Weimar were mostly in another hand—and sagely nodded her becapped head. She wasn't a bit surprised by what she heard. For when two young people were in daily *tete-d-tete,* and one of them the *professeur,* what more natural than that they should fall out of friendship and into love?

Indeed, she might have reminded Franz of the day when he himself had stormed through the streets of Paris, his

long hair flying, his cloak streaming in the wind; or lain face downwards bedewing his pillow with tears. Sick with love for one of his pupils. (He did take these affairs so to heart. Just like illnesses they were with him.) Afterwards, of course, he forgot; every one forgot; except an old woman like herself, who sat and remembered.

But she had to walk warily. Correspondence with Franz had grown very complicated since he set up house with a lady Princess. You never quite knew where you were; and it was safer *to* keep your real opinions to yourself—as long, that was, as he didn't run down the children. When, as now, he charged one of them with forward and unwomanly conduct, or, in words that didn't sound like his own, mocked at them as *precieuses ridicules,* then it wasn't so easy to hold your tongue.

And having defended them she went on to write that, to her mind, it had been a sad mistake on his part ever to take them away from Paris. If only because of the girls' *dots.* Once having been permitted *to* visit their mother, they should have stayed there and cultivated her. In which case Madame would have felt more warmly towards them; and towards him, too. For according to report she was still saying very bitter and sarcastic things about him. Putting their removal down to what she called "underhand machinations." If Franz could only have made up his mind to see her, the last time he was in Paris, things might now be different.—With regard to young Bulow, as Cosette was satisfied and he might prove useful in his capacity of *gendre,* the only real drawback seemed the shortage of money. And so her advice was to let both girls come back and renew their intimacy with Madame. Rumour had it that some property she owned was about to be pulled down, to make room for a new street. If this were true, she would have an excellent opportunity to show her cards.

The Princess was beside herself. Her hands shook, her eyes blazed, her voice was gutteral with emotion as she heaped reproaches on Liszt, making him pay dearly for his mild attempt at secrecy.

"Merciful Heaven! has then no one but me any sense left for what is fit and proper? . . . do I stand alone in my regard for the decencies? Oh! well for us that we rescued these . . . these daughters of yours, not only from their mother's clutches, but from others whose name I will not wound you by mentioning. How sheerly insupportable this mercenary, this sordid, this—yes, it must out!—this *peasant* outlook, with its cunning and scheming. But are we, whose scope of vision is so immeasurably wider, to degrade ourselves by sanctioning such methods? For such grossly materialistic ends to expose anew these innocent girlish minds to a contamination from which we have but just delivered them?" And still more vehemently: *"This* house they are not permitted to enter unless I am absent from it, for fear my presence might sully their purity—*my* presence, I, who would liefer be stretched on the rack than voice the sentiments I am here forced to read! Oh, till now I have never spoken out, never put my outraged feelings into words. I have acquiesced, have suffered (my *God!* how I have suffered) in silence, though the knowledge that it is so, has been a dagger, a poisoned dagger, in my breast."

Now, the great eyes swam in tears; the voice broke, tailed off in sobs.

Liszt's heart smote him. Laying down the letter, he crossed with short, quick steps to her side.

"Carolyne . . . my Carolyne! I beseech you, do not so torment yourself I A little matter of utility, my own, agreed upon between us, as you surely remember?"

But she would not spare him. "Of the thousand other slights and indignities I have to put up with, I do not speak.

I have borne and always shall bear them as my cross—for your sake. But this, this is something which, Heaven knows, I have not deserved. From me, whose sole aim would have been to elevate and enlighten them, these unhappy creatures must be kept apart; yet they are to frequent a house where lies and malice abound, where their tenderest filial feelings will be laid waste, by hearing their father, their adored father, belittled and derided. Is it possible you have already forgotten the last infamous gibe that reached us? 'Ganem, the slave of love!' And that of you, to you, my Franz, than whom no nobler and more inspired soul walks the earth. Great God, it is a viper's tongue!"

At last she had made him wince. But all he said was: "My beloved! Still . . . if / can forgive and forget? Remember, too, that the words you repeat came to us in a devious way. They may have been no more than gossip."

"But is it not enough that they should be going the rounds? You, Franz Liszt, a byword on people's tongues! —Oh! if only you were not so lily-livered, so poor-spirited —so different, so utterly different from me. At the least affront to you, I blaze, I boil. It is as if my heart's blood were being sucked from me."

Words of comfort failing him, Liszt drew her to the sofa. There he fondled the trembling hands, wiped off the heavy tears.

Not until she had wept her fill did he say gently: "Come, come, my Carolyne, be your own brave self again, and help me, as only you can. When this affair was first spoken of some months ago, you gave me your promise to do so. And the facts are unaltered. If Hans and Cosette are to marry—"

*"If they* are to marry! Well, in God's name, why should they? Compel that stubborn and perverse girl to give up her whim."

"—a *dot,* and a liberal one, will have to **be** found," **went** on Liszt as though she had not spoken. "For some **time** to come, Hans is likely to be a poor man."

"Then let them be poor! With such a prospect before her, your daughter will very soon come to her senses."

"Knowing Cosette as I do, I doubt it."

At his unmoved face, the ominous quiet of his tone, the Princess began to realise that the battle was lost; she **had** failed alike in her attacks on his love, his pity, his vanity, or even in bringing to a head his annoyance with his obstreperous child. Desperately she lashed out: "No one but you would give a second thought to such a match. Yes, I know I once agreed to consider it; but I told you plainly I should need time, and time you promised me. But as usual you have slid out of it, broken your word. Not only that: you correspond with your mother *on the sly;* ask *her* advice not mine, and will probably take it. For when it comes to the point, what *I* say and feel means nothing to you." And again the tireless weeping shattered her; for by now she saw clearly what lay before her. The inevitable letters between Liszt and the mother of his children; his not improbable journeyings to Paris, of which *she* would know only so much as he chose to tell her; the possibility of a revival of the old feelings, a re-knitting of the old bonds. And this last was the secret dread that never ceased to gnaw her; for, even in its autumn ripeness, the beauty that had once enslaved him contrasted painfully with her own unloveliness. And now it was over with her self-control. She fell to crying: "My head, my poor head! Where is my vinaigrette? Marie, Marie!—oh, go, send for the girl, fetch her to me! I am ill, I am suffering."

Doors opened, light steps came running down the passage. "Mamma.... Mamma darling, what is the matter? Yes, yes, dearest, here it is" as the missing bottle was

found, unstoppered, and held to the red and sodden nose. And then, on her knees beside her mother, in the tones of one not unskilled in handling such crises, the little Princess soothed and cajoled. "Hush, hush, don't cry. Come with me, come away to your own room and lie down. I will sit by you, and bathe the poor head, and hold your hand and read to you till you are able to sleep.—Yes, Anderson, please, the other side." And with the governess's aid, the broken, drooping woman was led from the room.

Wiping his forehead—the first and worst lap over, thank God!—Liszt looked at his watch. Still one precious hour was left him. Without a pause, as if no break had occurred, he drew his chair to the table and sat down to the sheets of black and straggly manuscript that covered it.

Not a sou unless I am allowed free access to my daughters. That is my last word. And having penned it Marie d'Agoult raised her head, on which the massy golden coils showed plentifully streaked with silver, and smiled to herself, a little derisively. She could afford to . . . now. And indeed she had long ceased to feel any very active bitterness—towards *L,is t.* That day was past. Now, she knew him better than to expect him ever to slough his skin; saw him as he was: vain, humourless, and with no more backbone than a worm in his dealings with women. Especially if they bore a pretty title. Then, the parvenu in him invariably got the upper hand.—And throughout the years when he alone was shouldering the cost of their children's upbringing, she had held to her bond and stood aloof. But if demands were to be made on her purse, it was a different thing. Nor was she under any further obligation to conceal her antipathy for the woman who had supplanted her, robbing her of her children and poisoning their minds against her. Who had had them educated according to the

methods, clothed in the mode, of a bygone day (oh, how one's fingers had itched to re-dress them). Who had even gone so far as to filch the name of mother! Now, however, the wheel had turned full circle. And so, very forcibly and distinctly, she wrote: Nothing at all, unless my wishes are consulted.

At the selfsame time, in Berlin, an even more grimly determined woman sat drafting her terms: again a mother, here in arms for a son who had not the grit to fight for himself. And, of all those involved, Frau von Bulow was to prove the most formidable. Already her mind was made up. If a consent to this marriage was to be wrung from her: this distasteful marriage; for nothing would convince her that Liszt's "adopted" daughter was a fitting match for a Bulow. If, however, it *had* to be, then she would see to it that the girl brought with her a dowry large enough to gild the pill. And to prevent any fresh burdens falling on poor Hans. Thus far, his so-called friends (these pretentious "futurists!") had had it all their own way; and shameless was the only word to describe the use they made of him. Boiling inwardly, she had to watch him slave at work that brought him neither prestige nor money, now for the perfidious Liszt, now for that other arch-bloodsucker to whom he lay in thrall. But nothing of the sort should happen here: with a mother to safeguard him. Her unyielding demand would be for a *dot* equal in amount to his own salary. Not a penny more, though. She would not have him pointed at as a man who was supported by his wife. A wife, too, not of his own choosing. And towards whom, quite apart from the question of birth, she herself could not warm. She didn't trust the girl. Deep, sly, with an inherited leaning towards intrigue—thus she judged Cosette. Self-opinionated, too, and already possessed of an influence

over Hans that augured ill. Without a doubt the day would come when Cosette's voice, Cosette's wishes alone carried weight with him. For so Hans was. Whoever saw most of him soon had him under her thumb.

Of course it was just possible that a large enough dowry would not be found, in which case the whole affair would die a natural death. Or if she, his mother, contrived to spin things out, sufficiently prolong the preliminaries, Cosette might either tire of him (Hans having no real attraction for women) or meet with some one more to her taste (Liszt's taste). Again, far from displeasing Hans by plotting delay, she believed she would have him with her. He was a born procrastinator; could go on living in a state of uncertainty that would drive any ordinary mortal crazy. For a decision might mean change; and something in Hans feared and shrank from change: the ups and downs of his own unstable nature gave him all the variety he needed.—Lastly, the enforced desertion of his mother could be relied on to add its quota. Disagree as they might over little things, when it came to essentials he was one with her, flesh of her flesh; and almost mechanically ranged himself on her side.

And here Frau von Bulow nodded to herself well-pleased. For now her way was clear to her. Time should be her ally; it was time she must play for. In which, God grant, some lucky accident might occur to set poor foolish Hans free from the snare into which he had fallen.

And so, these several conflicting currents and under-currents in motion, small wonder that the lone voice from Zurich urging: "Marry, and hang the consequences!" fell on deaf ears: was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

## VII

THE room in which Hans lodged was a back one, long, narrow and dark, having but a single window, and looking out on the walls of other houses. Not that this troubled him; he had no time for sky-gazing, or any taste either: clouds or sunshine, rain or snow made little difference to him. Two writing-desks stood in line against the wall. On the smaller, near the door, where he wrote by lamp or candle, lay a slim heap of manuscript. The other was stacked with a medley of things: a transcription on operatic themes, an overture for arrangement as a duet, a piano-score in the making, proofs of orchestral parts, half-finished articles for the Press, notes of letters to be written or commissions undertaken for his pair of famous friends.

He thought of himself at this time as a kind of ostrich —the proverbial hunted ostrich burrowing its head in the sand. Which didn't, of course, refer to the actual subsoil of this "sandy metropolis" *(a la* Sahara!). *His* sand was work. Sinking himself in it, he tried to forget what was going on around him, concerning him; when male and female alike had their beaks in his private life.

Things grew a little easier (because less likely to come to his notice) when Cosette and her sister left for Paris on a visit to their grandmother. Then, too, he had not always to be meeting Cosette's wilfully encouraging eye. His mother he knew better how to manage. She was only too well accustomed (poor old motherkin!) to his moody silences, his irascible outbursts. Still, days came when even she went about looking more depressed than usual; for **his**

nerves .played him sorry tricks. The mere suspicion, for one thing, of the real motive underlying Cosette's seemingly innocent journey, was enough to screw them taut as fiddle-strings. Oh! this abominable angling for money (the money *he* could not find) with all it involved of time-serving and foot-licking. Cosette had said: "But surely you would not let such a trifle stand between us?[5]' How easy that was to say . . . for a woman. How hard for a man to hear, and bear. Why, just now he would have set as much store by a respectable income as by the head on his shoulders.

Then, a still crueller doubt beset him. The letter in which he had poured out his heart, laid his feelings bare as never in his life before, long received none but a casual acknowledgment. And this lack of response on the part of the beloved man wormed in him. Out of it he read a disbelief, not only in his fervid assurances, but also in his power eventually to make good. It might quite well be that by now Liszt was coming to share his mother's poor opinion of his character (or want of character). Himself, he was the last to deny his weaknesses: along with his plainness of face, they had been dinned into him ever since he could walk. None the less, it was bitter as gall to imagine them the subject of discussion. And moments came when, in exasperation, he allowed himself the surly reflection: *why* could they . . . could she . . . not have let me be?

Meanwhile he toiled over transcriptions and arrangements. Compared with the loathsome means by which he gained his bread, the drumming into more or less (mostly less) talented youths and maidens the technique of the ivories, few things came amiss. While the business of converting the Berlin heathen to the Lisztian gospel, the breaking of stony ground for the advent of both Masters, would to the end remain a labour of love. Sometimes, in

passing the smaller table, he might pick up a page of his own composing and find a phrase or a progression "not too bad." But unfailingly he put it down again. *This* was for later, when he had earned the right to a little leisure; in the meantime a dozen more important things blocked the way. Not the least of them an almost savage desire to prove to Liszt that, no matter what happened, one's love for him and faith in his genius were unchanged.

He had, he thanked God, a ready pen. And from now on there flowed from it a series of letters to the press, of gibes, sallies, scathing criticisms and mocking reviews, one and all designed to make the flesh of his readers creep. Followed by Liszt with a grateful, if anxious eye, his sorties distracted his mother, who trembled for his official position, and deplored his unwillingness to step into Liszt's shoes (when empty) as the foremost piano-teacher of the day. But then she couldn't understand the torture teaching was to him. The fact being, he was born to 'do', not to goad others to it; nor had he twopenceworth of inclination to inform, or to share his knowledge. She also failed to grasp how much of his personal spleen he was able to let off in these corrosive flights. Without some such relief, he might have run amok.

Liszt of course came first; but Richard was not forgotten. Richard had constantly to be placated, kept in a good humour. No sinecure this, so full of contradictions was he. Just to think of it: in spite of his own lifelong indulgence, he was now refusing to admit that time spent on journalism was any but time misspent: successes won in this field, quoth he, were illusory, led nowhere, passed and were forgotten overnight. And a painstaking analysis of his *Faust Overture*, made partly with the idea of pleasing him, partly for love of the subject, elicited only a somewhat cool surprise at the trouble spent on it.—But therel Unless one

was doing something really practical for Richard, pestering theatre-directors, raising or lending him money, or making an arrangement of his latest score, he could show himself both ungrateful and cantankerous. Then, it was best to drop the correspondence for a time, and do one's best to forget both him and his affairs. These were going from bad to worse; and one's powerlessness to stop their downward course made one's heart ache.

From all this: the day's drudgery, the strain of conciliating one and proving his mettle to the other; from the walls of doubt and disapproval that hemmed him in, Hans found distraction in the few chances that came his way of appearing on the concert-platform. He didn't always cover his expenses, not if he had to travel to another town; and much valuable time went in freeing his fingers from their "hoarseness." His memory gave him no trouble, though, and he had early broken with tradition by stepping empty-handed on the platform. Once, he even managed to learn by heart, in a train, a piece unseen till then, which he had been abruptly required to play that evening.

Little by little he went up in public favour. Except in Berlin, where he had trampled on too many toes.

But his real feud with what it amused him to call "Mendelsfather-grandson-ism" began with his performance of Liszt's E minor piano-sonata. Provoked to ram at least one item by the Master down Berlin gullets, he had inserted this, among more innocent numbers, in a modest concert of his own arranging. A leading critic pounced on it, the rest of the flock followed suit, *he* leapt to a vitriolic defence, private letters got into the press: and thereafter it was war to the knife.

By then, however, his betrothal had been grudgingly sanctioned (though for months to come the makers of the

bargain were to haggle over the final terms) and by his side stood a clear-eyed, intrepid girl. Not the least of whose gifts was her ability to take the sting out of a wound. Was he reduced to a nervous pulp by some fresh example of idiocy or malice, Cosette would smile her little fine smile, and, with a cool or mischievous word, not only take the wind from his enemies' sails, but make him feel rather foolish, for his waste of energy. But now he did not resent it. For it wasn't as if she lacked feeling. He had seen her toss her head, with its golden crown, and decline to go to a long-anticipated concert, because her father's name had been removed from the programme. Again, when that most grandmotherly of institutions, in the most conservative of towns, where his pen had made him even more cordially detested than in Berlin: when the doors of the Leipzig *Gewandhaus* opened to him, and, with him, to one of Liszt's major piano-works under the composer's baton, she was completely carried away. Afterwards, in the green-room, she could not speak for tears.

Yes, a fiery little partisan of the Cause to which they planned to devote their lives. The best of good comrades, too: stilled for ever was his peevish questioning of her right to intrude. Now that their marriage was a certainty, she claimed a modest share in his daily work: made copies of letters, checked references, looked over his proof-corrections, both in music and type, having, for a woman, a very tolerable notescript. Through her, too, he was gradually tamed to Bach, whose austerities had so far shocked his modern ear; and whose patronage by the Mendelssohnian party made these still harder to swallow. Again through her, who had so much of her father in her, he won a deeper insight into Liszt's works, and modified and improved his readings accordingly. And since he profited thus in separation, what might he not hope for when he exchanged his

dingy lodgings, she her life at his mother's side, **for** ft home of their own? He began to look forward to it.

When his mounting bile gave him an extra-jaundiced hue, it fell to her to coax him up from desk or piano: now that they were formally engaged, convention permitted of them walking out arm-in-arm, provided they did not go too far afield. And these were red-letter days for Cosette. For they had still many a fascinating discovery to make about each other; and it was a joy to find in how many of the things that really mattered they were at one. Money, for instance. Both asked only for enough to live on, to live quietly and unostentatiously—anything over and above that was to be devoted to ideal ends—and they met anew in their fear and hatred of debt. An ardent Catholic, Cosette had in **the** meantime to content herself with his assurance that never would he, the Protestant, tamper with her faith. His own was lost long since; but, should he ever again turn churchwards, it might not improbably be to the Mother of all. An admission that set many a hope for the future twinkling in Cosette.

But what broke the last ice between them was a heart-to-heart talk about their respective childhoods. These had been equally unhappy; and for the same reason. And neither he nor she had ever yet spoken frankly of them, both shrinking from criticising those they loved. Now, the veils fell.

Cosette told of the summers spent as a child in the cloister of *Nonnenworth* on the Rhine.

"The last time we were there was the very last we were all together—my father, my mother, we children. Daniel was only a baby; but Blandine and I were old enough to know that something was happening . . . something dreadful. We used to put our fingers in our ears, or run away and hide, so as not to have to hear. *They* thought **we were**

too young to understand. And how our little hearts were torn. For our mother would snatch us to her and weep over us and rail against our father, our adored father, who had stormed out of the house, vowing that he would never return. As one day he did not.—Afterwards . . . well, I am confident he did what he thought best for us, and never would I presume to judge him. But how we missed our mother when she left us, no words can tell.''

Hans' case had been a more disastrous, if less tragic one, his parents not dissolving their marriage till he was close on twenty. He and his sister, said he, had spent all their young days in an atmosphere of strife. Not the violent, passionate quarrels that blow over and clear the air; but an incompatibility of temperament so profound that the only possible end was the judicial separation that ultimately took place.

"I didn't blame my father; and no one was more glad than I that he found happiness in a second marriage. Of my stepmother and my little stepbrothers I'm exceedingly fond. But it has always been my mother I've suffered most for. And I wish to God I could have given her a little of the happiness *she* deserves. Instead—and you can think how hard it hits me—I've been obliged to thwart and oppose her at every turn. My poor old mother!"

"Indeed I can. Even in this." And with her gloved hand Cosette fingered the coat-sleeve on which it lay.

"Even in this. But she'll come . . . she's coming round. The omens are auspicious," said Hans. And went on: "My father was one of the oddest of men. So extreme a radical that he ended by dropping the *von* and being known as plain Herr Bulow. Nor would he register as a citizen of any one state, preferring simply to call himself a German! As a writer he had no definite income; and my mother never knew how he was off for money. Of his personal

freedom he made a kind of fetish. Fixed hours or a settled way of living were anathema to him; and all his days he liked nothing better than to sling on a knapsack and disappear. When I add that he was also violently anti-clerical, you can imagine, you who know my mother's ultra-conservative nature, what her life at his side must have been. A difficult man, indeed. And yet, now that I'm older . . . Perhaps if I myself once dared to take my nose from the grindstone . . . But there! I mustn't make you afraid of what's before you."

Cosette laughed aloud. Never had she felt safer and happier. She wasn't, of course, foolish enough to expect their married life to be all roses: the air round Hans was invariably highly charged. But she did think she knew how to manage him; and once away from the person who most irritated and depressed him, he would grow less moody. On the other hand, an occasional storm or tantrum was no bad thing for an artist. Her father said it acted as a kind of safety-valve, a blow-hole, through which one let off unused steam. But if Hans found his true outlet in creative work, there wouldn't be much steam to spare. And to help him to this, was the star by which she walked.

Thus they strolled, talked, mused . . . and waited. Time slid by; the leaves on the linden-trees budded, unrolled, turned colour, fell to earth, and not once only: the cycle was well on its second round before the chafferers had finally sealed their bargain, the last hates and jealousies were burned out. Liszt, having skilfully finessed a way through these, saw his daughter assured of the coveted name; Frau von Billow's demands were met to the last sou; the girls' mother had not merely been permitted to see her children, but to keep the elder girl with her; from her vantage ground in Weimar, the Princess had intrigued for the last time. On the young people's side, too, everything

was in order. After a hair-raising struggle with officialdom, Hans had won the right to call himself a Prussian; the marriage-settlement, a rigid clause guarding the faith of unborn children, was drawn up, a suitable flat found and furnished, leave of absence applied for and granted. Yet still the end hung fire. For not even the wedding-day was theirs to choose. It depended in the first place on Liszt, who was taking the waters at Aachen, and shrank from interrupting his cure. In the second, on the good will and approval of the Princess. Owing to her equivocal position, the Princess was debarred from attending family gatherings; and Liszt, in his tenderness, thought only of her, and of how to recompense her for convention's cruelty.—"Let me know, my own," he wrote, "if the date I have fixed for the marriage is convenient *to you.* I mean, if you will then spare me to travel to Berlin."

Older by several years, Hans vowed, by what he had gone through; worn to a frazzle, the bride's name being what it was, by a distasteful notoriety; entangled in a net of dates with pupils and superiors, longing only to have the whole to-do behind him, he was now the one to champ and fret. Cosette, on the contrary, bore even a third postponement with unruffled patience.

But at last the day came; and before a small group of the bridegroom's relatives and friends, her father alone supporting the bride, Hans and Cosette exchanged rings and vows. Married according to the Catholic ritual, they were spared none of the forms and ceremonies to which Liszt, so long and so conspicuously neglectful of them, now bent the knee.

Cosette's strict upbringing stood her in good stead. Though pale and quiet, she was perfectly self-possessed; in this a marked contrast to Hans, who, both before the registrar and in church, was awkward and ill at ease. But

no sooner had they stepped into the carriage to drive home than her maidenly reserve broke down. Turning on him, with what he ever after teased her by calling a "perfectly tigerish look," "the eyes of a real man-hunter," she murmured: "Now . . . now I *have* you!" And the next moment was in his arms.

# PART TWO

I

IT was a fine morning in early autumn. The great lake, giving back the sky, lay like a sheet of opaque blue glass; on the sky itself, a piled-up mass of snowy cloud seemed only to deepen the blue in which it hung; a delightful freshness in the air told of first snow, real snow, in the high mountains. Large of head, small of body, Wagner trudged dejectedly. He was returning from one of the wooded valleys on the outskirts of Zurich, where the day's beauty, the trilling of the birds, the scent of the pines had exhilarated him to the point of throwing up his hat and singing aloud. But now he walked a broad road heavy with dust; much heavier, he thought, than when he had passed that way a couple of hours ago. And slowly and resentfully he shuffled through it. But there was also another reason for his dawdling. He was bound for home, without any wish to get there. In heading for it, he merely obeyed the commands of his stomach: this despot to which a man lay in bondage from cradle to grave.

He had been driven out by one of the miserable domestic squalls that were his lot, and had not their like for shattering his balance. As usual it had begun with the veriest trifle; but before you could count ten, the pair of them were at it hammer and tongs; and then it was tit for tat, tit for tat, with all the familiar *tu quoques,* until they reached screaming-point in their efforts to shout each other down. God Almighty! why could women not learn to govern their tongues? If Minna would but hold hers, refrain from the retort obvious, instead of eternally seeking to prove herself in the right, they need never quarrel at all. Surely to

goodness she knew by now that *his* violences were mere nervous excrescences, things of the surface only? At heart he was good-natured, easy-going, and generous to a fault. Provided, of course, that he was treated with a certain amount of tact, and consideration. But such a thing never entered Minna's head. All she thought of was of having the last word.—And so, though his forenoons were sacred, he had banged up from his desk, banged the door of the room to and marched out of the house, not even stopping to whistle Fips. The question now was, in what mood he was going to find her. Would his lengthy absence have softened her? Or would she meet him with the stony glumness, the smug, self-righteous visage that invariably provoked him afresh? "Heigh-ho . . . heigh-ho!"

But here his thoughts were abruptly diverted.

On rounding a bend he espied, while still some way off, a dark, longish object lying across the road; but what, he could not say. As he drew nearer, however, he saw that it was an animal, some cat or dog that had innocently lain itself down to sleep in the sun—a cat, by the tail. But this was no place for sleep. Heavily-laden wagons passed and repassed; and their peasant-drivers, if not themselves a-doze, would scarcely for a dumb beast's sake trouble to shift their course. He was no cat-lover; cats ate birds; but he would not have let even a rat lie there to be run over •.. if, indeed, this had not already happened. He quickened his steps.

But before he could reach the spot a man came out from a side road, peered for an instant curiously or contemptuously at the prostrate object, then, with a mighty kick from a great shovel-toed boot, sent it flying.

And—it had not been dead, only sleeping. For though it lay where it had fallen, in a kind of twisted heap, it made odd, convulsive efforts to rise, clawing feebly at the dust

with its front paws. But before he could get to it, it had ceased to struggle, just lay and looked at him with helpless, terrified eyes. He bent over it. Plainly, its back was broken.

"Oh, Pussy, Pussy! What have they done to you!"

He threw a despairing glance round. But not a soul was in view, who might have come to his aid. There was nothing else for it. And though every nerve in him shrank from the contact, his very finger-tips crisping with repulsion, he picked up the little maimed body and, holding it from him on outstretched arms, his eyes averted, he climbed the steepish path to the house.

Before he came to the garden-gate he was shouting: "Minna! Wife! Where are you?"

Minna's stout form appeared at the door, her face wearing its sulkiest, most hostile expression. But at the sight of his awkwardly-held burden this changed. "What's the matter? What have you got there?"

In a few halting words he told his tale. Then: "Fetch me a tub of water, wife . . . and quickly! It's all that remains."

"But . . .*you'll* never be able to do it, Richard! You'd better let——"

"No, no, you keep away." And setting his teeth he disappeared round the back of the house.

They sat opposite each other at the dinner-table.

But though very hungry, and the soup of Minna's best —a foundation of savoury lentils, its surface afloat with a wreckage of sliced sausage—he had taken but a couple of mouthfuls before he laid down his spoon and pulled his napkin from under his chin. "It's no use. I can't swallow."

And she was in the same plight.

At such a moment he forgave her everything. Leaning

**forward** he patted her **hand. "It didn't last long,** Mienel, the suffering. And it's all over now."

"I know. It's only that——" Here she broke down and wept. "Oh, *why* must people be so cruel?"

"Why, indeed!"

Leaving the table he went to the window, and stared into the sunshine till his eyes stung. Now, there seemed something gaudy and theatrical about the day's brilliance.

He blew his nose with a trumpet-peal. "I think I'll lie down for a bit, and try to sleep."

Minna also used her handkerchief. "Yes, Richard, do. And I'll heat the things up again later on." Which was a tremendous concession on Minna's part, her cookery meaning as much to her as his work did to him.

Stretched out on his chaise-longue, he turned his face to the wall. What a day, what a day! One, too, on which he had got up in the best of spirits, rejoicing for the thousandth time in the novelty of his pleasant room; in the sublime, the heavenly quiet of his surroundings. No flutes and pianos here, to torture his nerves; no sound but the friendly twitter of the little rogues that flew about the garden (his garden). Yes, to-day he had felt regularly in the vein; and, could he have got down to it without distraction, he might have written *Finis* to Act I. Only to think of it: he in this mood, the deeps responding to his call; and Minna and blind chance combining to frustrate him. It was nothing short of an iniquity. The greater, because he had seldom been so aglow: the grip this new work was getting on him amazed even himself. In the beginning, he had meant to turn out something light and short, with which to catch popular taste; something *practical,* that would stand a reasonable chance of performance. Instead, the subject was growing in depth and scope till he believed it would end by surpassing anything else he had done. Themes and

progressions were crowding upon him, too, almost before he was ready for them; for he was still busy with the poem. When the right time came, he would only need to turn up his palms and catch the golden rain: his own humble share in the matter being merely to ensure the quiet in which to note down what he heard. A strange process, this sudden descent of unsuspected treasure; and one he never ceased to marvel at.

But his lids were getting heavy, his breath came more and more evenly. And very soon he was fast asleep.

What seemed but a few seconds later he shot up at the opening of the door. It was Minna, who came bustling in without precautions, carrying a telegraphic-message. "This has just come for you."

His first reaction was one of violent irritation: would the woman *never* understand the havoc these abrupt wakenings played with his nerves? "Surely to God, if wake me you must, you might do it more gently! It won't be anything that matters, it never is." None the less, with a kind of greed, he snatched the paper from her hand.

Minna was justly irate. "What! I open your telegrams? —or letters? A pretty stew you'd be in if I did!"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake——" But here, having read, he broke into a peal of delighted laughter, and with a: "Hurray! Hip, hip, hurray!" he seized Minna by her portly waist and twirled her round. "He's coming, wife, he's coming! Oh, now everything will be all right."

"Who is? Who's coming?"

"Who? Why, Hans, the best-beloved. To be precise, the little Bulows, he and his young bride—the Baroness junior. (God grant he's found something better worth having than that awful old mother of his.) Oh, now at last, wife, I shall hear what I've been doing come alive. Hans is the man, the only man, for these terrible Klindworth

scores. When I think how I'*ve* muffed them . . . with my poor old doddery paws."

"Trash! You play perfectly well. That's just another of your senseless exaggerations," said Minna, plumping up and re-arranging the sofa cushions.

"Trash to you! No, no, my dear, I'll be the songbird of the party—here, let's see if I'm in voice!" and hoarsely he ran up and down the scale. The next moment to say, with an earnestness that brought tears to his eyes: "Honestly, old girl, this is the best piece of news I've had for many a long day. Since Franz was here last autumn. And you know how *his* visit was spoilt for me. But this is different. Hans is different. Hans is *my* man.—God, wife! the prospect of his company makes me realise what a sin it is for me to live as I do. In this utter solitude, this barren waste."

"Oh, la, la! Wherever you were or whoever you were with, you wouldn't be satisfied for two days on end." And Minna held to her breast and folded, in neat, diminishing squares, the shawl that had lain across his feet.

Oh, you everlasting wet-blanket, you! You she-Jeremiah! You kill-joy!

But it was said under his breath: at this crisis he dared not risk angering Minna afresh. For her, visitors meant additional work and considerably less of his attention. In the burning discussions, too, the talks that lasted far into the night, she could not nor was she expected to join. So he made haste to remind her, who was still, he knew, smarting under the last infliction: "There's no question, this time, of their staying in the house. Hans refused to have you put about. I promised to find lodgings for them in some quiet hotel. And I think I'll away at once and see what can be done.—But first for some food. Dish up that dinner, wife. Now I'm hungry. Now I can eat."

And having polished off a hearty meal, he **took** his hat, whistled to Fips, and set out for the town.

He trod on air. And in passing threw a fond glance at the massive pillars of the big house, to which his own little house formed a kind of appendage. Behind these dwelt one who, without cavilling or reservation, would share his joy. Directly he got back he would send a note up to Madame Mathilde, telling of the pleasures in store for them. Hours of pure magic, with Hans, the master, at the piano. Or those still more perfect evenings when, to a handful of intimates, he himself read aloud what he had written during the day. At the prospect, his eyes filled anew; while to walk, laboriously to set one foot before the other, became an intolerable mode of progression. And being by now safely out of Minna's sight, he climbed into one of the town's new, victoria-like cabs; and there, lolling at his ease, his legs crossed, his hat pushed to the back of his head, Fips on the seat beside him, was borne forward at a rate and in a fashion more in keeping with his mood.

Cosette felt ill at ease from the moment she stepped out of the train. To begin with, when the two men had at last done kissing and embracing, had stopped wringing each other's hands and gazing into each other's eyes and clapping each other's shoulders, the Master had turned to her, who stood modestly in the background, and exclaiming, for every one to hear: "I love Liszt better than anyone alive, and you are his daughter!" had put his arms round her and kissed her, very audibly. The beseeching look she threw Hans had no effect; he didn't or wouldn't see it.—But then Hans was not his usual self, and hadn't been since, as the train drew in, he had blocked the carriage-window, entirely shutting out her view, in his almost schoolboy eagerness for a first glimpse of the Master. The sight she was at

length allowed of the thickset, somewhat top-heavy-looking little man, with the pale, china-blue eyes and rather fattish, hanging cheeks, did not waken any very vivid memory in her. Of their earlier meeting. But then that was ages ago, in Paris; at a reading of one of his dramas, which they three children were permitted to attend. But their own adored father, whom they hadn't seen for eight long years, was also present, and so of course they had eyes only for him. Actually, her chief memory of that bygone evening concerned Marie Wittgenstein, who was on a visit to Paris with her mother. Though no older than themselves, the little Princess sat in the front row, among the notables, and was made a considerable fuss of, especially by Herr Wagner. While Mionny, Daniel and she, under their governess's wing, occupied humble seats at the back of the room.—

In the present circle, as Hans' wife, she might have sat where she chose. Yet she had taken a chair half-screened by the tail of the piano—on which Hans was playing them Beethoven's *Thirty-two.* The truth was, she had never quite got over the incident of the railway-station. It had left a kind of nervous fear in her, which a closer acquaintance did nothing to allay, of what the Master might do next. Or say. He had a trick of asking the most embarrassing questions; and, if she had given him the chance, would have thought nothing of inquiring how she liked being married, or what sort of a husband Hans was making, all in the worst possible taste. It made her doubly appreciative of Hans (dear Hans) who was so sensitive, so tactful, so restrained. *He* knew how to meet reserve with reserve ... as she had gratefully discovered in the course of their month-old marriage. And sitting listening to him, without the distraction of seeing him, she became aware how clearly these qualities stood out in his playing. Here,

too, one could trust him; trust oneself to him. And the strict variation-form suited him to a T.

Warmed by these thoughts, she turned and smiled at Frau Minna, who, like her, sat a little apart from the rest of the company, her hands clasped over her high stomach, her mouth (it must once have been an exceptionally pretty one) pinched and thin. Poor Frau Minna! She had been through so many hardships in her day, trapesing at the Master's heels from place to place, toiling for his comfort on insufficient means; and her sole reward was now, in everything that mattered, to find herself left out in the cold. He was sometimes painfully short with her, too, when she failed to understand. It was surely not her *faulty* if her mind hadn't been able to keep pace with his? That she was generous, kind-hearted and impulsive, she, Cosette, could vouch for; since, in spite of Hans' good resolutions, they were at present guests in the Wagners' house. For the lodging hired for them by the Master, and to which he so triumphantly led them that first evening, had proved unsuitable. Hans took ill almost at once with a feverish chill; and as soon as he recovered they were carried off to the *Asyl*.

Yes, for Frau Minna she would always be ready to break a lance. The person she did not cotton to, and found herself eyeing with distinct disfavour, was the really rather beautiful young woman who sat on the Master's right, and got the lion's share of his attention. Though this wasn't altogether surprising. Madame Wesendonk was extraordinarily well up in everything to do with his work. So quick of understanding, too, that she could snatch at a meaning half-said; while countless private allusions passed between them, to which they alone held the key. Of course, since they were next-door neighbours, a certain amount of intimacy was inevitable. But the display she made of it in public seemed a trifle—well, just a trifle *outre*. And Herr Wagner deferred

with such marked respect to her judgment, and opinions. Certainly, these were always to the point, and sometimes went deep—were the kind of things she, Cosette, might have thought of, had shyness not lamed her wits. And her tongue. For, in face of the elder woman's charm and assurance, her own confidence dwindled. Once more she felt very young and green. And was only too glad of her quiet corner. She did not *want* to be noticed. If she saw the Master's eyes veering in her direction, she hastily averted her own.

It still irked her to remember how foolishly she had behaved a few evenings back. Then, as now, they had been sitting in circle; and Hans had played to them, not only from Klindworth's piano-arrangements, bristling with difficulties, of *Rheingold* and *Walkure,* but, like the genius he was, had managed to decipher the pencil sketches for the first two acts *ot Jung-Siegfried,* the Master himself taking the voice parts. Not even this, though, could spoil the beauty of Hans' performance. Or of what he played. But it wasn't Beethoven; Beethoven gave you a sense of security: while the effect of this music was to make you feel downright unsafe. Quite different from *Tannhauser,* too, where one had the Christian virtues of faith, sacrifice, repentance to hold on to. Here was nothing of that kind. One swam in an enchanted sea . . . of sound, of emotion. The trouble was, the way she responded to it, going first hot, then cold. Against her will, all the same; for she resented so direct an onslaught on her feelings.—And when the general enthusiasm had died down, and the Master turned to her, who sat dumb, and jocularly and . . . yes, and *coarsely* demanded: "And what does our little Baroness say?" she couldn't get out a word. Confused and angry, both with herself and with Herr Wagner, she put her handkerchief to her eyes and escaped from the room.

That mustn't happen again. Hans, who was pathetically anxious for the Master to think well of her, had been quite annoyed by such childishness.

To-night, the same group of friends had assembled to hear the complete drama of *Tristan und Isolde* read aloud. Written act-wise during the past month, each act had been faithfully copied in a fair script by Hans (poor Hans!) who worked till the moisture stood out on his forehead, letting the radiant autumn days go by unheeded. A gentle reminder that he had his own health to consider drew a rather tart retort.

"To call what I am doing a labour of love would be putting it mildly. There's nothing personal about it. In working for Richard, I work for something greater than he is . . . than perhaps even he himself knows. And from you, Cos, if from anyone, I look for understanding."

And so, while he transcribed page after page in his small neat hand; or struggled with the Master's business-affairs; or stayed up half the night for one of the interminable conversations Herr Wagner loved, Cosette bound the strings of the bonnet to which marriage entitled her, and walked alone by the blue-glass lake. Or sat in the kitchen with Frau Minna, helping to slice beans, and listening to pithy stories of the pair's early days. Or, lying in bed, watched the hands of the clock drip from or laboriously climb the hours.

In the Master's workroom all was in readiness. Candles burned on the writing-table, chairs were ranged in a semi-circle, and the audience settled itself deep for the long seance. The Master, Hans to his left, Madame Mathilde to his right, was adjusting his spectacles, turning the pages of his manuscript. She, Cosette, again sat mousily in a corner, by Frau Minna; but on her other side to-night was Monsieur Georg, the poet, and a welcome neighbour, for

he was the sole beirig (except Hans) with whom she could exchange a word in her native tongue. And what a relief that was, only she knew. It felt like taking off a mask. For her German was still very stiff and stilted; the Master always made fun of her constructions. (Though his own French was intolerably bad.)

But hush! he had raised his hand. And now, the last throat cleared, the last silken rustle silenced—with yet a final pause for a moth, that was singeing its wings, to be caught and thrust out into the darkness—he began to read. And under his inspired guidance (he read as well as he sang ill) and for a space of time which they ceased to measure, those who listened, blank of eye, stony-faced, forgot the world; passing with the immortal lovers through hate, anger, distrust; passion, fulfilment, the ecstasies of pain and of death.

Like every one about her, Cosette sank beneath the spell. But, on this evening, free of the music's sensual torment, she did not find it beyond her to keep her emotion in check. Indeed, the deeper the tragedy, the harder she seemed to grow. Tristan's sufferings, Tristan's death roused no pity in her.—Pity? A sense of satisfaction rather, that quickened her pulses, brought a smile to her lips. Mounting, towards the close, to a kind of exultation in which she felt herself one with Isolde; and in her, through her, made life's supreme surrender.

By now, most of the women and many of the men were weeping: there ensued a chorus of nose-blowing. Down Madame Mathilde's lovely face the tears streamed unabashed. Even the Master rubbed his glasses. But *ber* eyes were bone-dry. Weep? . . . she? . . . when she burned as for some great heroic battle fought and won?

But what was this? Some one made moan? Yes! incredible as it seemed, Madame Mathilde was remon-

strating with the Master for his pitilessness, asking mercy of him for his creatures. Out upon her! . . . for a timid and puny soul.

But oh joy! For once he did not yield.

"What? You'd have had me let them live? My Isolde lose her beauty? Grow old and grey? Time dim their memories? Steal from their ardours? Child! take it from me: only in the rarest, most fortunate cases is it given to mortal lovers to end as they did—at the topmost height of their passion."

And here, to her own amaze (and later embarrassment) Cosette heard herself declare: "No, no! it *could not* be otherwise. This is the only possible way. Any other ending would have been sacrilege." (From across the room Hans' eyes flashed approval; he fairly beamed on her.)

The Master, too, showed his pleasure; if in the rather light, sarcastic tones that seemed to come natural to him in speaking to her.

"Bravo, bravo! Here's some one who understands. And she's right. Nothing else *was* possible!" And crossing to where she sat he took both her hands in his, and shook them up and down; drawing to her a notice for which she had not bargained.

To himself he said: So, so!—the little Bulow comes out of her shell. Perhaps after all there's something in her.

So far, he had not been able to make much of Hans' wife, beloved Liszt's daughter. The girl was both shy and suspicious. A trifle jealous too, no doubt, of his hold on Hans. Ah! these young wives.—"Unfledged" was his word for her. In more ways than one. His first sight of her at the railway-station, with her long, Liszt-like face, and long, lean neck, had made him think, not of a swan (oh dear no!) but of a young bird still without its feathers. —The little B.! Though the adjective was to be taken

figuratively, considering she overtopped both Hans and himself by a head.

At Cosette's outburst and Richard's lively rejoinder, Frau Minna turned and looked at the girl—with a new and amused interest. There went another of them. How they fell, these women! They reminded her of nothing so much as of ninepins, toppled over by a skilful hand. Of those members of her own sex present this evening, she was the sole one to keep her head. He could not get at *her*, with his fine, his superfine phrases. She knew them too well for what they were, mere showy excrescences. With the real man: sincere, yet insincere; pinchfist, yet spendthrift; petty-minded and large-hearted; kind and cruel by turns: with the real Richard, all this poetic verbiage had nothing whatever to do. And its production depended on things so mundane that his adorers would have swooned to hear them mentioned: what he had eaten for dinner the day before, the amount of exercise taken to digest this food. For, did Richard's stomach fail, his brain also lapsed. Hand to heart she could affirm not only that, to her care and forethought, they owed every line or note he had written; but also that *she* had paid, and often dearly, for each fresh uprush of his inspiration. She'd like to see one of these others in her shoes, for even an hour. What a hash, what an unspeakable hash, they would make of life at his side!

# II

THE chief feeling left in Cosette by this visit was a subtler one than that with which, in thought, the Master had taxed her. Far from resenting his hold, she rejoiced to see Hans' devotion appreciated and returned. No, it was jealousy of another kind, jealousy *for* Hans, that made itself felt when, the honeymoon at an end, they settled down to married life in a small flat in Berlin.

And she had ample time to think about it; for, to the confusion of the old Baroness's gloomy fears, she proved herself an adept manager. Hans, who had smarted under his mother's antiquated ways, was lost in admiration of her skill. Here was method, order, effortless ease. Never a creak of the machinery.

"*A* born housewife is my little Cosette!"

And it was not an easy house to run. Strict economy was necessary; for, though they pooled their incomes, the total was a modest one, and many outlandish calls were made on it. Hans' friends, colleagues, fellow-journalists had to be entertained, or lodged, the lame dogs among them helped over stiles. Nor was there any question of living by the clock: that central nerve of housekeeping. Pupils came for lessons at all hours; and mealtimes had to be shifted this way and that, to meet the case. Hans' own habits were equally erratic. Had he to perform in public, he did not rise from the piano for days on end. On the other hand, was he working at a score, or thinking out a review, not a sound must be heard.

Prompt, nimble, neat and presentable whatever her job —not for her the bed-jacket and felt shoes of her German

sisters—Cosette made light of every difficulty. She rose at six, to wake her maid; then dressed and twisted up her hair in the dark, so as not to disturb Hans. At half-past seven they sat down to coffee—French coffee, of her own making. And having seen Hans off to the Conservatorium, or settled at piano or writing-table, she went to market; and was very soon an expert at judging eggs and butter, or at telling the age of a fowl by its joints. Nothing came amiss to her. She felt so strong, so full of energy: as if only now, the dullness and restrictions of her girlhood behind her, she was beginning to know what it meant to be alive.

These domestic duties done, she too shut herself in: her sanctum was a tiny back room, just big enough to hold chair and table. Here she squared her accounts, took copies of important letters, or transcribed afresh, in her flowing hand, some hastily dashed-off article. Or she prepared her next lesson in counterpoint, a subject she was determined to master, in order to keep pace with Hans in all he did. Finally, taking up a fat, heavy, closely-printed volume, she became absorbed in it; sat with her chin propped on her palms, like a student swotting for his exams.

The weeks spent in Zurich, and a closer acquaintance with the Master, had been something of a revelation. Obviously, Hans had only to come together with his adored friend to forget every one and everything else: she had watched him play the parts of secretary, business-manager, pianist and accompanist, devoted crony and hourly companion rolled into one. Of course, considering the awful isolation in which the Master lived, and the very genuine affection he bore Hans, this was not to be wondered at. Or begrudged. Still, for Hans' sake, it was as well they met at intervals only. The plain truth being, Herr Wagner's affairs were by now so involved that anyone who tried to

unravel them was bound to get caught in their net. Especially poor soft-hearted, admiring Hans.

But the rather flagrant use the Master made of him did not mean that he had a poor opinion of Hans' abilities. On the contrary: from things he let fall, one saw that he had high hopes of him. As a composer. Hans' queer *Orchestral Fantasy* had here, too, made a profound impression. And when Herr Wagner managed to detach his thoughts from his own misfortunes (which wasn't often) he would lecture Hans severely on his duty to himself; urging him not to allow his talent to be smothered by the daily round; above all, not to waste his time in polemic, which faded more rapidly from men's minds than footprints from wet sand.

"No, pull yourself together, boy, and compose, compose, compose! *Make* music, instead of talking about it!" had been his parting shot, at the door of the railway-carriage.

The burning question was, what this should be.

For two or three years now, Hans had produced only a few little drawing-room pieces. Sketches for a trio and a symphony had remained in embryo: according to him, for the very good reason that he had tried to compose them *a la* Rubinstein, "either with or without inspiration." His incidental music to *Julius Cæsar*, written and performed while he was still at Weimar, was six years old; and the *Fantasy* ran it close. Time was slipping past, and still he got no further: he simply could not make up his mind what he wanted to do.

In a long talk soon after marriage, as they strolled the chestnut avenue at Nyon, he had made a clean breast of the difficulty he found in handling strictly classical forms. The fact that he believed them outmoded seemed to check what inspiration he had. For this to run freely, he must himself feel free; able, if necessary, to cast rules and restrictions to the winds.

"But Beethoven, Hans? You who play him so marvellously?"

"That's a different thing, my Cos. There the form is imposed on me. Here, I am obliged to impose it on myself."

And then he told her of an idea he had once had of writing an overture to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* Something brief and compact, that stood a fair chance of getting done, whereas a full-length symphony might have dogged his steps for years. But unlike "J. Caesar" it was to have been something more than a mere hotch-potch of motives. He had planned to condense in it, make it the carrier of, the philosophical contents of the drama.

But on the scheme being laid before Wagner, the Master had not only downed it, but trampled on it.

"What? At *your* age begin to repeat yourself?—for that's what our hawks and carrion-crows would see in it. No, no, Hans, it won't do. Particularly now you have shown us what you *are* capable of. Leave all such watery pap to the Rubinsteins and Raffs.—Besides, you grumble you've no lyric vein in you. Pray, isn't the very air these youthful lovers breathe saturated with lyricism?—As for your philosophical whimsies—intellectualism, Hans, pure and simple! Thus do the unfit belch—bring up their froth and wind—who know no better. Absolute music, I say it once again, exists solely to express emotion. All else is sawdust in its maw. To think for one moment of mixing up music and philosophy . . . like a hash, like a pudding . . . oh, Hans, my Hans, what tosh!"

Cosette grew quite hot and angry at Hans' story; and several retorts he might have made occurred to her. But she did not say them. For she was damped by the meekness with which he had given in. For all his seeming enthusiasm, the idea could have struck no real root in him.

This summer in Zurich, however, the Master himself

had gone back on an old suggestion—that of the *Oresteia.* And turning to her had said: "I held it under his nose years ago, presented it to him free of charge. Who didn't reply, give me so much as a thank-you, was our friend Hans." And swinging round again, to thump a palm with a closed fist: "If, as it seems, boy, the worm for writing overtures is not to be expelled from you, then why not this? Instead of a single overture to the complete Trilogy, compose you a separate one to each part; afterwards uniting them as movements of the only kind of symphony tolerable to the modern ear: one based on a great poetic work. A good classical scholar like yourself should have no difficulty in blocking it out. Come, now! What do you say?"

And after considerable hesitation—diffidence before so grandiose a scheme being, it seemed, the main stumbling-block—Hans had promised to see what he could do on getting home.

But no sooner was he back in Berlin than this good resolution shattered. From the moment he arrived he was caught up in a tornado of work, controversy, propagandism. And on the two mornings in the week he was free from pupils—it was to them Cosette had pinned her hopes—he inevitably found something more pressing to do: if not for himself, then for the Master or Father Liszt.

Slily she took a translation of Aeschylus from the shelf and laid it on his table. There, surely, he could not help noticing it. But he did: and by next day it was buried under a sheaf of papers. Then she began to see that, unless some one came forward and did the spade-work for him, the magnificent plan, so generously bestowed, so admirably suited to his genius, would again fall to the ground.

"Some one" could naturally only mean herself. Gently, very gently—not for the world would she have hurt him—she suggested that, in her spare time, she should make a

synopsis of the Trilogy, draw up a kind of programme, on which he could frame his work.

To her relief, far from resenting the proposal, he jumped at it.

"That's it, that's the very thing! *Then,* there would be some chance of my getting down to it."

So after this Cosette spent an hour or two each morning reading and taking notes. It was no hardship: she found the wonderful new, old world that here opened up to her a welcome change from kitchen and housework. Her mind had employment as well as her hands. And at moments so full was she of these ancients and their doings that they seemed more real than the paste she was rolling or the fruit she was potting. As time went on, too, pictures, great fresco-like pictures took to starting into shape before her; together with a distinct feeling for the individual instruments that might be used to accompany them. In short, she began to have ideas of her own for the construction of a symphony, without, alas! the manly ability to supply a note of the music.

But towards midday she would find her grip slacken as she listened for a step on the stair. And, once she heard it, books and papers were pushed aside, and popping her head into the kitchen to cry: "The master, Lina!" she was at the entry-door and had thrown it open before Hans could fit his key to the lock.

Hanging up his hat and helping him off with his great-coat, she followed him to the bedroom and stood by, holding the towel, while he washed his hands. Meanwhile cunningly spying out his mood. Did an attack of migraine threaten, or had something happened at the Conservafcorium to annoy him—and oh! how little it took—she would devote herself to petting him, or smoothing his ruffled feathers. But was he well, and in tune, she turned

the time to good actount. Sitting by him while he puffed his after-dinner cigar, she sought to instil some of her own enthusiasm into him: told how far she had got in her reading, asked his advice on an erudite point, or enlarged on the beauty of a particular scene.

And though he never failed to say: "Splendid!*' or "Clever little woman!" yet it was hard to believe him deeply interested when, even as he spoke, he was twisting round his finger the short curls that grew on her neck, and wondering aloud why they were so much fairer than the rest.

He liked to tease her, too. "I know somebody who grows younger every day!" At which Cosette, uncomfortably aware of her nineteen years, flushed and protested.

Banteringly as it was said, Hans meant it; though in a way he did not explain. Gone, he hoped for ever, was the slight primness, the maidenly asperity that had rendered the unmarried girl just a trifle alarming. The young wife was much less self-assured. Happiness had humbled her; and at the same time set free in her a merry childish streak that made her very charming. As he now went on to tell her. But, though glad to know she pleased him, Cosette could not help a small sigh. For, once he was off on this tack, it was farewell to any serious talk.

And then one day, like a thunderstroke . . . perhaps she *had* been rather long-winded; but it was over Cassandra's lament, a scene so powerful that she thought it must fire any composer's imagination. And Hans had seemed duly impressed. At least he had been warm in praise of her description.

But afterwards there was a pause, a rather chilly pause. And then came the cold douche.

He said: "It's magnificent, it's colossal; and I don't need to say again, my Cos, how grateful I am to you for your

trouble. Yet . . . well, I'm not sure we're going the right way to work. For me, I mean. You see, like this, I'm coming to the subject in bits and pieces. And so, when I begin to handle it in its entirety, I may find myself misplacing the values, laying false emphases. It seems to me it would be better—for a one-horse talent like mine—to meet it fresh, and *as a whole.* I wonder if you can understand what I mean?"

"Well, yes . . . I think I can, I think I do," Cosette said slowly, struggling to keep back her disappointment.

And he, lightly and easily, noticing nothing: "I knew you would, love. You're so extraordinarily quick in the uptake."

So that was that. From now on, she must keep her rhapsodies to herself.

Of course she saw what he meant. Evety artist had his own method of approach and attack; what suited one cramped another; and the last thing she had intended was to run counter to his. If she had erred, it was through ignorance. Or perhaps . . . well, to be candid, she had enjoyed showing him what she could do; had relished his praise of her clear-sightedness, her grasp of detail.

She went bravely on with her task. But now it *was 2.* task; the pleasure had gone from it. At the same time the ghost of a doubt, which had crossed her mind even while Hans was speaking, took on solid form. He had silenced her because he himself was full of a subject that lay much nearer his heart: the series of orchestral concerts he was planning to give in Berlin that winter.

These concerts were to stand for a red-hot manifesto of his artistic faith; were dedicated exclusively to the glorious trinity whose works were uniformly neglected or howled down: Wagner, Berlioz, Lis2t. But the difficulties in his way were enormous: he had neither backers nor followers,

and jealousy and obstruction met him at every turn. Until he had succeeded in hiring a hall and getting his orchestra together; in fixing his dates; drawing up a programme acceptable to his three gods; securing soloists of the first rank, who were yet willing to give their services for nothing: well, Cosette soon saw how absurd it would have been to expect him, at such a time, to concentrate on the composing of a great symphony.

Regretfully she laid her manuscript by. There was so much else to be done. For one thing, she made it her business to check, or at least to keep an eye on the outlay he was letting himself in for; and to cut down, to a still finer margin, their household expenses. She also discovered in herself an unexpected knack of making good the umbrage that he, the firebrand, was for ever giving. ("It's quite impossible, Cos, to avoid treading on *somebody's* toes!") And at the hint she dropped of more diplomatic methods, he pinched her chin for a "little Machiavelli." None the less when she succeeded, by what he called "her pretty ways," in drawing the fangs of a refractory critic, nobody was more jubilant than he.

All this came easy. Her true sacrifice to "the Cause" lay in mutely tolerating the presence, in a small flat, and for weeks on end, of young Tausig, dispatched from Weimar by Father Liszt as Hans' first soloist. Peace and order fled before this moody, ungracious boy, who, though little over school age, filled the house with the fumes of his rank cigars; who, after stuffing at the confectioner's, turned up his nose at the meals she provided; and called incessantly for the blackest of coffee or tea. Again, though she had grown used by now to living to the sound of a piano, the din Carl made in practising—these crashing, smashing scales in minor ninths, played legato, played staccato, from the arm, from the wrist—ended by driving her fingers to her

ears. She trembled, too, for Hans' piano. Had not Father Liszt advised them to make sure, for the concert, of an instrument equal to the young player's strength?

But Hans' patience was unending. Twisting the sense of a phrase, he excused every lapse with a: *genie oblige.* Well might Carl adore him! Often incredibly rude to her: by turns superior, sarcastic, familiar—a flagrant know-all and know-better—he looked up to Hans as a superior being. Father Liszt had also warned them to beware, at rehearsals, of Carl's rubatos. But Hans would take no risks, and went through the concerto—Liszt's First—with Carl in private, the lad swallowing criticism meekly as a lamb. Nor did he do more than grimace, when a veto was laid by his mentor on rum and *schnaps.* Uncanny almost, the influence Hans had over him!

But at last the night came; and, robed in her best black silk, Cosette took her seat in the front of the hall. Jolting along in the *droschke* shared with old Frau von Bulow, she had laboured to hearten the old lady, whose courage as usual stood at zero. Now, her own cheeks were hot, her feet cold, her heart pounded. The performers on the contrary rose, in true artist fashion, to the occasion. Hans held his orchestra in a master's grip; Tausig, the debutant, bore himself like a seasoned virtuoso, surmounting difficulties with the sovereign ease that had gained him his nickname of "the coming Liszt."

All the same, it was a case of money squandered, time lost. The ephemeral transports of a small, select audience stood no chance against the critics' coolness next morning. These pontiffs, graciously condescending to the excerpts by Wagner, condemned as one man the ramshackle construction and erratic melodic line of Berlioz, Father Liszt's unmusical extravagances. Thoroughly embittered, and with a score of fresh enemies to his credit, Hans threw up the

sponge. To attempt a second concert at this date would ruin him.

As it was, Cosette had to sit and watch him cruelly overwork, to pay the numerous debts in which this single one involved him. Any and every new pupil that offered had now to be accepted. For whole days he remained glued to his seat by the piano; afterwards emerging so dog-tired, so cold and blind with headache that he was fit only for bed. To him there, she carried in his bowl of barley-meal soup; sat by him while he ate; laid vinegared cloths on his forehead; and, with wifely tact, listened to his outpourings of spleen and disgust. For, though the flesh might fail, the spirit never faltered. And as soon as he could call a moment his own, he re-dipped his pen in gall, and began his wordy war anew. Personally, she thought these violent attacks bad policy. It was like holding people by the nose and pouring down their throats a physic they refused to swallow! Then, too, he was prejudiced in advance (and showed it) against any new-comer to the concert-platform who distracted public attention from his idols. Nor had any good fairy laid the gift of discretion in his cradle; and the biting *mots* that shot off his tongue were only too quick to go the rounds. His enemies lay in wait to snap them up. Thus, one of his articles giving dire offence in his birthplace, he lashed out that, on the whole, he preferred the Berliner's snotty beaks to the eternally dripping snouts of the Dresdeners. Which got him into thoroughly bad odour, there as here. Again, the mischievous prank he and Carl played a well-known 'cellist of conservative tastes. Locking the door on this person, they compelled him to sit through one of Father Liszt's symphonic poems, performed as a duet in two different keys! One laughed, of course, one had to; but rather wrily. And their victim never forgot or forgave.—These things she was powerless to help. But when Hans

fell to quarrelling with his Director, and came home one day threatening to cut loose from the Conservatorium, she took fright, and wrote secretly to her father, begging him to make Hans see reason. Herr Wagner, of course, was busy stoking Hans' natural restlessness with talk of a post at Berne. But she didn't trust Wagner's motives: Berne was much too near Zurich. And fortunately Father Liszt thought as she did, and lost no time in replying: "Stay where you are, boy, stick it out! Confound those who label you a turncoat." (An apt way of getting at Hans, who hated nothing more than to be called changeable.)

Besides, he himself admitted that, outside Berlin, his prospects were nil. In Weimar, cabal and intrigue were fast undermining Liszt's authority; the Court snubbed and slighted the Princess ever more openly. At any minute *Bon Grand might* burn his boats. As for Wagner: "Much as I love him, I'd be a fool of the first water to trust to his promises. Besides, he always has some axe of his own to grind."

Thus the winter slid by. They had their house to themselves at last. Tausig gone, and a visit from the Princess over (now that Cosette was married, convention permitted of her lightening poor Father Liszt's load): this expensive and distracting visit, during which one trod as on hot coals and weighed one's every word, brought safely to an end, Cosette began to hope that they might settle down to a quieter life, she take up her manuscript again, Hans find time for original work.

But it was not to be. For at this moment the Master wrote *Finis* under Act One of *Tristan und Isolde;* and, in his unruly haste to have it arranged for the piano, all but succeeded in making mischief between Hans and Carl. Ever since the previous summer it had been understood that this score was to be Hans' work, each act passing to him as

it was composed. Unfortunately, however, he had not yet finished the last job of the kind set him by Herr Wagner—that of Gluck's *Iphigenie*—and, grumbling and displeased, the Master was now bluntly proposing to hand *Tristan* over to Carl. Carl, at present his guest in Zurich, was at a loose end; besides being both quick and *industrious.*

Never had Cosette seen Hans so angry, so hurt. Sharp of eye as he might be for the Master's failings, he looked on the right to work for him as his special prerogative, and one he would share with nobody. Heated letters passed; Liszt and the Princess put in their spoke; Carl was accused of truckling; and all Herr Wagner's nimbleness of wit was needed to avoid a break. Until the manuscript came into his possession, Hans sat on thorns. Irritable was a pale word for his mood.

After this, of course, he was on his mettle; and every moment he could wring from his own work went on *Tristan,* He set himself a pensum: so and so many pages to be turned out per day. Or night. For it was often the early hours before he came creeping into the bedroom, shading the flame of the candle with his hand, half unwilling, half hoping to rouse her. And in the end unable to help it. For the effect of this music on him was that of a heady draught: he could not control his movements, and dropped things, knocked up against the furniture until, taking pity on him, Cosette let him see that she was not asleep.

Pushing back the *plumeau,* he sat down on the side of her bed.

"I didn't mean to disturb you. But as you are awake let me talk to you for a bit—if I don't talk I'll burst. Child, child, what music! What a man! The novelty, the variety, the *daring* of this *Tristan!* Believe me, there has never been anything like it, and never will be again. Think of it: not a single unaltered triad in the whole prelude, not one!"

Cosette put out her hand and took his, which was flapping aimlessly. "Tell me all about it." For when, on top of a twelve-hour working-day, his nerves ran away with him like this, the only thing to do was to give him his head.

Gratefully he obeyed; sometimes untying his cravat and rising to hang it over a chair-back, sometimes pulling off a boot and then, forgetful of it, sitting with it in his hand.

But however much he digressed he always ended on the same note.

"The truth is, it doesn't matter a brass farthing what a man of this vast, this stupendous genius says or does. I mean how wildly he talks, or how erratically he behaves. His mere presence among us is a gift to thank the gods for. It's our job to make life as easy as we can for him. Does he need money? Then it should be found. Is he out of sorts, unhappy? We must spare no pains to restore him to health and spirits. Even suppose he were a liar or a thief, his lies should be winked at, his thieving condoned. To such a man, ordinary standards can't be applied. And you may take it from me, not one of his contemporaries is fit even to black his boots!"

Cosette's eyes were moist. Dear Hans . . . dear, generous Hans! He went too far, of course: he always did—she couldn't imagine her father talking of condoning a crime. Still . . . But had even the greatest of geniuses the right so to devour the lives of those unfortunates who fell under his spell? She did not believe it. And the latent grudge she had thus far borne Herr Wagner began to turn to an active dislike.

## III

THUS, when summer came, she went none too willingly back to Zurich. But mysterious things were happening in the little house on the green hill; the oddest rumours reached their ears; and Hans was on pins and needles to discover for himself where the truth lay.—Besides, it was an idiosyncrasy of his to be able to endure quite well without the Master so long as no chance of a meeting offered. But, once this hove in sight, he knew no rest.

For her part, as she sat watching the distant chain of mountains climb the sky, she grew steadily more depressed. Had she believed in presentiments—but she didn't, she despised such foolishness, and even though, from the moment they got out of the train, everything went to confirm her in her mood. Just as last time the Master awaited them on the platform, and the same exuberant greetings were exchanged. Yet with a difference. His present heartiness struck her at once as having something forced about it. As being less an expression of pleasure than the outcome of an almost feverish nervosity, which set the very air around him jangling. Hans didn't seem to notice anything. But its effect on her was to make her shut up like an oyster.

Next, it came out that the spare room at the *Asy/was* still occupied, and they two would have to make do with a room at an hotel. No hardship this to her; but something of a blow for poor Hans.

As they drove, she at the Master's side, Hans on the little seat before them, she contrived a small, stiff smile in listening to Herr Wagner, who never ceased talking, laughing

childishly at his own jokes, his hat on his knee, his longish hair rising and falling in the wind. The while, transgressing every law of hospitality, he poked outrageous fun at his present guest.

"Announcements of your coming were useless; the broadest hints have failed to budge him. There he sits, chirping and clucking—more like a cockerel than a man. This is bad enough; but picture me, my dears, as I was a few weeks back. The prey, the helpless prey, of *two* of the species. Two famous tenors, each of whom was afraid, yes, *afraid,* to sing before the other. And between them, poor me, who had no use for them *except* for their singing. Who regard the race, its bulk, its brainlessness, merely as a necessary evil for the production of the necessary voice—ha-ha! But no; no voice for poor Riccardo—but his own. Our friend here actually had the audacity to tell me that he came to Zurich to rest from his labours. To rest—and with me! Children, I ask you! Is it not incredible? . . . passing belief?"

Mentally, and very coldly, Cosette refused her assent. Even operatic tenors were but human. But Hans was as bitterly diverted as the Master himself. Long and loud did the pair of them laugh.

Then, the dingy hotel-room of Herr Wagner's choosing, where the bed-linen looked only half washed, and drawers and cupboards emitted the combined odours of the countless travellers who had used them. On her knees, unpacking, Cosette could have wept. Had it not been for the prospect of meeting her mother, who was coming to Zurich on purpose to make Hans' acquaintance, she thought she might have been weak enough to suggest turning tail

Not three days later, it was she who was doing her best to steady Hans, to hinder him impetuously flying from the

place. By then, though with better cause, he was as upset as herself.

Wagner's *bete noire* departing, Hans drove out to the *Asyl* with their baggage, while she paid a visit to her mother at the big hotel on the bank of the lake. But in less than no time he was back; and, from her first glimpse of him, or rather of his reflection in a mirror as he walked the length of the room, Cosette saw that something serious had happened. His face, always colourless, was so pale that it made his grey eyes look black. Of course, being Hans, he tried to keep up appearances; kissed the hand presented to him, took the proffered seat, his share in an amiable conversation. But as soon as decency permitted he had her up and away.

Outside, she turned anxiously to him. "Is anything the matter?"

*"Matter?* Ho dear no! Only that nothing will persuade me to stop here. We're off—and at once!"

*(Now,* what about presentiments?) "But why? What has happened?"

"The luggage I've brought back with me. It's at the station, in the cloakroom."

"But . . . oh, please, don't walk so fast." For, heedless of her cumbersome skirts, he was rushing her at top speed along the quiet road.—

Well, he had driven out as arranged. But no Wagner came to the gate to meet him; not so much as a face showed at a window. So up he went to the house and knocked. In vain—though, within, he could hear voices going nineteen to the dozen. After a little he knocked again. This time the door was flung violently open, and by Wagner himself.

"But you should have seen him! Hair on end, bloodshot eyes, cheeks a brick-red. And there he stood and glared at

me—why, I might have been a debt-collector or his worst enemy! I saw at once he had forgotten all about my coming. But even when he remembered he only said: 'Oh, it's you. Well, I suppose you will have to come in.'"

*"Hans!"*

"And there in the sitting-room was Minna, her face even more disfigured than his, her eyes bunged up with weeping. And the look she gave me! The plain truth is, I'd arrived in the middle of a most infernal row. And they went on with it before me, if you please, paying no more heed to me than if I had been the table—which he thumped, while she bawled and stamped her foot. In short, such a scene as I can't attempt to describe."

Oh, poor Hans, who (unless of his own making) hated rows more than anything on earth.

"But worse was to come. They started trying to drag me in; to make me take sides. You can imagine how I felt. But I stood it until she began blackguarding him for filling the house with *his* friends, and expecting her to slave for them, even though they treated her like the dirt under their feet. (At this I really thought he was going to hit her.) It was the last straw. I muttered that I'd see him later, and got away as fast as I could. And never will I enter their house again!"

"But—"

"As for what it was all about—well, I'm afraid we . . . you . . . must face the fact that it hinges on—well, on Richard's er . . . friendship with a certain lady."

"Yes, Hans," said Cosette tonelessly, and hung her head. Illicit relations had been the blight of her girlhood. In marrying, she had hoped to shake herself free of them. And at his words such a stab of aversion ran through her that for a moment she could say no more.

But it was Hans she had to think of, not herself. And

though she burned as he did, over the treatment he had received, it wouldn't do for him to let his feelings run away with him. Did one remember what it had cost him, in work, time, money, to get here; his rapturous anticipation of the visit; the cruel blow the break would be to him . . . nor did she wish her mother, on whom he had made a very favourable impression, to put him down as flighty and unbalanced. Wagner was notorious for the violence of his tempers, Frau Minna hardly less. Both would no doubt cool down and come to their senses; thus making it possible for Hans to stay out his time in Zurich. Not at the *Asyl,* though. There she was one with him: never again!

All this she laid before her dear hot-head as he dragged her relentlessly along; her ankles burning in their close elastic-sides, her soles a-throb. Until she had made him see reason.

But the post next morning brought a letter from the Master that once more tore Hans in two. Wagner besought him, even if he could not *forget* the wretched scene he had witnessed, at least to *forgive* it; and neither of them would ever allude to it again. Let them pretend that Cosette and he had only just arrivedl Every one concerned was bent on making "a fresh start;" and, for this, Hans' presence would be invaluable. Minna added her entreaties, urging them to move into the guest-room without delay. "While I myself thank you in advance, boy, and from the bottom of my heart, for this new proof of your sympathy and friendship."

It wasn't in Hans to stand out against such an appeal—from Wagner. Over the top of the letter Cosette's eyes met his, and she saw that he was lost.

The weeks that followed were a strange and melancholy experience. The 'fresh start', so airily announced, proved just another of the Master's gigantic self-deceptions (to call

it, thought Cosette, by no unkinder name). Things had gone too far to be mended. The unhappy pair sat as if perched on a knife's edge: a chance word, a misplaced allusion, and they were at each other's throats again.

Hans played his usual part of general factotum; if, this time, more as man than musician: lending an untiring ear into which Wagner could freely and passionately unload his spleen; displaying the sheerly angelic patience that he reserved for the Master alone. Herself she was Frau Minna's confidante, and came in only for the reverse side of the unsavoury affair, Frau Minna harping on her wrongs and mouthing her dreary objurgations till the listener's head swam.

"After all I've been through with him, all I've done for him! But the man's little short of a monster. It's one law for him and another for the rest of the world. Where he himself's concerned he can't tell right from wrong. But this is the end. I've had enough. I'll stand no more!"

Shameful it certainly was, revolting even, to make use of a person as long as she was young and strong; and then, when she grew old and ill and unlovely, so to slight and humiliate her. And yet . . . This nagging tongue, this ungovernable temper, this inability to admit any standpoint but her own . . . Besides, between the two of them, it was a puzzle to know where the truth lay.

The scandal had begun some three months previously by Frau Minna opening and reading a letter that was not for her. That she had never been meant to see. A perfectly unpardonable act, Cosette agreed. Still . . .

Hans said: "Come for a walk," in order to give her Richard's version of the incident.

This ran: "I confess I *was* a trifle uplifted, feet off the earth and all that; for I'd just written the very last note of Act I. Was it then unnatural, in sending Madame up my

ideas for the instrumentation of the *Prelude*, that I should let myself go, kick over the traces a bit? Or ought I to have turned to one whose sole response would have been: is there money in it, will it pay? Whose eternal cry is for 'another *Rien i* But I tell you this: after she had filched my letter from a servant and misinterpreted it in the crudest fashion, when she came in chalk-white with rage and shook it in my face, horrified as I was, I did *not* for a moment forget that she is a sick and irresponsible woman. I remained perfectly cool—yes, cold as a stone. And this off-handedness of mine, the indifference of innocence with which I heard her out, had its effect. She calmed down, became convinced —or so I thought—of the grossness of her error."—

"A red-hot love-letter, a *criminal* love-letter!" railed Frau Minna. "Oh, I'd had my suspicions of them all along —she with her drooping lids, her way of looking through you, her mealy-mouthed 'Master' here and 'Master' there! But so sly were they that I'd never managed to catch them. This time I had. And in I marched to Richard—for I hadn't done anything I was ashamed of, or gone an inch beyond my rights. And I wish you could have seen him. He regularly crumpled up. His hands shook, his mouth (that mean, pinched little mouth of his) twitched and trembled till I thought he was going to *cry*.—But there! The man has the oily tongue of a serpent; and fool that I am I let him talk me round. Not that I *believed* him; I gave that up long ago; he says just what suits him best at the moment. But I'd back him to talk the devil himself dry; and I'm only a poor old woman. And so he got away with it—that time. But when I came to think things over, I saw what a fool I'd been. And I said to myself: Minna, here's your chance, you take it. And so I on with my bonnet and up to the house, and there I flourished the letter in milady's face, and told her plump and plain what I thought of her. And said,

said I: if there's any more of this, if you don't leave my husband in peace, I'll pass it over to *yours*', and then we'll see!"

Hans groaned.

"Richard's answer to that is that the husband was already informed. Knew everything there was to know. And from his wife's own lips."

"Oh, Hans, do you really . . . I mean, do you think that *possible?"*

"Frankly, I don't know. *As* a husband, it would certainly show him in a very queer light. But it's all a muddle. The one thing that's plain is, Richard cannot *exist* entirely cut off from congenial society."

"But other men . . . I mean other artists . . ."

"It's no use, Cos, you can't compare him. He stands alone."

To this there came no reply: she had heard it so often. Besides, at the moment, she was taken up with her own irrational feelings. Why should she, who had always been ready *to* admit the artist's need for sympathy, for encouragement, who had sided so fierily with Hans in his lack of either, now be unwilling to make allowances? Why, in Herr Wagner's case, should it seem to her a sign of weakness?—Or even of self-indulgence?

Hans meanwhile was declaring that Richard had known nothing of Minna's fateful visit until, meeting by chance with the lady and her husband, he had been dumbfounded by her icy air, nettled by Monsieur's odiously self-satisfied smirk. But having, in a terrible scene, wormed the truth out of Minna, he had done the only possible thing; had there and then packed his wife off to the mountains, and himself undertaken to drop all intercourse with the big house.

So fer good. But on Minna's return three months later,

the whole wretched affair had flamed up anew; and by now Wagner's days at the *Asyl* were numbered.

It had been left to Hans—Hans and her, Cosette—to find, on paying a duty-visit, that Madame was once more stiff with resentment. At what she held to be a deliberate affront. To welcome Minna home, the servant (the *same*, wondered Cosette, scenting perfidy, who had so glibly handed over the letter?) this man had set up the usual flower-begarlanded arch; and so childishly (or maliciously) proud of it was Minna, so determined to let every one know she was not being taken back on sufferance, that she refused to have it removed. There for days it stood, in full view of the big house, and giving stark offence to the house's mistress. No, it was plain: not on Minna's account only would an end have to be made. A delicate, highly-strung woman had been cut to the quick, and was now ready to see injury where none was meant. (Delicate and highly-strung were Hans' words for her. Strange, thought Cosette, how easily men let themselves be influenced by a pure profile and a lovely mouth.)

Wagner tore his hair.

"God save and preserve me from all women!"

But such a phrase was intended only for the public ear. Or to hoodwink Minna. (Bluster as he might, Cosette believed he went in fear of her.) To Hans alone did he unbosom himself. From her bed Cosette could hear his voice droning on, his feet stumping up and down his little workroom. But what passed at these midnight sittings she did not know. For Wagner had begun by gibing: "But there! I suppose I must deny myself even the luxury of speech. When a man marries, if everything's not retailed in full as soon as the marital candle's out, there's trouble." And on Hans vowing that his wife was different, never would Cosette resent his silence, Wagner gave a cynical

laugh, and said that in that case she was unique, a female miracle. However, so urgent was his need that he'd have to chance it.

Thus Hans alone knew the truth. And went about so pale and depressed that it looked as if there must be even more in it than met the eye. And that was bad enough. The break-up of what Herr Wagner's friends had confidently hoped would be his permanent home; yet another departure into exile.

Cosette's own feelings remained very mixed. She might, however, have felt more kindly towards him, had he not chosen just this moment to antagonise her afresh.

It had become an *idee fixe* with him that the one person who could have warded off a catastrophe was Father Liszt. (Liszt as man of the world; dexterous of mind as of finger.) And his own passionate appeals in this quarter failing, he gave her no peace till she, too, tried her hand, feeding into her pen the most outrageous requests to her father, to let everything else slide and hasten to his, Wagner's, aid.

Naturally, no notice was taken of the letter. (At the *Altenburg* it would be put down to her as a gross impertinence.) Hence, its sole result was to make the Master more irritable than before.

One morning at the coffee-table there was a shocking scene. It ended by him dashing his cup and its contents to the floor, and banging out of the room. Hans ran after him; she, Cosette, followed Frau Minna to the kitchen. And there she sat, watching the broad-backed, high-stomached figure flounce about, listening to the harsh, angry voice, the crashing of saucepans, till she could bear it no longer; and taking a piece of needlework retreated to the little dining-room, which was empty.

But Hans, it seemed, had gone out with Klindworth—dear, good, sane Klindworth, whose presence at this time

was as soothing as little Tausig's was provocative, the lad's unquenchable pertness acting like gunpowder on the Master's nerves. ("Why, oh, why have the young no respect for me?") And finding himself at a loose end: "For I might as well set out for the moon as try to work!" and her alone and unprotected, Herr Wagner seized the opportunity to launch an attack on her father, for his shallowness and heartlessness, his perfidy as a friend.

Cosette sat and listened, her head bent over her sewing. (Herr Wagner's undivided attention still confused her.) But to hear her father belittled touched her on her tenderest spot. (Nor was she Hans, to be twisted emotionally round the Master's finger.) Her head might droop *("What a* goose-neck the girl's got!") but her indignation mounted, till it got the better of her fear and drove a protest over her lips. "But I warned you beforehand nothing would come of my letter!" And finding herself able to bear, without collapsing, the tirade that followed on Liszt "as a father," she said more quietly: "The reason he does not . . . cannot come, is because you asked him to come alone. That naturally gave offence. Besides, I think you forget who else is here, in Zurich." As always, though, when forced to allude to her father's unworthy servitude, she flushed darkly.

But for other people's feelings Herr Wagner cared not a heller.

"Ha! Do you imagine you're defending him, by insinuating that he's capable of letting such paltry trifles stand in the way? Would you have him bob round inquiring, does it suit one and is it pleasing to the other? Great God!—what would be said of a person who stopped to take his collar off, or worse still ask *if he might,* before jumping in to rescue a drowning man?" Here, stemming his hands against the table, he leaned across it, bringing his face closer to hers.

"And suppose I had *not* said, come alone, it's you only I want? Why, the last time he was here—the second in nine long years!—what did I have of him? He wasn't permitted to *budge* , without that woman. That intolerable woman, with her parrot-like gabble about everything under the sun, whether she knows what she's talking about or whether she doesn't. Whose idea of heaven it is to jabber, jabber, jabber, surrounded by a cohort of Professors. Until so sick of it, so nervously exhausted was I, that I took to my bed. I'm ill, I wrote, I can't come, can't see you; and pulled down the blind and turned my face to the wall. Yes, yes, so it was. And twice only . . . in nine years!"

In and out of the canvas, Cosette thrust her needle.

With an enormous shrug and a resounding sigh he added: "Well, he's made his bed—and it's not of feathers." To continue: "But what of me, and *my* loss of a friend who was more to me than any brother? The only living mortal capable of understanding and appreciating what I'm doing. Yet who now, under this malign influence, pipes to the strain of: come, come, my good Richard, old slow-coach that you are, get a move on, make hay while the grand-ducal sun shines! Hurry up with this *Tristan* of yours, measure it off by the yard, ladle it out like soup! Yes, so he has the effrontery to write to me—me, from whom each note has been wrenched in agony. To speak in this way of a work I've put my heart's blood into, all I've suffered and am still suffering. While to him it's just a *pike d'occasion,* a bit of good business, a commercial undertaking!"

His violence, his pathos might be borne. Not so his sneers. With something of his own vehemence Cosette tossed her head and retorted: "But my father has not seen *Tristan* yet! How *can* he know all this?—Or have you told him?"

For an instant the Master did not reply. He had fallen

into a dream, and stood gazing out of the window, his pale eyes deeper in colour from the blue overhead, his peevish mouth awry. But abruptly coming to himself, he snapped out: *"To/d* him? What a question! Or do you actually believe, young woman, that one puts such things to paper?"

Cosette swallowed hard. "Then—please forgive me for saying so—but I don't think it's fair. You expect people to know by *instinct* what you're feeling and . . . and"—she jibbed at the "suffering" and substituted "going through. And because they—no, I mean my father—because he doesn't, because he *can't,* you make him these reproaches. It isn't fair."

What his answer might have been she never knew. For here Hans and Klindworth came bustling in; and Wagner straightway forgot all about her. With a childish curiosity he fell to investigating the contents of the several brown-paper bags they laid on the table. (For him a great ripe golden melon; for Minna, a plump young pullet for roasting.)

On seeing who her companion was, Hans raised his brows in sympathy and surprise.—But he was pleased all the same. For he hoped that in time these two would learn to appreciate each other, Cosette in particular cease to regard the Master's shortcomings with so critical an eye.

But she made no response. Rolling up her work she hurried from the room. Now that the *tension* was over, she found herself all a-shake. And upstairs in the bedroom, with the door firmly shut behind her, she indulged in the luxury of a good cry.

And so it went on till well into August, Wagner growing daily more outraged by the non-arrival of the money on which he was depending to make his escape. Hans had to

apply for an extension of leave, the Master all but blowing the roof off at a hint of his desertion.

"You can't *do* it, boy! What's Hecuba—your blooming Stern!—to me?"

On the other hand, the belated offer from Liszt of a flying visit, would Richard consent to postpone his departure, was almost savagely turned down.

"What? Another ten days of this hell? Not for the King of Saxony himself!—No, no, no. He wouldn't come when I needed him. Now he can stop where he is." And much more in the same strain.

But even when quiet reigned in the little house, it was an ominous quiet, the hush of suspense that precedes a storm. A few half-hearted 'attempts were made to repeat the musical seances of the previous summer. But there was no real life in these; even though Hans and Klindworth sat by turns at the piano, and Wagner once more sang every voice-part—with what Hans called "sublime unself-consciousness," but beneath which Cosette often quailed. The right mood was not to be recaptured.

Hans deplored it doubly because of her mother's presence. Madame d'Agoult's gifted pen and innumerable Parisian connexions might have been of enormous use to Richard, had he only put himself out to be pleasant. But Richard had no liking for Gallic culture; and never did he behave more freakishly than when the lady tried to start a discussion on art, or to get at his opinion of his contemporaries. At such times he would either lie stretched on the floor, playing with Fips; or sit dumb as Papageno; or, *horribile dictu,* go off at a vulgar tangent on the medicinal properties of haricot-beans. It was left to the rest of them, himself and Klindworth and young Tausig, to carry on the debate, ("All this quacking and baa-ing about art turns me sick. I refuse to pander to it. *Do,* and hold your tongue, is my

motto!") Which, thought Cosette, wasn't even true. For when he chose, no one was fonder than Herr Wagner of theorising.

But at last, thank God, the truant money arrived; and the date of his departure was fixed. One final and terrific row took place, drilling the nerves of all who heard it, Frau Minna, blind and stupid to the end, obstinately persisting in staying on alone at the *Asyl*, to pack, sell, and strip the house bare (thus ensuring, thought Cosette, that nobody should re-enter it). Richard, on the other hand, was for the less conspicuous method of shutting it up for a time as it stood, while Minna and he set out, ostensibly on holiday, in different directions. This battle over (Frau Minna as usual coming off conqueror) and a painful farewell visit paid at the big house (poor Hans, who accompanied the Master, returning from it worn to a frazzle): now, nothing stood in the way of a general exodus. And with many a backward glance on Hans' part, the three of them climbed into a *droschke* and drove down through the town to the railway-station.

Here, an awkward little incident occurred. As if suddenly grown conscience-smitten at the discomfort they had suffered as his guests, Herr Wagner now could not do enough for them, and fussed round them like an anxious hen. For one thing, he insisted that he and he alone should settle for the cab. Cosette, standing a little apart, nursing her bandbox, saw him wave Hans aside with a lordly gesture. But the fare was more than he had reckoned with; and peer into his purse, scrape at his pockets as he would, he couldn't make it up. Hans had to come to the rescue. Even to provide him with some coins to get home!

Of course Wagner carried the thing off with his usual boisterous jocularity. (Actually, she believed she felt more embarrassed then he.) And she need not waste her

sympathy. No matter whether he was in or out of pocket, he would no doubt loll like a lord next day in a *first-class* carriage.

It was a highly emotional leave-taking. Wagner was going down over the Alps, and who knew when the two friends would meet again? Hans made no effort to hide the big round tears that rolled down his cheeks; Wagner dabbed at his lids with the back of first one hand, then the other. Her own eyes remained dry. At this moment her chief feeling was one of irritation. On his behalf. When you saw the confused way in which he lived, thought of the mess he had made of things in Zurich, it seemed foolish in the extreme for him now to go off alone, be turned loose as it were to commit further blunders. What *he* needed was somebody to look after him. Unfortunately, those who might have done so had their own lives to live, their own careers to nurse. There was only Minna: and at this moment Minna suddenly showed up as a thickheaded and crassly obstinate old woman. One who lived for nothing but herself and her grievances. With no more imagination, or understanding for the kind of man she had been unlucky enough to marry, than a stone by the roadside.

Thus Cosette mused, as she sat and watched the chain of snow-capped giants sink to the level of the horizon, each fresh kilometre bringing her nearer and nearer to the sandy flatness of Berlin.

## IV

THAT winter promised to be an exact replica of the last. One foot over the home threshold, and Hans was back in the whirl. Work, and arrears of work; cantankerous disputes with Stern, who was turning rusty over his subordinate's prolonged absences; newspaper controversies and feuds; concert-*tournees;* ever more ambitious schemes for the advancement of "the Cause": into all alike he flung himself with the old exaggerated energy. This time, though, with nerves already on edge from the happenings in Zurich.

Cosette did what she could. But one result of his present state was an unwillingness to accept help, even from her. Unless he did everything himself, errors might creep in: such was his whimsy. It would probably pass. But in the meantime she was shut out.

However, she was not unhappy. She had a task that fully engrossed her.

Ever since Hans' work on the first act of *Tristan*—farther he had not got, Wagner, thanks to his domestic broils, having come to a deadlock in the instrumentation of Act Two. But this, and the glimpse caught of the glories in store for them, had been enough to fill Hans with a passionate desire himself to turn to opera. Backed by Richard; who as usual could be relied *on to* unsettle him.—But, no, there she was not quite fair. *Tristan,* and the weeks spent in Wagner's company, had only renewed and deepened Hans' ambition. As far back as the Weimar days, he had toyed with the idea of an opera on the Merlin saga; and even in his hurry-scurry life in Berlin it would sometimes

crop up. Now, it came fully alive, like a ghost that takes on flesh.

Except over *Tristan,* Cosette had never seen him so stirred. Pacing the room, his dear, dark face aglow, he tumbled his feelings out before her.

"What I want is a subject into which I can put my *whole* self! This eternal petty trifling with petty forms has been my undoing. For who can get up any real enthusiasm nowadays over them? But an opera, Cos,—with its tremendous possibilities—oh, the joy of it!"

Cosette glowed with him. This was how she loved to see him, brimming with energy and self-confidence. Her own belief in his powers never wavered. The genius was there, it only needed tapping—by a suitable subject. Hitherto he had let himself be much too easily influenced by what other people thought he ought or ought not to do. The *Oresteia* had been Wagner's idea, not his; and the fact that he did not now refer to it by a word showed how little it had meant to him.

In the course of that summer he had begged more than one of his literary friends to write him a libretto. But nothing had come of it. And as he said, truly enough, if he depended on himself he might wait till Domesday. Cosette knitted her brows. For if he were not caught on the hop, before he had time to cool off . . . Now the work she had put in on the *Oresteia* had sharpened her wits, taught her the rudiments of constructing and condensing. Besides, she thought she knew better than anybody else just what Hans wanted. She had often heard him say: "Something on heroic lines. Larger than life . . . and rather simple. With not too many changes of scene. Above all, no piling up of details."

Once more, she stepped into the breach.

But she had learned wisdom. This time there should be

no bothering him in advance, with a subject that was still in the raw. So, as often as he was out of the house, she sat behind a wall of books in her little den, reading, noting, plotting; only when it came to the versification turning for assistance to a trusted friend and accomplished journalist. And before the end of the year, *Merlin, a Music-Drama,* had been stitched into an embroidered canvas cover, tied with ribbons, and laid beside Hans' other gifts under the Christmas Tree.

Slily she watched and waited.

On opening the packet and discovering its contents, he could not believe his eyes: looked from it to her and back again, speechless with amazement. Then, dear impetuous fellow, he cast propriety to the winds. Throwing his arms round her he kissed her, kissed her again, and danced her about the room. Though several friends and relatives were present.

"Was there ever such a wife?—such a wife as mine! Good people all, I hereby call you to witness that I've married a genius. Oh, we're not *Bon Grand's* daughter for nothing!"

Vainly Cosette tried to free herself, protesting: "Wait, Hans, wait till you've read it, dear, and see if it will do." There was no quelling him.

Or not till his old mother, who sat watching these antics with a dry, forced smile, beckoned Cosette to her and whispered: "Such a pity, my dear, that you cannot also make him a present of the time it will take to write it—this clever piece of yours!"

But Hans overheard. And for the rest of the evening Cosette watched the tiny seed of doubt thus sown poisoning his mind; could almost *hear* him thinking to himself: time? yes, indeed, where's the time to come from? She bit her lip, looked away; but the damage was done. And as she moved among her guests, straightening or snuffing candles,

slicing cake or ladling out punch, she found herself quivering with impatience. Surely, surely, if your heart, your mind, every living inch of you was bent on achieving something, then, no matter what the obstacles, you contrived to *make* the time for it? In other words, were time's master, not its slave. And the proper answer to a person who moaned: "I can't find the time," ought to be: "Then where have you lost it?"—Thus mentally she tossed her head. While Hans continued to exhibit to one and another of the party (with a jubilation that now struck her as excessive) his clever young wife's bugle-call to action—the new burden that was being laid on his overloaded back.

For such it ultimately proved to be. At first he talked and thought of little else, spread the good news far and wide, wrote exultantly to Father Liszt: "It's everything I've longed for—and I'm in the skies!" And then. Invariably, yes, without exception, just as she thought he was at last going to buckle to, something urgent, important, impossible to postpone, would turn up, get in the way, destroy his mood. Something (it almost began to seem) more *interesting.* And did one press him, he lost his temper.

While not a month later he brought such a hornet's nest of scandal about his ears that all prospect of sustained work was at an end.

Hans was in funds that winter. A brilliantly successful tour left him with a profit of two hundred thalers; and in January it was possible to launch another of what Father Liszt called his "concert-attacks" on the Berlin public. Everything promised well: the wished-for soloists volunteered their services, rehearsals went off without a hitch, on the night itself the hall showed three-parts full, and his own playing of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto was enthusiastically received. But the next item on the programme,

Lisst's *Ideale,* gained but a single round of applause, which was quickly smothered in hisses.

This time Hans didn't stagger to the green-room and there, from rage and excitement, lose consciousness. Instead, he laid down his baton, stepped nimbly from the dais to the front of the platform, and said in a loud voice: "Will those who are hissing have the goodness to leave the hall!"

In her fright the old Baroness grabbed at Cosette's arm and clung to it. Cosette closed her eyes. But she could hear the gasp of surprise that ran through the audience. (The ominous gasp. The dumbfounded audience.) *Never,* in the annals of music, had such a thing happened before. Never had conductor so far forgotten himself. Not only to cross the barrier set by convention between listeners and performers—to speak at all I—but in so insolent a tone, ordering out people who had as much right as he had to be there.

Of course nobody stirred. Or no one but a Princess from the royal box, whose hour it was to drink tea. (At which the old Baroness melted into her handkerchief.) Hans himself walked coolly back to his desk, rapped it, raised his stick. But what he played next got scant attention. The atmosphere remained tense, oppressive.

And next morning the storm broke. Not a paper or journal of any hue but was at Hans' throat; not a critic but made it his business to belabour, with abuse, scorn, ridicule, the presumptuous young tyro who had dared to make so violent a break with tradition. Till now, the antagonism which it seemed Hans' lot to provoke had been directed chiefly at the unpopular cause he stood for, and only obliquely at himself. Now, it became a personal matter, was aimed at him alone. And reached such heights that not even his bodily blemishes were spared: his stumpiness,

plainness of face, the Frenchified tuft that adorned his chin. He was also accused of presuming on his marriage to Liszt's daughter, believing that he could therefore allow himself any licence. Yes, for the rest of the season the name of Hans von Bulow served as a target for the combined slander, hatred, malice of musical Berlin. Or, as he himself put it, his unpopularity was such that it made a popular figure of him.

"Lucky for me I got the 'Court-pianist' when I did. After this, I might have whistled down the wind for it."

Her first shock over, Cosette rallied to his side, staunchly defending him, and even struggling to hearten his old mother. Among his friends and intimates of "the Left", the news of "Billow's maiden speech" created a joyful sensation. Wagner wrote from his Venetian palace in the tone of: "Huzza! That's the ticket! Go for 'em, boy, let 'em have it." Father Liszt was wiser. He expressed no disapproval; said indeed that Hans' action might even simplify matters—provided he now kept his head. "Whatever happens, remain calm and cool, my boy, as befits the convictions for which you are fighting." And went on to quote Goethe to the effect that, do the dogs bark, it merely proves to us that we ride.

As, however, the hullabaloo showed no signs of abating a generous offer came from the *Altenburg* to finance a second concert, at which Liszt himself would conduct the offending work: "partake of the hisses," as the Princess put it. Overflowing with gratitude, Hans vowed the proceeds to charity, and ran himself off his legs to get everything ready in time. He succeeded; Liszt's presence proved a draw; and when the night arrived there was not a vacant seat in the hall. And under the composer's baton *Die Ideale* had a magnificent reception ("I having added," wrote Liszt, "just the necessary *je-m-sais-quoi* to Hans'

reading.") But, thought Cosette, it would **have been** impossible to visit another's misdeeds on her father's head. His dignity, his modesty, his serenity *impelled* respect. (If only Hans would take a lesson!)

But that he'd never do. He could neither control nor hide his feelings. Nor was she even sure he wanted to, wanted to be different. In a way he seemed to get a kind of stimulus from all this horrid excitement. Certainly he never played better than at a concert about this time. To which she accompanied him with a thudding heart. For the rumour ran that he in his turn was to be hissed off the platform; or at any rate not to be permitted to play till he had made public apology for his rudeness. (And in the hope of a new scandal, the hall was crammed to the doors.) But Hans laughed at such threats, played like one possessed, and nothing whatever happened—or nothing but round after round of applause.

All the same, the toll taken of his nerves was a heavy one: migraine blinded him, he slept brokenly, and by day lived in a perpetual state of exasperation. Hence, he jumped at a chance that now offered of giving some soirees in Paris. To turn his back for a while on the' "Berlin stew;" on threats and anonymous letters; on Stern and his breed; on the very sound of the German tongue, not to speak of the special brand of *Mauscheln* that afflicted his ears: nothing had ever come more opportunely. He would not only go, but would take her with him. And Cosette thought gleefully: Paris . . . Paris in spring, when the gas-lamps begin to burn green in the clear evening air, and the fantastic old streets and squares are visions of romantic beauty . . . after the straight hard matter-of-fact lines of Berlin. Paris, where she could at last be of some real use to Hans; where a mother and grandmother waited, one to take him to her heart, the other to make him free of her *salon;* and where the third

person in his triune godhead might be approached **and** adored. Hans' enjoyment of it all was boundless, was childlike; and many a castle did he build of one day shaking the dust of *"Poussiereopolis"* off his feet, for the finer dust of Paris.

Gently but firmly Father Liszt, who would countenance no extravagances on the part of his daughter's husband, brought him back to earth. And very soon after their return the second act of *Tristan* arrived, and still further subdued him. For, with harassed publishers and a wildly impatient Richard sitting as it were on his doorstep, he had again to extend his working-hours to ten a day, exclusive of piano-lessons.

Alternately he raved and despaired.

"Not even from Wagner would one have expected anything like this. I fall from one surprise and delight into another. But . . . well, Cos, the rest of us might just as well put up our shutters and retire."

Or: "Infernally fascinating and infernally difficult!—anti-pianistic to the *nth.* degree. There are danger spots that have to be worked and re-worked—single bars even that I rack my brains over for half an hour at a time. It's too much for one poor head. I shall end by owning myself beaten."

But this was just the froth of the moment. He toiled without a break, living like a hermit, putting up through the long, summer vacation with the noise, the dust, the dry heat of Berlin. And before August was out could joyfully report the finish of the second act. But by then Act Three was upon him.

As she walked the sunbaked streets, Cosette found herself clenching her gloved fists. For at times she felt anything but the patient Grissel she had to pretend to be . . . for

Hans' sake. When, throwing on bonnet and mantle, she seized any pretext to escape from the house. Fled *Tristan* and all that *Tristan* implied.

It was asking too much of her to sit, day in, day out, listening to Hans' struggles with this terrible score. For which, too, his thanks were often grumbles. "Thicken your bass, boy, it's much too thin." Or: "What!—a harmonic accompaniment to my shepherd's pipe? I'd like to see you try it I" Or: "How much longer are you going to be? For God's sake bestir yourself I" Deeply resenting the tone of these criticisms, for one who would not or could not stand up for himself, Cosette was not far from hating Wagner. And not only for his lack of manners, his Saxon boorishness. What defeated her was his iron grip on Hans, which nothing loosened.

How differently she had meant things to turn out. As an inexperienced, cocksure girl, she had dreamed of a life-long sacrifice to Hans' *own* genius. And had looked down in superior girlish fashion on those who had failed him. She was wiser now. One's best-meant efforts shattered on his absorbed interest in the affairs of the day, his all too open ear for the demands other people made on him. Or perhaps it would be truer to say on his ultra-conscientiousness. He couldn't persuade himself to dodge an appointment, or leave a friend's errand undone, or let slip a chance of having a dig at an enemy. And over these and similar things he wore himself to shreds. Surely, surely, the creative artist's first duty was to himself? Implied *learning* to shirk, neglect, hold aloof? If necessary even to become slack, go friendless, appear a renegade, provided by doing so he could produce a masterpiece. But over Hans the *moment* had such power. In it, he spilled and wasted himself.

And then, on top of everything, *Tristan,* and *Tristan's* unholy effect on him—on every one who heard a bar of it.

"Asphyxiating" was friend Draeseke's word for this strange, even sinister music, in which poor Hans would drown for months to come. And when, in what he himself called a "struggle for breath," he tried to shake off the obsession, his raptus sufficed only for two or three little piano-pieces!

She turned away; shut herself up with pen and paper, wrote interminable letters to her friends, tried her hand at a translation from the German. And of this Hans thought so highly that, when a French version of *Tannhduser* was needed for a possible performance of the opera in Paris, he wrote off to Wagner suggesting her as translator. Without even consulting her!

To his surprise she was annoyed, and flatly refused to consider it.

"But why on earth not?—Too hard? When you've coped so splendidly with Hebbel's crabbedness? What nonsense!"

But Hebbel was different.

He in his turn was vexed; even hurt. Took the matter so personally that against her will she gave way, and agreed to see what she could do.

Carrying the book to her sanctum, she sat for some time and stared at it, averse even to opening it. For there was more, much more, in her swift, instinctive refusal, than hesitancy before the task of fitting words to a music for which they had not, and never *would* sound as if they had been written; of laying syllable on syllable, with due respect for rhyme where it occurred, and for the substance of the poet's thought. Also not forgetting her father's dictum: *En mature de traduction, il y a des exactitudes qui equivalent a des infidilites.* And yet, for all this . . . it might have been done. Or at least attempted. (In one way, she would have enjoyed measuring her strength against it.) What she could not face was the prospect of coming, she, too, under Wagner's thumb; of being tutored, bullied, hectored (and he

would be much less likely to spare her than **Hans.)** At **the** mere thought of it, something in her screamed a protest. No: something tottered, failed, died.—But never would Hans understand such childishness.

Fate, however, provided her with an ally, the best of allies. For at this point Father Liszt, performing **a** complete volte-face, astounded them by declaring that works so ultra-Germanic as Wagner's belonged solely to the German people. It would exceed the ability of any translator faithfully to present them in another tongue.

And on this beloved authority, to which even Hans ungraciously yielded, Cosette took her stand.

## V

BUT the slight estrangement caused by her wilfulness did not last. And shrank to nothing before a calamity so crushing that to have lived it through together formed a new and inseverable bond.

Brother Daniel came that August from Vienna, where he was studying law, to spend a part of his vacation with them. Cosette and he had seen little of each other since her marriage; and their joy at meeting was unbounded. As children their grandmother had been used to call them "three cherries on one stalk;" and cut off from this warm intimacy Cosette still knew what it was to feel a stranger in a strange land. But how well the links had wornl Between her *brother* and her were no differences of opinion, no rough edges to file smooth. Though Daniel was now a tall lad of twenty, they still understood each other at a look, with half a word.

But her happiness was short-lived. He had come to them to be cured of a neglected cold. But neither soothing remedies nor change of air relieved this. On the contrary, the short, hacking cough grew in violence, his temperature rose, and within a very few days he was dangerously ill.

Cosette put everything else aside to nurse him. Hans had neither the leisure nor the nerve for it: to look on at illness unmanned him, made him ill himself.

He withdrew to the hired room where he had now to receive his private pupils. But, the crisis past and Daniel on the road to recovery, he spent every moment he could spare by the sick-bed. And some that he couldn't. For an ardent friendship had sprung up between the two: a kind

of passionate attachment, which wiped out the ten-years' disparity in age, the many fine differences of race and confession. They had first met that spring in Prague, where Hans was conducting one of his revolutionary programmes; and Daniel, musical to the core, but hindered, he too, by his father's veto, from taking up music as a profession, had been swept off his feet by Hans' daring and genius. For once in his life, Hans found himself on the pedestal he kept for others. And the pleasurable novelty this must be to him only Cosette knew; who saw him trampled on and domineered over by Wagner; unable, in face of Father Liszt, to shake off his one-time status of pupil.

It was not unlike the case of little Tausig over again. Except that Hans treated his new friend as an equal.—And well he might, Daniel being so brilliant and many-sided that Father Liszt had been hard put to it to decide what to make of him. The law, medicine, an academic career: he would have shone equally in any.—While his morbid sensitiveness, a legacy from his strange, unnatural childhood, was here safe from shocks. When Hans *chose* , he could be tact and delicacy in person.

To see the two of them happy together made Cosette happy too. And sometimes, on the point of entering Daniel's room with a book or a nosegay of late flowers, she would turn away, afraid of intruding. Or of disturbing Hans' flow. For all his volubility and surface frankness, Hans was by nature very chary of himself; kept his real thoughts and feelings under lock and key. Now, he tossed them out pell-mell.—Daniel also shared his burning interest in Wagner's music and Wagner's theories. And later on, at his request, Hans set the doors of the rooms ajar and went to "the instrument of torture," to play excerpts from his arrangement of *Tristan.* While as soon as Daniel was able to leave his bed, he was usually to be found

in a corner of Hans' den, sitting reading while Hans worked.

So the weeks passed.

It was on her, Cosette, that the shadow first descended: the uneasy feeling that all was not well. And almost before she was fully conscious of it, Daniel had a slight relapse and was ordered back to bed. And there he remained. For it was winter now, and icy winds came hurtling down the long, straight street, contriving to make themselves felt even through the jealously-sealed double windows. While each day that broke was a little darker and shorter than the one before, its air more of an affliction to sick lungs and a tired chest.

About this time, too, Cosette had a dream which further depressed her. She dreamt that, wakening suddenly in the night, she started up with an unpleasant feeling that there was some one in the room. And was aghast to see, standing motionless at the foot of her bed, what looked like a tall grey pillar or column of mist. But even as she looked it moved, and she saw that it was alive—was a figure, swathed in a veiling delicate as cobwebs, yet impenetrable. Horror-struck she waited . . . for it to turn, as by some obscure means she knew it would; though with a movement so laboured, so slug-like, that hours seemed to pass as she watched, her heart hammering, her clenched hands digging holes in the bed. But at last it had writhed itself round, and she saw its face. And the face was Daniel's. With a cry she fell back on her pillow—and woke in earnest.

The memory of this dream was not to be shaken off: it lay over her mind like a withering blight. (That awful, unnatural twisting, that set and lifeless face.) But she did not speak of it to Hans. Hans had a healthy contempt for dreams and presentiments. And would be angry with her for letting it obsess her. Besides, she didn't want to dis-

quiet him. Like Daniel himself he was taking the doctor's restriction at its face value: a temporary precaution against the onset of winter.

Now, it was chiefly she who kept her brother company; for even to listen to talk brought on his cough. Sometimes she read aloud to him; but more often he lay and read to himself, a lock of reddish-gold hair falling over his white forehead, one long thin hand outlined against his book. While, by window or lamp, she sat alone with her thoughts. And what thoughts! In her present strait, she hadn't one person to whom she could have spoken out her forebodings. The doctor remained evasive, non-committal; downing her tentative inquiries as those of a young and ignorant girl. Her father? No, like Hans, he had to be spared. Though for other reasons. He had come once to Berlin early in Daniel's illness, rejoicing them by his presence, renewing their own exhausted air with a breath from the outside world. But, for all his kindly sympathy, her love-sharpened eyes had detected his inner restlessness, his uneasy hankering to be gone as soon as decency permitted. And she understood. He was on the stretch lest he should exceed the few days' liberty accorded him. While each hour by which he cut his visit short would be counted to his credit.—Besides, like many another great artist, he had a horror of pain and suffering; preferred to pretend they did not exist. Or, if that were impossible, then to hold them at arm's length and forget about them.

Their mother; their grandmother; Blandine. One a charming but casual acquaintance; one old, half-blind, decrepit. Mionny, a wife now, and no longer her own mistress. Or not to the extent of hastening from Paris on the strength of an evil dream. Nor was there room in the narrow flat for another visitor.

At first she had written freely to them of Daniel's

condition. But after he took to his bed anew, she wrote no more. There was as little to tell of him as to do for him. Sometimes, in despair at what she saw coming but was powerless to prevent, she made wild plans for carrying him off to some balmier air, where to draw his breath would be less of an effort. But there it remained. For did she squarely face the difficulties, the terrible and complicated machinery to be set in motion, her courage failed. Hans and she were so poor; Father Liszt's small income barely sufficed for his own Spartan mode of life. The necessary money would have to be begged from the one possible source; and that meant the bursting of a fresh storm—a very Pandora's box of trouble—over her father's head.

She drifted into a mood of hopeless fatalism. What was to be would be.

Now, when she sat by Daniel's side, though one half of her mind never ceased to follow his whistling breath, the other was busy building up, from bits and scraps of memory, a life for this young brother; the only life he was to know.

As vividly as though it had been yesterday, she recalled her first conscious sight of him, the baby, the little "Da." A tiny toddler in drawers and skirts he had clung, with all his puny strength, to the hand of his Italian wet-nurse, from whom he was about to be separated, meanwhile screaming himself almost purple in the face. The nurse had wept, too, declaring, in boisterous peasant fashion, that, if taken from her, he would surely die. But some one else who was present said coolly, oh, no, red-heads were always like this, and shook and slapped him. Nothing helped, though, till she and Mionny, creatures more of his own size, each took a hot fat hand in theirs and walked him away. Quiet then, but for an occasional sob or hiccup, he waddled along, his little cheeks blistered with tears.—She had always been his favourite. Just as she cried for

Blandine were they apart, so he was lost without her. And when she went to school he laid his little face against his grandmother's knee, and asked if he couldn't be dressed up as a girl in one of C'sette's hats, and go too.

His own school-days had been one long triumph. Oh, those festal occasions when Mionny and she, loosed from their prison, had sat and watched him mount the podium to receive prize after prize; in their excitement stretching destructively at the tips of their black-kid gloves.—Or, again, that unforgettable evening when, after eight years' absence, their father had suddenly appeared at the flat where they lived with their governess; and not alone, but with a string of notables, all come to hear Herr Wagner read his drama *Siegfrieds Tod.* By then, they two girls had begun to feel themselves definitely outside the pale; and so shy were they, so overwhelmed by this intrusion, that they had hardly dared to look up. It had amazed her, on stealing a glance at Daniel, then a lad of fourteen, to see him standing erect and open-mouthed, his eyes almost popping out of his head with interest in Siegfried's fate.—Little wonder that, of the three of them, he was the only one Herr Wagner noticed.

But Daniel had never lacked spirit. And when the time came for him to make his mother's acquaintance, to mix equally with both parents—and here again the *Altenburg* was open to him while still taboo to them—he had sometimes provoked and even angered their beloved father, by his crude attempts at justice. Hence, his banishment to Vienna: when he might equally well have studied in Paris or Berlin. At the instigation, no doubt, of her whose aim in life it was, to separate them and keep them separated from their father.

Well, by cutting Daniel off, at his age, from every home tie, she had succeeded beyond her imagining.

He would usurp a share of his father's love no more.

When Hans came in of an evening, exhausted with a long day's teaching, with examining pupils and writing reports, with preparations for a recital and his never-ending work on *Tristan,* his first question, as he threw off his fur cap and wriggled out of his greatcoat, was always an anxious: "How is he? What sort of a day has he had?"

As long as it was humanly possible, Cosette reassured him. ''About the same."

But, the doctor beginning openly to shake his head, to talk of over-study and strength outgrown, her wall of pretence crumbled. And the time came when she had Hans' grief to bear as well as her own. His unbridled grief. For though he listened to her in silence, when she went back a minute or two later she found him in a truly pitiable condition.

Next, she had to brace him to the task of keeping from Daniel the knowledge that he was dying. On this point she was inflexible. She knew her brother's highly imaginative temperament. No matter at what cost he should be spared the agony of mind that precedes a lingering death: suspense, profitless rebellion, the fears that stalk the night. Since he had to go, it should be in peace: the peace of ignorance. And the responsibility for his passing unabsolved, she would take on her own shoulders.

Tearfully Hans agreed. But her strength was not his; and from now on he gave the sick-room a wide berth, distrusting his self-control, his ability to act the required part. For, the weaker Daniel grew, the more confident he was of his ultimate recovery. Cosette herself often paused before entering, and deliberately arranged her face, that it should eJJno tales.

Hans looked on, dumb with admiration. He could

**not** imitate her. In him, grief brought out **the** rebel.

Embitteredly he railed: "I need only to find a friend, a real friend, a brother in more than name, and he's snatched away."

Or: "As I walked home, I looked at all the old people who are still alive—who are *allowed* to go on living!—hawking and spitting, or propping themselves on sticks, hardly able to drag one leg after the other. When every one of them would be better dead."

For the first time he even thought coldly of Liszt, who sat aloof and serene. And his was the letter which, early in December, caused the Princess to raise her brows and hand it to its owner, remarking: "I think the time has come for you to go."

"Oh dear, must I?" with a timorous sigh from Liszt.

"I fear so, my poor *Faineant.* For one thing, I do not trust that daughter of yours, living in her Protestant environment. God knows what heresies she has by now imbibed! It falls on you to see that your son is properly prepared for death."

But for once the Princess met a will as strong as her own. For once Cosette put another's peace of mind before her father's. Nor was Liszt, loosed from his chains, hard to win over. So the end, when it came, was as tranquil as she had laboured to make it. Daniel died in his sleep, and so quietly that the two on their knees beside him did not know when he ceased to breathe.—Hans, who was himself laid up with an attack of migraine, Cosette refused to disturb.

Both men wept freely: Hans with his usual unrestraint, Liszt more decorously, and at moments even **a** trifle absently, his uneasy mind already on the search for phrases with which to justify his backsliding. **But** Cosette's eyes were dry as she prepared her brother for the tomb, **and**

built up his catafalque in her little sitting-room. She was long past tears. Felt drained of feeling; as hard and cold as the December earth, in which Daniel was to be laid.

Wagner wrote "She is the richer by a great if sorrowful experience." But though she knew these were just words —and cruel words at that, which only an old man could have said—yet something in them got below the frozen surface of her. Passionately she recoiled from the suggestion of a personal gain; so passionately that there was nothing for it but to fling herself face downwards on her bed, and cry till she could cry no more.

## VI

OVER this small private tragedy, life closed like water over a dropped stone.—For every one but her. But she did not murmur. Or all too bitterly resent the rapidity with which those who had wept with her forgot, and allowed themselves to be caught up anew in the whirl, before the wreaths withered on Daniel's grave. Life had to go on.

For Hans she was even glad that, soon after New-Year, he contrived to escape from Berlin on a three-months' tour. His work on *Tristan* was done at last; and, after what he had been through, the rush and excitement of travel and concert-giving would freshen rather than fatigue him. Less matter for rejoicing was it that, his first grief stemmed, his mind snapped back to Wagner with the resilience of a freed spring.

But the disturbing news that the Master, Venice exhausted, Lucerne palling, had not only betaken himself *to* Paris but was planning to settle there, threw Hans into a fever. Things hadn't gone too smoothly between the pair of them during the past year. Hans had jibbed—yes, actually jibbed!—at being rung out of bed at two o'clock in the morning, the hour at which telegrams from Venice seemed fated to arrive in Berlin. Containing chiefly aggrieved demands for money: of which, harry publishers, collect performance-fees, chase after likely wealthy patrons as he would, Hans could never supply enough. There had also been unpleasantness over an unlucky comment of his on *Tristan,* made in a private letter, which had somehow found its way into print. While a very hotbed of mischief resulted

from a blundering but well-meant effort to iron out yet another estrangement between the Masters, by forwarding Richard's bitter complaints of Liszt's coolness (and of the female machinations that underlay it) to Liszt himself. From which unholy muddle Father Liszt emerged with flying colours; his glosses on Wagner's statements proving so destructive that Hans was shocked into a fierce denunciation of Wagner's lying ways.—But the personal pull survived even this. And directly a chance came of seeing Richard, of being with him, of answering the appeal for help which, disappointed of a meeting with Liszt, he now sent out: "It's you, my Hans, I want—and you alone!" everything was forgotten. And so to Paris, where Wagner had rented a house for three years, was furnishing it (with, no doubt, his usual opulence) and engaging a bodyguard of domestics, meanwhile laying plans for a series of concerts, and building on specious promises of a French performance of *"Tannusere":* to Paris Hans went.

The climax had come when he learnt that Richard was sending for Minna to rejoin him.

"Oh, Cos, was there ever such a simpleton? Those two will never—*can* never pull together again! I declare it's enough to make one tear one's hair."

"I expect he's lonely, wants a home," and Cosette sighed, less at Wagner's folly than at Hans' insistence on it.

"A *home!* What sort of a home has Minna ever made for him? What has she ever done but distract him? I'd fifty times rather hear he'd taken a mistress."

Hans off, amid the usual fuss and commotion: eleventh-hour messages, mislaid papers, forgotten letters, a frantic dash for his train: all this over and order restored, time hung heavy on Cosette's hands. Her mourning precluded the paying or receiving of any but a few intimate visits; to fill the days she took to going out and walking till she

was tired: black as a raven against the snow's whiteness, and, was it windy, wound round or fluttered after by her long, pennon-like crepe veils. Many a head was turned after her; both for her unusual height and slenderness, and for the golden bands of hair that showed beneath her bonnet. But she was unaware of it. She walked sunk in thought; and her thoughts were as flat and grey as the streets she trod. In the beginning. But, as they passed from death and its mysteries, to herself and her own ineffectual and confused life, they grew so oppressive that she rose against them and drove them from her.—But this is nonsense, sheer nonsense. What if he does write: "Say what one will, Wagner is a noble fellow. You must forgive me if both heart and head drip with him"—there *is* another side to Hans. Think how dear and good he was to my poor, poor Daniel. His heavenly patience in those months of discomfort. Oh, be glad in him as he is. Forget all the silly hopes and ambitions you once had for him. If he can only find happiness in working and fighting for others, then it is your duty to make the best of it. To be a good and understanding wife to him as things are ... as things are.—

But the onset of spring bringing with it the knowledge that she was to bear a child put a different face on everything. Came like the answer to an unuttered prayer. Her life was not after all to be empty: it would have a centre again, a living centre, and the gap left by the loss of Daniel's love be filled. True, Hans did not share her joy. He was first sceptical, then dismayed, and ejaculated: "Good Lord! here's a pretty kettle of fish," the drawbacks and the drawbacks alone presenting themselves. And certainly these were many. For months before and after the child's birth she would be hindered from going about with him (her attention always so to speak on tap); nor could they afford a nurse, or give up a room for a nursery. And

**when it was so hard already to** keep the house **quiet.** . . .

Again, his nervous anxiety on her behalf was such **that he** would not hear of **her** being exposed to the jolting **and** fatigue of coach or train. And she, effectually damped by her broodings over the coming outlay, repressed her own aching hunger for a change of scene: an air with some life in it, the cool fragrant shade of pines. Instead, for the second time they dragged out a summer in the drouth and dust of Berlin, where every drain had its own peculiar odour, every stairway was stagnant with the fatty smells of German cookery. (At which her French nose still revolted.)

But the child once there, he was touchingly happy. And she made him happier still by the suggestion that, to the Daniela of her choosing he should add the name of one of Wagner's heroines. Senta was his choice: if, he wrote, the Master would consent to *his* eldest daughter acting as patron saint to theirs.

The following summer, however, Cosette's wish for forest shade and a brisker purer air was granted. She spent it, by doctor's orders, in the Bavarian mountains.

Her recovery from her confinement was slow; and over a brave attempt to nurse the child she grew white and peaked, and thin as a herring. On returning from another lengthy absence in Paris, Hans was horrified to find her coughing just as Daniel had done. He fell into a panic, leapt to the blackest of conclusions, and gave her no peace till she had placed herself anew in the doctor's charge.

She did not share these fears: she knew better than anyone the reserves of strength that were in her. What would have done her most good, of course, was a little easing in the tension of her life at Hans' side. But not even when he was away was there any slackening of this. His

letters involved her in every detail of his fevered existence, causing her to fret equally with and for him, whether he was there or here. And when he came home from Paris where, along with Richard, he had gone through all the delusive hopes, the subsequent drops to earth that preceded and followed the *Tannhauser* debacle, he himself was in a state of collapse. Was like a man who had been living in hashish-dreams, and now found himself deprived of his drug.

True, Wagner wrote: "What *can* I say to such a friendship as yours, my dear, my dear good Hans? Again we have undergone so much together that there's nothing for it but to think of ourselves as one: one heart, one soul!"—words which would formerly have sent Hans sky-high. Now, worn out with his own and Richard's exasperation; conscience-smitten over her illness; nervous as a cat at the coming move to a roomier flat; confronting a disgruntled, disagreeable Stern; with missed lessons to make up, short of money, out of practice, his head empty as a drum—oh, poor, poor Hans, who could help pitying him?

It wasn't her sympathy, though, that made him try to justify himself. It was the expression he claimed (especially when, as now, he was rasped beyond endurance) to read in her eyes.

"I'm quite aware I've overdone it; you needn't rub it in. But if you only liked Richard a little better, you wouldn't judge me so harshly.—Yes, yes, of course, I know what his music means to you. But you will persist in separating the man from his art. And the whole time, whether you're conscious of it or not, a sort of questioning and criticising goes on in you."

Or again: "I admit I should never have gone to Paris in the first place. Or at least not have stopped there. I've nothing to show for it, and my own life's muddled beyond

the telling. Only the rich and the idle can allow themselves such luxuries. Not a poverty-stricken piano-hack like me."

Yet in their hearts both knew: let a similar cry for help reach him, and he would dash in seven-mile-boots to meet it. Even yet, his main concern was whether or no he had succeeded, when at Karlsruhe, in interesting the Grand Duke in *Tristan* and *Tristan's* composer.—Yes, Hans, if anyone, needed a thorough break, to blow the Paris cob-webs from his brain. Though, nominally, he went with her to Bavaria to watch over her, and make sure that she carried out the rules laid down for her cure.

Cloudlessly happy days followed. The infant had been left with its grandmother; there was nothing to come between them; nothing to distract (or infuriate) Hans. And as she sunned herself in this new peace, Cosette suddenly became aware how young she still was. Her twenty-third birthday might be past; but the pleasure she took in the beauty and novelty of her surroundings was that of a child. Thus far, her life had been lived in a series of poky flats, with, for sole outlook, the stone fronts of other houses or the lines of a paved street. Till now she had never really seen the sun rise, or sat and waited for the stars to prick themselves out on an indigo plain. She reminded herself of a person doomed to walk eternally under an umbrella, conscious only of the strip of ground at her feet.

Her day began soon after dawn when, past the peasant's house where they lodged, the goatherd drove his tinkly flock up to grass on the lower slopes. Followed, a little later, by the rounder, deeper tones of the cow-bells; and yet again by the harsh clang of the solitary church-bell, alling the peasants to Mass. (Hans, who might sleep
igh goat and cow-music, would turn in his bed at this,
noan.) She by then was on the balcony, waiting for

**the** sun to come up from behind its mountain, the valley still deep in shadow, the scents of the night still cool and fragrant to the nose. Here, too, rather than in the gaudy little chapel, where a fat, unshaven priest gabbled through Mass, she said her prayers. But also she was anxious to preclude a single jarring note in the day's harmony. And tolerant though Hans was, his strength to resist a flip of the tongue or the turn of a witty phrase was not to be trusted.

On this balcony, which just held a couple of chairs and a small table ("A good job we're both on the lean side!") and at any abrupt or violent movement creaked ominously, they drank their morning coffee and made plans for the day. In the course of which they explored soft pine-needled paths, gathered bilberries and wild strawberries, or sat before mugs of ice-cold beer in a wayside inn. Or, as she grew stronger, climbed the lower heights and, stretching themselves on the sun-dried turf, looked down on the valleys and forests below. Then home, hungry as wolves, to nights in which even Hans knew what it was to sleep the night through, his poor, overstrung nerves loosed from their strain, the pricks and stings of his thorny life forgotten.

For on agreeing to accompany her he had stipulated: "But, remember, not a note of music! Or even a word *about* music. I feel as if I never want to hear it or hear of it again."

And so their talk, as they went, was of the pleasant desultory kind that best suits a long day's ramble: how to find the way, the nature of the road, the view, the chances of a meal, and so on.

But all this was too good to last. Before July was half over, poor Hans' attempt at holiday-making fell through. Or, in his own words, "a higher power laid a veto on it,"

frowned on his presuming to think that for a *few* days in the year, every musical galley-slave had the right to slip his chains. But it was Father Liszt who issued the summons, calling on him to take part in the *Tonkunstlerversammlung* to be held at Weimar early in August. And there were reasons why it was impossible for Hans to refuse.

None the less, his first reaction was a violent: "I shall *not* go, I shouldn't dream of going!" the letter flying from his hold and landing in the honey-dish.

Cosette retrieved it; but made no answer.

"Well? . . . why don't you speak? Can't you see what folly it would be to cut my stay here short? When I've just begun to feel the benefit of it?"

"Well . . . yes. Though frankly, I don't see how you can get out of going."

At this the veins in his forehead swelled. "Oh, I know, I know, my dear, and it's *quite* in orderl When your father and his wishes are in question, no one else counts a fig!"

"Oh, Hans . . . *please.* But—"

And the "buts" had it. As he knew they would, they must. For, in addition to the honour done him, which was no mean one, this Festival formed the close, the climax, the grand Amen to Father Liszt's all but twenty-year-old connexion with Weimar. Thereafter, the *Altenburg* would know him no more. For over twelve months now the Princess had sat in Rome, employed in what Hans called "bullying His Holiness" into dissolving her marriage. Now, this end achieved, it remained only for the Master to rejoin her and be made one with her.

Yes, go Hans had to, no matter what it cost him, how loudly he groaned. And with a sigh Cosette resumed her wifely task of greasing the wheels. It must surely, she urged, be *some* compensation that he was singled out conduct the *Faust* Symphony, his favourite among t

works. Besides, was there not a meeting with Wagner to look forward to?—the latter having at last, except for Saxony, been made free of his native land. But she might have spared her breath. The lamentos continued without a pause, Hans not being one who could say his say and have done with it. Instead, in the week that was left, he tore his grievance to shreds; tried it out as it were in all the keys. And a joking reminder, how he had once described this weakness of his as an inborn leaning towards *Themes with Variations,* fell very flat. Brought him back, by such twisted ways as only Hans could follow, to the moot topic of her daughterly nepotism.

Peace and pleasure were things of the past. He spent his mornings at the counter of the little post-office, his afternoons over letters, letters unending. For his second day's conducting was to consist of a manuscript-programme, the drawing-up of which called for tact and care, several of the unperformed being his personal friends. Then, his choice duly approved by the authorities, there were orchestral parts to get hold of and go through, dates to fix for rehearsals with the orchestra, besides what he called "preliminary rehearsals with himself" (for it was his habit to get every work he performed by heart) notifications and invitations to scatter broadcast.—Till one's head swam; and mountains and forests ceased to be.

When the train finally bore him off—there could be no return for him, his work in Berlin beginning in mid-August —Cosette fell back into the surrounding stillness with a relief that was almost physical. Among the hundreds of words said had been many expressions of regret, genuine regret, at the loneliness to which she was being left. Had he dreamed, said Hans, of anything like this happening, he would never have brought her so far away. At the time, **and even** while she was faithfully promising not to omit

one glass of the prescribed milk, Cosette had felt herself smiling inwardly. Now, there was no further need for pretence. Lonely? . . . she? Why, there were times when she felt that silence was the most precious thing in the world. And she sank into it as into a magic pool, letting it close up, round, over her.

Hence, on hearing that not only Blandine and her husband were on their way from Weimar to visit her, but that Wagner, bound for Vienna, would also be of the party, she had a moment of real dismay. In her joy at seeing her sister again even this sister's husband could claim a share. But Wagner! Fresh from Paris and the Paris disaster; without a doubt morose, embittered (as how could he help being?) and burning to pour his woes into every new ear —no! the prospect was unthinkable. To have to listen to the story all over again; see cut up, by cantankerous complaints, her long, lovely days over a book; or those restful evenings on the balcony when, chin in hand, she sat and watched the rosy tints of the afterglow fade to night, through silver and grey.

Never, however, had she been more pleasantly mistaken. The Wagner who, early one morning, confronted her on the sandy platform was a very different person. Of ill humour or embitteredness not a trace. On the contrary, of the three who clambered down from the train amid jest and laughter—they seemed to have laughed the whole way from Weimar!—Wagner was the gayest, the most unruly. As they followed their barrowful of luggage to their lodgings, he bantered and twitted without a break, joking about everything . . . and nothing. And when, travelling-bags deposited, toilets adjusted, they set out in search of refreshment, what must he do but take Blandine on one arm, her, Cosette, on the other, and in this embarrassing

fashion (for both had to bend towards him) parade them down the village street. Relating meanwhile at the top of his voice, in his broad Saxon speech, the overnight effects on the party of the good Munich beer.

"That we found the train at all was a mere matter of luck. And ask our little Madame here who it was who slept as her head touched the cushions!"

His raillery disconcerted Cosette. And to Blandine's silvery laughter, and his own throaty chuckles, she could add but a somewhat forced smile. She felt that she walked a stranger between two who were already fast friends.

That evening she sat long on her balcony. For, after sending her usual good-night kiss to her child, and loving wishes to poor Hans, she found her thoughts straying back to Wagner—his astounding elasticity, his elephantine humour. Plainly, there were to be no tedious reiterations of his misfortunes. For him (lucky man!) what was over was done with. The few references he made to the *Tannhduser* scandal were as waggish as the rest: though perhaps, because of his French hearers, a trifle more circumspect. At any rate, he spoke airily of it as an *i* 'adventure," and one that might even prove of service to him in the end, by casting a halo round the whole absurd affair. His talk turned mainly on the future. Of Karlsruhe, where his dear good Hans had tilled the ground, he had great hopes; was still more sanguine of Vienna—though Hans inclined to think this just another "grand Wagnerian delusion." Still, what if it were? It was surely better to look forward, trust in one's star, than for ever to be crying over spilt milk?

"Of course," she reminded herself, "one reason he's like this is that there's no Minna here, to throw cold water on him."

And now it occurred to her that she was seeing Wagner

for the first time when—how should she put it?—when he wasn't being henpecked or ... or bothered by a woman. By women. For there was no Madame Mathilde either, to . . . again she hesitated. What exactly *had* been the effect on him of that charming young person? And was it, too, over and done with?

But here with a frown she pulled herself up. What was she thinking of? What had Wagner and his behaviour to do with her? What did matter was the reunion with her sister, after their three-years' separation: the joy of picking up threads and finding them intact. The difficulty was, to get enough of each other. On walks they would always find themselves dropping behind. Or they slipped out to the balcony; or shut themselves up in Blandine's room, the door locked against intrusion and interruption.

Here, sitting on the bed, their hands clasped round their hunched knees, they talked and talked. Characteristically avoiding all reference to Daniel's death; and shying off any but the most casual allusions to their married lives.

It was into their childhood and early girlhood they delved, a time when every new experience had been shared between them. And now it was do-you-remember here and have-you-forgotten there, each vying with the other in fishing up incidents from the days when they were little girls together. And over some of these they laughed till they cried. The black-kid gloves bought three sizes too big for hands that refused to grow; the garments built strictly on the lines of those worn by their aged duenna; the edict that forbade their backs ever to touch the back of a chair. Or the distorted ideas of propriety: the questions that must not be put; the words and sentences, even whole pages blacked out in the few harmless novels allowed them. Or Cosette's difficulty in scraping together enough little sins to take to her first confessions.

Again and again their laughter rang out, Blandine's high sweet treble carrying far beyond the closed door.

At which, presently, there came an unmannerly battering,

"Here I say, you two, what are you up to in there? Open the door and let me in!" And Wagner, awake from his afternoon nap, and heartily tired of his own and his companion's company, continued to knock and to rattle the handle till the key turned and he could enter.

Straddling a chair, his arms folded over its back, his big chin dumped on them, he eyed with approval the two flushed, animated faces, the coronets of fair and golden hair. Meanwhile grumbling jocosely: "This will not do. Here am I, the most unlucky, the most hard-done-by man in Europe, than whom nobody more needs cheerful society, and yet you two young women selfishly shut yourselves up and enjoy your jokes in private."

"But, dear Master, we believed you asleep and forgetful of your caresI" from Blandine, with a flash of her fine teeth.

"Asleep? In this parrot-house?—Well, the least you can do is to let me into the secret. Now then, what's all the fun about?" And Blandine merely continuing to laugh, in teasing, provocative fashion, he turned to Cosette.

But once again Cosette felt so out of it that she could not even conjure up a smile. And with a whimsical lift of the brows, he reverted to her more affable sister.

"Well, here's another question. Why, as soon as I appear on the scene, does our good Cosima shut up like an oyster? Yet when I'm safely out of the way, it seems she can be as lively as any of us."

At this Cosette flushed, tried to defend herself, stumbled, got into a tangle. Blandine (with what enviable ease!) came to the rescue.

"Why *should*'she laugh, if she isn't amused? One doesn't!"

"Oh, well, of course, if you put it that way. But never

mind, never mind," seeing Cosette's discomfiture. And good-naturedly: "My dear, if it's any satisfaction to you to know it, you're not alone in your opinion. There are plenty of others who write me down a mere tomfool.—But now, girls, listen, and I'll *tell you* something. I intend to adopt the pair of you. Yes!—I've quite made up my mind. Your own father doesn't want you, never has. Doesn't appreciate his luck in possessing two such charming daughters. While a poor lonely old fellow like me . . . So, from now on, I will be your *lieber "Papa.* And then, my dears, it will be your duty to divert me when I need diversion. And to have no secrets from me!"

His air of finality was droll in the extreme. Cosette could not help joining in the laugh; though not with Mionny's gusto. For even this silly joke seemed to carry a sting in its tail. Need he treat them quite so much as children? As unworthy of a single serious word? *She* knew how very differently he could behave to a person . . . a woman . . . he respected.

But Blandine had tossed back: "Dear Master . . . this entrancing prospect! But what of the other two people concerned? They may have something to say."

"Your husbands? Pooh! Frankly, I don't know what you young damsels are doing with husbands at all.—Besides, they don't appreciate you either. *Or* need you." And at the fresh outcry this provoked: "You don't believe me? Well, you'll perhaps take your sainted father's word for it? Did he not say—you, Blandine, will bear me out." And turning to Cosette: "It was in Weimar, and we were all engaged in singing the absent Hans' praises: the fire, the precision, the depth of his readings, his inimitable memory—the fellow has the whole bag of tricks at his disposal!—not to speak of his brilliancy with his pen. Whereupon I, the lame dog of the party, humbly ventured

the opinion that, with so much to his credit, he would hardly have needed to marry Miss Cosima Liszt. To which your good Papa made answer: 'That was a luxury.' Yes, his very words.—But Good LordI What's the matter?"

For Cosette had gone as red as fire. And springing to her feet she ran out of the room.

And out of the house as well . . . with Wagner in it.

The story was not new to her. As told by Blandine it had merely raised a smile at her father's neat retort. But on Wagner's lips the phrase bit like mustard. Was an affront, and was meant to be; summed up the deep, underlying contempt she had felt through all his random talk. So this was what they—what he thought? That Hans would have got on just as well without her. That she was merely a kind of decorative appendage.—Hans ought to have been there to hear them say it. He would soon have put them right. For he was never tired of telling her what a help she was to him; sometimes even going so far as to declare that, without her, he'd only be *half the* man he was. "He wouldn't have needed to marry Cosima," indeed!—

Meanwhile Wagner was demanding perplexedly: "But what have I done? What did I say to ruffle her?" And since Blandine only smiled, shrugged, and turned her pretty, ringed hands outwards: "Tell me, my dear, why is Cosima so . . . so——"

"So what, Master?"

"Well. So . . . so distrustful, so everlastingly on the defensive. Mind you, I'm not belittling her. She's Liszt's daughter right enough. Has written me letters, in Hans' stead, that couldn't be bettered. Yes, yes, full of fine phrases. But if one wants to get near her, or have a little joke with her . . . why, you might as well try to catch a -bird with your naked hand."

"Oh, you mean shy, elusive?"

"Like a creature unused to human contacts."

"A wild man of the woods. Or Crusoe's Friday. Oh, Master I" It was no use, Blandine was off again, her lovely laughter bubbling over at the picture of Cosette in such a role.

Wagner left for Vienna early next morning. And his luggage carried down, various forgotten articles collected, a general search made for a lost umbrella, they stood round him in the hall, waiting for the coach. He was in high spirits; kept up to the end his merry give-and-take with Blandine. Cosette held aloof. She was glad to see him go. To learn that she had been discussed behind her back (and so offensively) was the finishing touch. But what else could you expect? He had no manners. And, to her mind, very little character either. Look at him now, and think of the last time she'd seen himl On the platform at Zurich that was, when poor Hans had wept so copiously, believing it to be the end of everything for Wagner. And lo! instead of an irreparable disaster, it had proved but a temporary inconvenience: his chameleonic nature had absorbed it and recovered from it.

How fixed her stare had grown over these and similar thoughts, she did not realise till he turned and caught her. Then up rushed the blood again (there seemed no hindering that.) But this time she fought the impulse to drop her eyes, break the contact. And succeeded, too; it was he who had to let go. For his peasant-hosts had come forward, and were wiping their right hands on coat and skirt preparatory to shaking and being shaken. And so braced was she by her little victory that she could look on with a mild amusement at his flutteriness over the coach's non-arrival; his fidgety re-examining of the locks

on his tin trunk; the slapping of his pockets to make sure of his keys; the counting over, for the dozenth time, of his loose, odd-shaped packages.—Really, for fuss and agitation as a traveller, there was nothing to choose between him and Hans.

## VII

BACK in Berlin, however, with real things to occupy her, she rather shamefacedly dismissed the whole thing from her mind. And would never have dreamed of mentioning it, had Wagner not brought it up. Besides, poor Hans was ill for weeks on reaching home. Rheumatism inflamed his joints, neuralgia sent its knives darting through his head. And *her* jumbled feelings would have had small interest for him, who lay roundly cursing his fate. But let Wagner say a word, and his curiosity was at once astir. And from Vienna, in waiting for a "tired tenor to rest his vocal chords," the Master wrote: "Say what you will, I stick to my opinion, your Cosmus is a wild unruly child."

"What does he mean?" asked Hans, peering up at her from under his bandages. And then there was nothing for it but to explain.

But he found her oddly wordy, and cut her short. "Surely you didn't let a trifle like that annoy you? It would only be one of Richard's jokes. And joke he must. It's his way of being and showing that he's happy."

"Yes, at another person's expense. But he never considers anybody's feelings but his own."

"Nonsense! As for the other bit of it, I couldn't have believed you'd be so touchy. It's not like you. You're generally above such feminine weaknesses."

"Am I? I don't know. You see ..." And in Cosette plunged anew; even finding a certain satisfaction in picking Wagner to pieces (as he had picked her).

But Hans pshawed and tutted. "It's just the old story: you do not understand him. And never have. But at least

you can try to get used to him. For now the ban's lifted I hope and expect to see a very great deal of him. In fact I shall ask him to look on this house as his second home. So I'm afraid you must put your pride in your pocket."

Before she could answer, before Hans knew whether she was going to make difficulties or agree with him, he was waving her aside: "Oh, stop arguing, stop arguing!" For by now it was late in the day; and his enemy threatened its usual evening onslaught.

"All this silly talk's bringing on that accursed pain in my arm again; I suppose I'm in for *another* sleepless night. Oh, what's that damn fool of a doctor doing, not to give me a stronger draught? He doesn't know his job. Or understand my case. To-morrow I shall call in some one else.—No, I *won't* have another plaster on, I couldn't bear it, my skin's raw from the last. And, for Heaven's sake, take these bandages off—I must get my hands free. Look at them! Look at those fingers! Did you ever see such monstrosities? Shall I *ever* be able to use them again? If not, it's the end of everything.—Oh, God! don't say the child's going to begin now? If she screams as she did last night, I shall go out of my mind. And just listen to those feet! Will the fools upstairs *never* go to bed? No, it's too much—it's more than mortal can endure. If you can't keep the house quiet, I shall go raving mad!"

But the plaster was not to be shirked, the sleeping-draught had to be swallowed (and at its present strength, the doctor not daring, in the case of so nervy a patient, to prescribe a stronger dose); the child was teething, its poor little mouth red-hot, its protest as natural as his own; nor could the inhabitants of the flat above be expected to retire for the night at eight o'clock. On then with the plaster, amid groans and shrieks, down with the draught, a courteous

note sent to the people overhead: and, all this done, and Hans sunk in an uneasy sleep, for her, Cosette, an hour's ceaseless pacing with the heavy year-old child. Crooning the while, her cheek against the dark, downy head (so like Hans' own):

*O nous acheterons de bien belles doses,*
*En nous promenant le long des faubourgs,*
*Les bleuets sont bleus, les roses sont roses,*
*Les bleuets sont bleus, J aime mes amours.*

And finally a mouse-like creeping into her own bed, where she lay scarcely daring to breathe, much less to turn, for fear of recalling Hans to consciousness and pain.—

"A poor little Martha if ever there was one! Honestly, I don't believe there's another woman living who could have come through those weeks as you did."

By this time Hans had struggled to his feet again, and, though still not wholly free of bandages, was tottering about his work.

And to the Martha he soon after added Mary: "Martha and Mary in one!" For here came Liszt, on the eve of his departure "for Athens," of his marriage to the Princess, to pay them a last, last visit. And now, said Hans, there were "father's feet" for her to sit at.

Cosette smiled, and sighed. She would have asked nothing better. Just to sit and listen mutely to the loved one's voice.

But the reality was very different. "Talk to me, my daughter. Talk to me, *ma Cosette!"* was Liszt's continual cry. Which meant: distract me, release me from the burden of my thoughts. And proud as she was to respond, she found the task no light one. It meant the perilous skimming over a surface that must not be so much as scratched. Meant

**a guard** on one's every word, every tone: the keeping of one's voice dry and bare of sympathy. For on all that had happened to him, and was still to happen, Liszt maintained a frigid silence. And though her heart ached for him, Cosette understood and appreciated his reticence. Indeed, in this trait, felt herself truly his daughter; for she much preferred not to know what was going on in his mind.

However, for all that, they spent some delightful hours together.

Very early, and very cautiously, to avoid waking Hans: to avoid, too, a biting word; for, dear as Liszt was to him, she was dearer, and in spite of himself he chafed at her present absorption. (Particularly when, as the Protestant of the party, he was made to feel the outsider.) With due care then, she rose and crept out to accompany her father to the early Mass with which he unflaggingly began the day. And wonderful moments were those when, all else forgotten, she knelt by his side, praying with him and for him. There, the many barriers life had set up between her and this beloved being fell. Their souls *met* and mingled like two streams that by devious ways reach the same flood. Oh, *Gloria in excels is Deo!*

Coming back to earth, renewed and purified, neither was inclined to return at once to the house. Instead, they wandered arm-in-arm through the quiet streets, relishing the stillness, the tang of the crisp autumn air. Afterwards, as often as not ending up with the violent contrast of **a** visit to the fruit-market. Here Liszt, to whom the pleasures of the eye made a strong appeal, would stroll from stall to stall, revelling in the Breughel-like scenes, the gaudy skirts and kerchiefs of the peasants, the hues of flowers and fruits. Especially of the grapes which, at this season, were massed in incredible abundance on stalls, in tubs and barrows: green grapes round as marbles, or oblong and

of a dusky yellow; purple grapes heavy with bloom, or of a greenish-blue dashed with gold. Animated and at his ease, he exchanged pleasantries with the sellers, now and again popping a luscious berry into his mouth, or stooping to pat a child's flaxen head. And on the way home, this mood still holding, he would take off his hat and let the breeze ruffle his shoulder-long grey hair, his hard eyes softened, his large tense mouth relaxed.

On one such morning, he turned abruptly to her and said without preamble: "It is a very great happiness to me, my daughter, to know you so happy."

Cosette started. She had been enjoying the sound of her mother tongue, spoken without jerk or flaw. (For all Hans' fluency, one could never mistake the foreigner.) And so there was just the suspicion of a pause, space enough for a breath's intake, before she answered: "Oui, *mon pere."*

But neither her momentary hesitation nor the slight upward intonation was lost on Liszt's sensitive ear. He said again: "Yes, the assurance of your happiness makes up for much, child."

"Yes, my father." (How she loved the "child" on his lips!)

"You have the best of husbands, Cosette. And a sweet infant."

"Yes. Yes, father."

"Thank the good God daily for such blessings, my daughter; they are a woman's highest prize. Our dear Hans may not always be easy—if he were, he would not be the artist he is. But at heart he remains the staunchest, most honourable of men. I leave you with confidence in his hands—you whom I sometimes count the sole child left me. Your brother sleeps in his grave. Your sister . . . well, Blandine has come under other, and shall we say less favourable influences. But for you I have neither fears nor

regrets. I see you in your element, *ma Cosette,* For it lies in your power to give what a man stands most in need of, what only a woman *can* give—faith in himself."

To which Cosette once more replied: "Oui, *mon pere"*

But a fit of expansion such as this was not repeated; and, as the date of his departure approached, Liszt withdrew more and more into himself. Cosette relaxed none of her efforts to divert him ("You're the only one, Cos, who can still bring a smile to his face"); arranging the little whist-parties he loved, a special feast for her own "name-day," or wheedling him into escorting her to concert or theatre. But by now he was passing beyond even her reach.

The sight of his moral collapse infuriated Hans.

"Can it actually be that he *needs* that woman as a stimulus? Oh, horrible thought! Yet if *I* try to stir him by telling him of my plans for his glory, the only answer I get is, 'It doesn't matter, I can wait.' Wait! Franz Liszt *satisfied to* wait!"

Cosette declined discussion, and wept to herself in private. But on the last evening, as she sat alone with her father in the twilight, her feelings got the better of her discretion.

"Oh, why, *why* must all this be?"

For an instant the directness of the attack surprised Liszt. Then harshly he bade her be silent.

"For understand this: there is nothing to be said, nothing I can permit myself to hear." And more gently: "Unless it were, *Tul'as voulu, Georges Dandin!* Child! I have the debt of half a lifetime on my shoulders, and paid it must and shall be. God of His mercy will sustain me." But as he turned aside she caught the muttered words: "Myself, I don'tthinkI'llsurviveit."

Shaking off the sense of oppression, of numbness and helplessness, with which this visit had filled her, Cosette

turned almost gratefully back to the duties and tasks of everyday life. First came her child, who had been too long left to the servant's care. And by now the little Lulu was beginning, literally and figuratively, to find her feet; and also to make her tiny will felt. The time had come to show her that a superior will existed. To work, too, on her infant feelings by hinting at a possible withdrawal of affection, did she disobey or not try to please. To say kindly but firmly: "Mamma will not be able to love her little one if she soils her clothes, or persists in hammering the floor with her spoon." Or: "We shall have to tell Papa and see what *he* says, if she won't come out of her bath without crying, or eat up her gruel till she can see the *Kikeriki!"*—the cock-a-doodle-doo this, which adorned the bottom of the bowl. For it was not without anxiety that, as the months passed, Cosette watched her child's dawning character. Lulu was not only wilful, but capricious. And many a time instead of the tears of repentance that should have flowed, in answer to the patiently-repeated: "Are you good now, *ma petite?* Can *Maman* love her Lulu again?" Cosette had to see the little mouth tighten, the little nose crease, the small head shake rebelliously, while an impish twinkle lit the baby eyes. Lulu was *not* good, Lulu could do without Mamma.

Books on the upbringing of infants were of no use; their theories and generalisations never seemed to fit the case. She had just to grope her way alone. Hans refused to interfere: he was much too busy. Besides, this was a woman's job. All he did was occasionally to seize his little daughter and toss her sky-high: a game that elicited shrieks of pleasure, but merely over-excited an already excitable child. But then he had no understanding of children. Nor any great liking for them either.

Here, Cosette paused and wrinkled her brows. What

about herself? Was she so very different? Had she **ever** *really* pined for children, or felt that her life would be incomplete without them? Frankly, no: except in those first hours of wretchedness after Daniel's death. Of course, now the child was there, she loved it dearly. But the raptures she had anticipated before its birth had not materialised. She had never caught it to her in a passion of mother-love; or seen the whole world in two baby eyes. Nor was she aware of trembling for its safety when out of her sight. As long as she knew it in good hands, she could be happy away from it. Now, too, that it had outgrown the stage of a warm and comfortable bundle, and was asserting itself as an independent being, of a disposition very different from her own, her sense of responsibility towards it, nervous fears lest she should not do right by it, began to outweigh her softer feelings. And many an earnest prayer did she send up for guidance.

But the training of a child, however meticulous, did not fill one's life. Nor was it possible to exist for ever on the infant level. And various odd jobs done for Hans, letters docketed and filed, a vast mass of old concert-programmes turned out and re-arranged, Cosette went to her writing-table; where, she had to confess, the sight of pen and paper gave her a thrill the equal of any. Her work was nothing more high-flown than the translation of a friend's novel into French. But such as it was she enjoyed it; and left Hans' sarcasms unanswered.—Hans was restive at once, at seeing her so employed.

Not for long, though. In the course of that autumn what he called the unexpected, she the long-anticipated, came to pass. For close on ten years now, he had been before the public as a pianist, abused here, belauded there, but never getting his full due. Now, his luck turned; and in his first recital of the season he hit the bull's-eye. The audience, a

representative one, rose at him, and would not let him go. More astounding still, even the most recalcitrant of his critics knuckled under, sang his praises; not a single voice being raised *in* opposition. One had to forgive him if he grew a little dizzy over it.

In previous years when, the day after a concert, she saw him brandishing a newspaper, her heart had sunk. Well she knew what lay before her. For expostulate as she would: "Oh, why do you read them? How *can* you care what they say? You know it will all be forgotten by to-morrow." Or, in seeking to rally his spirit: "If you've pleased yourself, that's surely all that matters? Aren't you afraid that, by brooding over the holes they pick, you'll spoil your elan? . . . become too self-conscious?" But Hans couldn't see it in that light. A morbid curiosity impelled him; he must know what was being said of him. Besides: "Am I a *fish,* not to be rattled by that damned old Z.'s blasted impudence?" And: "Not to read their lucubrations, still more not to feel hit by them, would imply a self-assurance, a self-conceit even, that I for one don't possess!"—The result was, he would be incapacitated by his bile for the remainder of the day.

Now, in reading, he openly wiped his eyes.

"What a pressl It's sheerly incredible. Milk and honey are the only words for it. And to think of this happening when I was nearer than I've ever been to throwing up the sponge. I didn't tell you; but in private I'd begun to sound my chances for the vacancy at Schwerin."

Cosette slid her arm through his. "I see nothing incredible in it. You've beaten them at their own game, that's all."

"Yes, and I'll see to it that I keep them beaten."

Ahl here lay the snag: for one like Hans there could be no question of resting on his laurels. Two further soirees were to come. In both of which he was determined to

repeat, if not to outstrip, the success of the first.

Only perfection would do him. "I *dare* not play badly now." And during the next fortnight he sat for six hours a day at his piano, fining and re-fining. Often calling her in to see if he had achieved the requisite smoothness in the *Adagio* of Beethoven's no, with its fluctuations of tempo; whether his cantilene in the *Arioso* followed a natural voice-line; or to consult her on his reading of a composition by Liszt.

"For I still value your judgment more than anyone's."

A pet phrase of his at this time was: "My reputation has regularly grown over my head." Or: "At last, my day has come! I shall soon be the fashion, and able to do exactly as I like.—Look here! Even the *Gewandhdusler* have begun to nibble."

His classes at the Conservatorium overflowed; ever more invitations reached him from outside. By the end of the season it could happen that he was playing in five different towns in a week. For now Stern, too, was "eating from his hand."

The bestowal of a couple of orders gave him a tremendous inner satisfaction. Though he feigned indifference, and pushed his own feelings off on her. At one of the evening entertainments they were forced to give that autumn, she overheard him say: "It's the wife who fancies herself." And with a confidential smile: "You know what wives are."

Once, when he had watched her moving among their miscellaneous guests, a born hostess, instinctively finding the right word for each, he remarked: "This sort of thing's where *you* shine, Cos!" And, still on the bubble, he added: "To see you the whole evening looking as if you hadn't a care in the world, and to think of what you must have gone through beforehand, with only Marie to help you!"—But such a flash of discernment was rare. As a rule, Hans

**saw** nothing of what went on **around him;** was **blind and deaf** to any but his own affairs.

And never more so than now. When every day brought its fresh quota of excitement.—With the natural result that, by the time the musical year ended, he, too, was done. All these months he had existed solely on his nerves; now, they failed him; and the coming of spring, with its warm, enervating winds, its belated showers of sleet and snow, did the rest. Neuralgic and rheumatic aches sprouted anew; his spleen swelled; a severe inflammation of the eyes all but blinded him. Long before this, though, he was back at his old plaints: crying out that he was sick, sick, sick to the soul of the sound of a piano; totting up how many thousands of hours he had sat pinned to a chair, listening to pupils maltreat the keys. Moaning that, for him, life was plainly never to be anything but a soul-deadening struggle, without a single free moment in which to collect himself: that, indeed, this self of his, his real self, was fast disappearing from sight.

A complete change of air became imperative. And directly the Conservatorium shut its doors, they went to join Wagner in his villeggiatura at Biebrich on the Rhine.

## VIII

THEIR destination was Hans' choice; he would hear of no other. It was all but a year now since he and Wagner had met; and to him it seemed "more like ten than one." Besides, there were again several little misunderstandings to clear up. Absent in person the Master might be; but his spirit—in the shape of whims, moods, misfortunes and needs—never ceased to haunt them.

The first unpleasantness had arisen during the autumn. Weary of sitting in Vienna "listening to a tenor gargling," Wagner had proposed himself to them for a week's visit. Hans was overjoyed; and spread the good news far and wide. Unfortunately, the date chosen clashed with more than one of his engagements outside Berlin. And, on hearing that these could neither be cancelled nor altered, Wagner took the huff. Berlin without Hans had no attraction for him, he wrote: and with scarcely a word of regret went off in the opposite direction. To Venice. In the company, if report spoke true, of none other than Madame Mathilde—and her husband. (Now what in the name of seven devils! . . . from Hans.)

On this excursion, an old scheme of a dramatic comedy built round the shoemaker-poet, Hans Sachs, gripped the Master anew. And thereafter his one thought was to find the privacy and quiet in which to set to work on it. To be ready, too, for the musical ideas which, no sooner did he begin to write, would come tumbling out of the clouds. Why, even in the train, travelling back to Vienna, the ghostly outlines of an overture in C Major had begun to take shape before his astonished eyes.

His cry **was: 'I'm like a broody** hen**—or a woman about** to be delivered—I need a nest." But where to find it? "I'm on the rocks again for money; and not a single person comes forward with an offer of hospitality. Nobody likes me, nobody wants me. Oh, Hans, I'm sick of it, sick to death of every one and everything. I do believe that, if I disappeared from the world to-day, hardly a soul would trouble to inquire what had become of me."

Despairing equally of Vienna and a singer whom he now suspected of *quaking* before the role of *Tristan,* he snatched at a shadowy invitation and betook himself to Paris. There, finding that he had once again miscalculated his chances (in what he was frank enough to call "true Wagnerian fashion,") he had to make do with a cheap lodging in a small hotel. However, so ripe was his theme that not even this "unsavoury habitation" could damp his flow. And in a very few weeks he was able to trumpet the good tidings that his comedy-drama was written. To the last dot on the last i. Now for the musicl

But the pother over the writing was like a breeze to a hurricane when it came to finding a suitable place in which to compose. For this, he vowed, he *must have comfort:* his present surroundings would quite literally kill the child at birth. Nor could he afford to wait. Ideas were descending on him in such profusion that it was almost unsafe to quit the house. At any rate without a notebook. And to make the best of these themes and phrases, they had to be hammered out, shaped and welded, while hot.—But the several feelers, not to say barefaced proposals which he put forth bearing no fruit, he trampled on his inclinations and made an impassioned appeal to Hans. Could they, *would they* help him? Provide him with some quiet nook or corner where he might work undisturbed? All he wanted was a room to himself. Very little waiting on; and just a couple of light meals a day.

Hans tore his hair.

"Why, in God's name, must he *always* ask the impossible! —I suppose it *is* . . . er . . . impossible, Cos?"

"Hans!"

"Oh, yes, I know. Well, *you'll* have to write and tell him so. You've the pen, you can manage it . . . without giving mortal offence. I can't."

"It will surely be enough if I tell him the truth? Just how we're placed?"

For, in a flat that was scarcely big enough for their own needs, they were soon now going to have to find room for Hans' mother, forced by circumstances to make her home with them. As for "quiet," there was the thunder of the piano to be reckoned with, the presence of a fidgety, high-spirited child.

Even Wagner saw it wouldn't do.—At least they assumed he did, Cosette's letter receiving no reply. The next thing they heard was that, on the strength of his drama, he had contrived to screw an advance out of his publishers; and intended to settle for the summer at Biebrich on the Rhine.

But with this a fresh pother arose. No sooner arrived than he announced his intention of giving a reading of the *Meistersinger* to a circle of intimates and friends. Hans must straightway down tools and proceed to Biebrich; or half his pleasure would be gone.

Hans stamped and swore anew.

"Never a thought to anything but what *he* wants! Cos! I'm fast coming round to your opinion—that he's the most unreasonable of men, a hopeless, an incurable egoist."

For just as little as before could Hans afford to throw over engagements made long since, and painstakingly dovetailed into his crowded life. But it went very hard with him, again to have to say no. On Cosette's advice—she thinking it would carry most weight—he stressed the

monetary loss which an upset of his time-table would entail; **and** hinted at his increased responsibilities as the father of a family. Concluding his letter with an entreaty to Richard to stretch a point, fix a date that suited both, come to Berlin, and there give his reading.

At this, the fat was in the fire in earnest. They now got to hear of the grudge borne them for their refusal of his former offer of a visit. Also, how little Cosette's "unanswerable" arguments against his sharing their home had impressed him.

He thanked Hans for his suggestion. But when it was a case of so many doubts and scruples, when there was so much humming and hawing to be done before the least thing could be decided on, he greatly preferred to stay where he was, and to leave Berlin to its fate. "The truth is, I don't believe *anybody* can live for long in a German capital, without growing strangely weak-minded—I mean scatter-brained and tactless. . . • From now on, whoever wants me will have to go down on his knees to get me! . . . Why, even Cosmus seems to have grown quite tame."

As for his request from Paris, what he had thought was, that "merely for the sake of having me, the pair of you might have gone against your consciences and have spun some pretty yarn about all you were willing to do for me, did I come—even though afterwards things should turn out quite differently. . . . But God forbid! Nothing but prudence, caution, hesitation. No doubt you were right. But *I* thought—the devil take them!"

However, it was the same everywhere. "Wherever I turn, two outstretched hands, but with nothing in them . . . held, indeed, palms out to ward me off. Well, at least I know now where I stand. And the end of it all will be, I shall marry my wife again."

So, at the reading of the *Meistersinger*\ which duly took

place, the one old friend present was little Peter Cornelius; who, at the Master's word, came flying up through flood and storm from Vienna, arriving to the minute, and departing again early next day.

"The kind of prank I should once have said only Hans was capable of. . . • Now, my boy, Peter has become your rival. And a close one too! He's a fellow in a thousand . . . every bit as original in his way as you are in yours."

(Grown tame had she? He wouldn't have thought so had he known how wroth she felt at this sorry ruse, this mean attempt to play Peter off against Hans. And, by rousing Hans' jealousy, to tie him down more securely than before.)

Afterwards, of course, it leaked out that Wagner himself had paid a good share of Peter's expenses. Strange, indeed, how he could always find the wherewithal to satisfy a whim.

To help keep him in funds that winter had been a formidable task. (Sometimes, goaded beyond endurance, poor Hans would declare that money and money alone formed the ground-bass of their relations.) Never did what Wagner so airily called his "quarterly demands" fail to arrive. Which meant unending trouble for Hans, in collecting scattered and overdue *tantiemes.* Or in racking his brains whom he could next tap for a loan. On occasion he had even come to the rescue out of his own pocket. In Wagner's favour it had to be said that he paid his debts *when possible.* Again, that the money was chiefly required to keep the wolf from Minna's door.—Or so Cosette thought till she saw his own mode of living. For the villa in which he had rented rooms, carting his furniture all the way from Paris, stood in spacious grounds overlooking the Rhine, and was one of the largest and most imposing houses in the place.

To Biebrich then they hastened, directly term ended: Wagner's eagerness to clasp Hans to his heart equalling that

of Hans to be so clasped. She herself would have welcomed a more bracing atmosphere. It had been her turn not to feel well, to have headaches and the like. And the prospect of being exposed anew to Wagner's queerly upsetting influence was not attractive.

However, again a surprise was in store for her.

This time not even Blandine was present, to amuse him and flatter him. And the young woman, another Mathilde (how the name haunted him!) who, from under her mother's wing, watched over his bodily comfort, was both modest and retiring; and promptly made way for these friends of older standing. Hence for once she, Cosette, enjoyed the lion's share of his attention. And it did make a difference.

On their arrival they found the Master "undergoing the tortures of the damned"—in other words, sitting for his portrait. (At the wish of her whom Hans now christened "Mathilde the First.") And he all but fell over himself, in his joy at seeing them.

"Thank God, thank God you've come! I count on you to save me. To have to sit here, like a dummy or a mummy, and put up with what this imbecile's making of me! Surely to God, in my worst moments I've never looked anything like that?"—with a fling of the hand towards the easel.

But the artist, too, dripped despair. *His* sole job, he said, was to paint in one day and paint out the next.

"For every day he appears with another face!—As for getting him to keep still, you might as well try to paint a grasshopper in motion."

Said Hans: Cosette should take a book and read aloud to him while he sat. This would occupy his mind, divert it from what was happening. Besides she, with her sound artistic taste, might be able to give the floundering painter some useful hints.

Wagner submitted; if with a bad grace. "For I loathe being read *to!"* Still, if they thought it would help . . .

A volume of Goethe reached down from the shelf and thrust into her hand, Cosette obediently took her seat. Not before though, shocked at what she saw, she had persuaded the artist to content himself with a profile (in which, at least, the vast overhanging forehead, the hooked nose and jutting chin would be recognisable.) Then, with some diffidence, for she was unused to reading to people, she set about capturing and holding the Master's interest. (Afterwards, it seemed, Richard told Hans he had sometimes caught himself listening to the voice rather than to what was read.

"A very agreeable timbre. What's more, unlike most women, who are little better than parrots, our Cosmus follows what she reads.")

But to induce him to sit still was beyond her power. To this restless being, this bubbling little cauldron of energy, movement was as natural as breath. He could not even think without the aid of his muscles. Was he struck by a passage in *Tasso,* he must straightway comment on it: and this meant whipping round in his seat, with arm and finger outstretched to point his words. Or he would descant on, say, the difference between him and the poet-hero: "I'd always back myself to save my bacon with a joke. That's how I stop sane." And was childishly put out ("Plague *take* the thing!") at her cry of: "Oh, Master, your pose!" or the loud cluck of dismay that escaped the artist.

The latter's groans over the shifting expressions of this face were justified; didn't indeed go far enough. It changed not only from day to day, but from minute to minute: reflected each passing thought. Did a prolonged howl issue from the kennel of his friend, the house-dog, you saw the mouth tighten, the brows contract, the eyes grow dark

with the wonder: what are they doing to him now? Or at some unusual sound or stir in the quiet sandy road, a naive inquisitiveness would overspread it. While any pretext for a break was of course hailed with joy. Thus, on the artist inquiring if she would one day permit him to make a sketch of her hands, Wagner was up like a flash; and exclaiming: "Quite right, quite right, my boy, they're worth a dozen of this old phiz!" dragged her to the "seat of torture" and stood gleefully by, watching her sit, arms extended, fingers interlaced, in his stead.

At this she ventured to remonstrate with him. The portrait—it was in the nature of a return for many a generous gift and loan—*had* to be finished. By interrupting work on it, he was merely prolonging the agony. And he took the reproof in good part. Trotted meekly back to his seat with a: "Hey, ho, the wind and the rain!" There was really no *gyile* in him—that she began to see, thanks to this lengthy chance of watching and studying him. His chief failing was his over-impulsiveness. This it was that made him blurt out everything he thought and felt, with never a care for the feelings of others. Still, he was open to reason. For when she pointed out the mortification it would be for the struggling artist to have to admit failure, he was touched and penitent; and for a short time gave himself all pains to keep quiet.

In the course of these hours spent at such close quarters, she gradually lost her sense of awkwardness and malaise in his presence. Became able to shake a finger at him, or to rebuke him with a motherly: "Come, come!" (At moments, too, their eyes would meet in amusement at the painter's airs: the circlet of fingers peered through, the backward prance, the knowing angle of the head.) Also, the kindliness she had glimpsed in him over his treatment of Minna showed itself afresh. He never forgot to ask after

her headache.—And it was something new to have *her* ailments noticed.

On one occasion, he came over to her and clapped the book to.

"You look as if a feather would knock you down. Up and out with you, my dear, into the open air. I vow!"—two fingers held aloft—"not to quit the stool of repentance while you're gone."

Yes, on the whole this might have proved the most agreeable holiday yet spent in the Master's company . . . had it not been for Hans. There were moments when she blushed for Hans; so on edge was he. Far from being a relief to his nerves, Wagner was acting on them like an irritant. But then he hadn't allowed himself a single day's rest. By the time she arrived, twenty-four hours after him, he was hard at work copying the text of the *Meistersinger*. (Once, she would have blamed Wagner for this. Now, she was juster; saw that Hans burned to make himself indispensable; to recapture his place in Richard's heart.) So at this job, in the gruelling July heat, he toiled for eight hours a day, for five days on end. Sitting over it till the pen dropped from his paralysed fingers. Afterwards, of course, he wasn't fit to speak to. And even in front of others couldn't control himself.

"Ho, the pepper-pot!" And Wagner humorously pinched and shook the fleshy tip of his nose. The door had just banged behind Hans, in a taking over a mislaid notebook (eventually found in his pocket.) "Still . . . if he weren't, he wouldn't be what he is," the Master added consolingly. Reflecting to himself that there had been nothing of this sort before *she* came. Hans and he had sat cheek by jowl. Somehow or other the girl contrived to ruffle the lad, put his back up. All unawares, of course. And in spite of the **best** intentions.

Cosette knew what the matter was. Couldn't help knowing; for, alone with Hans in their hotel bedroom, she listened, morning and night, to the tale of his grievances, his outbursts of bitter discontent. Had to hear him ask himself, over and over again, what devil had ever possessed him to set foot in Biebrich. He might have known Richard only wanted to make use of him, get what he could out of him. "As individuals, we others scarcely exist for him." And in the same breath went on to flay himself for his unwillingness to be sacrificed. "When there's so little in one worth whining over!"

"Those songs of mine?—yes, they're here, in proof, and I ought to be revising them—and can't even bring myself to cut the string of the packet. For I know beforehand how they'll strike me. As so trivial, so amateurish that they'll sap the little courage I've got left. And the end of it will be, I shall pitch them in the fire without looking at them.—No, it's no good your talking. Wagner for one's neighbour, and one sees oneself for what one really is."

Cosette had made no move to interrupt: she knew better. She just sat there, with her elbow on the sill of the open window, her chin in her hand, and looked across the great swiftly-flowing river to the green, vine-carpeted hills on the opposite bank. She was long past the stage of casting things up at Hans. And every rational word she might have said would somehow be wrong. If she tried to talk sense to him, the storm would merely shift its centre. To sympathise or console, and he would leap to the conclusion that she was a partner to his doubts and despair. So, there was nothing for it but silence. Though even silence, when *she* kept it, had the power to sting.

The reason for this particular bout of dejection was plain: a closer acquaintance with the poem of the *Meistersinger* had been too much for Hans. He had not only had the copying

of it: **the** day before, Wagner had got together a handful of people and given them a reading of the entire work. One of his inimitable readings: in which, born actor that he was, he brought each scene to life, made each character take on flesh; his voice so capable of modulation that, even amid the liveliest hubbub, he did not need to put a name to the parts. His hearers had sat entranced, not only by his virtuosity, but by the humour and beauty of this masterpiece—dashed off at white heat in little over a month. Its sturdy German humour, too; for here was neither Braganz nor Cornwall, nor any other outlandish region. This was the ancient little town of Nuremberg, with its peaked houses and twisted streets, its lilac-drenched gardens, and the quaint personages that inhabited them: one and all dowered with a life that far outstripped reality.

Its effect on Hans was not to be wondered at. She herself had been quite carried away: had laughed with Wagner and shed tears with him, knotting her handkerchief to a ball between her fingers. And the great final apostrophe spoken, she found herself throwing reserve to the winds and crying: "I think you're an almost greater poet than a musician, Master! . . . if such a thing were possible." (The last words added in response to a warning glance from Hans, always on the watch to defend Richard's feelings from hurt.)

But Wagner was not displeased—far from it.

"Come now, that's worth hearing!"—as he wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead. "That's the kind of thing I *want* to hear. And you, my dear, are the first to say it." (Which brought her a second queer look from Hans, which was harder to understand.)

Just as on that other, long-past evening when the Master first read *Tristan* to them, she felt herself better able to breathe, without the music. So, one could keep one's wits

about one, extract the last drop of meaning from what was read. Whereas, under the rocking tumult of his strange, nerve-shattering harmonies . . . well, somehow, one's sole thought then was of flight.—However, in the various musical sittings that followed, no undue demands were made on her emotions. What Hans played to them—from rough pencil-sketches—of the first act of the *Meistersinger*, did not go deep enough to hurt. Wagner's own singing of *Wotans Abschied* merely made one wish he wouldn't. And when two great opera-singers arrived, to be initiated into the complexities of *Tristan*, the many breaks and interruptions, the Master's illustrations of what he wanted, effectively kept any nervous agitation at bay.

Despite his despondency, Hans did not dream of stinting with himself. In days like these he was seldom off the piano-stool. And at the end not at all. For towards the close of July Wagner received an injury to his right hand, which prevented him from touching the keys.

Ever since settling in Biefcrich, he had taken the fate of his landlord's watch-dog passionately to heart. This unfortunate animal lay day and night on the chain: lay unnoticed, uncared-for, unloved. For hours at a time it might be seen stretched on the bare earth; or heard tossing, devoured by vermin, in its unsavoury kennel. Wagner frothed with rage; could not sleep at night for thinking of it; and note after note did he indite to its master, expostulating, explaining: a dog wasn't a block of wood; but a sentient creature, needing both love and companionship. To no purpose: the owner would neither part with the animal nor amend his treatment of it. But Wagner was not to be done. Accepting, with gusto, the notice to leave with which the quarrel ended, he continued to loose the beast from its chain, take it upstairs to his room and feed it. Finally, of his charity, proposed to rid the poor beast

of its vermin by giving it a bath. Whereupon Leo, who had never since his birth been washed or combed, took fright, turned on his benefactor, and bit him in the thumb.

At first Wagner made light of the injury, and loyally defended the dog. The wound, however, beginning to throb and swell, it became necessary to call in a doctor, who applied leeches and a powerful ointment, put the hand in a sling, and forbade all and any use of it.

Hans was beside himself.

"Just *think* what this means I . . . with him only half way through the first act. Schott's like a cat on hot bricks already; and will certainly refuse a further advance. And what then? Where's the money for next winter to come from? Not from me! I've tapped every Jew-man I've ever heard of. As for Vienna, why, *even* Richard's beginning to see how fishy things look there.—God! is there no one who can hinder him from making such a blasted fool of himself?"

Cosette demurred. "He did it out of kindness."

"My dear good woman, a Richard Wagner has no *business* to be kind!"

"But if you're born with humane feelings?"

"Humane tommyrot! What's a dog—what's the whole race of dogs compared with a single line of his work?"

Cosette felt unaccountably annoyed. "You don't care for animals yourself, and so you're not a fair judge—of some one who does."

"Well! it's the first time I ever heard *you* stand up for them. But it seems you can be just as irrational as any other woman.—I tell you this, though: we shall all have to pay for it."

And he was right: a Wagner wrenched from his work, unable to put so much as a dot or a note's tail to paper,

was a very different man from the one who had sat down each morning at his writing-table, simmering with content. He meandered about, distracted and distracting, vehemently questioning the good of existence. The portrait had to be shelved; for who could paint a face so determinedly set in creases, or disfigured by an irritability that broke out a dozen times an hour. Varied only by fits of rage that made one tremble (just as his music did) and hurry out of hearing.

In his defence, Cosette told herself that those about him didn't know how to handle him. Had she been alone with him, she believed she might have done something to ward off the paroxysms, flatten the nervous crease between his brows. Hans taunted her with being a woman. Well, this seemed to her essentially a woman's job. Men, even the best of them, had little tact. Here, they either attempted to reason with Wagner; or they took offence at his rudeness; or, worse still, cowered before him. When what he really needed was to be *comforted.*

Of course, at moments the sun did break through: and, oh dear, how one appreciated these blinks! (One felt almost grateful for them.) Then, all alike conspired to keep his humour at set fair. Excursions were made to noted beauty spots and other places in the neighbourhood, sometimes with success, sometimes without. They heard a performance of *Lohengrin* at Wiesbaden (one of the failures, this.) They tried their luck at the tables there. Or they rowed out of an evening on the vast river, in which the lights from the banks ran down like live and wriggling snakes; while the two singers sent their voices over the water in the Steersman's Song or the Love Duet.

For the most part, though—and even after he was able to make a limited use of his hand again; for by now

the desperate straits he was in for money were beginning to tell on him—Wagner remained what he called "sad, sad, and heavy at heart." A sadness too often, alas! shot through by a desire to visit his sufferings on others. Thus, he omitted none of his attentions to the dog; *partly*', Cosette thought, for the sake of keeping those about him in a twitter. It amused him to scare them. And then their continual fussing and fiddling over him got on his nerves. Many and many a time she would have liked to say (especially to Hans, the worst sinner): "Do just let him be. That's not the way to take him."

Whether or no she knew a better, she unexpectedly had a chance to prove.

It was towards the close of their stay; at Frankfurt, where they had gone for the night. In the wake of the others Wagner and she were crossing the square to their hotel, when they came on an empty wheelbarrow, left standing by some workmen. The Master had been in low spirits all day; and the opportunity to put some one out of countenance was plainly too good to miss. For, with a mischievous, even spiteful chuckle, he suddenly turned to her and said: "I'll wager you're not game to sit in this and let me wheel you up to the hotel in it! Eh? The gracious lady, the *Freifrau von Bulow*, arrives in her barouche, with Wilhelm Richard Wagner as jehu!"

For a second, before a picture of faces stiff as cardboard with disapproval, Cosette hesitated. Then, with a toss of the chin, she smiled back at him and said lightly: "But of course I am! Why not?" And with her open parasol in one hand, with the other bunching her full skirts to her, she made as if to take her seat.

Wagner gave a kind of gasp . . • and simultaneously took a quick step forward to prevent her. Then, his hat shoved back, his legs apart, he stood and roared with

laughter: the jovial, full-throated laugh they had heard so seldom of late.

"Upon my soul, I believe you would!—Ahl you had me there, my dear, you had me there."

He took her arm, he squeezed it; he applauded her, ragged himself. And, both still laughing—for his fun was infectious—they continued on their way.

## IX

TO make merry, share laughter with another, left one with a warm, companionable feeling: however far removed this other might be. Besides, a little frank nonsense did one good. In her life with Hans, there was no time for levity. (When had *they* two laughed together last?) Nor was Hans given to wasting his wit—the scintillating, verbal wit, the quips and twists and puns with which he amused his friends and stabbed his enemies—on his home. So it was not unnatural that she should enjoy recalling a moment's fun. What *was* strange was that the very next time she and Wagner met, two months later, much the same thing happened. Again his sense of humour got the better of him; again she caught the infection. Though on this occasion tears would have been more in place. For she was clad anew in heavy mourning; and he saw still another forlorn hope fizzle out under his eyes. And yet they laughed: how they laughed!

Hans and she had only just got back to Berlin, when the news of Blandine's grave illness reached them. Followed, a couple of days after, by the announcement of her death. But this was no surprise to Cosette; she was prepared for it, knew it in advance. The previous night she had had one of her extraordinary—Hans called them "ghoulish"—dreams. Wakened from sleep by the opening of the door, she had seen her sister enter the room and glide towards the bed. This time, there was nothing horrid in the sight; and, except for the stealthiness of the movement, nothing unnatural. It was Blandine herself as she lived and moved:

so real, so deceptively lifelike, that for a moment Cosette's awareness of distance and separation was blotted out.

"Mionny!—*-you?* Oh, what is it? What's the matter?"

But the figure did not reply. Just smiled—Blandine's unforgettable, dimpling smile—and slowly shook its head.

"And your baby?"—from Cosette, whose heart had begun to thump.

For answer, the folds of a heavy cloak were drawn aside, showing an infant nestled in the crook of the arm. And, with that, darkness again . . . and emptiness.

In her fright she woke Hans, who pacified, scolded, pooh-poohed: it was merely a dream, a vivid dream, bred of her anxiety. An attitude he was stiffened in by the morning's news that the month-old baby lived and throve. But Cosette's belief that she had actually *seen* and spoken to her sister was not to be shaken. For one thing: on a finger of the hand that raised the cloak, she had observed a ring set with emeralds, which was unfamiliar to her. And this ring, they afterwards learned, had been a gift to Blandine from her husband on the child's birth.—A fact that nonplussed even Hans.

But, though he would have no traffic with the supernatural, he was profoundly moved by Blandine's untimely death: this "callous annihilation" of one so young, so instinct with vitality. And when he saw how Cosette's heart ached for her old and crippled grandmother, now left comfortless, it was he who suggested her journeying to Paris and taking the little Lulu with her. And this was a real sacrifice on his part; for he hated nothing more than an empty house.

Once back in the familiar place that still stood to her for "home," Cosette found herself haunted by thoughts of escape. Blandine lost to her, her whole inclination was

to remain with those who had best known and loved her sister. Her grandmother, too, besought her; Blandine's husband having generously offered to let her bring up Blandine's child. Now Hans had already made something of a name for himself in Paris: why should he not cut himself free from the "grey town" of the long, long streets, and try his fortunes anew? His soul quailed visibly before the coming winter in Berlin.

And for a while Hans himself toyed with the idea, which had much to recommend it. Then (she not being there to stiffen him) he began to waver, to see the other side; and finally, unable to make up his mind, wrote off for Father Liszt's advice and approval. And that was the end of it. This time Liszt not merely disapproved, he crushed the scheme with iron hoofs; his reasons, they were many and practical, amounting in sum to this: he would never consent to the husband of his daughter turning vagrant, becoming the musical vagabond of his own early years. Hans was under considerable obligation to the Prussian Court, as well as to the fine old name he bore. He must prove himself a man of character, whose word could be relied on.—The ancient thrust this, which always brought Hans to his knees.

"When have I ever failed to live up to my word!"

So once more Cosette put her own wishes and feelings aside, and, with such spirit as she could muster, went back to what Liszt pointed to as a wife's proper place. And, to begin with, Hans was both tender and considerate: held his moods in leash, nipped his sarcasms, let prayers and church-goings pass without comment. Nor did he demur at the money laid out on masses for the repose of Blandine's imperishable soul; or draw blasphemous comparisons with the provender supplied to their departed by the heathen. And when the date came for the concert in Leipzig at which

he was to meet Wagner, he tried to divert Cosette's mind by taking her with him.

This concert had been got up by a well-to-do young man of the Biebrich days, known among them as the "famulus." Partly for his own benefit, he, too, being a composer of sorts, partly for Wagner. For Wagner was on his beam ends again: in debt all round, borrowing freely and promiscuously, with hardly enough in his pocket to cover his railway-fare. Work on the *Meistersinger-* was shelved, his tenor pasted up once more as "indisposed," a web of intrigue threatening to smother the last slender chance of a performance of *Tristan* in Vienna. Nothing remained but for him to set out anew on a weary round of concert-giving; and in Leipzig he was to conduct excerpts from his published works, and give a first performance of the overture to the *Meistersinger.*

These trials had left their mark on him. Unobserved, Cosette watched him enter the *Gewandhaus* and stand for a moment at the back of the hall, holding his hat to him, and gazing moodily and with distaste at the familiar scene. He was pale and drawn-looking, his eyes, too, were pale, and the creases between his brows might have been cut in by a knife. (This is how he'll always look, she thought, when he's a really old man.) But at sight of her, sitting by herself, in her heavy mourning, his face did one of its lightning changes. The frown faded, the pinched mouth relaxed. And as he came hurrying over to her, knocking the chairs apart in his eagerness, it was quick with pity and sympathy.

He seized her hands, murmured: "Poor child . . . my poor child!" twisted a chair out of its row that he might confront her, and sitting down fell to putting straight and searching questions about Blandine's end. Ejaculating as he listened: "Incredible! Atrocious!" "Is it possible?"

"Plainly, an utter lack of proper medical attention!"—things which Cosette had hardly dared to *think*. And did he feel that he had gone too far, he would lean forward and stroke her hand. Or he brought out his handkerchief and used it on his eyes: "To have to tell oneself that such a vivid creature as Blandine is no more!"—Until Cosette found herself speaking more freely of her loss than she had yet been able to . . . even to Hans.

But meanwhile the hands of the clock had gone forward, had reached the hour; it was time, it was past time for the performance to begin; but where, oh, where was the audience? Wagner turned for a survey; shot up his eyebrows, primed his lips to a soundless whistle—and looked meaningly back at her. In this pleasant old hall, capable of accommodating all the musical cream of Leipzig, a bare thirty or forty people had taken their seats. Cosette and he had an entire side of it to themselves. In the centre sat the concert-giver's fiancee with a handful of friends, far off to the right a small group of Wagner's relations; while scattered here and there, thin as the first stars at dusk, were some dozen followers and admirers from other towns. But that was virtually all. Of the natives, the Master's fellow-countrymen, hardly one showed as much as the tip of his nose. Line after line of chairs stretched empty, bare of a single occupant.

It was too much for Wagner.

"I've never seen anything like it! It's positively Hoffmanesque."

With this he began to chuckle, to laugh to himself under his breath, but so contagiously that he soon had her laughing, too. And, once off, they could not stop; and every trivial incident convulsed them anew. The shocked faces that peered from the green-room door; Hans' face as he mounted the podium: his goggling eyes, the aghast, semi-

humorous look he telegraphed them: his marvellous playing of Liszt's new concerto—to the air, the walls, the lines of empty chairs ("Let's only hope *they've* enjoyed it!" from Wagner) the sheerly unbelievable compositions fathered by the concert-giver. Nor did the long faces turned towards them by Wagner's disgruntled relatives, or the angry looks of the composer's friends subdue them. By now they were helplessly a-giggle, might have been boy and girl once more, their sides a-shake, their eyes running water.—Before his own appearance on the platform, Wagner had to spend some time in the green-room, getting the muscles of his face under control.

The limpid C major, the monumental harmonies of the Overture had a calming effect on Cosette: if calm it could be called to find her eyes wet with tears of another kind. And the concert at an end she exerted herself, with what Hans styled "all her Frenchy tact," to gloss over their irresponsible behaviour. But contrite she was not. For the space of a blessed hour she had forgotten her grief, Wagner the failure of one more friendly effort to avert disaster.

They took leave of him that night, not expecting to see him again; then ran into him by chance in the street next morning. It was bitingly cold; a fine, icy rain fell that pricked the face like needles. The Master was pale and hunted-looking, stamped his feet for warmth as he stood, seemed restless to be gone. On parting, Hans turned to swing his hat, she to wave her hand. But Wagner did not look back. The little figure went scuttling down the street, his "robber's hat" jammed deep on his forehead, the skirts of his greatcoat flying. And as he whisked round a corner and was lost to view, Cosette had the sudden feeling that, with him, went more than the mere sight and sound of him. It was as if something vital, a kind of spiritual warmth, was being withdrawn from them , . . from her; leaving her

destitute, and doubly conscious of the bleak November air, the fine, dispiriting rain.

The months that followed were among the unhappiest she had known. To get through them, without flinching, she had to summon all the pride she possessed to her aid. And her condition told against her. For there was now another child on the way, another—no, she would not let the "unwanted" cross her lips. Whatever happened, she would love and cherish the new-comer. But the elation of her first pregnancy was not repeated. By now she knew just how much . . . and how little . . . a child meant to her. Her thoughts were broody, full of care; ran on how to make room for the nursling; to obviate the confusion caused by a lying-in. For long she had hesitated to share her knowledge with Hans; had put off telling him from day to day. She shrank in advance from the *unwelcoming* look with which he would greet her confidence: the quick contraction of the brow, the sigh, the resigned upward tilt of the chin.

The hopeless: "Oh, well, I suppose there's no helping it."

Sitting sewing in the nursery, she let her thoughts play round a state of things in which father-and-mother-to-be rejoiced as one, over the new gift that was being made them. Glad of it, and glad in each other. At the picture, the ready tears sprang to her eyes. She had to take out her handkerchief and wipe them away.

But here she felt a touch on her knee. Lulu had dropped the empty cotton-reel which she preferred to either stuff doll or woolly bear, and was holding out a scrap of brightly-coloured paper, chirping in her baby French: " 'Erel Lou' div Mamma."

"Thank you, darling. How nicel—But, oh, Lulu, what

have you done? Torn your pretty picture-book? You mustn't do that, dearl What will Papa say?—our good kind Papa who gave us the pennies to buy it!"

"Papa . . . mor' pennies." And Lulu hitched up her little skirt and did as if to feel in a trouser-pocket.

"No, no, indeed he hasn't! Papa is obliged to work *very* hard to make them. We must think of that, and save him all we can."

But her words went unheeded. Lulu had lifted the rest of her petticoats, and was dancing a jig.

Laying hold of the sprite, Cosette stroked the clothes into order and turned the little face up to hers. But, instead of reproving, fell into a reverie over it. The child's likeness to Hans grew more marked every day. Here was the same full round grey eye (except that Lulu, the wilful, had come into the world with one of hers blue-speckled), the same long upper-lip, the short, well-cut nose with the wide and fiery nostrils. The tricksy look, the pout of defiance, the naughty wrinkling up of the nose—all belonged to him. Yes, it was Hans' face in tenderest miniature: and to see it as it were afresh, in these unspoiled baby outlines, went to Cosette's heart. He himself seemed to speak from it—and with a long-lost directness. Oh, let her not be too hard on him. He never spared himself. Instead of sitting here thinking cold thoughts, she ought rather to pray for grace to understand, have patience, hold fast.

But Lulu was wriggling to get free. Cosette loosed her hold; and, not for the first time, wondered who would guard and guide this little bundle of mischief, if she had to go. For it was becoming a fixed idea with her that she would not survive her confinement. Brother and sister hewn down while still in the bud, why should she alone of the three be permitted to adventure further into life?—And, tossing wakeful in the darkness, she composed many a

letter to her grandmother, to her father in distant Rome, making her wishes clear.

Into the hands of the person she had now to call mother, no child of hers should fall.

When, on Hans' only sister becoming engaged to marry and live abroad, there had first been question of the old Baroness making her home with them, Hans had spoken very plainly.

"We know, you and I, what my mother is; and what it will mean to have her always with us. Upon my soul, there isn't one woman in a thousand I'd venture to ask it of. But it just so happens you are that one. If anybody can manage it, Cos—contrive to live at peace with her—it's you."

"I'll do my best. I can't say more."

And she had kept her word.—Though how little this best amounted to, only she knew. Hans (like most men) was able to shut his eyes to what he didn't wish to see; what did not actually concern himself. And she was much too proud, and too solicitous of his comfort, to complain. As time went on she learned to exist, even to hold her head up, in an atmosphere of disapproval dense enough to dash the boldest. From early morning on, from the moment the old Baroness took her seat at the coffee-table, she, Cosette, had to stand a running fire of criticism, of hints and innuendoes. Nothing escaped this gimlet eye; and nothing it saw pleased it. The fact that Hans and she had continued to make French their language. The "extravagant French fashion" in which she ran her house. The way she managed her servants, clothed and brought up her child. The influence she exerted over Hans; his unmanly deference to her opinion, or his manly exertions to bring his income up to hers: for all alike she was held responsible. Nor were her personal habits spared. The fact that she chose to read when

she ought to have been sewing or knitting, or persisted in continuing her long afternoon walks, meant pinched lips, dismal forebodings. ("When I was young . . " Or: *"Never,* Cosima, have I known a woman in your condition so fly in the face of Providence!")

However, all this touched no one but herself. And in time she grew inured to it: only now indeed did she begin to realise how strong her back was, how stiff her neck. Inwardly she might be wringing her hands, but outwardly she never lost her bearings, or failed to carry her head high. Or to keep silence. Silence was her defence. She ensconced herself behind it, and refused to be tempted into the open.

So much for her. What she could not tolerate, with any degree of composure, was the unhappy effect of his mother's presence on Hans. To have to stand by and watch the old stranglehold, which she had fought so hard to loosen, get him down again, the old weaknesses it uncovered show up anew, both saddened her and exasperated her. The five years of their marriage seemed to count for nothing, less than nothing, when a word, a look even, from another had this uncanny power over him,

Hans writhed under it . . . and yielded to *it:* grew glum and depressed. No longer did he come home to dinner garrulous with the events of his morning. He said as little as was possible and, the meal over, unbound his napkin and fled from the table.—Not that this helped. For his mother claimed her ancient privilege of occupying a seat in his study while he worked. And he had not the nerve to show her the door.

Did she, Cosette, attempt to explain or defend his need for privacy, the rejoinder would be a tart: "I'll thank you, Cosima, not to interfere. I presume I may be allowed to know my own son best?"

Was Hans then foolish enough to take one's part (in

spite of imploring signals) or did his own loosely-held patience for once give way, there was a scene, a horrid scene, of tears and recriminations, of pardons begged and renewed protestations of motherly or filial love.

Then, it was she, Cosima, who made her escape. (Escape: how the word haunted her!) To sit alone in her bedroom, heavy of mind and of body, and count the hours to her release.

## X

PANTING a little in his thick winter clothing, Wagner pumped up to the second floor and rang the door-bell.

"Not at home? What! not even the Baroness?"

"I'm sorry.—Unless it's the old lady you mean?"

"Good Lord, no!" And he winked an eye at the maid; who tittered. "So, so . . . all these stairs for nothing!—Do you know where they're to be found?"

"Oh, well,"—the girl dropped her voice and in her turn lowered a lid. "You see, it's this way. The Baroness is not quite up to the mark just now, and doesn't receive."

"What?—Aha! I understand. But I'll wager she'll see me. Just you take in my name. Say Herr Wilhelm Richard Wagner's at her door."

*"Acbl* Are you *the*——"

"Yes my dear, that's me. The author of some pretty bits, what?—Come, now, off with you!"

Returning, however, she again shook her head. "Madame's deepest regrets.—And I'm to say you'll find the *Herr Baron* at the Conservatorium."

But Wagner was not so easily disposed of. Taking a card from his pocket he scrawled on it: *My good Cosmus, what nonsense is this? Do you intend me to camp on your doorstep?—* And that did it. He was ushered into the *salon.*

To him there came Cosima, more than a little confused, her colour rising and falling.

In his usual possessive fashion Wagner seized both her hands.

"Well, I must say, a nice way to greet me! Took all the

pep out of the little surprise I'd planned to give you—give the pair of you. But why? My dear, you surely don't mind *me?* Want to make a stranger of me because of this?" And with a sudden swift movement he opened her arms wide, and looked her up and down. "There! Let that be an end to all false modesty!"

Instead of becoming unnerved by this appalling frankness, Cosima was amazed to find herself standing up to it.

"It wasn't my wish. I didn't mind."

"Whose then? What, the boy's?—that ridiculous boy? How like him!—But now come along. Put on your bonnet, and we'll go and beard him in his den. Anyhow, you ought not to be bottled up indoors. You're as white as my nail. A blow in this March wind will do you a world of good."

"When is it to be?" he asked chattily as they descended the stairs. And at her reply raised his brows and rubbed his chin. "Then we must be careful. Pick out some steady old nag that's not likely to run away with you." After which he walked up and down the row of *droschken,* disregarding raised whips, comically appraising each spavined steed.—

Hans was giving a lesson at the far end of a hall. On entering, the two of them remained standing just inside the door, in the shadow of a balcony. A number of students were grouped round a couple of grand pianos, at one of which sat the young Maestro. Something had happened to displease him. He was holding forth at the top of his voice, sparing none.

"Bravo, bravo! That's the stuff to give 'em," muttered Wagner, and, turning to her, nodded and went on nodding approval.

Out of the tail of his eye Hans caught the movement, and became angrily attentive. "Who's that down there? This room is strictly private!"

Wagner chuckled; drawing her further into the shade.

"Do you hear what I say? Confound it! what impudence is this?"

And with its short teacher's-jacket flying, the irate little figure came pounding down the hall.

And then, what a *jubilate!*—what a hugging and kissing and slapping of backs. The two could not let each other go. Till Hans had to take out his handkerchief and dry his eyes.

But the first transports over he cast an anxious glance at Cosima; and frowned. "Whatever are *you* doing here, Cos?"

"My fault, all my fault. I can testify that she actually tried to get out of seeing me. Warned off, I understand, by you?"

"Well . . . yes. You see I haven't forgotten something you once said about women in——"

*"Ach, was!* What have other women to do with her? Our Cosmus stands in a class by herself." At which Hans heaved a sigh of relief.

"Of course, you'll both dine with me. We'll have a jolly little meal together, and I'll tell you everything—all my news."

Meanwhile, till Hans had finished teaching, Cosima and he would take a drive round the town to see the sights. "Don't worry. I'll be as careful of her as if she were my daughter."

But the suggestion had been thrown off at random. Wagner didn't give a fig for sight-seeing, or for Berlin either. Having looked out a few times, in obedience to Cosima's raised finger, he declared that every one of these ruled-line streets looked exactly like another, and all were equally hideous. As for the buildings . . . So she let him be. Besides, his mind had gone off at a tangent. The carriage they drove in, chartered from his hotel, had just been newly upholstered, in a luxurious dove-grey satin. And Wagner's

pleasure over this, his delight in both colour and material, had to be seen to be believed. He couldn't keep his eyes off it—or his hands either. Went on patting and stroking it, or softly running his palm up and down; half the time, she thought, without knowing what he was doing, yet unconsciously more attentive to its silky-softness than to anything that was said. She couldn't help smiling to herself as she followed the insinuating movements of the small, broad hand, whose curved back showed that it had oftener been cramped round a pen than extended on the keys (so different from Hans' flat "piano-paws," where each finger was straight as a rod, and independent of its neighbour). And here she fell to thinking of all this hand had done (and had still to do) in recording, transmitting to the world, the inspirations of genius: a perfect partner to the controlling brain. Yet, from so stupendous a task, it could stoop to an artless pleasure in the touch of a smooth sleek stuff. Her smile lost its edge; her eyes deepened. Oh, how young of heart he had remained. For all his genius, how simple . . . how childlike.

And this new feeling of lenience, of tenderness even, went far to condone those little traits in him that had hitherto offended her. His manner of eating, for instance. In the restaurant, his plate set before him, Wagner fell upon its contents like one who had gone hungry for days. On each tasty little green gherkin popped into his mouth, his teeth closed in a kind of joy-bite. Or he sipped and savoured his *VJidesheimer* as if it were a vintage wine. Till now she had looked on him as frankly *gourmand.* To-day, she was more inclined to see in this relish just another offshoot of his unconquerably youthful temperament. Added to the man's enormous energy in all he did. Eating or drinking, laughing or talking, raving or reviling, it didn't matter which, he put his whole soul into it: never did it occur to him to be stingy

of himself. Beside him Hans, for all his brisk and snappy wit, paled to a cautious, even timid person.—Though at the moment Hans did not show to advantage, so intent was he in worming out how much truth underlay Richard's newest "flights of imagination."

These had all to do with Russia. For Russia the Master was now bound, in response to an invitation from the Philharmonic Society in St. Petersburg. But the two concerts which he was to conduct for this body, were, according to him, mere stepping-stones—or, more bluntly, just the thin edge of the wedge. Amazing reports (no, he wouldn't repeat them, they staggered credulity) had reached his ears of the wealth, the rivers of gold that flowed in this music-loving capital, where Grand Dukes and Duchesses were plentiful as peas, devoted patrons of the arts, and one and all inspired by a holy zeal for R.W. and his works. Yes, his prospects were of the rosiest: he saw himself not only free of debt, but living in plenty for the rest of his days. So much so that, on the way to Berlin, he had cut across and scoured the Rhineland, for a suitable site on which to build.

"Another *Asyl!* Though, mind you, I don't fly high. The most modest cot will do me; so long as it has a tree or two before the door. But a home of my own I must and will have. Otherwise I shall go utterly to pieces. For close on five years now, I've endured the misery of hired rooms.—*Meister singer?* What do you take me for? No, no: not another note will you or anyone get from me, till I'm provided with a decent place to write it in. Surely, surely, aware of all I could still give the world, were life made smooth for me, it isn't too much to ask?"

Indeed no, naturally, of course not, agreed Hans: in haste, yet with obvious reservations. But Cosima's reply was a nod and a smile. For she was beginning to understand.

Hare-brairded, quixotic as Richard's schemes and visions might be, or might seem to others, to himself they were as necessary as bread. Deprived of them, he would not have the strength to go on living. Oh, let him keep his dreams, instead of dashing cold water on them. Time could be trusted to do that. And by then he would have others to hug in their place.

It was the same with *Tristan.* In spite of his many frustrated hopes, of the, to every eye but his, scurrilous tricks that were being played on him, he continued to pin his faith to promises of a performance after Easter.

"No; my pale, bespectacled hero's still in the megrims. *But*—we shall soon see now what he's made of 1 For the truth is, my boy, there's some one else in the offing. Yes: to whom *he* can't hold a candle. Oho, I can see what you're thinking, you doubting Thomas, you! The same old dupe, eh?—the same old visionary? Never were you more mistaken. This is fact—solid fact.—Besides, I'd stake my life fate doesn't intend me to end as a virtuoso of the time-stick. Why? Because otherwise I should have taken a ticket for the next world long ere this!"

And now he detailed his sufferings over the three concerts he had been forced by dire necessity to give that winter, in one of the Viennese theatres.

"Before I'd done with them, I'd sweated blood like any holy martyr!—Well, yes, of course, and a good deal else, too. But come now, Hans, could you, with your ache for perfection, have put up with acoustics in which every tone of the brass came back doubled and re-doubled? Till one's ears literally shrieked for mercy? After the first of them, I saw there was nothing for it but to erect sounding-boards round and over the stage. Before that, I'd had to bring the orchestra up to strength, and arrange for it to be properly built in. And so, what with one thing and another, *and*

the hire of the theatre, in spite of a tremenobus *artistic* success the person who made nothing out of it w-s poor old Richard!—Nay, I won't say that. The way nose boys, Peter and Carl, toiled over the orchestral parts was a proof of friendship I'll never forget. Even young Braims did his bit—he's a decent, unassuming little fellow, thoigh entirely lacking in go. Peter, too, can be a bit soft a times; but Tausig has a spark of your fire, my Hans, y,ur nre and your devotion. I can still see him stumping .ound, trying to rake up enough to cover at least a part of:he costs!"—And Wagner sat back in his chair and laugled at the remembrance.

"However, all that's over now; these Rissian concerts are to be the last, absolutely the last. It also means an end to your troubles, my lad, the unceasing fag and bother I've put you to. For which I thank you once again from the bottom of my heart. I'll *even—jawohl!*—forgive the lukewarmness of your efforts *(you* were obviousy resolved not to lose too much blood!) to fix up a concert or me here: I, who believed you destined to set a Berlin lalo round my head! As for the sacrifice of your ring, well, *x* I said before, what's a Grand Duke's pretty gift compared with the *Ring I* shall one day, God willing, lay on your table? A return well worth a paltry trinket, eh?"

And here the small, round-backed hanl crossed the table, found the flat one, and pressed it fondly.

"But now just one thing more, and the last favour, I hope, I shall ever be forced to ask of you. I'm told, on the best authority, that it's impossible to tnavel in Russia without furs. Well, as you can imagine, it's beyond *my* means to make such a purchase—and for the few short weeks in which I should need them. Is there, my good Hans, among your friends and acquaintances some lucky mortal with a coat he'd be willing to lend me, for the time

being? No? Well then, I've also heard that certain dealers exist, members assuredly of one of the twelve tribes, who make a practice of hiring out furs—or at least of agreeing to take them back when done with. This you will greatly oblige me by arranging for, without delay. And if, for the moment, you can assist me by settling the account, you'll earn my undying gratitude.—Oh, and that I don't forget, a roomy foot-muff must be part of the bargain. I'll guarantee to send 'em both back reeking with celebrity!"

Throughout all this, Cosima had been content to sit and listen, her eyes travelling from one to other of the two faces. Everything Hans thought or felt lay almost pitifully bare to her. Not a blink, not a half-blink, that she could not read the meaning of. Richard's face, as usual, belonged wholly to the moment. Did he mention Israel, his features took on an almost Jewish droop; under his description of the glories of St. Petersburg they turned rich and lordly. What an actor was lost in him! And, in spite of the lines and wrinkles, how young he could look. It was the eyes that did it—these mischievous, laughing eyes (these radiant eyes). Time had been powerless to tame *them.*

But when that night at midnight they saw him off, staggering under the heavy furs which Hans had somehow managed to procure for him: there, standing on the dark and draughty platform, amid echoing shouts and the ringing of bells, amid honks and clanks and whistles, he was a very different man. His features seemed to have shrunk: he looked old and fragile, and quite unfit for the arduous journey that lay before him. Once more, Cosima did not share in the emotional farewells. But her heart was big with pity. And afterwards, on her knees at her *prie-Dieu,* she offered up an earnest prayer, made special intercession for the lonely little figure they had watched vanish into the night. Dear Mother of God, be merciful. Grant him, just

this once, some recompense for all he has gone through. Of Thy grace let failure and disillusion be averted from him.

And for a time it seemed as if her prayer had been heard. At least when Richard re-appeared, on his way back to Vienna, he had a tale to tell that succeeded in laying even Hans' doubts. It was not only of plaudits and enthusiasm, wild as sea-spray and as ephemeral. No: in St. Petersburg he had become the protege of a German-born Russian Princess (oh, no, no, no: not in the least *a la* Witt!) in whose company he had spent almost every evening of his stay. And this personage now proposed, in return for a series of concerts conducted each season in the capital, to endow him with a fixed yearly income.—Again the three of them shared a merry meal, drinking to his good fortune, listening to his adventures.

But, alas! in the long run, all that remained to him was the memory of these. The *tournee* did not throw off enough to support him for one single year (the most Hans now confessed to having dared expect). While the affair with the Grand Duchess turned out just another of what Richard euphemistically termed his "fall in-kins!" Put more plainly, the suggestion of seasonal concerts and a yearly income had come from him, not her. And the lady had failed to nibble. —Oh, was there ever such a *wilful* dreamer! ("Such an accomplished liar!" from Hans.)

Six months elapsed, it was late autumn, before they saw him again. For that summer found Hans loud in his determination to keep out of "the toils."

"Never again will I condemn myself to go through what I did in Biebrich! *Some* small degree of personal freedom even the least of us has a right to. Little as we may know what to make of it."

Cosir too, needed rest, after a tryi
confiner t of sickness in the nursery. An
so, with en and a maid, they turned north-
wards, a elves on the sea-coast near Copen-
hagen. ce went the holiday was a failure.
The flatn scape, the good bourgeois society
drove Ha the close presence of the children
fidgeted h and Cosima soon saw that, keenly
as he had ch and all Biebrich stood for, yet
it had pro a stimulus that was not to be got from this dullness a and monotony, this over-large dose of family life.

It was the same old story, too: though he ran away from Richard, he was not rid of him. And the news from Vienna couldn't have been worse. True, the "be-tree'd cot" had gone, with much else, to the wall. Instead, however, and banking solely on his chimerical Russian projects—*Tristan* having by now been definitely abandoned—Richard had rented a flat in another big villa, and was furnishing it in a style that caused even the tolerant Peter to sigh "oriental I" and made Hans see red. ("How he *does* it is what I want to know! Upon my soul, I shall end by believing him an even greater financial genius than a poet or composer.") Richard meanwhile averring that, only in this way, by surrounding himself with fine stuffs and vivid colours, by hangings of plush and damask, could he hope to induce the mood necessary for the completion of the *Meistersinger.* As it must and should be written. "If I'm forced to live with cotton, what I write will be cottony, too."

As to ways and means . . . well, that August the first gossipy rumour reached their ears of money-lenders and notes of hand. And was followed and confirmed, soon after, by the news that Wagner had laid down his pen, and was afoot once more with his baton for company.

And so it went on throughout

In the course of one of these jo 'ng, too, a slight detour to avoid Dresden, lved—he dropped off in Berlin to see them. led it for a passing call, between two train imself be persuaded to stay for the orchestra s was that evening conducting. So again the went out to dine; again he and Cosima filled Dy driving up and down the Berlin streets.

But on this day everything was d No invigorating March wind, with its veiled promise of spring, swept the streets. It was November's end, wind-still, harsh, grey. Nor was there any piquant satin lining to the present coach, to divert and delight. As long as he was with Hans, Richard had kept up the old, jovial tone, laughing and making merry over his misfortunes, outdoing Hans the punster in quips and quirks. Here, with no Hans to incite him, his humour failed. He sat glum and silent (was there ever a face that could so fall to pieces?) moodily rehearsing the visit, the humiliating visit, he had just paid in Zurich, and chewing the bitter cud of it.

Then Cosima ventured to put a question. And in brusquely replying to it, Wagner caught a glimpse of her eyes. These were bent on him with a look so full of compassion that, having turned away, he hastily glanced back, to make sure. And after that he knew where he was. For looks of this kind, dripping with pity, were no novelty to him; and under cover of them, say or do what he would, he was safe. So now he gave his feelings the rein, and in no half-hearted manner: lashing out at those who had injured him, paying out his spite, fulminating against the world for its lack of understanding, its cruelty, its icy neglect.—Not even to Hans had he ever so let himself go.

In sum: "The plain **truth** is, **I** might as **well be dead. In** fact I'd be better dead. Nobody wants me, nobody cares that much," with **a** vicious snap of the fingers, "for me, or for the work I'm slaving my life away to give 'em, lay as a gift at their feet. All I get in return is mud—mud and venom. Godl the howl that's been raised because I've dared to own a couple of plush *fauteuils,* to hang my walls with a few wretched yards of velvet. Or because it's my misfortune to have a skin too sensitive for wool or cotton. (Clothe me in calico, and out I come in a rose-red rash!) Yet I'm abused for it as if it were a crime. And by the very people who ought to be emptying their pockets, or at least beating their brains, how to keep me supplied with these necessaries. Yes, necessariesl I need them, I've got to have them—I *cannot* exist in an organ-loft like Father Bach, I'm differently made.—But what's that to them? Do they care, or do they even try to understand? Not theyI Fat and pampered, lolling on their own plush sofas, they're content to watch me, old, tired, penniless, squander the remnant of life that's left me in trapesing the country, in order to live at all. While the work I was sent into the world to do, which only I can do, lies mouldering—neglected, forgotten. Fools, blind fools! Ah! had they only treated me differently, how might I not have rewarded them? In this head"—and he struck at his vast brow—"how many a masterpiece exists in embryo that will now never see the light of day.—Why did I ever come back—set foot again in my native land? Become the dupe of their cliques and intrigues, the bait of their Jew-ridden press, their petty princes' whims? Once out, I ought to have stayed away. Yes, it's I who have been the fool. And, by God, I'm paying for it! How it will all end, Heaven alone knows. They won't let me live—and I don't seem able to die."

For all the vigour of his language, his voice had gradually

sunk from its high-pitched start to a low **rumble. Now,** turning to her, he said in everyday tones: "But there, my good Cosmus, why trouble your ears with such talk. Forgive me, my dear. I'm a sad babbler once I get going."

But Cosima had not noticed his change of tone. Nor did she hear his apology. Her thoughts were with her eyes; and, as before, it was a hand that held them. His right hand. After smiting the air with many a trenchant gesture, this had dropped back on his knee, and there it lay, like the dead thing he himself had so emphatically wished to be. The sight of it—creased, even withered of skin, disfigured by ropy blue veins—sent an almost physical pang through her. (So rare a thing, so irreplaceable; so old, so mortal.) And almost before she knew what she was doing, she had stooped and put her lips to it.—And there she kept them.

Thus bent, she did not see the slight contraction of the brows that accompanied his quick and gentle: *"Aber Kind!* What are you doing?" But the kindliness in his voice struck home; and he felt his hand grow wet.

But again the experience was not a novel one; and he had no hesitation in dealing with it. Slipping his hand away, he put his arm round her and drew her upright. At the same time relieving the strain by taking out his own handkerchief and playfully offering her the use of it.

In saying: "My dear, you mustn't let all the nonsense I've talked upset you. It's a tremendous relief to me to be able to indulge in a good old grouse. Yes; I actually enjoy it. So much so that I'm apt to forget whom I'm talking to. I assure you, it's not to be taken too seriously."

Cosima nodded. She had obediently dried her eyes, but continued to sit clasping his handkerchief.

"I know. But it's not that. What hurts me is when you say nobody cares, nobody understands. That isn't true. I care . . . and understand, too—I'm sure I do."

"Not always. If you did, you'd know without being told that, in all I say, there are two who are never included —and that's you and Hans. You are the great exceptions. Friends such as no man, not even a Richard Wagner, can hope to find more than once in a lifetime. As for the rest, every man-Jack of them, why—pouf!" And, from what might have been a dandelion in seed, he blew the fluff with so comical a gesture that Cosima was forced to smile.

And, in smiling, still more to adore.

# PART THREE

I

LIKE the old tiger to which he was fond of comparing himself, Wagner paced to and fro and up and down the many rooms and various floors of his chalet overlooking Lake Starnberg. Between the tall trees in the garden the wide expanse of water danced in the sun. In the distance, beyond a stretch of rolling, wooded country, a line of snow-topped mountains was embossed on the sky's blue: Bavarian blue, with great round snowball clouds for facings. Morning, noon and night he revelled afresh in the beauty of the scene; stepping out now on this balcony now on that, to view it from a new angle.

The sole drawback to his enjoyment was, he had no one to share it with: it all rebounded on himself. In the beginning, he hadn't felt his isolation. The heavenly stillness, the unfamiliar sense of security (no more dunning creditors, no more nightmares of a debtors' prison!) the knowledge that the miseries of life were over for him, had made the place seem a Paradise on earth. But since then several weeks had passed, and his first raptures had lost their glow. By now he had become aware that the house was too big for comfort, much too big; and to know what it was to feel exquisitely lonely in it. Lonely, and dull. Until the "Bechstein" for which he had written post-haste to Berlin arrived, he could not settle to work; and his daily drives to *Schloss Berg* to visit his young Sovereign (his saviour, his redeemer!) were a mere drop in the bucket. Besides, each time he returned from one, he felt more alone than before. Not to say flatter: the ecstatic tone that prevailed in these interviews—it was like being required to move and have

your being in the rarefied air of a mountain top—proving something of a drain on his vitality. After all, he was gone fifty. Fifty—over against nineteen!

He hadn't had a soul he could *really* speak to since his flight from Vienna, three months back. And never had he so pined for company. Why, he could have talked for a week on end, without fumbling for a word, of the miracle that had happened: the sheerly fabulous event that had split his life in two. Beginning with that never-to-be-forgotten day when he was at last run to earth in Stuttgart by the King's emissary; and in solitary grandeur (and considerable inner disturbance) had journeyed to Munich, there to stand face to face with the patron saint of his dreams, find himself clasped to a King's heart, see a fantastically-beautiful youth, who was at the same time a reigning monarch, prostrate in adoration at his feet.—And, ever since, wonder had succeeded wonder: before his eyes the incredible, the inconceivable had come to pass. Aladdin's lamp wasn't in it: *bis* wishes were fulfilled before he had time to utter them. By now he was in possession of a fixed income; of a *palais* in Munich; and, as *pied-cl-terre* for the heat of summer, this delightful, lake-cooled villa.—The size and emptiness of which at the present moment were getting on his nerves.

Had Minna only been a different woman! With what open arms he would have welcomed the poor old storm-tossed comrade of his youth, his poverty, his Odyssean wanderings. But from Minna there was nothing to be hoped. Of this, the experiment he had been fool enough to try in the early days at Biebrich had given abundant proof. They had been together but for a week; but in that time all the old horrors—the grumblings and the jawings, the insensate jealousy, the iron will to master, get him under her thumb—had broken out afresh. (Or gone on

as if the pair of them had never separated.) God preserve him from repeating the experience. No, Minna had dug her own grave. A more liberal allowance, the comfortable knowledge that she no longer needed to weigh each penny before parting with it, was the only share the poor stupid old creature could have in his new prosperity.

From Minna, his thoughts flitted to the person Hans had so aptly christened Mathilde the Second (of her forerunner in the title it was still wiser not to think.) And on this young woman they lingered with a peculiar pleasure. He knew no one it would have better suited him to set at the head of his house, or whose presence in it would be less disturbing to him. And he did not despair of ultimately breaking down her defences. Consisting though these did of a whole regiment of mothers and aunts, one and all on their hind-legs to protect her virtue. (Which he, ha-ha! had no idea of assailing.) Yes, sooner or later he thought he would contrive to attach to himself this simple, lovable, impressionable creature, who seemed made to fill the gap in his womanless existence.

But in the meantime?—Ahl he might feel the need of the good Mathilde; but the person he really wanted was another: was Hans, Hans, and again Hansl Hans, king of friends, who alone was capable of understanding the significance, the crashing significance of what had happened, and whose joy in it would equal his own. Yes, every nerve in him cried for Hans. But of late it had become an almost impossible job to loose the fellow from his moorings. His responsibilities and obligations spread like weeds. He was for ever knuckling under to some one or something; either to his precious Stern (or un-Stern) or to dates fixed months in advance, to attacks of illness, or domestic ties. All so many drags and clogs on his progress. And the more disastrous because he was neither bold enough nor sage

enough to recognise the moment for tipping such superfluous lumber overboard.

Well, he would show him how!—And now letter followed letter, one as hot as the other, and all in the same strain. Hans should come to him at once, and if it was only for a week. He needed him badly. "I might almost say I owe you to my young King." For the latter had set his heart on hearing everything he, Wagner, had written, and who but Hans could gratify this wish? "I want you here to Niebel and to Tristel for me"—a sad hash his own rusty old fingers would make of it.

Or again: "Make no other plans for the summer, don't for a moment think of Wiesbaden or any such mouldy hole. . . . Come here, join me in this lovely spot, and rest, recover from your labours." Not a farthing should it cost him. Wouldn't he show himself generous and let one for whom he had done so much now have the unspeakable joy of turning the tables? Besides, a marvellous plan was taking shape; which was to get him appointed Court Pianist to the King. But all this could be discussed when they met. "Only come! Prove your genius, cut yourself free. . . . Look you: take the invitation as coming straight from the King. Can you, dare you refuse? . . . As a Baron, are you not already a bit of a King yourself?"

Then, things still hanging fire, Hans being in wretched health again, and seemingly quite incapable of knowing his own mind, Wagner brought his big guns into action. In a large fierce squiggly hand he wrote: "Well, then, my boy, as it seems there's no getting you alone, here and now I invite you to bring your wife and children and servants with you, and to be my guests for the whole summer. . . . I can put an entire floor of the house at your disposal. You shall have sitting and bedrooms, a nursery, a servants' room, and a music-room all to yourself, Hans. The

children will thrive in the garden, we'll boat on the Lake, make excursions to the mountains. Only come! . . . My house is desolate. Except for you I have no friends. Only you two—and my King. . . . And how necessary *you* are to my happiness I need not say. Wire me at once, and let it be Yes. I cannot and will not bear a refusal."

Little Lulu had said her piece, made her bob, given her hand: over which, clicking his heels, the Master had stooped in courtly fashion, before snatching the child up and kissing her soundly. Now, both children slept—he had been allowed to tiptoe in for a peep at them—and the nursemaid had gone below to gossip with his own factotums.

At supper, for which he vowed his appetite was twice its usual size, he talked as hungrily as he ate, pouring into Cosima's ear the full story of his magic deliverance. Describing how only that spring, as a hunted man not knowing where to turn for safety, he had stood before a Munich shop-window and looked with interest at the entrancing features of the youthful Monarch, little recking that, at this very moment, their owner's chief concern was to discover *his* whereabouts. For, on hearing *Lohengrin* two years previously, young Ludwig had sworn to himself that, should he ever ascend the throne, one of his first acts would be to summon to his side the author of these ravishing strains. And, the King his father dying unexpectedly, he had at once sent out messengers to track Wagner down. Then, of their first meeting, their emotional and ecstatic meeting, their countless other meetings, the young King's infatuate devotion, his brilliant mentality, what he had already done for *'Lohengrin's* composer and what he still had it in mind to do: of all this Wagner told, occasionally raising a corner of his table-napkin to flick away a tear.

Cosima's own eyes filled as she listened. She could not

eat. Early in the meal she **had** laid down knife **and fork,** and sat there, chin in hand, drinking in his tale, a small unsteady smile on her lips.

Until, pulling his napkin loose, Wagner tossed it from him and with a: "Look here, I'm afraid I've talked your head off. But if you only *knew* what it means to have some one to speak to!" took her by the arm and piloted her to the balcony.

"For now I want you to see night fall. It's an unforgettable experience here. No, this chair's more comfortable, and I'm sure you must be tired, after that long journey with two such little children."

"Oh, I'm used to them. And they are very good."

"And your biggest, most troublesome child you left at home, eh?"—settling himself as he spoke in a chair at her side.

One of his roguish looks accompanied the words. But Cosima felt the sting in their tail. And tearing her enchanted eyes from lake and mountains said hastily: "Please, don't misjudge Hans. He was quite sincere when he said it wasn't possible for him to get away before the end of the week. You know he has been very ill again. He broke down completely after his Russian tour. And has had all that lost time to make up. He hoped, by sending the children and myself on ahead . . ."

"Of course, of course. And very grateful I am to him. And to you, too, my dear, for coming. You and your delightful bairns.—Still, I can't deny I've taken his behaviour—his waverings, his lukewarmness—deeply to heart. At such a moment as this to fail me! Why, **I've** had almost to go down on my knees to him, to get him to say he'll come at all."

"He had his reasons."—And in spirit Cosima assisted once more at Hans' interminable debates with himself,

whether or no to let himself be sucked back into the vortex, and how much could be believed of Richard's Munchausen-ish adventures. Drawing the fringe-trimmings of her dress through her fingers, she added: "But he was sadly torn. I think it grows harder every day for Hans to make up his mind. About anything."

"Hm," said Wagner. "Hm." And gave her a shrewd, appraising glance. Then: "And you, what had you to say to it?"

"I? Oh, nothing , . . nothing whatever."

"WhatI Do you mean to say he didn't discuss it with you? Ask your advice?"

Cosima turned back from the lake, from which the colour was being visibly drained, and shook her head.

"No. But then I've given up trying to influence Hans. — I f you were to ask *him,* he'd tell you I retired as usual into one of my 'icy silences'."

"That sounds a little bitter, my dear," said Richard, and scratched the ruff of hair that grew under his chin.

"Does it? But what is the use of advice that is never taken? Or that even provokes a person to go and do just the opposite? No, nowadays I save my breath—merely hold myself in readiness for whatever may be required of me.

"And that bitterer still."

"Bitter or not, it's true; and, believe me, best in the end. At first—I was young and ignorant then—I thought I had some right to wishes and opinions of my own. But I soon learned wisdom. Nothing ever came of them. So I grew philosophic, and bowed to my fate. Which seems to be just to drift—drift with the stream, let myself be carried along wherever it flows."

Again Wagner looked searchingly at her.

"Just how old are you, Cos?"

"I? I'm twenty-six."

"Twenty-six!—and to be talking in such a strain. Why, child, at your age, with the cream of your life before you, you ought to be full to the brim with zest and energy."

Her reply was a lift of the shoulders, a gesture at once so despondent and so French that Wagner frowned. Nor would she meet his eyes. She continued to gaze steadily at the landscape she had been brought out to see; and his next question was put to her averted head.

"Is there anything wrong between you and Hans?"

"Wrong? I trust not. I think no one can say I'm not a good and obedient wife."

"My dear"—and he laid his hand on hers—"I don't wish to pry. But if it would be any relief to you to speak . . . remember, I'm old enough to be your father."

These words, intended to ease and soothe, had an unlooked-for effect. Flinging round in her seat, with a brusqueness in striking contrast to her usual composure, she cried: "Oh, *don't* say that, don't, Richard, I won't have it! You old? Why, at heart you're younger than any of us. I think you couldn't be old if you tried."—Hei voice was warm with feeling.

Though a trifle taken aback, Wagner could not help glowing. "Well, there certainly are moments when one realises how little mere years have to do with it," he admitted; and straightened his waistcoat. The next moment, however, coming to her aid with a: "Not that I meant I expected *to* die to-morrow!"—and he laughed at her out of his wise old eyes.

"Oh, I know. But all the same . . ."

She turned away again; seemed to be struggling with herself. Then, suddenly resolved, threw up her head and faced him. "Listen. You asked if there was anything wrong between Hans and me. And I said no. Well, I take that

back. Except that it's not *anything,* but everything. The truth is, nothing is right.''

At this he took her hand between both of his and gave it an encouraging clasp.

"Come, speak out, child, speak out all that's in your heart. You may be quite sure I won't misunderstand, loving Hans as I do."

"Oh, I'm not afraid ... of that. Besides I don't want to lay the whole blame on him. It's hardly his fault that we are perhaps two of the most ill-advised, ill-matched people who ever came together."

"Why did you marry him? ... if you didn't care for him. Were you forced into it?"

"Oh, but I did! I did, indeed," with an appealing glance for belief. "And I still do—there's so much in Hans one can't help liking . . . and admiring. *You* know, Richard how loyal he is; and how honorable, and fair, even to his enemies. And how big-minded: he'll always go out of his way to help a fellow-artist, he doesn't know what jealousy means. As for me, I can never forget his goodness and kindness at the time of my brother's illness. Those were terrible months for us all, in our tiny flat; but particularly so for Hans. The piano might not be touched, he had to turn out to give his lessons, or to practise; besides all the expense he was put to, and the suffering and misery. Yet never did he murmur ... he who usually can't endure the least restraint. And when Daniel died . . . " Here she paused, to add in a low voice: "But then I think: he loved Daniel nearly as much as I did." And almost inaudibly: "In one way, perhaps, better than he has ever loved me."

Resting her elbow on the rail of the balcony, she laid her free hand over her eyes. Tears again. And neither for Daniel nor for Hans. No, as so often before, she had only to come together with Richard to feel she wanted to cry,

to let herself go, lose herself in the all-embracing warmth and sympathy that went out from him.

Wagner was discreetly silent: she should tell her story in her own way. And steadying herself she went on: "But what I'm trying to say has nothing to do with *my* feelings for him. It's he who doesn't want me any more. Or need me. Unless to nurse him when he's ill, or to keep the children quiet. And it's not enough. One can't exist on it. Of course there's some excuse for him. He has had to work so hard ever since our marriage—Hans is so proud, he *will* make his income equal to mine—that nothing seems to exist for him any more *but* work. He puts his whole strength into it, every minute of his time. And it makes him so cold, so impersonal—inhuman almost. Sometimes it's as if, outside it, he has no real life at all.—Oh, Richard, he should never have married—not me or anybody. He's one of those men who don't need a wife. Or children either. He never wanted children—he doesn't care for them. No, not even very much for his own."

At this, in spite of himself, there burst from Wagner: "Doesn't care for his children? Impossible!"

But she let the interruption pass unnoticed. "When Lulu was born, though things were different then between us, it was bad enough. But Baby in there"—and she signed with her head towards the upper room where the children lay sleeping—"when I first knew Baby was coming, I hardly dared to face him. To have to tell him that a new burden was in stoke for him, a fresh upheaval in his life. And oh! knowing how he felt, to hear him talk, in his bitter, bitter way, of *neue Vaterfreuden.—Vaterfreuden?* Why, when he got back from Dresden, the morning Baby was born, and came in to see me, and I turned down the sheet to show her to him, all he could find to say was: *'Another* girl!' I had been through a terrible night; I was so weak that even

to lift my hand was an effort; but this was more than I could bear; and I lost my temper and flung out: 'Yes! another girl. But you, you ought to be glad of it. Girls are so much cheaper than boys.' But when he had gone, *how* I cried!—Oh, can you wonder, Richard, that I've learnt to . . . to dread his ever coming near me, for fear I should have another?"

"My dear, my dear, what things are these you are telling me!"

"And there's more than that. When I first knew Hans, years ago, my heart ached for him, he was so unhappy, so wretchedly unhappy at home. His mother . . . with her strange, cruel hold on him . . . and he as much afraid of her as if he were still a child. Well, now that she has come to live with us, it has all begun again: the old fears, the old domination. Me she hates; she has never forgiven me for marrying him. You see, I wasn't . . . good enough for a Bulow. Besides, she won't permit of any influence but hers. He must belong to her alone."

"But *hate,* my dear?"

"You think I'm exaggerating? Listen, then. When Baby was born—the pains began the afternoon before; Hans was out, and the servant, too, so I had to go to *her* about sending for the *sage femme.* And she wouldn't believe me. Said she knew better, it was not possible, was just my imagination. That I was only trying to make a fuss, to keep Hans back from his journey; a person like me had always to be in the limelight. I wasn't going to have that said a second time —especially as Hans took her word for it, when he rushed in for his travelling-bag. So I set my teeth and clenched my fists; and when the spasms began and the sweat ran down me, I dug my face into the pillow and bit it, filling my mouth with the linen. I would rather have died than *let* her hear me. Or than go back to her.

By the time the midwife came next morning, the child was there."

All this had been poured out as fast as she could speak. Now, she took a deep breath, and said more quietly: "But I think something did die in me that night. Something that will never come alive again."

Only with an effort had Wagner restrained himself. And the string of epithets he here let fly were of a kind to twist even her pale lips to a smile.

"Well . . . now, you know something of what my life has been. And still is. But I have never told anyone else about it . . . about that night. And I never shall. Only you, Richard, only you."

But her words touched the fatal spring; and even as she said them she began to weep, this time as openly and unashamedly as a child. For all his pity, Wagner found his mind wandering to the open door behind them.

As if she read what he was thinking, she struggled to check her tears. "Forgive me; I'm sorry. But I think I'Ve never known, till *now, just* how unhappy I've been."

Flinging prudence to the winds, he put out his arm and gathered her to him.

"You poor, poor, poor little woman!"

She did not resist; even nestled closer.—And lying there, her head on his shoulder, secure in his clasp, she felt like one of her own tired children laid happily to sleep. Could have wished never again to stir, to move from the fold of this arm. Here was her place, here she belonged.

And on Richard beginning to speak, to assure her that her confidences would be sacred, that she need make herself no reproaches, or have any fear of his misjudging Hans: as she listened to him she gave a shiver of impatience.

"Oh, what does that matter . . . now. What I've said . . . or what you think . . . about Hans. The reason I've

told you, told you everything——" And with a rush: "Oh, can't you see, Richard, can't you see?—why I've been able to do it? It's *not* because I knew it was safe with you, that you wouldn't misunderstand or think too harshly of him. No. It's because—because I love you, love you, love you. Oh, I didn't know it was *possible* to feel for anyone as I do . . . for you."

A brief, benumbed silence followed: in which the thuds of both hearts were uncomfortably audible.

Wagner managed to choke back his involuntary: 'I feared this, yes, I feared it.' He *could* not so wound her. And, she stubbornly refusing to be set free, all he got out was an echo of words already said.

"Child, child, do you know what you are saying?"

At this she lifted her head and looked him in the face. "You're wrong, I'm not a child. And I know quite well what I'm saying."

"And even so you came here? To me?"

"Not of myself. I was sent, ordered to come. Everything was arranged for me. Can you wonder I believe in fate? ... my fate?—Oh, be kind to me, Richard, be kind. It's all I ask."—And with a sigh of content she turned back to her resting-place.

Fate? He chewed the word; sitting there with her, with Hans' wife, in his arms. An embarrassment, a calamity even, that he would have given the world to avert. By God, he had never asked for this; or done anything to foster it. So to smite, so stab to the heart one whose devotion was a by-word; whom he looked on as his son. Incredible, unthinkable!—Yet, even as he protested, there came sliding into his mind words forced from him, by perfidy and desertion, in that last iniquitous winter in Vienna. "I am now come to the stage of taking everything I can get. From anyone!" And he'd be *hanged* if there was much to

choose in one way between his state then and now! Money and security, yes: but as for solace and affection, the same old lost sheep, the same outsider. Who was it who, only a couple of days ago, had gone beating up and down this house, in a perfect frenzy of loneliness?—Besides, all said and done, he was but a man. And one whose need of love and life, and the mighty stimulus they afforded, was in proportion to his genius. To be able to say to himself once more: *Ich bin geliebt . . . ich liebe. . . .*

He might have spoken his confusion aloud, so apt was Cosima's response to it.

"Nothing matters, Richard, nothing will ever matter to me again—but you."

Now: among all the many women he had known, had any said a like thing to him? Not one. There had been eternal doubts and hesitations: husbands to be spared, children lived for, family-feelings considered. Not one of the bunch (and particularly not she against whom his rancour was deepest) had had the grit to rise above the conventions that bound her. None but this girl had so far forgotten herself as to put him first, with a cry of: "You, alone!"

His grasp of her tightened.

The moon came up, throwing a veil of silvery gauze over the distant landscape, turning the lake into a bed of molten silver. And still they sat, the dark and sleeping house at their backy the silence of the night around them.

## II

ON the eve of Hans' arrival, a week after, Richard was moody and restless; and finally confessed to an uneasy fear that she might fail in carrying things off as, for Hans' sake, they should and must be carried.

"God knows, I'd rather lose a limb than hurt him. Though nothing will persuade me that to take a thing on which no value is set can be reckoned a crime."

They stood on the little wooden landing that ran out into the lake, watching the mountain-dark yet limpid water lap the sand. And, being screened by tall trees from the house's many windows, Cosima ventured to slip her arm through his and keep it there.

"Ob, please, don't be afraid, Richard. Trust me, it will be all right.—I didn't come here to make difficulties for you," she added, with the small fine smile that just touched the corners of her lips.

Ohol was Richard's mental comment on these words. Aloud he said and heaved an audible sigh: "Well, as you say, child, fate. And who were we to struggle against it. —But no regrets, eh?"

*"Regrets?"*

At her tone he turned and looked at her; with vaguely troubled eyes. She hung her head; but could nofrkeep back the colour that stained her face to the very temples. He sighed anew; but this time to himself. And pitying her confusion feigned an interest in the fussy little steamer that was puffing its morning journey round the lake. Not till she was as pale as she had been crimson, did he pat the hand that lay on his arm, saying kindly: "There,

there. I trust to you. I know you'll do your best."

So groundless his fears were (though she loved him for harbouring them.) But then she *knew* herself; as he didn't, couldn't know her—seeing in her only her youth and inexperience. But if her Spartan upbringing had enabled her to mask her feelings, walk unmoved amid enmity and malice, it would scarcely fail her here, where Richard's honour and Richard's peace of mind were at stake.

And she was right. Except that everything proved a little easier than she expected. For she had forgotten to allow for her happiness. The effect of this was twofold. It took the sting from the necessary shifts and unavoidable prevarications. At the same time, being more than heart could hold, it ran over, and Hans, too, came in for a share of it. She felt a new tolerance for the many sharp corners of his vigorous little personality. Even his facetiousness (this Berlin malady) no longer jarred. She found herself able for once *to* laugh with him and at him.—And very soon was feeling equally grieved that Richard should see him at a grave disadvantage—in other words, at his worst.

In the beginning, overjoyed to be with them, Hans was in wild spirits. His sallies, his pungent comments on people and things kept Richard in a roar. But she knew better than to trust this nervous gaiety; and his looks, *seen* after a week's separation, filled her with anxiety. The spring had gone out of his step, too; he walked like an old man. And then, a real misfortune, the weather chose just this moment to break, f From crisp breezes and radiant sunshine they passed to days of endless rain: a hard, merciless mountain-rain, that blotted out the distances, shrouded the wooded hills in drifts of mist, hammered grey on the iron-grey water, turned the flat roads into quagmires of puddles and gluey wagon-ruts. Richard got himself up in galoshes and leggings, and a coarse, water-tight blanket-garment, such

as the peasants wore. But Hans, in course of paying his first important visits to the King, had only his inadequate town-attire: his constant exposure to the weather would have tried the hardiest; and in a very short time he was prostrated by one of his cruellest bouts of nerve and rheumatic pains.

Then she, Cosima, was back at her old job; and a prisoner to his bedside. For no one else might touch his swollen, aching joints, or stroke his forehead, or pass light finger-tips over his lids, in an attempt to chase away the lines of zigzag spectra—"geometries" he called them—that dazed his vision.

"Empty all that filthy physic into the lake! And send the doctor packing. You're the only one who can do me any good.—Ah! you don't know what marvellous hands my Cos has. There's healing in their very touch."

This to Richard, who stood at the foot of the bed, drumming his fingers, and dolefully reviewing the collapse of his projects for Hans' benefit.

The sight exasperated the sufferer. "For God's *sake,* keep him out of here! It's more than I can bear to have him standing there thrumming, and looking like a death's-head. I don't need reminding what a mess I'm making of things. Besides spoiling his summer and upsetting his house."

She soothed, she promised. And while the rain fell, and the wind sighed round the eaves, sat listening to his groans, his self-execrations, his despair. For his secret fear was—with a distraught look at his crippled right arm, his immobile, bandaged fingers—that he would never get back the full use of them. And to put this into words unmanned him. Turning his face to the wall he began to cry.

Horrified beyond measure by the sounds, Richard sat at the dinner-table and bolted his food without knowing what he ate. Was, Cosima saw on rejoining him,

as much in need as Hans of cheer and comfort.

"Oh, you mustn't take it so to heart . . . what he does or says."

"Why? Is he *always* like this when he's ill?"—hastily and hopefully, his fork, with its cluster of meat pinned to it, suspended in mid-air. (And at this most inopportune of moments, she made the discovery that, of the woebegone eyes fixed on her, one was larger than the other, or at least more widely opened.)

"Well, yes . . . I'm afraid he is. He doesn't bear pain well; even though he has had so much of it. Besides, one has to allow for his extravagant way of talking. I'm used to it; I understand. Those who are not can't be expected to. So I think you should keep away, Richard. After all, there is nothing you can do for him."

His relief was patent. "Well, if you really think so. But you, my dear? Will you . . . will it be all right?"

Together with her little smile (this time he could have sworn there was a dash of mischief *in* it) she gave him one of the long, speaking looks that were now the only intimate gesture left them; and said softly: "It will be quite all right."

Here, however, a more pressing question arose than the breakdown of Hans' visits to the King. The *Tonkiinstkrver-sammlung* was due to meet in August at Karlsruhe; on Hans' shoulders lay a heavy share in the programmes; and even to him it had now become plain that he would not be fit to travel-Met alone conduct. Nor was this all. A rare guest had announced himself: for the first time since settling in Rome, Father Liszt was coming up over the Alps. Hans was beside himself at having to fail in his obligations. But did he think of Liszt, he could have wept anew. Close on four years now since they had met: and he not there to welcome the beloved man.

Nor Wagner either. For, vowed Richard, wild horses would not get *him* to Karlsruhe, after the scurvy tricks played him over *Tristan.* As for the *Tonkunstlerversammlung,* let it stew in its own juice: what had it ever done for him! Now, thank the Lord, he was his own master, could make "a long nose" in every direction.—Liszt? . . . why, upon his soul, he had almost forgotten Liszt's existence! For more years than he could count, not a word, not a line, thanks to the Machiavellian intrigues of a vicious and crazy old woman.

In private Hans had many a hard thing to say of Richard's attitude.

"When it comes to bedrock, there's not a scrap of generosity in him. *His* pride, *his* revenge! That's all he thinks of. The rest of us can go to blazes."

Cosima listened with only half an ear. Hans' cavillings were not to be taken seriously. Were but bubbles on the surface. Below, the current ran full and deep.

But the hurt to her father's feelings was a very different matter. And long after Hans had ceased to grumble she sat and pondered, with knit brows.

Her suggestion that she herself should travel to Karlsruhe was met with open disapproval.

"What?—go away and leave me lying here? With no one to look after me?" from Hans. And Richard's unspoken but no less obvious horror at the thought of being charged with this querulous and unruly patient.

She quieted them: no, no, nothing of that kind> Her plan was, to take Hans up to Munich, where he could get more skilled attention: hadn't the King himself suggested their consulting one of the Court physicians? And when she had seen him comfortably settled at an hotel, with somebody to do for him, she would go on to Karlsruhe, and there explain things to Father Liszt, and put them right.

And she had her way. One morning Richard stood and swung his hat at the tail of the departing train; afterwards returning to a house which, but for two babes and their *bonne*, was as drearily empty as before. A sort of bewitched abode he was beginning to think it: one of the malignly-enchanted castles of fairy lore.

But to leave Richard forsaken was no part of Cosima's scheme. And, arrived in Karlsruhe, where truthfully and with tact she exonerated the absentees, she set to work to pit her will and her daughterly influence against the strangle-hold that went out from Rome; to undermine the jealous power which aimed at controlling even the beloved's affections. Set herself to woo her father, thaw the ice that was encrusting him: as of old, rising betimes and going to Mass with him; laying herself out to please those who pleased him; accompanying him to dinners and receptions, where, did he fall melancholy or abstracted, she took it on herself to cover his silences, keep the ball of talk rolling.

Until she had him where she wanted him; could coax and wheedle as *she* chose. Munich had been forbidden him, it lay too near the plague-spot that was Wagner; but to Munich in the end he went; and was, she believed, consoled for any pangs of conscience he might suffer by the sight of poor Hans' joy. And there she played her second card: might it not, she queried, be looked on as a breach of decorum, pointedly to shun the person on whom the King was showering honours? ... appear to reflect upon His Majesty's judgment" Starnberg was but a stone's-throw distant; and (now for the heart-strings!) in Starnberg, desolate amid his grandeur, a great little man of genius sat and counted the hours till they met.—

"Frankly, it's all this young woman's doing—this terrible daughter of mine!"

The first rapturous greetings were over—Richard had

danced, sung, laughed and cried in a breath—but Liszt still had his arm round his friend's shoulders, and, as he spoke, he put out his other arm and drew Cosette to him, including her in the embrace. And Richard in his turn feeling for her hand, and pressing and fondling it, they stood, the three of them, linked as one, she and her two dearest. For a little while she held it out. Then, freeing herself, slipped away to her own room.

There when, under Father Liszt's magic fingers, the opening chords of the *Meistersinger* were marching through the house, she, too, shed tears of happiness. Not only had she succeeded in bringing back to Richard the friend he had given up for lost. But, in that outer room, genius sat by genius: at Richard's side was a man of his own stature, the single one of his contemporaries himself great enough fully to understand greatness. From where she sat, she could hear Richard singing at the top of his dear voice, or breaking off to descant on what he sang. Oh, that the stimulus of Liszt's presence might inspire him to take up afresh and bring to an end this glorious, all-too-long neglected work!

If so, for the first time, she would have been of some use to him.

Was it also to be the last?

For weeks, months even, Hans' acceptance of the generous offer made him by King Ludwig hung in the balance; and though the appointment as "King's Pianist" carried with it a very fair salary, out-of-pocket expenses from door to door, relief from the drudgery of teaching, a new life in a new and beautiful city. But here all Hans' perversity came to light: the chance of escape his, he could not make up his mind to seize it. Throughout his illness he had sighed to be back in Berlin—home air alone would cure

him—and now he began to discover in himself all manner of fondnesses for the place that had seen his early struggles, his rise to fame.

Lying soaking in medicated baths, or rigid under the grip of iron plasters, he belaboured the question whether to go or to stay; reiterating his doubts, summing up the fors and againsts till one's head swam, and one knew beforehand every word he was going to say.

"What I feel is, here in Berlin I'm *somebody;* in my own small way a bit of a personage. While down there I shall have my name to make all over again. With a public, too, that's notoriously lacking in culture and taste, and musically quite uneducated. That also, mark you, has a name for disliking strangers. On the other hand, it's humanly impossible for me to go on here as I've been doing. Another winter like the last, and I'd be past praying for. But give me half a chance, let me only get my neck out of the Jewish yoke, and I'd still be worth my salt. God knows I'm not afraid of work—within reason. I ask for no bed of roses. But the risks, my good girl, the risks!—it's these I shy at. They seem to me incalculable. For one thing the King's so young. What confidence can be placed in a boy of nineteen? Suppose he tires of me? What then?—me, with all my roots pulled up.—Oh God! boiled down, the whole thing hinges on my infernal health—or want of health. Had I been blessed with a sound body and nerves worth a rap, I shouldn't hesitate: to stop where I am. But there are you and the children to consider—these poor little wretches we've been hard-hearted enough to bring into the world!"

"Do He still, Hans. Each time you move you disarrange the plaster."

"Another thing," he went on—after a readjustment endured with many hisses and catches of the breath. "Besides all this, there's my mother—my unfortunate

mother. What's to become of her? There can be no question of taking her with us. Or not until we've shaken down a bit. And even then, at her age, to be torn from her friends, dumped down among strangers—you can imagine what that would mean for us!"

Thus far, he had shared his thoughts. What came after was for himself alone. As for *you,* my good fellow, it would be good-bye for ever to H.v.B, as a separate entity. Your time, your strength (the little that's left you), your talents (so-calledl) would be at the beck and call of another, and valuable only in so far as they served this other's ends.—But, oh *God,* did it matter? Did anything matter? How could it, when all that had once fired and inspired him—ambition, joy in the fray, belief in himself and his abilities—was now as cold as dead meat. Better far to snatch a plenary indulgence, and make final sacrifice of his remains to one as far above him as the stars by night.

And yet . . . and yet . . .

It was too much for him; he teased himself into a fever. And ended by laying the onus of a decision on other shoulders. Father Liszt, secretly applied to by Cosima and now appearing in Berlin, soon gave these self-torments their quietus.

Said he: "My son, with so flattering an offer from a reigning monarch in your pocket, it would be preposterous to think of continuing here in your role of petty pedagogue. And has it not occurred to you that a refusal on your part, if taken amiss by His Majesty, might react unfavourably on Wagner's prospects? Come, Hans, see reason. Besides, a position of this kind is exactly what I have always hoped for you. And the outlook is brilliant. My boy, in the half-dozen visits you paid His Majesty you accomplished more than I, in Weimar, say in ten long weary years. But then I hold that both of you—yes, my Cosette here, too—are

utterly thrown away in Berlin." With a fond smile at Cosima, who sat by.

She managed to return the smile, and to drop a few words in among Hans' hundreds. Then fled, leaving them to it. She was dead-weary. Only now, too, that the uncertainty of the past weeks was over, did she feel how dear it had cost her. Though not by a syllable had she sought to tip the balance. Her belief in fate—in *her* fate—was too strong for that. And if the decree had gone forth that she was to spend the rest of her life far from Richard, she would have humbly and mutely acquiesced. What was to be, would be.

But there was another reason for her weariness, perhaps even for her extreme passivity. Side by side with Hans' maddening irresolution, she had had a suspense of her own to bear; an uncertainty that ate deep into her woman's being. Now, this too was ended. By now she knew that her suspicions were justified: she was with child again. With child? . . . again? Ah, no, no, no! Richard's child it was—and in very truth a love-child—that lay under her heart.

## III

THE chosen *palais* having proved unsuitable and a substitute hard to find, Wagner kicked his heels in Starnberg throughout September, alone again but for his servants and an occasional passing visitor. Nor could he work. Though his head boiled with ideas for the third act of *Siegfried*—it was on the completion of the mighty *Niebelungen* drama that his young Protector had set his heart—to attempt to concentrate was like milking into a sieve. And every few days he was obliged to journey to Munich, for rehearsals (vilely unsatisfactory rehearsals, too) of the *Fliegende Hollander,* which the King clamoured to hear.

It was October before he was free to turn his back on clouds and mud, inadequately heated rooms, the arctic air that drove down from the new snow on the heights. In Munich there awaited him a fine villa built of stone, large as a young castle, standing in one of the best streets, and with a spreading garden in its rear. This princely abode was his for as long as he deigned to make use of it; and, swearing that it would be for all time, Wagner had a vision of himself stretched stiff and stark in one of its noble rooms; in brief, he intended not only to live but to die there.—Meanwhile, however, he had to be content with an hotel, while the accursgd business of decorating and furnishing went on.

Cosima, coming to Munich to look for a flat, found him in the thick of this. Found him, too, sneezing and coughing in the bleak Munich winds; but half-recovered from an attack of his old internal trouble, which had called for a small operation; pestered by inopportune visitors; sleeping

badly, or not at all; sitting, by order of the King, for his portrait; rehearsing imperfectly-trained singers and an unwilling orchestra in the *Hollander,* together with a programme of excerpts from his works, planned as a sop to the King's impatience. Found him pale and fragile, and all but skinless with nervous irritability.

" I f this is prosperity, may the Lord preserve me from it! I'm literally torn to shreds. And when my one wish is to get back to work. But for that, I must, I must have help. Oh, why doesn't Hans come? Is he never going to get well? I need him more than I've ever needed him," groaned Richard, and flipped a bundle of unopened letters from him with such vigour that they fell to the floor.

On him in this confusion, his mind devoured by his immediate troubles, the happy hours in Starnberg if not forgotten at least heavily overlaid, she, Cosima, had now to drop her bolt. And of the many hard things life had demanded of her, it was one of the hardest. The impulse to keep silence, keep her knowledge to herself, was almost irresistible. But she fought it. Speak she must. For if she did not, and he learned—as sooner or later he was bound to learn—that a child was on the way, might he not infer . . . Oh, no, Richard, nol Believe me, no!

But it was the eve of her return to Berlin before she found a halfway-likely moment.

They had been over the new house together, and sat resting in what was to be his workroom. The windows were still curtainless, but the Venetians had been lowered, and, but a single lamp burning on the writing-table, the room lay deep in shadow. Richard, too, was in a mild mood; talked long and gratefully of his young lover, the King.

She listened without hearing, so loud were her heartbeats. And directly he stopped speaking she took the plunge. "Richard, listen. There's something I have to say

to you. Something I think you ought to know." But to continue in this business-like tone was beyond her. Her voice broke. "Oh, I'm *sorry,* I'm sorry. The last thing I want to do is to bring you trouble."

"Trouble? Well, I'm used to that. What is it?" His tone was kindly, if a shade preoccupied.

But when it dawned on him what she was trying to tell him, his dismay was pitiful to see. She could not watch it, looked away, drooped her head, all thought of self wiped out by what she felt for him.

There he sat, his dear face pinched and withered, his sensitive mouth chewing as if he ate—a habit he had when deeply perturbed.

"My Godl" he said at last. "My God. So fate has still not done her damnedest with me. Still has it in her power to blast, destroy me!" And then, his words tumbling out faster than he could say them: "But of all the scurrilous tricks she's played me, this is the worst! At a moment when my whole future hangs in the balance, when I stand a stranger among strangers, with only my King's love to support me; at such a moment for it to come out that I have lain with my neighbour's, nay, with my best friend's wife—Great God! it means the end of everything. And not for me alone, but for all of us, yes, every single one!" And springing up from his seat he went thudding about the room, throwing out his arms, running his hands through his hair.

Though his words were like so many stones aimed at her heart, Cosima met the storm in silence—except when required to confirm the piteous: "But are you *sure,* child, are you quite, quite sure?" with which he more than once broke his flow. Sat trembling, yet unafraid; strangely unafraid. For comfort she had his eyes—his disarming eyes. Say what he might, *their* innate goodness was not to be obscured.

But when his first violence was spent and he had fallen back on: "The end, the end of everything!" she raised her head.

"Must i t . . . does it *need to* be?" she asked in a low voice.

At this he stopped, and whipped round to face her.

"What's that?" And husky as a crow from mingled catarrh and emotion: *"What!* You believe it might actually be possible . . . mean you would be willing . . .?"

A fresh droop of her head stood for an answer.

With two steps he was by her side. "But Hans? What of him?" And to the room at large: "Oh, my poor, poor Hans, what have I *done* to you!"

"Well . . . You see, Hans is so ... so vague. Yes . . . always." It came as a whisper, was scarcely audible.

His eyes probed her through as he stood taking in all she could not say. "I see. I understand," he said slowly; and with a profound sigh of relief passed his handkerchief across his forehead.

And now he was transformed, his excitement dropping from him like a cast-off garment. Now, too, she had his full attention. He saw her distress: her pallor, the hunched shoulders, the nervous tremor of the locked hands. Pulling up a chair, he sat down before her and clasped these firmly and encouragingly in his.

"And so you would really be willing to do this for me? —But, child, have you thought what it would mean? Are you sure you'd have the strength, the nerve, to carry it through?",

"Yes, Richard.—Besides, what . . . what happened was all my fault."

He was beautifully and swiftly down on this point of view.

"Ah, nonsense! Stuff and nonsense! If fault there was, we shared it. But put all such far-fetched notions out of your head. It was nature, child, old Mother Nature herself

who took a hand. (And a perverse jade she has proved herself!)—But let that be. What troubles me is whether I am justified in asking so much of you. In allowing you to weight your young shoulders with such a load. Ah, well," with another sterterous sigh, "if it can't be done it can't, and *damit basta!* In which case there'll be nothing for it but to come out into the open and bear the consequences."—Though how slight was his belief in this contingency, his next words showed. "But now come, let us put our heads together and lay our plans. They must be water-tight. For Hans' sake . . . it's Hans we've got to think of—our poor old Hans!"

"He shall never know. As soon as . . . as *I* knew, for certain, I saw that this was the only possible way."

"You did? Good Lord, was there ever anyone like you!"

He squeezed her hands, he shook them, he raised them one after the other to his lips.—And for the first time was struck by the beauty of these long slim tapering, almost jointless fingers, the velvety softness of the skin.

His heart glowed; and he sighed anew.

"Oh, out on the perversity of things! Here am I, who all my life have wished, nay, longed for a child of my own. *What* wouldn't I have given, in those grim and dreary years with Minna, to have some young thing, one of my own blood beside me, to turn to for refreshment. And now that my wish is to be granted, I can have no joy in it; or any real share. Shall need to stand by and see *my* child passed off as another's. Never be free to claim it as *my* own."

The ready tears sprang at the thought. And Cosima's self-control abruptly failing her, they fell into each other's arms and wept as one.

In spite of all it had given him, Wagner did not warm to Munich. And at Peter's animadversions on the place

that was now their common home, he looked up from his book and nodded a grumpy assent.

Cosima, presiding at evening-tea in his rose-pink *salon,* wished Peter further. How foolish, how more than foolish of the latter to air his prejudices in this wayl When it should have been his business to slur over the shortcomings, dwell on the charm and advantages of the town; in other words, help to settle not unsettle Richard. The disagreeable events of the past month had seen to that.

But Peter loved to hear himself talk; and, being besides a bit of a simpleton, tactlessly droned on, adjusting his spectacles on his "professorial" nose, replacing the strands of his lank, overlong hair behind his overlarge ears.

"No, my town it's not, this cold, unfriendly place, perched up for all the winds that blow to whistle through its streets. And oh, these streets, these endless, shabby, monotonous streets—*Amalien, Turkey Theresien, Gabelsberger* or whatever else their names may be—one so like another that you never know which you're in . . . and what's more don't care. Merely to have to walk through them, between their rows of scabby houses, sends your heart into your boots. Yet, tell me, can one good word be said for the *JLudwigstrasse*—this pompous, pretentious *Ludwigstrasse!*—which the people here think so much of? I doubt it."

"Talk of long straight streets, what about Berlin? There's no comparison," said Hans rudely.—He had just come in, muffled to the ears against the March blast, and so cold that his cup shook as he raised it to his lips.

"What Peter needs is a wife—to keep him cosy," threw in Wagner, without troubling to raise his head. "That's all that's wrong with *him"*

Peter bristled. "Well, I . . . well, really . . . surely I may be allowed my own opinion?" (And thought: for him to drag in wives!)

"Take a friend's warning and don't bank on the cosiness." And draining his cup, Hans set it do wn" with a rattle that caused two pairs of eyes to meet, and Peter to fix his on space.

With a heightened colour Cosima threw herself into a pause that threatened to grow embarrassing.

"My good Cornelius," she said suavely, yet with an undertone of patronage that did not escape the thin-skinned Peter. "Do you not think you have perhaps lost the *habit* of big cities? I mean through having lived so long in smaller towns, which are more easily assimilated."

"Rubbish! What about his years in Vienna?"

But Peter's back was up. Ignoring Hans, he retaliated: "No, Baroness, I do not. It is true I *have* spent a good part of my life in what you, accustomed only to the metropolises of the world, must inevitably regard as mere nests. A misfortune for me, no doubt. But it had no effect on my feelings for Vienna. I was happy there, and very loath to leave it. But this Munich, this so-called Athens-on-the-Isar, never shall I feel at home in it. If I were asked to describe it, I should say a city without a soul. Planned mainly for show. Hence, insincere to its foundations. Yes, the equivalent of a lie, a brilliant liel" And Peter preened himself, both for his choice of epithets and for his refusal to be downed.

"Very pretty, very pretty," said Hans, exasperated in his turn at the other's obtuseness. "With your gift for phrase-stringing, my lad, you ought to join the staff of one of the cock-eyed rags that pass here for newspapers. Then, you'd have a chance of putting it to some use."

Though the composer in Peter winced at the sneer, he merely turned his mild eyes on his friend and smiled.—Hans was a privileged person.

But Cosima, fearful of any mention of the press before Richard, once more sprang into the breach.

"You tell us, *mon cher,* that you find Munich uncongenial for what you call its insincerity—though I think a more suitable word would be theatricality. But, come, provided you——"

"Now she's off!" from Hans.

"And so am I." Wagner shut his book with a clap that made them jump, and tossed it from him. "Do you imagine I've nothing better to do than sit here and listen to this twaddle?" And, suddenly grown furious: "I—who can hardly find the time to pare my finger-nails?"

"Where to, Richard?" asked Cosima in a low voice.

"Where to? Why, back to slavery, of course. Letters, letters, letters, thousands of letters, to write, to wade through, to squeeze out an answer to—though not one of them'll do me or those that get 'em a happorth of good. Look here!" Sliding back the doors of his workroom, he reappeared with both hands full of unopened envelopes, which he flourished at them.

"But it's so late; and writing at night excites you. You'll spoil your sleep again," remonstrated Cosima. And getting up from her chair, heavily, for by now her pregnancy was far advanced, she crossed to where he stood. "Give them to me; let me sort them out for you. I can at least lay the rubbish aside."

"My dear, for all I care you may throw the whole lot into the wastepaper-basket." As he spoke Richard shovelled the letters into her hands so generously that they overflowed. Peter had to go down on his knees to retrieve them, and to help carry them back to the desk.

With her departure, the air of the room cleared. Or so it felt to one of them. Relieved of a distasteful job, Wagner was his genial self again; Hans dropped his twitting and carping. The three drew their chairs closer, and the Master talked, at long and at large, of the subject that lay next his

heart: the magnificent Festival-Theatre, which his adorable young King proposed to erect on the further bank of the Isar, solely for performances of the *Niebelungen* dramas. Built according to Wagner's own plan by a famous architect, this would contain some startling innovations: an invisible orchestra, an amphitheatre rising fanwise from the stage. No longer would the eye be distracted by a moving phalanx of bows, the puffing of the brass, the conductor's unavoidable gymnastics; and each seat in the house would have an equally good view of the stage. Such a theatre was an old dream of Wagner's, so old that, considering the tricks fate had played him, he still hardly dared to believe in its fulfilment. And sitting there, his arm round Hans, he made the pair of them his confidants, shared with them his various hopes and fears.—As man to man. Hip never patronised, thought Peter.

Hans of course took a tremendous, a professional interest in everything to do with the scheme. But then Hans had no fish of his own to fry: no newly-completed *Cid* to tremble for. In coming to Munich, he had made full and heroic sacrifice of himself and his career. God grant him some return for it, mused Peter; if only in the shape of gratitude (from the proper quarter). Certainly, no timelier step had ever been taken. On the tight-rope on which Wagner walked—a royal "favourite," but without public backing, with, indeed, still a dozen enemies to each well-wisher—the hold and support of this loyal friend might prove his salvation. If only Hans' health stood the racket. Poor *withered* Hans, who sometimes looked as if a breath of wind would blow him away. At this very moment he ought to be at home and in bed. Anyone could see how done he was.

Anyone but Wagner.—But, the later the hour, the more alive *he* seemed to come. And the subject of the theatre exhausted, he was seized by an itch to read aloud; to share

with others his own pleasure in the writings of a great modern philosopher. For this, a full house was needed, and Cosima was peremptorily bidden to leave her sorting. Ranging the three of them round him, he affixed his spectacles, opened the book. A capital reader, he had also the gift of making abstruse subjects clear, of lighting up the dull. None the less, as the clock ticked on, Peter saw that Hans was in the same boat as himself. Every few minutes one or other of them had to smother a ferocious yawn, by a clinch of the teeth so violent that it brought tears to the eyes.

Nor was this the end. Kindled by his author, now thoroughly in the vein, Wagner was ripe for music—his own. Up went the lid of the piano, Hans to the piano-chair, *Tristan* to the rack: *Tristan* which, by order of the King, was to receive its baptism of fire early in the coming May.

Then, however, Hans not he would wield the time-stick.

"For the fat I sweated out over the *Hollander* would have kept a family in lard for a month. Can't be done, children, can't be donel I'm getting an old man now."

So saying, he planted himself at Hans' side, and sang through the whole of *Tristan's* first act.

Tears and embraces followed: with a special hug for his *Auszugler*—the creator of this inimitable piano-score. The next moment Hans and he were embarked on a technical discussion which, to Peter, seemed as if it might go on for the rest of the night, Hans by now being as fresh as Wagner. Even when they ultimately got away, Cosima and he had to hang about the street, Hans having dived back into the house for a last word.

No longer were one's yawns to be controlled. Out they would, almost cracking the jaws with their force.

Feeling his companion's eye upon him, Peter repressed a monster spasm.

"Pray, excuse me. But the truth is, I'm no night-bird. Besides, I have had a particularly tiring day. Hunting for a subject for my next opera."

"Ah, really?"

The studied coolness of the tone flicked him anew. (Great GodI had *no* one but Wagner the right to call himself a composer?)

He hit back. "And then, between ourselves, I confess to finding an evening of this sort something of a strain. I'm second to none in my admiration for the Master's temperament and energy, his marvellous elasticity of mind. But to be asked to keep pace with him, even for a time, is exhausting—at least for a lesser mortal like myself."

"But naturally!" agreed Cosima: so promptly that Peter flushed. "That I can well understand. But does it matter? As I see it, my good Cornelius, this is precisely just where we—*nous autres*—-come in. To provide him with an outlet for his superb vitality."

But Peter was not to be downed.

"What amazes me is how, living at this pitch, he has managed to last as long as he has. One thing, though, I'm sure of: he won't make old bones."

That did it. He saw a finger stray to her eyes, and her voice quavered. "Oh, I know—only too well."

Hans, however, coming scurrying out of the house on his short legs, coughing and hawking at his first intake of the night air, laughed the notion to scorn.

"Tommyrotl Richard's as tough as leather. For all his stomach troubles and abscesses and piles, he'll live to see the rest of us into our graves."

And having successfully crushed the sentimentalists, he tilted his North German nose and sniffed—disdainfully.

"Pah! *How* this wretched place does stink of malt!"

## IV

IT was not May, it was the middle of June before the long-heralded performances of *Tristan* took place. By then, the infant with the well-marked features—born on the day of the first full orchestral rehearsal (oh, happy augury!) and named for Isolde—was over two months old. Its father, presented to it on its birth by Hans, who, at the advent of yet another girl, was announcing himself in good Berlinese as having "become a mother for the third time": Wagner leant over the crib and peered apprehensively at its contents. Could, however, God be praised (and fifed and drummed!) see no trace of resemblance to himself—or for that matter to anyone—in the red and aged bit of pulp. Straightening himself, he clapped Hans on the back and reverted with a lightened heart to his own affairs.

They were of a nature to thrust even this long-dreaded event into the background. For he was within an ace of the supreme moment of his life: the miracle, belief in which had gone with other faded rubbish into the dust-shoot, was at last to happen: thanks to one who possessed not only the faith but the power to perform miracles. Except on the piano, he had not heard a tone of any of his works since *Lohengrin.* Now, the great score that had so long lain dumb was to wake to life, the whole mighty erection of *Tristan* rise before him. Ah! the birth which *he* awaited far outstripped any mortal childbearing.

If at this moment he had room in him for another feeling, it was gratitude to providence for Hans. Without Hans where would he have been: he, with his "confused" nerves, his sopping sweats, his various bodily ailments. But for

once fate had dealt well by him. Hans, trustiest of lieutenants, was there to shoulder the entire drudgery of preparation. Not only this: from his early work on it, he knew *Tristan* by heart; with his prodigious memory could almost have conducted it blindfold; yet, when it came to details, he responded like the harmonics of a fundamental to one's lightest wish. On Hans it now devolved to prove—to the doubting orchestra, the timorous singers—the *possibility* of this score, hemmed and hawed over by the cognoscenti, derided by the ignorant, turned down by Karlsruhe, by Vienna, as unsingable, unplayable.

But Hans' own ambitions went further. He was out to give these easy-going South Germans a lesson *in* musical production. Not for him the slithery and casual sight-reading in a body, to which the orchestra had been accustomed. Sparing neither it nor himself, he took each group of instruments singly—the several strings, wood, brass, percussion—tirelessly repeating, hammering away at a phrase till he had brought it to perfection, breaking down conservatism and obstruction. Sometimes he spent the whole day at the theatre; in the evening going on to Richard's for a piano-rehearsal with the voice. Wagner himself was astounded at the physical endurance displayed by this fragile, most diminutive of men.

Whose ample reward it was to be able to say, as he sank into bed: "Richard is satisfied."

Of course, the strain told—on a frame still enfeebled by months of illness—and those about him had to handle him like brittlest glass. There were times when he could hardly bear to be spoken to, let alone reasoned with; while contradict him, and he would fall to stamping or shaking his fist—just as if he had his orchestra before him! Cosima merely sighed, and increased her measure of indulgence; but Wagner, himself so given to nerve-storms, was shocked

—shocked into placidity. More serious was it when Hans took to letting himself go in public. On a refusal to grant him extra space for his increased orchestra, the exasperated "pig-dogs" he applied to those stall-holders whose seats he wished to see demolished, ran like wildfire through the town; and, being taken up by the papers, caused a pretty scandal. It also provided the good Bavarians with a welcome outlet for their resentment against the bunch of foreigners who, unasked, unwanted, had descended upon the musical life of Munich, to show it what was what. Hans had to eat his words—in print—and at the first performance of *Tristan* it was thought wise to close the cheap seats in the upper galleries, for fear of a disturbance.

Through all this and more: a rain of scurrilous unsigned letters, of personal threats, demands amounting to black-mail, coupled with open attacks in the press; so much more that one wakened of a morning wondering what fresh outrage the day could possibly bring: through it all, Wagner walked like a man in a dream. Threats and menaces held no terror for him; wild hatred, senseless opposition had met him at each forward step of his career. An unsurpass-able Tristan; a very tolerable Isolde; Hans as interpreter, his King for a pillar of strength: with these to lean on, he was proof against harm.

On the morning of the last full-dress rehearsal, early in May, Baroness von Bulow, gloved, bonneted, mantled, stood in a stage-box of the Court Theatre, and, while Wagner was below addressing the orchestra, received, in his stead, various friends and acquaintances among the six hundred invited guests who filled stalls and dress-circle. Strangers, too, not a few, were brought to be presented to her, and to click their heels before her. Not only was **she** the wife of **the** conductor, the famous **(and** notorious)

Hans von Bulow. By now it was becoming subtly understood that the Master himself would look with favour on civilities shown the lady who acted as his secretary. (His private secretary.)

She was much admired as she stood there, very tall, graceful, distinguished-looking, in her billowy hooped gown; a trifle paler than usual from her recent *accouchement*, but apt as ever at finding the right word for every one: the happy phrase that sent its recipient away feeling himself specially singled out.—And many were the flattering comments passed on French polish, French breeding; on a charm of manner that left mere beauty far behind; on Billow's good fortune as a husband. While those to whom Wagner was dear took courage from her complete composure. Standing so near the fountain-head, she could be trusted to reflect the Master's own mood.

For her part, Cosima was thankful when this, the little help she could give, was over, and when she was free to rest her trembling limbs (trembling not with fatigue alone). From her seat, she continued to deal out nods and smiles and waves of the hand. While under her breath she sent up a last fervent prayer. Oh, dear Mother of God, let all go well for my Richard! Of Thy goodness grant him the success he deserves.

Now, the shrilling of bells in corridors and *foyers* hurried the stragglers to their places; and the tall, resplendent figure of the young King appeared in the Royal Box. Hans came threading his way through the strings; and, a minute after, darkness fell.—And what a darkness! A kind of puff of surprise went up from the audience as it enshrouded them. This was indeed an innovation. One could not even see to consult one's watch!

As Hans raised his stick, the door behind her was stealthily opened, a light touch fell on her shoulder, which

**her** own fingers flew to meet; and Richard took the chair set ready for him in the farthest, obscurest corner.

Then, in a silence so profound that one hardly dared to draw breath, the baton fell: and with the first tones of the Prelude, the first timid tender question sobbed out by the strings, Cosima passed into another world.

A dream world, that was yet realer than any reality; that, by the sheer intensity of its dreaming, turned the real into the dream. A world in which appearances were unmasked, pretences seen through: where stark truth reigned. Where soul spoke nakedly to soul, stripped of convention's veneer. —A terrible world. For the harsh white light of truth that was its essence, shedding its beams on every hand, lit up one's own poor life with the rest; and, playing full on things one had hugged to oneself as virtues—compromises and concessions, pity and consideration for others—showed them up for the shams they were. And so remorselessly, that all one had hitherto endured, connived at, made the best of, seemed suddenly to grow unbearable.—From the mirror here held up she would have liked to turn and fly; to put space between herself and the hideous reflection. Whereas she could not stir a finger, for fear of distracting Richard.—And as she sat there, pinned to the spot, gradually, very gradually, the centre of her emotion shifted. For she was listening to this daemonic work for the first time in its entirety; and little by little the poison worked. The resistless passion that saturated it, prickling the nerves, whipping the senses, became her passion; and, washing her adrift, submerging, suffocating her, carried her away on its flood, beyond hope of rescue. *Tristan:* first heard, first lived through, with, not a hand's reach from her in the soft warm dark, one for whom, more rapturously than any Isolde, she would have laid down her life. Cold tremors ran

through her; the blood streamed to her heart, streamed from her heart. And as the death-music climbed and soared, love and death indistinguishably one, she felt a demon wake in her which till now, by every means at her disposal, she had fought to keep under.

Throughout the long day—from ten till half-past three o'clock in the theatre, between the acts, and afterwards, in company—she walked like a shade among the living. Or like an automaton, that said and did all that was expected of it, joined in applause, shed tears of enthusiasm, played the hostess, took part in animated discussions. But her real self was far away.

Richard alone saw something of what was working in her; and more than once she felt his kindly, understanding eyes upon her. "There, there! The child mustn't take it too much to heart," he whispered. Believing, even he, that the tragedy of his lovers' fate it was that oppressed her.

But at last she was alone. The whole house slept—and she would not disturb it. Nothing of her moved but her locked hands. They wrung and twisted as, propped on her pillows, she sat and stared at the shapeless masses of the furniture, their monstrous black shadows that swayed in keeping with the flicker of a street-lamp. Yes, there sat she, Cosima Liszt, Cosima von Bulow—mere pride of name should have forearmed her!—and looked her shame in the face. Like any other woman. Except that the question she put to herself was not: "What is to become of me?" but: "What can I *do?*"

The time for drifting was past. The self-contempt, the loathing for her present life, stirred up in her by the divine sincerity of great music, a mighty work of art, was insupportable: she felt contaminated by such feelings . . . she, who had carried her head so high. That she could ever have

laid herself open to them! Awake now to the maze of cozenage and deceit in which she was lost, she put her hands to her cheeks to hide their burning . . . alone and in the dark though she was. And then ... All along it had been possible only because she was dealing with one whose trust in her was absolute, who measured her integrity by his own. Whom just because he *was* so honourable it had been easy to blind, to hoodwink.—And to the sleeping Hans she sent a thought so warm that it was like a caress.

But never again. No more impostures. At whatever cost she would get back her self-respect, wrench herself free of lying and fraud, of the treacherous *laisser croire* which at this moment seemed even more contemptible than the lie direct. She had come to a crossways. On the one side hpnour bade her stamp out, reduce to ashes, the wild love that possessed her, give up every hope of personal happiness. To go on mothering Hans along with her children, cosseting his nerves, backing and encouraging him, while she herself grew old, grew cold, under the weight of a bond that had turned to iron. On the other— Ah, there lay a bliss so perfect that she dared not picture it. Once give her fancy rein and she was done for. None the less her hands went back to her face, and held it, tightly clasped. For she knew that what she was asking of herself went beyond her strength. How could she ever bring over her lips, words that would strike Richard out of her life?—Oh, *why* had she needed to wake? ... to become aware of what she was and what she was doing. Better, far better (for every one; had she been left in the dark. Which meant . . . that she had never heard *Tristan.*

But even as she formed these words a thought so cruel smote her that it drove everything else before it. *Tristan?* —what had *Tristan* to do with her? Not because of her, or through her, or for any love of her, had this supreme

cry of human passion been uttered. Another—not she—had called it into being. And only now that herself she had lived through it, and been scorched by it, did she grasp all that this implied. The knowledge was wormwood. She went down under it, bit the dust. Burying her face in the pillows, heaping their soft down round and up and over her head, she surrendered herself to an anguish so acute, a resentment so bitter that her teeth chattered, her hands grew cold. While feelings such as she had not known were in her pushed to the surface. The dregs of feelings, which set her among the lowest of mankind: hatred and malice, a vindictiveness that made her afraid. Yes, at this moment she knew what those unfortunates went through who were driven to commit a crime.—Nor did it end here. For, as she lay and wept, at her meanness, her irreparable loss, a still more ruinous thought insinuated itself. And this was that at some future time the same thing might happen again: still another come into Richard's life, and, playing upon his loneliness, his tenderness of heart, take the place that might have been hers. That should have been hers. That *was* hers; that she, and she alone, had been born to fill. And that no one, while there was breath in her body, should steal from her.—And with this, her founderings were over: doubts, guilt, compunction crumbled to dust. For she could not see it happen—and live.

Pushing back the hot, heavy masses of hair (the hair Richard loved) from her forehead, she sat up and looked about her. Tear-stained, shivering, exhausted; but clear-eyed. For now she knew where she stood: never to doubt again. It was to Richard she belonged, with every fibre of her being. The words that had broken from her, that first night at Starnberg, held all there was to say. Except for him, no one mattered.—And to keep her place at his side (to keep him *hers)* she was prepared for any sacrifice.

## V

BUT to see one's path and to follow it were very different things.

The plan that had ripened in her of first letting the excitement of the *Tristan* days go by, and then opening her heart to Richard, and, with his assent, to Hans, came to nothing. Forty-eight hours after the triumphant dress-rehearsal, they were in an upset that sent one's personal troubles to the wall.

She was sitting nursing her infant when Hans came in, from what he considered a rather unnecessary "run through" *mesga voce,* fancied by Richard, with the news that "Isolde" had sneezed and complained of her throat. Merely in order to harass the harassed, in his opinion; but Cosima was not convinced. And ignoring his sarcasms she thrust babe and feeding-bottle into the nurse's arms, tied on her bonnet and hastened to Richard, whom Hans reported—again he thought quite unnecessarily—jumpy.

For she knew her Richard. And as she expected she found him in the depths, already envisaging the worst.

"My dear, the truth is, I've been far too happy of late, and the powers-that-be retain their ancient grudge, God! am I *never* to know peace?"

His distress automatically became hers. The bewildered eyes, the small, shrunken face (every one who met him anew was remarking how he had aged) tugged at her heart-strings. She yearned to take the great head to her breast, to hold it close, safe from the world. But this was no moment for tenderness. Instead, she took his arm and joined him in his restless pacing, egging him on to talk

freely of his fears and presentiments, and bringing up a battery of reasons with which to demolish them.—Afterwards, though, she paid a secret call on the offender, to see for herself how matters stood.

Two days of laming uncertainty went by. Innumerable billets passed between the *Briennerstrasse* and the singer's hotel; she, Cosima, inquiring there so often in person that her visits came to be resented, as casting a doubt on Frau Schnorr's good faith. But all to no purpose. The catarrh, which was genuine, did not yield, the voice grew rough and unsteady. With the exception of Richard they began to steel themselves to the inevitable. He (dear soul) having, thanks to her, swung round to the other extreme, doggedly refused to abandon hope. Hence, not till the eleventh hour, when people were on the point of starting for the theatre, could the baleful notices be posted: the first performance of *Tristan und Isolde* was "indefinitely postponed."

The consternation, the commotion that ensued beggared belief. Munich, itself in gala, its skies of a deep lupin-blue, across which crisp breezes drove snowy cloud-balloons; its pleasure-loving folk summerly attired, streets and gardens massed with lilac on the eve of blossoming: Munich had for days been filling up with strangers from far and near. Musicians, critics, reporters, friends and enemies were assembled there, one and all on the stretch to hear the latest work of the man who was now the greatest genius of his day, now the most arrant charlatan. Many had undertaken the lengthy journey at considerable cost and trouble. Busy teachers and conductors, like friend Klindworth from London and Lassen of Weimar, had obtained but a week's leave; and as day added itself to day, and the performance still hung fire, were forced to go home no wiser than they came. Others with more time on their hands or more money in their pockets made the best of it, and settled down to

await developments. For diversion they had the pithy and appetising gossip with which the town seethed. The King and his ministers, Wagner and his henchmen, none was spared. But the fruitiest crop of rumours sprang up over the reason—the real, the true reason—for *Tristan's* postponement, only a few intimates being willing to swallow the tale of a nasal catarrh. Or to credit the singers' blame of the inhuman draughts that hurtled across the great barn-like stage, and chilled them as they sat or lay, drenched in sweat from their exertions and from the weight of their garb. Or to pay attention to Hans' grumbles over the superfluous *mezza voce.* ("Four days' rest between dress-rehearsal and performance, and Isolde might never have snuffled!") The great majority, including many a well and all the ill wishers, together with the but half-convinced, the ignorant, and the entire local press, were not to be gulled: the barbaric difficulties of this music and the impossibility of finding singers to cope with it were here made plain. A man's voice *might lest* out, a woman's delicate organ never.

Thus a month dragged by.

In these days Cosima let everything else slide, to devote herself to Richard. Encouragement he no ionger needed. Once the blow had fallen, his native grit, his buoyancy of mind and his indestructible humour came to his aid. ("What a man! Nothing on this earth will ever keep *him* down. He's the proverbial cork in person," marvelled Hans, who himself was sour and disgruntled.) No, her present business was to guard Richard . . . from his friends. For those who kicked their heels in Munich held that they had a right to the Master's company; and even total strangers took to breaking in on him unannounced.

A couple of rooms on the ground-floor of the house in the *Briennerstrasse* were placed at her disposal. Here, she handled the flood of letters that poured in after the

catastrophe; at his request replying to many of them as she herself thought fit. Or in a tiny *salon* she received intending callers, permitting only those to mount the stairs whom Richard himself wished or whom she thought he ought to see.

He christened her "the little keeper of the door." And laying a fatherly arm about her excused himself to Hans for the flagrant use he was making of her time and strength.

But Hans wouldn't hear of it. "My dear man, if I know Cos, she's in her element. Has a chance to show her paces such as *my* poor life's never given her."

His tone of ownership, his tiresome self-disparagement nettled Cosima.

"That's nonsense, Hans. There are ever so many things I could do for you ... if you would only let me."

"I know. I know. If, for example, I weren't one of those mulish people who don't think a letter's a letter unless it's in their own fist."

Wagner turned up his eyes. "And I who am only too happy to pass them on to somebody else!"

Linking arms, they went oft" laughing and chaffing; while she turned back to the letter she was composing. The tricky letter, each word of which had to be weighed. And over which, when he read it, Richard rubbed his hands. Said he, he'd never known and couldn't imagine a like talent for glossing the unpalatable.

"This is where your French up-bringing comes in, child. No nation like the French for pretty phrases."

And then he spoke of other, more important letters, which he one day saw her tackling: inveigling without loss of dignity, damping without putting out the fire.

For he had so little of the courtier in him. His inconvenient frankness, his advantage in age and experience would out. Aye, inconvenient; for, did an extra-blunt word

chance to escape him, back came a distressed entreaty to know if and how the recipient had offended. And then it was all to do over again. Which ruined a morning's work. And, dearly as he loved the lad . . . But she—a born diplomat—would take the inditing of such epistles in her stride.

She could but agree. No matter to whom she wrote, with Richard and his work for theme, her pen literally danced over the paper.

Another morning he descended the stair (she read trouble in his step) and tossed a sheaf of bills on her desk.

"Just cast your eye over these wretched things—*I* can't make head or tail of 'em. And something's wrong somewhere. It's *utterly* impossible for all this money to have run away in three short months!"

Alas! there was nothing impossible in it, as she soon saw. The accounts rendered were fair and square. They dated, however, a good deal farther back than the period mentioned—some were being presented for a third or fourth time—and the sum total considerably exceeded Richard's hasty totting up. Shocked by the figures, she tried to think out ways and means of retrenchment, by which he might be enabled to live within his purse. But, though he cheered her on, she failed—and somewhat ingloriously. For she found herself up against needs and habits of too old a growth now to be disturbed. The few suggestions she ventured on called forth dismayed protests. Richard could not, it seemed, exist without this or breathe without that. What he wanted he *must* have; and on the spot. Who was she to cross him?—Besides, her attempt at interference upset his servants; and had hurriedly to be abandoned.

Meanwhile, over all this, weeks slid by; June dawned with its golden sunshine, its Italian skies; and early in June the leaden days of suspense came to an end. Isolde, cured

**and** in voice again, returned with her Tristan to Munich; and thereupon those four performances took place which were to form a peak in the town's musical history. After each in turn, familiar faces vanished; the crowd of strangers thinned and gradually petered out; and, with a secret concert in the Residence Theatre, conducted by Wagner himself for the King's sole benefit (they others, some twenty strong, concealing themselves in dark and musty corners): with this, the festivities of the memorable summer of eighteen hundred and sixty-five found their close.

Now, thought Cosima, now surely her hour would come, she be free to tell Richard of her unalterable decision. But far from it. From this time forward until that morning, six months later, when a stunned and ashen Wagner bade farewell to the city of his dreams, misfortune after misfortune rained on him, outdoing in grossness any that had gone before.

The first blow to fall was perhaps the most staggering. His beloved tenor, the Tristan to whom, at first hearing, he had listened with tears dripping through bis fingers; to whom he looked not alone for the creation of his Siegfried, but for the rearing of a school of singers worthy the name: Schnorr von Carolsfeld went home to Dresden only to sicken of a mysterious illness, and to die of it within forty-eight hours. Hans and he flung themselves into the train and journeyed through the intolerable summer heat, to snatch a last look at the beloved face. But even for the funeral they came too late; and found themselves standing before a filled-in grave. Back to Munich they fled, Hans declaring bitterly: "Schnorr has paid for us all. The whole thing was too perfect. A victim was demanded, a vengeance!" Richard vowing: "Never again shall *Tristan* be performed!" and looking what he felt, a broken man.

He shut himself up, would see no one—but Cosima. *She* could be trusted not to encroach on his feelings, or to madden him with platitudes; her own experience of death and loss had taught her the value of silence. Of one thing, however, she did speak; and freely, as she could never have spoken to Hans. During their absence she had had one of her strange dreams, or visions, of the dead; and she told how the great singer, garbed as Tristan, had suddenly appeared to her in the night—no, she had not been asleep, his appearance had shocked her out of her sleep. Standing there, himself in some mysterious way lighting up the darkness, he had signalled to her and endeavoured to say something, though what, she was too flustered to grasp. Now, she thought it might have been the "Comfort my Richard" with which he had passed.

"I saw him so plainly, he looked so lifelike. . . they always do, Richard . . . that it's hard to believe it only a dream. To me it seems as if I have *really* seen them, really spoken to them."

Richard, his tired eyes fixed on her, nodded indulgently, without a trace of Hans' ingrained scepticism.

"It may be, it *may* be . . . who knows! Man's future is wrapt in mystery. And perhaps mercifully so.—But as for your apparitions, child, are we not all ghosts? Who lives? Who is dead? I for my part have perished times without number. Yet here I am.—What I *cannot* reconcile myself to is the way misfortune dogs those who are true to me. Yes, it happens again and again. Because Fate cannot get *me* down, it lays violent hands on them. They need only to dedicate their lives to me, to my cause, and they are done for."

It went to her heart to have to leave him at such a time, in such a mood. But Hans and she were bound by a long-standing promise to join Liszt that summer in Budapest.

And not even for Richard's sake could she break faith with her father.

''*He* needs us, too," she entreated, drooping under a fire of protests and remonstrances.

But Richard wouldn't admit the comparison; was angry and unreasonable.

"Not as / do! Have you ever seen your father without a bodyguard of admirers, or a fair one at his side to console him? Or too cast down to take a relish in society? And as all question of marriage is over, and he now wears a cassock, his value will go up by leaps and bounds. Whereas I— Well! if I end everything by throwing myself in the lake, you'll know, the pair of you, who's to blame."

For his destination was a tiny shooting-box of the King's, standing high above the pine-darkened *Walchensee.* Here he repaired, to rest and recover from his loss. But he did not hold it out for long. He fell ill; it rained without ceasing; mists veiled every prospect. Also, after the close companionship of the past months, after the warmth and tender indulgence he had learned to depend on, to be alone was unendurable. He missed a woman's thoughtful care, missed Cosima, missed her at every turn. And that others should have a prior right to her, drag her away, drag her about, threw him into a fit of blackest jealousy. The father, of course, would withdraw to his Roman fastnesses; but Hans, poor blind old Hans, it wasn't so easy to blot out. Now would he, even if he could. For he needed Hans, needed him too—in one way every bit as much as Cosima. Yes, the truth of the matter was, he wanted them both.

Once more, however, his state of excitation provided a stimulus. Back in Munich, he dashed off at top speed the first rough prose draft of *Parziva/,* for which young Ludwig was pining. And then all was well.

* * * *

But the position of King's Favourite demands an easy seat, a light hand. And for Wagner, who came to it encrusted and encumbered with the debris of his long and chaotic life—his "mountebank's" life—it was to prove untenable. From the outset, everything told against him. The enormous disparity in years between him and his benefactor sent people's eyebrows up their foreheads; the more lenient contenting themselves with gibes of "nurse and nursling," the malicious depicting him as a species of Lola Montez, who held an infatuated youth in his claws. His reputation of spendthrift and wastrel had here, too, travelled ahead of him, poisoning the air; and he had not been three months in Munich before he was obliged to strike out in self-defence. At that time, however, being still sanguine, and unstaled, and having Peter and Hans at his elbow to sift, tone down, delete, he had made a very good job of his reply to his critics. Also, the young King's plan for beautifying the city, by laying out, parallel with the *Maximilianstrasse,* a vast thoroughfare which, bridging the Isar, should lead to the Festival Theatre: this plan had then existed solely in the King's brain. But six months had passed, it was autumn now; and with the reappearance of the famous architect, designs in pocket, "Ludwig's folly" threatened to assume solid form. The cabinet, in which sat some of Wagner's bitterest enemies, took fright; and, harnessing the press, fell to work in earnest to rid themselves, the town, and the exchequer, of this public nuisance, Richard Wagner.

His Prussian sympathies, his Prussian parasites: when by choice no good Bavarian sat in the same room with a Prussian pig-dog! His North German Protestantism: in a town where every decent citizen crossed himself and went to Mass. His revolutionary sins: "This man of the barricades!" His unholy debts, his *swindler's* debts, of

five-years' standing, now to drain the Bavarian till. Ha! let the personage who had given so fantastic a pledge be held responsible for it, pay for his whistle out of the privy purse. As a warning, as a lesson. Infatuate young Monarchs had to learn that public revenues were not to be trifled with, or outrageous compacts entered into over the heads of their legitimate advisers.—But all that went before was a mere dimpling of the surface compared to the squall that followed a week's visit paid by Wagner to the castle *of Hohenscbwangau.* There, this adventurer was for days closeted with the King. Plotting and conspiring. Eavesdroppers reported him out to get a finger in the political pie, to drive a wedge between the King and his counsellors, undermine the constitution with his own scabrous tenets of socialistic democracy. Thereafter, the Conservative and ultramontane journals jibbed at nothing. The sums already squandered by, and on, this paid music-maker; his mode of living, his Caesarian luxury; his insatiable, his locust-like appetite for money; his megalomaniac schemes for cutting streets and building theatres. Moreover, at his heels flocked a hungry crew that had also to be catered for. What other object had the founding of a weekly journal, a School of Music, but to provide incomes for this tribe of sycophants, every man-jack of them bent on carousing in the joys of the Wagnerian Paradise. (The while, in Dresden, his poor old deserted wife lived in penury; eked out a miserable pittance by taking in washing.) And to all this the worthy but simple Bavarians were asked to say yes and amen, by one who, in 1848, had marched at the head of a band of incendiarists, in an attempt to blow the Saxon King's palace sky-highl

And so on. The very devil was loose.

And yet, had Wagner continued to be wise and hold his tongue, he might have won through. His dignified silence

began to impress even his detractors. And young Ludwig did not wavei. Moaning over the wickedness of mankind, the blockheadedness of public opinion, he yet never ceased imploring his friend to patience. Delayed for a time though their plans might be, postponement did not spell abandonment.

But at Wagner's side was one—and only one, Hans being away on tour, Peter still out of favour after his wilful absence from *Tristan* that summer. And Cosima suffered torments: took things to heart as he himself hadn't done for many a long day, and as nobody else ever had suffered *for* him. Each fresh insult, each new and ribald He caught her like a lash across the face. Incomprehensible to her was his own rhinoceros-like toughness of hide (fruit of a lifetime's drubbing and battering), his sloth to re-enter the fray. But he was very well where he was; comfortably housed, money to hand; and, so long as young Ludwig stood firm, he inclined to sit tight and let the heathen rage.

But an inordinate, passionate sympathy was not Cosima's sole card. She reasoned, she persuaded, bringing all her nimble wits to bear on the situation. His protracted silence, she urged, was fair neither to—"Well, Richard, if you would rather, we'll leave you out of it"—was hardly fair to the King himself. This high-minded, great-hearted being was still too immature, too unversed in ruling, too much in the dark to find his own way through the present imbroglio. He needed guidance. Otherwise, he would dwindle to a mere puppet in the hands of the intrigants who surrounded him. It was high time for him to assert himself, to show who was master, put a stop to the machinations of this infamous camarilla. Only then would there be peace. And this should now be said—said openly.

And Wagner listened . . . and, sighing and nodding, let himself catch fire. He had no reason to doubt Cosima's

judgment. Indeed, during the past half-year he had learnt to lay more and more weight on her clear-sightedness and intelligence ("Liszt's living image, but mentally miles above him," he had once said of her) on her good sense, her almost masculine grasp of business; and, not least, on her woman's gift of intuition. And so, failing to allow for the equally womanly emotion that here clouded her vision, he yielded; and together they bent their heads over the anonymous article that should force the King's hand. In it boldly and bluntly advocating the removal from the cabinet of those two or three unworthy members who were the source of all the mischief.

It saw the light: with the result that, a bare ten days later, Wagner was bidding the city of Munich a hurried and ignominious farewell.—For three months only, besought the heartbroken young King, shattered by the combined onslaught of friends, relatives, ministers; and shaken to his depths by the figment of a popular uprising. Merely until the present storm had blown over. *Then*, there should be a triumphal return. Meanwhile, their hearts were indissolubly one: no knavery or evil-speaking had power to sever them, or to destroy his faith in the greatest artist of all time, and his beloved friend.

It was early, before dawn, and a bleak December morning. The gas-flames writhed in the wind, sleepy porters yawned, the little group of people collected on the platform stamped their feet and struck their palms for warmth, in waiting. Only shortly before the train was due to start did a *droschke* rumble up and Wagner step from it, his greying locks dangling lank and unbrushed. With him were his man-servant and an old, sick dog. And he hadn't so much as a look for anyone before, contemptuously downing an official's protests, he had seen this animal comfortably

bedded on a carriage-seat. After that, a word here, a word there, a long whisper to a distraught Cosima, and the bell clanged, the doors slammed to. Slowly the train slid into motion, there was a wave of the hat, a window pulled up with a crash: and Richard Wagner had taken yet another of his many departures into the unknown.

## VI

WHEN Cosima was away, Hans lived in bachelor fashion. Got up when he liked, ate only when hungry—and not a morsel more than he had a mind to. Not much caring what; for he had small taste for dainties or high living; held them in the same contempt as soft beds or upholstered seats. Wood and a hard mattress were so much easier to spring up from.

On this particular May morning he had been at his desk since five o'clock, and, preparatory to the real business of the day, was standing, one foot on a chair, bolting down rolls and coffee.—Naturally, he missed Cos. No one like her for remembering where he had thrown things; for finding the lost, or keeping order. Among the children, too. In her last absence the little rats, with all the rest of the house to play in, almost maliciously chose the passage just outside his door. He was always having to shooh them off. This time, thank goodness, she had taken the triplet with her.

None the less he had been against her, who had but just reached home, starting off" again for this "Triebschen" on Lake Lucerne where Richard had ensconced himself (vowing, for the hundredth time, that he had found his dream-house, from which he would only be carried out feet foremost.) While what her father would say to it remained to be seen. Liszt had already thought her visit *to* Geneva in March gratuitous. But Cos had talked him round; and of her present excursion she even used the word "duty"—which of course (for her) clinched the argument. And certainly the picture she drew of poor old Richard in exile was a very pathetic one. His cold unsuitable house; the

shock to his soft heart of Minna's sudden death; the King's fulsome promises yet failure to show their enemies, the ministers Pfi. and Pfo., the door (lacking which clearance Richard would not return to Munich): in helping him to face and bear these trials, Cos had no doubt been extremely useful. A still more important point was his progress with the *Meistersinger,* of which she had carried the first finale back with her, as a kind of peace-offering. And, God, what a one! Worth all they had endured and were still enduring for Richard's sake. And, was the latter sincere when he vowed he couldn't get on with the second act, if left to moulder in solitude, it ill became any of them to stand in his light. As dewily fresh this work as if it were his *opus* I.

"I declare the fellow writes as if the Holy Ghost dictated to him—as no doubt He does!" had been his own cry on running through it. And so he had agreed to give Richard the "loan of a family" till he himself was free to join them.

But here now came the post. The post, his bugbear.

Still in the same attitude, in one hand the cup of ultra-strong coffee that was to whip up brain and body, with the other he turned over the letters the servant laid on his desk. Nothing to-day, it seemed, either to rattle or infuriate him. But hullo!—here was one from Richard. And to Cos. He had evidently thought to catch her before she left. Some commission or other, no doubt. Or it might be post-poning her visit. Better see at once what the trouble was.

Setting down his cup he slit open the envelope.

The heading struck his eye, but not his consciousness; which wen slithering over it. But his bewilderment grew; and before he had reached the foot of the page he turned incredulously to the back sheet. But there was no mistake: there stood Richard's name, Richard's signature. For an instant he let the hand holding the letter droop to table-level, his eyes dumbly interrogating the room. Then, with

a deep, trembling breath, raised it and forced himself to read on. Word by word, line by line. To the end.

Before he finished his bones had run to water; and as he crushed the infamous thing to a ball and flung it from him, he was shaking so that he fell rather than sank into his chair. Almighty God! what was this? In Christ's name, what *was* it? Cos?—*his* Cos? Richard . . . his Richard.

Air, he needed air, and made to go to the window. **But** a rising nausea mastered him. Hurrying outside he was violently sick.

The spasm left him grey-faced and sweating; but back again he groped for the paper and disentangled it. For in the interval he had had time to doubt his senses. Needed fresh proof, black on white. And he got it. This letter . . . a letter such as could only pass between two who . . . oh *God,* no! He threw it away again, and put his hands to his throbbing head.

The servant barging in, in rude Bavarian fashion, to say that he was wanted, caught the full brunt of his fury; and beat a quick retreat. But there was no retreat for him. The person she announced came by express appointment: was one of the four extra violins he was demanding of the theatre director, to preclude another such glorious fiasco as the last performance of Liszt's *Elisabeth.* Pitching the letter into a drawer he turned the key on it.

Then came a summons from the director himself; decisions had to be taken that called for promptness and a cool head; business of all sorts transacted to do with some special performances of "the works" ordained by the King. A disgruntled Wagner having retired in high dudgeon, the entire responsibility lay on him. How he got through that morning, or what those he had to deal with thought of him, he never knew. At moments he found himself sitting staring at faces without seeing them, or

without hearing a word mouths said. With the monotony of a clock two words ticked through his brain: Cos and Richard, Richard and Cos.

Not till late in the afternoon did he belong to himself. Then, ramming on his hat, pulling the brim down low over his eyes, he fled from the house, from the prison of his room. And through the mocking May sunshine, for what seemed an eternity to one who never walked, he pressed forward as though he were pursued. Dreading above all to meet anybody he knew, he made for the wooded paths that ran alongside the Isar. Here, but for an occasional pair of lovers *{lovers!*—the mere word sickened him afresh) he was safe. And the fierce, ice-blue river, swollen by rains and melting snows, lashed and thrashed in harmony with his own mood. Of fury. Of despair.

For this was the end; of him, of everything. Zany and cuckold, never again would he be able to hold up his head. In this foul place, this thrice-accursed Munich. Where, did the scandal out, the very sparrows would glut themselves on his shame. Was *it* not enough to have endured, almost to breaking-point, the bespattering of his public reputation? Was his private life now to be dragged through the slime? And by two in defence of whose loyalty he would have gone to the scaffold!—He moaned to himself; made audible noises in his pain.

How long had this infamy been going on? How did it come that he had never suspected anything? Desperately he racked his memory for even the slenderest clue that might have served as a pointer. But in vain. His brains were a sodden mass. Besides, he could answer for it: *had* such a foul suggestion presented itself, he would have crushed it like a gadfly. Never could he have stooped to doubt the woman who bore his name, was the mother of his children. And so, poor purblind fool, he had gone on reading his

own pride, his own decency, into her; making her free of the most precious thing he possessed, his lifelong friendship with Richard; puerilely content to watch her labouring for Richard's cause. Blind, blind, blind! And yet there had been some reason for his fatuity. Was Richard not double her age? Old enough to be her father? One would have thought her as safe with him as *with* the father she so adored. —Or made believe to. For how much else about her was humbug, was hypocrisy? Was there any truth in her?—Oh *God!* she might have kept her hands off Richard.

For with all his genius Richard was but a man; and weak as wax when it came to women. Memories of that last appalling summer in Zurich came crowding back to prove it. Richard, tossed and torn between a pair of the sex, dragged one way by pity for his old wife and the comfortable habits of a lifetime; another by what seemed a genuine enough passion. The place getting too hot to hold him off he went, trumpeting his sufferings to the skies, and vowing that he was utterly done for. Whereas, having thundered them out in a sublime work of art, he found his system cleared and himself as it were risen anew. Truly, a boon to mankind; but a sorry example of mortal constancy. Nor did his subsequent gay bachelor life in Vienna help to redeem him. But so Richard was, so he would always be. —And behind this thought there dawned a first, faint glimmer of hope.

No, it was not Richard he feared, but a stronger than Richard. Ten years at her side, years of *peine forte et dure,* had taught him his lesson.—And now, with a rush, all the deep, secret antagonisms of the marriage-state broke loose and rose to the surface: unuttered criticisms, suppressed resentments, dislikes and even hatreds, long and faithfully kept under. This Cosima, so sleek and smooth of tongue—French-polished (te-hee!) to the *nth* degree—but inwardly

as cold as stone. And as unyielding. Pit your will against hers, and you were made to feel like putty. This Cosima, with her superior airs, her eternal condescensions! Or the icy silences *to* which you vainly sought the key. Or the narrowed eye that was for ever reading between *your* lines. This sophist, this mystery-monger, reared from childhood to the practice of expediency, and mental reservations. This Catholic, able to make complete surrender of herself only in the confessional, and coming coldly and perfunctorily to the performance of a wife's most intimate duties. (No, no, there was more in it than this; but he could not face it.) Besides, the word duty sidetracked him. For he thought of the last time he had heard her use it—and the memory was too much for him. He broke into a laugh, a savage laugh, which went echoing and re-echoing through the woods. Ha-ha-ha, she and duty!—who had been unable to resist the arms of the one other man besides himself she had really known. Christ! it was enough to make one *die* of laughing. But his breath giving out he rounded on himself with a bitterly jocose: come, come, why judge her so harshly? Did not licence run in her blood? . . . this all-too-mixed blood of hers? Ever the docile daughter, was she not merely following in the steps of two who had set the satisfying of their desires above every moral consideration? "Child of a notorious liaison" his mother had stamped her, when first the question of a marriage arose (this marriage into which he had been booted like the dummy he was!). Trust a mother's eye for seeing through veneer and overlay; a toother's nose for scenting danger. But all her foresight had not availed him. For he was in the grip of one stronger than himself, than any of them. And whom in his heart he believed he had feared then as now.

Feared, yes; but also taken off his hat to, for her grit, her staunchness. "All will come right if only *we* stand firm!"—

so she had stiffened him. And netted him. For from **the** noose he saw descending he had often been tempted to cut and run. This was a streak of the father in her: the same unruffled endurance, the same passionless resistance had supported Liszt through trials that would have ground a lesser mortal to powder. Nor was it her sole heritage. Liszt's superlatively clear judgment (in all that did not concern Liszt himself) came out in her as a kind of instinctive wisdom that left a man's cold reason far behind. And with the years one learned to pin one's faith to this, to prefer her advice to anyone's. Her swift summing-up of people and things, her womanly intuition, had spared him many a trip and stumble in the Berlin bog. Or pointed the way through impenetrable tangles. But not as a woman, with something of a man's stoicism had she, for his poor sake, lived a life bare of every luxury, sometimes even of moderate comfort, in order that he might have the means to follow his star. And then her patience, her heavenly patience with his moods, his foul nerves. Or the innumerable nights she had sat beside his bed, tirelessly soothing his pain, fighting his morbid fears; without her, he would have dropped off the hooks long ago. But a kind of magnetic strength went out from her; and even in his blackest moods . . . why, no time ago he had been writing of her: "My wife is the one person I can bear to have always about me."—Was it *thinkable* that a day might come . . . a day when . . . Oh God, have mercy on me a sinner!

For his was the blame, his alone, he saw *it* now. He had never been worthy of her. Had done nothing'to deserve her, or to requite her for all the tender care she had lavished on him. Far from it: he had taken everything for granted, looked on her as a bit of himself, a fixture, something that belonged and would always be there—like any other of his goods and chattels. And meanwhile **a greater than he had**

learnt to know her, and to value her. (And to see **how** grievously she was wasted.) Was it any wonder that her heart had opened to this finer touch? That she, the sure, had been rendered unsure? No wonder, none: not even to his own criminal denseness. So much he understood and admitted, freely, and in the end might even have come to condone. What broke him was the knowledge that, in another way, she was no different from other women. She, his delicate, high-minded wife, had given the rein to her senses, had succumbed, like the weakest of her sex, to a fierce animal attraction—oh, any thing else, and without wincing, but not this, not this! His brain threw up pictures (outrageous pictures) such as no lover or husband could look on and retain his sanity. He found himself beating his palms one on the other, while tears streamed down his face.

But almost in the same breath he saw himself: as he must appear to her . . . to others. His ugliness; his puny insignificance; his . . . his physical weakness. But never had it occurred to him that she, *his* Cosima . . . And then, the utter failure he had made of things, who had brought it no farther than to scramble aloft after genius, earning for sole laurels the title of *ami du Wagner,* or, bitterer still, *ami dufavori.* Yes, on every side he found excuses and extenuation—for her. But none for one who, not content with having devoured your whole existence, now helped himself to your wife. Picking her casually as a fruit—there being no other handy. The baseness of the act stunned him. But, a thousand times more, the contemptuous indifference it implied.—Oh, Richard, Richard! has *my* love meant so little to you? That you can let *it* go, give it up without a pang . . . for hers.

And this pain had the last word; was like the slow and deliberate turning of a knife in his breast.

* * * *

Out of it he did what, afterwards, he could have bitten off his tongue for; what, indeed, for the next few years he was to make it the business of his life to undo. He broke silence.

Peter was partly to blame. The tender, questioning look Peter turned that evening on his own ruined face melted his defences. Cold and starved with misery, he reached for the warmth of a friend's hand.

At first darkly hinting his fears that of all the plans and projects laid for the future none would materialise. The probability was, he would shortly send in his resignation, shake the dust of Munich, of this country, off his feet, and go away . . . somewhere, anywhere, where he was not known. For that morning he had opened a letter addressed to his wife—it was not his custom, but in this case he had thought he might need to telegraph after her. Since the letter bore the Triebschen postmark.

"So I opened and read it. And at what I read, Peter . . . I mean the *kind* of letter it was . . . my horror . . . horror over what I had done, what I had got to know——" The words strangled him, he couldn't go on.

, And it was enough; he had been understood.—But what was this? Of the expected cries of amazement and disgust, or even of protest or disbelief, not one. Cornelius flushed like a girl, refused his eyes, turned his own away. Great God, as if that helped! For this face (hawk's features cloaking the soul of a sucking-dove) was without cunning. And pity and shame, shame for him, disfigurecj it. Peter suspected. Peter *knew.* And if Peter then others too: friends acquaintances strangers enemies the whole witches' kitchen of them, the whole cesspool that was Munich. Only he not, only he.

The frenzy that swept him at this thought had to find outlet. And for the better part of the night he sat over a

letter—to Richard, not her, for her he would never blacken paper again. Every now and then pausing to wipe his dripping forehead, or to tear what he had written to bits. Or, letting his head fall on his arms, to drink his degradation to the dregs. He, the smug, the self-satisfied husband: the innocent, the gull, who alone went ignorant of his wife's amours. He, Hans von Biilow!—a name from now on to be greeted with snickers, or to serve for a dirty jest. Who, in his blindness, had almost put himself out to feed these crapulous tongues. He balled his fists as thing after thing he had done or said returned to smite him. None more mercilessly than his ferocious outburst over her reported appearance at a theatre, on the night of Minna Wagner's funeral, dolled out in white satin. It wasn't only the abominable lie that stuck in his throat. All his Junker pride had bla2ed at this pawing over by a dirty press of her private life. *"My* wife, Frau von Bulow, daughter of the Reverend Abbe Franz Liszt" *(thus* he had blustered!) "is not a public character, neither a singer nor an actress nor any other of those ladies whose photographs adorn the shop-windows . . . Nor are we in any way *related* to my honoured friend Richard Wagner." Christ! as he rehearsed the words there seemed but one possible way out: the bullet that would effectually hinder him from ever opening his mouth again.

But even as the thought formed he crushed it. Not for him, this easiest of exits. For on whose head but Richard's would the whole squalid scandal rebound. Back then to the letter, each word of which had to be dragged separately from his brain. And out into the cold dawn with it before he tore it up for the last time.

The brief note that reached him some two days later was headed: "Oh, my Hans!" concluded: "May God bless you, and all of us, Your own affectionate Richard," **and bade**

him, now if ever, to show his courage and good sense, the *most* sensible thing he could do being to come to Triebschen without delay.

But *he* was no genius, to fling responsibilities, fling loyalty and decency to the winds at the bid of impulse. He was merely, as men went, an honourable man. And for another couple of months must remain tied to his post.—But before as many weeks had passed he was anathematising his inflated sense of duty, his flunkeyish respect for law and order. Was demanding of himself why he alone should be left to endure a persecution outdoing in grossness any so far inflicted. For a stolen visit paid by young Ludwig to Triebschen, on the Master's birthday, soon leaked out; and once more there was the devil to pay. Cabinet and press rose in arms at a possible renewal of Wagner's influence, Wagner's intrigues, perhaps even a reappearance in Munich of the shady old adventurer himself. Since, however, in the meantime the latter was out of the way, it was his "creatures," his *"complices"* who came in for the spittle. He, Bulow, as most in the public eye, was chief victim: "this emigrant of doubtful character" who, having duped and imposed on an innocent King, had played a despicable part in the general chivy on the royal purse, the public funds. Foul; but refutable. Deadlier far, the dragging in, for the first time, of *her* name. And in what a fashion! He had to see her jeered at as "that carrier-pigeon, Madame Dr. Hanns de Bulow," see *her,* too, accused of lining her pocket, hear her relations with Wagner openly and scandalously hinted at. Almost beside himsel, he sued one editor for libel, sent his seconds to another, dashed off a red-hot letter of resignation to the King; meanwhile exhausting his remaining strength in retaliations and explanations so lame, so false in tone, that even his friends shook their heads. But he soon saw that there was only

one means of gagging slander. And early one morning he threw some clothing into a bag and took train for Triebschen.—There to face the other hell that awaited him.

Wagner's trap, drawn by an old white pensioner of a horse, met him at the station. It was a June evening; not a breath stirred. The vast lake lay almost as motionless as the mountains round it or the sky overhead, and as deeply, richly violet-blue. But so far as he was concerned they might have been the colour of lead. His eyes remained glued to the short twisty wooded road; that was being traversed all too quickly. The vehicle trundled into a courtyard, a mighty bark boomed forth, and a great Newfoundland came lolloping towards them—with Richard after. Though his limbs didn't seem to belong to him, he somehow clambered out; but his foot had scarcely touched the ground before he was in Richard's arms. And with one of these arms lying warm and safe about his shoulders, he was led down the sloping path to the house.

## VII

THIS house on its hillock, with its tall poplar sentinels, its pointed roof, its many windows, its breath-taking view, was his home for the next three months.—If home you could call a place from which there was no escape, which caged you as securely as a beast in a 200, though with bars other than iron.

But that was afterwards. On the first evening he felt dazed and bewildered, everything was so different from what he had expected. Richard having taken him to his room on an upper story, Cosima came in; but not the Cosima he had shrunk from facing: wan, distracted, her proud head bent, humbling and humiliating herself before him in a way he had never thought he would live to see. Of all this not a trace. Her eyes soft with pity, her hands outheld, concerned only for him, she whispered: "My poor Hans . . . my poor, poor, poor Hans! Oh, *what* you must have suffered!" It was too much; he broke down and cried like a child. She with him; while Richard, tramping the floor, consigned mankind *en bloc* to perdition. And this sense of unity, of intimacy and warmth, coming after his weeks of icy solitude, sent the blood streaming to his heart. Once more he was with the two he loved best on earth. And, wrong-headed, perverse as it might seem, he was glad, yes, *glad* to be there.

The meal that followed was necessarily a silent one, for a servant went to and fro. But as soon as it was over and Cosima had gone upstairs to the nursery, Richard took him by the elbow and steered him down a slope of meadow-grass, to a seat by the edge of the lake. Here they sat, the

great dog at their feet, the velvety-black expanse of water before them, the Rigi's bulk looming dark on the starry sky.

To Richard by now a familiar scene. But to Hans, fresh from the lights and hum of a city, the last word in melancholy and desolation. He shivered. Richard drew closer to him, laying one arm along the back of the seat.

"Listen to me, Hans. There are two weaknesses I've done my utmost to steer clear of in life: cowardice and insincerity. I don't think anyone's ever been able to call me a coward; and I am certainly not going to be insincere . . . with you. When the right time comes, we shall thrash this whole unhappy affair out; fairly and squarely, as man to man. But not to-night. We're both too worked-up. There's just one thing, though, I must say, must make clear to you. My boy, I know, we all know, that in what has happened yours is the hardest part—out and away the hardest. (As for fate's refined cruelty in letting you learn what you did *as* you did, it doesn't bear thinking of.) And so, whatever you decide on, whatever you may think best to do, I want you to understand that I shall be one with you, that you can reckon on my assent."

He paused, and shot a glance at the mute figure by his side. But Hans, who was sitting forward, elbows on knees, his fists dug into his cheeks, made no reply.

"And then . . . I'm going to ask you, indeed to beg you, to leave Cosima out of it. I mean out of the many difficult and painful explanations that lie before us. She has suffered so atrociously, felt for you so acutely—it was all I could do to hinder her from rushing back to Munich—that I cannot permit . . . I mean I'm sure you'll agree with me she ought, where humanly possible, to be spared."

Here, feeling for Hans' shoulder, he said in a low voice: "For what has happened, I and I alone am to blame. I

think you know your wife too well to doubt that."

There was a jerky movement, as if to throw off the encumbering hand. But Richard held firm.

"You also know *my* impetuous nature, my headstrong ways. Once more they have been my undoing. And that you should think harshly and bitterly of me—well, God knows, that's understandable. But let it remain between the two of us. Don't carry *it* over to her. Leave Cosima out."

At this a sound escaped Hans that was meant for a laugh, but sounded more like a bark.

"*Her* idea, of course!—Yes, yes, I know her. Who better?"

The tone was so uncompromising that Richard himself withdrew his hand; and a short silence followed. (In his ears rang the words: I cannot, I *will not* stand by while . . . while . . . Anything else, Richard; only not this.)

He sighed. "Of course, you know her best. Who would deny it? Still . . ." Then, with an abrupt change of tone: "But as I've said before, all that is for to-morrow. You'll hardly see her again this evening. Come indoors, Hans, come to the piano. I've wonderful things to show you.—Up, Russ! Oh, my poor old fellow, did I biff you? But it's all your own fault for being so black."

And once seated at the Erard in Richard's workroom, with the manuscript of *Meistersinger* open before him, Hans was doomed. The musician in him utterly routed the man; earth and earth's miseries shrank to their true proportions. Nor was his brain idle. Just as *his* fingers alone were capable of bringing these dead symbols to life, so none but he could appreciate, both as artist and critic, what Richard here aimed at doing—or rather did, without aiming, by virtue of the blind genius that was *in* him. The pearly freshness of this music, its crystal humour, its plastic beauty, its bosses of Cellini-like detail, stamped it as a new departure

for even that old wonder-worker R.W. He heard himself laugh aloud, felt himself sniff to keep his eyes dry. And, the last chord struck, almost before he knew what he was doing he had stooped to kiss the hand that wrote it. But Richard, who was in the same plight, met him half-way with a sound hug.

Morning, of course, brought him back to earth; and he was bitterly cynical at his own expense. As well as at what he now considered the trap used to snare him. An empty coffee-cup on the table, he stood at his window looking out. Not at the silvery glitter of the lake, the puff-ball clouds that sailed the blue, or the massy form of Pilatus stretched like a lion *dormant* in the sun. It was Cosima he watched, as she settled the children—*his* children—with their toys and school-books on the flowery meadow-grass that grew round the house. By day, she bore considerably more resemblance to the Cosima of his imaginings. Was languid, pinched of lip, heavy-eyed. Plainly, the sleep of the just had *not* been hers!

But as she turned to re-enter the house, her ear was caught by a melody that came floating out from Richard's room, was being tried with varying cadences. She halted, stood stock-still, to drink in the lovely theme, her face turned up to it, her clasped hands held to her breast, her hair live gold in the sunshine. And on her face a look of such content, joy, rapture even—why, not in all the years he had known her . . . or thought he had known her . . . Fascinated, he gazed. Until, becoming uncomfortably aware that he was spying, he frowned and turned away.

But from this glimpse of her, rapt to oblivion, he worked through to a perception of the misery that was its natural complement. Which, so far, he had wilfully ignored.

Leave Cosima out. In other words: make her free of the mercy she had not shown him. (Or was it that Richard

distrusted her self-control? Feared she might give herself away in public?—he, her lawful husband, standing for the public!) Leave Cosima out. Act the gentleman, even to one's own erring wife. Go on as if nothing had happened. Exchange views on the weather, the children, the war, but avoid like the plague scratching so much as an inch below the surface. Well! as a pair the two of them had never been given to probing and ferreting: he wasn't built that way. And if he had fought shy of it when all ran smooth between them, how much wiser, aye, and safer, too, at this juncture, *not* to dig and delve, when God alone knew what horrors might be unearthed. And when he himself was so worsted, so mangled, so drained of life and hope that he felt more like an empty shell than a man. Easier far to seal one's lips, shut one's eyes, and let the dead past bury its own dead. Forget, forget, forget: it was all that was left him.

Richard was ageing. His locks showed white patches, his cheeks had fallen in, the tired, lined eyes, with the deep creases between the brows, were the eyes of an old man. The dreariness and indignities of exile, his fiercely concentrated work on and galloping progress with the *Meistersinger* had combined to take it out of him. But this wasn't all. And though one's heart ached to mark the change in him, yet a certain grim satisfaction was not to be kept under. To know that neither of them, Richard no more than she, was happy, made up for something. To the extent that I have suffered, let them suffer, too.

Or rather, let her suffer. For, did he succeed in disconcerting Richard, watch him grow red and confused, or hear the eloquent old tongue stutter and stumble, he was so contrite that he could have kicked himself. And this schism, this cleft between what he felt and what he ought to

feel, persisted. No matter how fiercely they went for each other, he was always the first to give way. The old Adam was too strong in him: from time immemorial it had been his job to bear and forbear with Richard. To shield and protect him. Besides, there was a danger of upsetting him for his next day's work. Christ! . . . had it only been some one else's wife he hankered after.

The plain truth was, his feelings for Richard had become a habit—and who ever yet shook off a habit at one go? It was a matter for prayer and fasting. And so when Richard, losing his last rag of patience, hammered the table and thundered—in a voice that might have been heard on the other side of the lake—"Almighty God! do you think it costs me nothing to stand here and eat humble pie, me, Richard Wagner? Hear myself called to account by one young enough to be my son?"—then, his consternation at what he was doing outstripped the speaker's own.

Or when, dropping to the minor, Richard lamented: "I'm an old man now, Hans, and a very tired one. I don't need to tell you, who've seen so much of it, what my life has been. But this I *will* remind you of: never, in all the weary years, have I known what it was to have a home—a real home—to turn to for rest and comfort. Encouragement, sympathy, understanding, a child at my knee to divert and relieve me: these joys have never been mine. And so I say how can—how *dare* you, you others, sit in judgment on me? Who every one of you has accepted as a matter of course, all that has been denied me!"

Sit in judgment? At such moments he felt more inclined to cry: in Heaven's name, take her, she is yours. (Ah, had *she* only not shown herself so damnably ready to be taken!)

And thus it went on, day after day. Getting them nowhere.

. . . .

"Do you still refuse to swallow your physic?"

Richard's tone was lighter than the look that went with it.

His work for the day behind him, Cosima and he paced leisurely up and down the flat, poplar-lined path by the water's edge.—Hans was off on his customary visit to the public reading-room; and there he might be trusted to sit, his head in the papers, till he had absorbed the most recent news of the war with Prussia; had scanned each column for a mention of his lawsuit, or regaled himself on the latest diabolical inventions of their enemies: (that he was a spy in Prussia's pay was now old history.) "I *must* know where I stand," he defended himself against Richard's loud-mouthed disapproval of "this wallowing in the mud." ("Though I've come to believe it acts on the fellow as a kind of stimulant.")

However, his weakness had its advantages: it gave him something to do, and left them free to walk and talk unobserved.

Her crinolined skirts a-sway, her leghorn hanging from her arm, Cosima studiously fitted her steps to Richard's. But though she looked quickly up at his words she did not at once reply. They walked the length of the path and turned to retrace their steps before she said: "You think I ought to?"—in a tone of the kind which, did he chance to overhear it, made Hans squirm. Its tameness, its humbleness was so foreign to her nature. (The worse, of course, for those who were taken in by it. For she'd have her own way in the end.)

"That's for you to decide."

"Yes, Richard." But again she hesitated, and it was only with a perceptible effort that she brought out: "And I'd do it in a minute—take what you call my physic—if I thought it would ease matters. But I don't; I know Hans too well. My silence he will respect—he always has. But if

I were once to break it, give him an opportunity . . . oh, then he would never let me be. Would work like a madman to influence me, wear me down. And things might be said that couldn't be healed."

"Well, perhaps you're right. Though personally I'm all for plain speaking."

Her tongue tripped a little, in its haste to bridge the rift. "Ah, yes, had I been able to talk quietly to him, prepare his mind, and at my own time. But it's too late now. In the state he's in, it would be like putting a match to gunpowder. Especially as it is me he is bitterest against. You, Richard, he may some day forgive. Me, never." And after a moment's pause she added tonelessly: "Besides, what is there left to tell him? Except that I belong to you . . . and always shall. At least as long as you want me."

"Well, you know you're safe there. But don't worry. Speak or not as you will, things aren't going too badly. I have his word that he will continue on here, take no final decisions before October; and by that time we shall all know better where we stand,"—with a meaning squeeze of the fingers on his arm. Here, though, he sighed. "Poor old Hans, I admit we're asking a good deal of him. And really, everything considered, he's not proving *too* unreasonable. We're unanimous, he and I, that no hint of our personal differences shall reach the enemy's ears. Or young 'Parzival's' either. As long as *Meistersinger's* in the offing, our watchword is and must be caution."

"Oh, I know, I know."—Not this, his standing up for Hans it war that disquieted her.

"You say you don't think him unreasonable. But what about his preposterous idea that I should go to Rome, to my father, for two whole years? Is *that* reasonable, Richard? What does he think I am? A piece of furniture? And what would become of my children?"

But Richard only laughed. "Not as mad as it sounds, Cosel. All it means is that he doesn't think we know our own minds. Wants to try us."

"To try *me"* she corrected. And thought: to revenge himself on me. Aloud she sighed: "Surely no one *but* Hans could make such a ridiculous, unpractical suggestion."

"Practical or not, if I saw you giving it a second thought, I'd take a header into the lake. And I can't swim."

"Russ would jump in after you!"—And with a hand on the head of the larger of the two dogs that padded solemnly at their heels, she laughed what Richard called her young girl's laugh. For now her heart was light as air. She had got what she wanted.

With the first week of August the weather broke, turned wet and cold. Day after day the rain streamed down, clouds blotted out the mountains. The lake was stone-coloured, roof and trees dripped water, the low-lying meadowland turned to bog. Triebschen's inmates went about in top-coats, hunching their shoulders; for the house (snatched at for its isolation and the beauty of its setting) had been designed only for a summer residence, and contained no stoves worth the name.

Out of sorts and out of temper, Richard was of course the loudest sufferer.

Bringing his fist down on his manuscript he declared: "Utterly impossible!—so I can't go on. To work I *must* be warm. Besides, if this is summer, what will winter be? No, there's nothing for it but to pack my traps aad turn out yet once more!"

Hans grew equally vehement in bringing home to him the fresh scandal his flight would provoke, the sinister meanings that would be read into it.—And so from now on they existed to the tune of hammering and brick-

chipping, of the **rough** voices of workmen, the dust and confusion that accompanied the building in of the missing stoves.

Richard barricaded himself behind his piano and, fuss as he would, contrived to get on with Act I I. Cosima kept to the nursery, where she taught and amused the children. He, Hans, had no such thought-deadening occupations. Did the clouds hold up for an hour, he went out and plodded through mud and saturated grass. Or he sat in his cold top room, a rug over his knees, and read the dreary hours away. Meanwhile watching his fingers stiffen, his stretch—at the best of times nothing to boast of—contract. Except in Richard's service he hadn't had his hands on the keys since getting there: Richard's work prohibited it. Ah, well! the damage done these his most valuable members was of a piece with the rest of his misfortunes. And in his present mood he couldn't even work himself up over it. So dead sick was he of music, and everything connected with music, that, had he only had himself to consider, he would have hung it on the nail and tried conclusions with another trade.

Yet those evening hours when they gathered round Richard's piano, to hear what new marvels the old wizard had produced from his hat in the course of the day, were his one solace. Then, too, for a little, a ghost of the old unity bound them . . . all three of them. But only a ghost: so damnably sensitive had he become to the expression of an eye, the undertones in a voice. (Torments of which he could never again hope to be free.)

But time was flying; he could not sit there for ever, doing nothing, earning nothing. And over the prickly question of the future Richard and he were soon at loggerheads again. His slapdash resignation had never been accepted; hence, officially, he was still "absent on leave." And Richard

contended that the King's open letter (dictated by himself into the royal pen) voicing completest confidence in Herr von Bulow and admiration of his gifts, together with a grieved indignation at the wrongs done him—that this letter cleared the bill, and allowed of an honourable re-entry into Munich. Hans would not have it. To his mind, the sole value of the King's *apologia* was that it permitted him to make his exit with dignity, A great deal more than this "paper satisfaction" was needed to get him back to a place where he had suffered so abominably, so atrociously, both for Richard and himself. He wanted deeds, not words, and kingly deeds at that. More, if ever he *were* induced to return, it would not be alone. Did he go, Cosima went with him: and they could put that in their pipe and smoke it!

And then, for him, the last gross smack in the face. She was pregnant; and there could be no question of her quitting Triebschen before the child—Richard's child—was born.

# VIII

FOR Cosima the months that followed were not unhappy ones. They formed a kind of truce between the pitiful conflicts of the summer and the future's uncertainties. Also, as long as she was with Richard, the outer world's ugliness lost its power: might hit at but could not disable her. While to learn from his own lips that never had he felt so ripe for work, and that hers was the credit, filled her with an almost mystic content.

The upsets her occasional absences caused him bore it out. But he allowed their necessity. To this end Hans had settled for the winter in near-by Basle, and there from time to time he sent for her to join him. For convention's sake, she had to show herself with him in public, be introduced to his pupils, enable him to write to his friends that his wife was with him. Humbly she paid her debt. And the few barren days were amply made up for by the pleasures of home-coming. Her first glimpse of Richard scurrying along the platform, peering into the carriages; the drive home in the old shay, hand clasped in hand; the light in his eyes as he dragged her wraps off and bombarded her with questions: these were jewelled moments for which no price was too high.

Or to hear him admit: "All the time you're away I'm haunted by the fear that you won't come back. That somehow he'll manage to get at you. With me not there to hinder it."

And then to take up afresh the happy round that was food for both heart *and* head. Richard in the vein; she writing to his dictation—never had he *dreamed* that such a perfect

secretary existed! Or relieving him of the burden of the many-paged letters needed to satisfy young "Parzival's" hunger. Or listening to him read aloud. Or teaching her children. The days had not hours enough: she could have wished them twice as long.

But the wheels were turning; were being turned. For it wasn't *in* Richard to sit by and look on unmoved at the downfall of one whose sole crime had been his loyalty. And the King, who had a genuine liking for Hans, was lending a gracious ear to schemes for his reinstallment. (Besides, without him, no *Meistersinger.)* But at various minor baits put forward during the autumn ("carrots dangled before an ass's nose!") Hans merely sniffed. Not until Christmas, by which time the notorious Pfi. and Pfo. had been consigned to limbo, their places taken by a minister of Richard's own suggesting, did he begin to waver. And, truly, as *Hofkapellmeister,* answerable to the King alone; as head of the projected Music School, with a salary to run from the present date—*na!* offers of such munificence would hardly come his way again.

But still he could not bring himself to say the binding word. His horror of Munich extended to its very pavements. And scepticism ran it close. Put not thy trust in Princes!—in emotional and unstable youths who had yet to master the first rudiments of their kingly calling. To learn also that a "Bulow" was none of your upstart musicians, but a man of blood, whose line could hold its own with that of any king. Before he allowed himself to be caught anew, he'd see his contract black on white before him, each clause calculated *to* meet his demands. Richard might save his breath in exhorting him not to make things harder than need be for the *"very* young head" they had to deal with. He himself had a head to consider. And he was damned if he'd ever again be fried in his own grease!

When, in addition, he fell to "talking fustian" about liking Basle and enjoying his work there, Wagner's patience gave out. For weeks he, Richard, had toiled to perfect his scheme, had covered reams in getting the King where he wanted him; even down to the *amende honorable* of a Knightly Order. Was everything now to shatter on Hans' mulish obstinacy, his pig-headed pride?

"I declare, this new tack of his, giving himself airs because of his birth, is too grotesque for words. Hans, of all people! But there you are: scratch the radical and out pops the Junker. Upon my soul, I begin to wish him and his affairs at the bottom of the sea."

Pitiful rather than grotesque, thought Cosima. Still: "It's just the old trouble: he can't make up his mind. And here, where so much depends on it . . ."

She left her sentence in the air, for Richard's sake. But to herself went on: and he all alone, with nobody to help him. Momentary impulses (such as his resignation) Hans might sometimes act on. Otherwise . . . well, till now he had always had her to thrash things out with, marshall his pros and cons before. And were she with him at present, she would soon sweep his brain of its cobwebs. Find out *for* him what he really wanted; prevent him from making himself ridiculous.

Her use to him in this line remained her secret. Another, alas! was plain to every eye. His vindictive stipulation apart, it was next door to impossible for him to go back to fill the important, the *exposed* positions offered him, without her. To do so would queer his prospects from the start. Henceforth, her place was at his side. And the more because (like him) she couldn't share Richard's belief that the King had changed his skin, conquered the boyish indolence which, coupled with self-distrust, made him so little to be depended on. The camarilla, its leading spirit the Queen Mother, was

still rootedly antagonistic to Richard and Richard's influence; and at any sign of irresolution on the part of the King the old intrigues would begin anew. Hans would need to walk as warily as a cat. And his talent for finesse was small.

Still, whatever happened, he could not stop in Basle. The climate didn't suit him; he had been below par ever since settling there, and at Christmas had gone down under an attack of low fever, which he didn't seem able to shake off.—And then the provincial atmosphere of the place, the cramped outlook: Hans to drudge again at teachingl Richard believed he sang its praises merely in a spirit of opposition. But she saw through to the malice that lay behind. To this pass you—the pair of you—have brought me. It is entirely my own business if I choose to remain in the ditch.

Knowing him better than he knew himself, however, she foresaw the end long before he got there. And began on the quiet to make ready for her departure. But her baby was nearly two months old, the orchestral sketch of the *Meistersinger* complete to its last double-bar, before all the details were settled, the last objections cut from under Hans' feet. Richard had more than once to tear himself from his manuscript and journey to Munich, for an interview with the King in person. To clear up misunderstandings, iron out Hans' misdemeanours, but also, alas! to squelch the renewed mutterings in the King's circle, to which this long delay was giving rise.

He came back with nerves fretted to fiddlestnngs: "Not a wink of sleep since I left!" And stretching himself on his red-and-gilt sofa, bade her perform what was known between them as "the laying on of hands."

"To exorcise the devils. As only you can. Upon my soul, if I were in a padded cell I believe this touch would

restore me to sanity.—Well! let it never be said I haven't done what I could . . • to atone for *some* of the injury Hans has suffered. Hang it all, don't I still *love* the fool?"

To and fro went the slim cool fingers over the monumental brow, that was hard as marble, but a warm and living marble, to the feel.

"And it's my honest conviction I've put a stopper on any further chicanery. The King has come up to the scratch at last. Still, our wild man of Basle may not find it all plain sailing. And there'll be no me there for him to turn to, if he's in a tight corner. Not for a million would *I* live in Munich again! One glimpse of it was enough. So I've told Hans he's to look on me as dead, and to carry on as if I actually were.—Now, let him show us what he can do."

But here he sighed.

"Yet if I *have a* doubt, it's of him. Not of his abilities: these I've never questioned since I first rammed a time-stick into his hand. But his ungovernable temper, and oh! the bite of his tongue. When he's in a taking he lashes out with words so caustic, *and* so witty, that they spread like wildfire; and those they're aimed at never forget or forgive. And the more torn, the unhappier he is, the wittier he seems to grow.—Though actually he hasn't a spark of *real* humour in him. It's more like savagery."

Again he sighed.

"Well, anyhow, there we are, so we stand. By hook and by crook—mostly crook—I've hauled him aloft again, given him another chance to do the work he's best fitted for, that nobody else *can* do. The 'child' will get its longed-for 'festival performances;' be able to dream itself once more into the shoes of Lohengrin and Tannhauser. *I* shall see my *Meister* brought to life, under conditions as good as I can hope for this side Elysium. Of the lot there's only one who goes empty-handed, to whom nobody comes

'bringing gifts'. Though she deserves more than the whole bunch of us put together."

"I think I've always known it, Richard. I mean how it would end. How it must end."

"Yes: clear eyes like yours are not to be deceived. They put *others* I could mention to the blush.—Buttherel . . . we haven't a loophole. It's back into the limelight for us, with the public's gorgon eye fixed unblinkingly on all we do, all we say."

This time his sigh had the strength of a groan.

"But was there *ever* such a tangle, such a Chinese puzzle? Hans the one person I dare entrust my *Meister* to; Hans' wife . . . ah! Hans' wife. On the throne an inexperienced, romantic lad, upon whose goodwill my very existence depends. Who means well, means well: that I shall always maintain. There's sound stuff in the boy. And when once the flowery years are past . . . Yes, if those about him only had the sense to let him be, to allow him the emotional outlet he finds in my works, I see no reason why he shouldn't develop into a ruler of whom any country might be proud. —But that's by the way. As things are, he has to be nursed, humoured . . . and kept in the dark. For, like most romantics, he's a prude at heart. (While even to those on thrones, the green-eyed monster's no stranger.) And through this tangle i" must find my way: I who, not two years back (and *what* years!) believed my trials over, a haven rtached where I could live and work in peace.—Peace? God! it's enough to make an elephant laugh."

Reaching up he found her hands, and brought them down, clasped in his.

"I'm wiser now. Now, I know where and how peace *is* to be found.—But having found it what do I do? Of my own free will set to work to demolish it.—Free will? There's no such thing: not for the artist. Of all living

mortals he's the most unfree; stands powerless in face of his own powers. In other words they possess him, not he them. And are capable of hounding him on *against* his will, he with as little strength to resist them as a dry straw the wind. For there's no blinking it. My fondness, my pity for Hans is only half the story. Before his welfare, before peace, before even you, comes the hunger to see what one has conceived in solitude made manifest, brought to light, bestowed on the world for which it was created: yes, and even though it be greeted with boos and catcalls, with sticks and stones!—Art? Let no one talk to me of art. There are times when I'm inclined to see it as a kind of bane: a curse laid on those unfortunates who are doomed to practise it. Quite certainly a species of madness. And none so mad as I!"

Cosima slid to her knees, and laid her cheek to the four clasped hands.

"But a divine madness, Master."

"Maybe, maybe. But am I never to be allowed a taste of life's joys? Go to my grave solely as the vessel through which it pours?"

In silence she drew her lips over the back of his hand.

"Here, at the end of my days, I find the love and companionship I've dreamed of ever since I first knew conscious thought. Yet the daemon in me gives me no rest till I have turned you from me; sent you back to one who has never known how to value you and never will; though he'll look on your going as *his* right, *his* due! If this isn't madness, what is? And yet: *ich kann nicht anders!"*

"You wouldn't be my Richard if you could."

"There speaks her father's daughter.—But I'm of the earth earthy; have a foot in both worlds. And merely **to** imagine Hans' satisfaction, how he'll smack his lips **and gloat over** getting you . . ."

"No, no. He isn't like that."

*"Achwas!* He wouldn't be human if he didn't. And I'm the last to blame him. If only he doesn't try to revenge himself on you, to make *you* pay."

"If he does, I shall be given strength to bear it. And after all, Richard, we . . . I mean there is . . ."

"No, and again, no! I see what you're driving at, and I won't hear it. The force that brought *us* together was as little to be withstood as any other force of nature. One doesn't excuse oneself for being swept away by a torrent, or caught up in a hurricane! Cast your woman's sentiment aside, learn to view it from this standpoint, and what you're going back to may be tolerable. And remember that though I let you go, because, for the life of me, I can see no other way out, wherever you are, however many miles divide us, I shall never cease to think of you as mine. Mine only."

He felt her tears on his hand. Freeing one arm he laid it round her and drew her to him. And looking past her into the green light of the April evening, said, as much to himself as to her: *"Wahn, Wahn, uberall Wahn!* All this misery and heart-break for the sake of a dream, a chimera, an insubstantial cobweb spun from a human brain. *Is* it worth it? Thinking no, there are times when I see myself shaking off my yoke, sending kings and kings' favours to the right-about, going back to poverty and freedom, my own master once more. A *mansarde* in Paris, eh, Cosel? You and I alone together, subsisting somehow, living only for each other and for our happiness. Come, what about it?"

By now she was crying in earnest. Yet staunchly she shook her head.

"The *Meistersinger"* she whispered.

Putting her from him he jerked himself to his feet.

"Oh, damn the *Meistersinger!* This insatiable maw! This Juggernaut! Before we're done, we shall every one of us lie flattened out under its wheels."

## IX

IN spite of a summer broken into by kingly caprices, by misunderstandings and humiliations, what Wagner termed the "play-work" of orchestration—three hundred pages, at the rate of three a day—was finished early in October. Thereupon the real work began: the search for singers of sufficient talent and sensibility to carry the chief roles. This went on all through the winter, here, there and everywhere, Munich excepted; both composer and conductor declining to attempt a performance with the soloists of the Court Theatre, grown musty with tradition, and in matters of art beneath contempt.

It was, however, one of the very few things the two did agree on. Otherwise differences abounded; Hans seeming to go out of his way if not to create, at least to foster them.

As now, thought Cosima, watching him fling up and down her room.—His own was uninhabitable; for in it sat his mother, once more come to make her home with them. And before this intolerably biased mind, Hans did not dare to let criticism of Richard escape him; so fearful was he of rousing suspicion of the calamity that had befallen him.

In pacing, he struck with loose fingers at the open sheets of a letter he held. Inveighing: "It's not only absurd, it's positively offensive. He won't take anybody's word for anything. 'Refuses even to *discuss* a singer whom he himself hasn't heard!"

"Surely it's but natural . . . when so much depends on it?" said Cosima, laying down her pen.

"Natural? Ha! . . . there I'll cap you and say 'naturally'!" (When he sneered, the full round eyes protruded, the small,

lean, lower part of the face fell in.) "For don't we know that everything—*everything!*—the great man thinks well to do must be condoned on the score of nature? His own nature! For, as saith the poet: *Naturam expel/as furca, et*cetera, etcetera.—But to return to our sheep, in the shape of his puerile distrust of any opinion but his own. Here am I, for his behoof squandering my time on endless screeds to those best qualified to tell a tenor from a doughnut; and the only thanks I get is to hear that he doesn't give a rap for my judgment. Not he! He'll go on dragging unfortunate artists on wild-goose chases to Munich—and without even first inquiring the size of their paunches! Surely to God we might be spared a repetition of last summer's scandal?"

Cosima sighed.

"Come, you yourself thought Tichatschek's a brilliant performance," she urged gently.

But Hans refused to be sidetracked. And ignoring her warning "Ssh!" went on still more shrilly: "But I'*ve* learnt wisdom, learnt wisdom! Have had my eyes opened to the fact that not the silveriest-clear of tenors or the finest dramatic utterance avails in dealing with a romantic greenhorn—a King moreover who permits himself to 'disobey orders,' and keeps his opera-glass glued to the bulk of an elderly and unshapely singer. Lugged here by R.W. for purely sentimental reasons, because, close on a quarter of a century ago, he created the role of Tannhauser!—However, this much I'll grant you: our great man contrives to get along very comfortably indeed minus any superfluous wisdom. And why? Because, when the inevitable happens and Majesty demands a more sightly, less portly Lohengrin, what does *he* do? Retires in deep offence to his fortress and washes his hands of the whole thing! Who is it pays the piper? Who toils, for ten hours at **a** stretch **for three**

days on end, to hammer the part into another tenor's shallow brain-pan? Who else but Bulow, the flunkey, the slave!"

Cosima flushed. Hans was as well aware as she of Richard's real reason for abandoning a production he had laboured to perfect. Had the King's refusal of the unlovely old singer been made to him in person, instead of reaching him, so insultingly, at second-hand . . . But there! . . . what was the use of talking? It would get them nowhere; lead only to a fresh spate of words. So, picking up her pen, she went on with a letter to the royal culprit, smoothing out yet another pucker in the cloth of this alliance.

Her unwomanly self-control, her arbitrary dismissal of the subject incensed Hans.

"That's it, that's it, behave as if I weren't here, as if I didn't exist! The minute I touch on myself and my affairs, you make it cruelly clear how little they mean to you. Had you from the beginning taken only a hundredth part of the interest in them that you do in———Here, stop, come back, I'm going! I'll take myself *and* my troubles off, swallow them, choke 'em down. Or try and find some one who still has an ounce of feeling left for what becomes of me. —Perhaps after all *bei Muttern am besten* as they used to say in Berlin," he murmured to himself, hearing the door shut behind her. And was not far off weeping at his own words.

In the nursery—a safe refuge, Hans seldom entering it —three of the four little girls came running to her, and she held out her arms for the baby. And there sat, her cheek to its soft down, letting their prattle pass her unheard.

It began to seem as if Hans had overestimated his strength, in taking up a life that was so like the old life and yet so different. Headstrong and simple *("A* one-faceted nature," glossed the many-sided Richard) he had

not paused to think how, in time, a knowledge of this difference might come to worm in him. Poor Hans! For her part, she had spent many a night living through what lay before her, shirking none of the pitfalls. And so had come back (she hoped) better equipped to meet them, and ready to make generous allowances. If she failed, it wasn't for want of trying; or for lack of good will. But simply because, for all her pains, her heart was not in it. Wild and vagrant, uncaring of ties or duties, this was for ever slipping control. Listening, longing, reaching out like a flame towards the one she had deserted; a murmur from whom had power to blacken the sunshine, while to know him even tolerably content turned winter to spring. Hans had had his way; had got her back, and could salvage his stricken pride with the familiar phrases: my wife does this, my wife says that. But her soul he could not redeem. And, consciously or unconsciously, he was beginning to know it.

A visit from Father Liszt, however (the very first she had not hailed with joy) went off better than she had dared to expect. She was not in Hans' confidence; he merely bade her be silent and leave it all to him. But she could guess at the means used to throw dust in these tired old eyes; for she sensed the forlorn hope to which Hans clung. ("A passing infatuation, a most unfortunate infatuation, but now, as you see for yourself, happily over and done with.")

An assurance gratefully received. Though to find order restored, her in her rightful place as wife and mother, Hans' interests hers again, her strong arm his, would in itself have been enough for Liszt. (Stir no depths when the water runs clear.) An attitude that certainly made things easier. Hans might scoff in private at the "Catholic propensity" to skate the surface; at the mask of the "Catholic smile;" but in his heart he was well content to save his idolised Master pain.

(His last remaining idol: of the three whose initials he had once so proudly picked out as first, middle and end letters of his own name.)

To her, Cosima, whether going the rounds with her father in his Abbe's soutane, or sitting opposite him at her tea-table, Liszt dwelt persistently on his joy at Hans' reinstatement and felicitous prospects. "Here, I see him reaching his zenith." So persistently that at times the smooth phrases went unheard, the filial *"Oui, mon pere!"* fell without thinking from her lips. After which, reassured and refreshed, Liszt returned to his Roman purgatory, there to give the lie to evil speaking and slandering.

It was a very different thing when Richard came to occupy the two rooms set apart for him, in the new and spacious flat. Then, she too assumed the Catholic smile (if she wasn't clenching her teeth.) Friction set in at once between him and Hans' mother. The old Baroness had never ceased to regard "this Wagner" as a malign influence in her son's life; and Richard . . . well, his retort was always the same.

"I cannot and *will* not sit by and hear you so spoken to. In your own house, too! What's Hans about to allow it?"

"Hans knows better than to interfere. Besides, it's nothing new; I'm used to it."

"Used, indeed! I shall end by giving the old . . . old witch a dressing-down she won't forget."—He had to be coaxed, implored, lectured to prudence.

For even the unspoken sides he took often made it hard to save appearances. Cosima would see the sharp old mother eyes travelling, under lowered lids, from him to her and back again, weighing and inferring. God alone knew what was being covertly hinted and insinuated to poor Hans; thus driving the iron still deeper into his soul.

Besides working him and keeping him worked up.

Some such secret torture might well underlie the painful

scenes he now took to making—before Richard, to Richard. This, and the abnormal strain he lived at. Never had he had so little mercy on himself. A fortnight's time-table showed him rehearsing and conducting no fewer than eight different operas and two orchestral concerts, on top of sixteen hours' teaching a week, a host of deadening office-duties as director of the Music School, the earliest group-rehearsals for the coming *Meistersinger*. All of which had to be got through whether he was ill or well—and well he rarely was. Small wonder that he had no strength or patience left to put up with whispers and innuendoes. Or with the petty intrigues and open obstruction that continued to block his progress at the theatre. Such, for instance, as the arrangement of his orchestra. This he re-grouped, on modern lines; and so would leave it; only to find, the next time he mounted his desk, the instruments back in their old order, the players confused and disgruntled. The doing of one who, were the King a man of his word, would long since have been pensioned off; but instead, with true Bavarian laissez-faireism, was left dangling on to block and annoy.

The first time this happened Hans came home white and shaking; and there fell foul of every one and everything. In his wrath even going so far as to hurl reproaches at them —Richard and her—for the indignities he was made to suffer. Yes! it was all their fault. Had they but minded their own business, refrained from mixing in, kept their fingers out of the pie, never never never would he have set foot again on Munich's "infamous soil!"

Fearful what such wild talk might lead to, she sent Richard a long, imploring look. He understood; and after a few hasty snorts, of surprise and indignation, bit his lips and sat mum, "for Hans to pitch into."

But when the same thing happened again, and yet a third

time ("The fellow's making a habit of it!") his patience gave out, and he fled to his lakeside home. Where the dismal sighing of the wind, the swish of the poplars, the thrumming of the rain on the windows was music by comparison.

"To go on living in such a state of ferment is beyond me.—As for you, angel, saint that you are, you deserve a martyr's crown."

And yet a time was to come when he actually found himself thinking with envy of these nervous explosions. For the moment at least they cleared the air.

The cast of the *Meistersinger* satisfactorily filled, however, the date of performance fixed, back he had to go. Hans had done all that was humanly possible without him; had toiled for months at piano and string and wind rehearsals, with what, in happier days, had been dubbed his *"alle Bulow'n ehrlich* thoroughness." Besides, sound as was his handling of the orchestra, his capacities ended with it. He knew nothing of production. This was where he, Riccardo, came in, who could do the jobs of half a dozen people rolled in one; combining the talents of composer, conductor, stage-manager and actor. With his scrape of a voice and still less of a presence, he brought now a Sachs to life, now a Walther or a Beckmesser, an Eva or a Magdalene. Together with the atmosphere they moved in. But there! —wasn't this his natural element, to which he went back like a fish to water, or a mortal to dry land. (Ha! dry was good, when he thought of the sweat that blinded him, the streams he could feel chasing one another down the small of his bacK.)

Had he only had his singers to deal with, who doted on him, all would have been well. But his appearance on the boards was the cue for a deliberate revival of the obstructionist tactics that ground Hans down. And, naturally, to a still more intensive degree. For was he not the arch-

sinner, sole begetter of the unheard-of fuss and trouble to which the heads of this archaic institution were being put; the intruder who, it was whispered, outside the sacred precincts permitted himself no half-and-half criticisms of their "slovenly and antiquated" ways. His officiousness was bitterly resented, his influence undermined: though with due caution, considering whose was the caprice that brought him there. (Happily, rumour had it that the royal interest was beginning to wear thin.) And so, what should have been a joy and a stimulus degenerated into a petty and undignified warfare, the general obscurantism extending to the very carpenters and scene-shifters.

It had also to be carried on under the shadow of a depression which never lifted. Outbreaks of violence on Hans' part were nowadays rare. The "Hansian fire" found its vent in the re-creating of a music which its conductor ranked above even that of *Tristan* (oh, Richard, Richard, that you, in whom this divine fire burns, should have done what you have to me!) But the preliminaries called for the closest of alliances; composer and conductor needed to think and feel as one; and meanwhile a wall had risen between them that made a labour of every contact. If, in the past, anybody had told him, Richard, that he would one day need to flog himself to be able to work with Hans —Hans, *his* Hans! • . . But so it was, and so it remained. He was up against a galling coolness and lack of response. An attention that wandered, made a point of wandering; though of any but him courteously observant. A pale and stony smile that was three-parts sneer; rapier-like thrusts from which he had neither the heart nor the agility to defend himself; two-edged words whose stings went on festering in his breast. Yet he persevered: and not for sake of the work alone. He could not bring himself to believe that the choicest friendship he had known was petering out, a

**love on which he would have staked** his life, dying, if not dead.

On the night of the twenty-first of June, eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, the great theatre was once more crowded with an audience gathered from far and wide. In the Royal Box, amid a cluster of blue and glittering uniforms, sat the King, beautiful as a young god with his ebony locks, his lofty, candid brow, his deep-set tragically expressive eyes. Wagner lay hid till the lights went down; then stole into the ground-floor *loge* where Cosima awaited him; intending to listen, in peace and obscurity, to what he was afterwards to call the finest performance ever given of work of his.

But it was not to be. In the course of the overture came a summons to the King's side; and in this exposed position, the one blackcoat, the single raven among the peacocks, he was forced to sit the evening through. Further, when, at the close, the thunders of applause were not to be stilled, Majesty withdrew, leaving him to all appearance sole occupant of the royal enclosure, from which to lean out and bow, and bow and bow again, his thanks for the ovation.

## X

A GRACIOUS and well-meant gesture on the part of young Ludwig; but one that worked only harm. Had he taken the composer by the hand, led him forward and as it were presented him to the people, as His protege, His thing, the exceptional honour done might have been swallowed, if wrily. But for a Monarch to obliterate himself, leave a commoner to occupy His place, was an act so sensational, a breach of etiquette so flagrant that at the sight the Court well-nigh gave up the ghost.

And when, moreover, the commoner was none other than this hated and distrusted political schemer . . . this sapper of public funds . . . this opera-composer . . . this Wagner I—In a trice all the dogs of the press were loose again, and yapping fiercely at their victim's heels.

Once more Richard made his escape. And this time there would be no return. Munich had seen the last of him.

Back in Triebschen he took to his bed, where he lay shivering with fever or soaked in night-sweats, his brain as confused as his blood. And for as long as this state continued his thoughts went no further. Enough for him the comforting reflection that never again would he dissipate his precious strength *in* trying to ginger up moribund institutions, or to teach Jew-dogs of directors their business. Let 'em mangle his work as they liked, he wouldn't know. Hans was to be depended on to beat out the music; and, provided none of the singers was too fat or too old (or too lean or too ugly or too anything else) there would be no complaints from the upper regions. With the performance of the *Meistersinger* his immediate debt to the King was

paid. For some time to come he could count on freedom to live as befitted his age and his genius. Withdraw from the world, and dedicate himself exclusively to that end for which he had been put into it.

But, tempting as the prospect was, his mood refused to lighten; remained sodden as unleavened dough. A natural reaction, he supposed, to the over-stimulation of the past weeks. You couldn't exchange the vivifying air of mountain tops for that of the flats, without a certain inner dislocation. Given time, his languor would pass. But time passed and it didn't: he was up and himself again, had abundant leisure, a house silent as the tomb, everything, in short, but the necessary furor. And, without this, how tackle the repulsive job of resuscitating *Siegfried's* cold corpse? Instead, he meandered aimlessly about with his dogs, feeling as though he might never put note to paper again. Also that it would not very much matter if he didn't!

But quite so prostrate as this, so imbued with the futility of things, he had never known himself. Exhaustion wasn't enough; there was something more radically wrong here; and the sooner he unearthed it the better. With a bad grace, for he abhorred self-probing, he turned his eye inwards; and before very long had dug to the root of the trouble. What was laming him, acting like a brake on all his faculties, was the impossible position, the hopeless tangle he had got himself into over the two people who meant most to him. Whose combined devotion had alone enabled him to survive the racket of recent years. Hans and Cosima, Cosima and Hans. And until he had come to some sort of clearness about his future relations to these two, he'd be good for nothing.

But talk of depression!—the depths to which he now sank were fathomless. For, twist and turn it as he might, the upshot was always the same. With Munich went

Cosima: there was no blinking that. The *Meistersinger* disposed of, he was done out of pleading the aid her blessed presence had been to his work on it. And he had no other excuse good enough to hold water. In the meantime she had struck root again in the old surroundings, he was equally determined to shun them; and so, except for brief occasional snatches, they would come together no more. -—Oh, *why* hadn't he held on to her while he had herl Declared openly that he couldn't live without her, flinging everything else to the winds. Instead, he had virtually driven her from him—and now must pay the penalty. For meanwhile a new barrier had sprung up between them. Despite petty hindrances and the scurvy treatment of directors, Hans was going ahead like a house on fire; was winning over public *and* critics: the famous night of June the twenty-first had for him too been a personal triumph. Impossible, unthinkable, to make fresh trouble for him.— Sing placebo, Richard, you poor old fooll It's all that's left you.

Decency compelled. Henceforth his lot was to stand aside, hold aloof, and leave these two to rebuild their shattered lives. (Rid of the constant jab and stab of his presence, Hans would surely calm down, recover his balance, begin to forget, and, in forgetting, to forgive.) Over-hard he didn't think they'd find it. Often during the past year he had noted, and jealously, how many were the links of thought and habit that still bound them. Ten years of marriage took as many years to undo. And both were so young. Whereas he . . . be . . . No: in Sachs, in wise old Sachs he had foresung his own fate, presaged the heroic —heroic? . . . the repulsive and unwilling sacrifice now demanded of him. Which there was no shirking. *Ade* then, all fond and foolish dreams!

Sitting at his desk, golden pen in hand, his manuscript

before him, waiting forlornly and fruitlessly on the afflatus, or tramping fields and woods in the hope of making himself tired enough to sleep, he chewed the cud of these wormwood thoughts. Walked like a blind man amid the blue summer glories of lake and sky. For him everything was black, without and within.

But the "cramps and convulsions" of which he was given to declaring his life composed were not yet over for him. Barely a week later he was standing in the Lucerne post-office, concocting the urgent, persuasive, yet cryptic telegram that should bring Cosima to him.

Ever since coming to Munich, she had shared in the general obloquy. The vilest of presses had shown her no leniency on account of her sex. Charges of acting as his "mouthpiece" was he absent, of playing "carrier pigeon" between him and the King, even of herself hatching political schemes, had all in turn been levelled at her. Bitterer still, the personal slights and affronts she had had to put up with that winter, fruits of a jealous woman's serpent tongue. But these, too, she had borne like the Trojan she was, holding her fair head not an inch the less high because of them. Of course, as long as the King stood firm (kept the blinkers on) this was possible: and so far the lad had turned a royally deaf ear to whispering tongues. Now, at a stroke, everything was changed. A man whose word young Ludwig trusted, one they, too, had believed their friend, was reported to have joined the enemy and made public reference to their liaison. The fat was in the fire at last—and in earnest!

Yet his first impulse was to laugh, and laugh he did, loud and long. That this should only happen now!—*now* when, for over a year, he had gone about Cosima with gloved hands, treating her with the respect due to another's wife.

In truth, a mad world.—But rage was gaining on him. For he could read between the lines of this fresh attempt to besmirch him in the King's eyes. Even for his so-called *friends* it had been too much to see him perched up alongside royalty, the "victim" of unparalleled honours, and presumably drunk with pride. Low he had to be brought; and how more speedily and effectively than by the re-exhuming of his intimate personal relations? (With young Ludwig's noted prudishness to cheer the diggers on.)

But he'd be beforehand with them, would cut the ground from under their feet. Yes! his mind was made up: and with its old lightning swiftness. The letter in which, still only half convinced, the King warned Cosima of this new snake in the grass, and took it upon himself to prescribe her future conduct: reply to such a letter she could not; or not without entangling herself; and this he had never required of her; himself had done all the hedging and quibbling. The necessary hedging, while the fate of the *Meister* hung in the balance. Now, thank God, that clog was removed; and he'd be drawn and quartered if he ever again so demeaned himself. His blood was up, his heart raw with bitterness. And he'd cook their goose for friends and enemies alike, by himself coming out into the open.

Besides, the girl had suffered enough, by God, she had —for him and his accursed work. He could not and *would* not ask more of her. From now on, her place was at his side. Let the thunderbolts fall, they'd brave them together. —And only to think of it, to picture her his own again, sent a new bout of fever spurting through him. ^Preposterous, monstrous, insane even, the idea he had toyed with of renouncing her. *Never* could he have risen to such heightsl She was as necessary to him as bread; more, a thousand times more, than all the kings in creation; than the oldest and closest of friendships. And should young Ludwig see

fit to drop him over it, should Hans' prospects sputter and fail . . . well, *let* 'em!

But until he got her! He had ordered her to leave Munich there and then; but a day, two days went by, and he heard nothing. Days of exquisite torment. For as often as she was absent from him, submitting to other influences, other wills than his, he was never quite sure thai her immoderate sense of duty might not get the better of her.

At word that she was starting, he impulsively set out to meet her half-way. And when he saw the slim, tall figure coming towards him on the platform (never yet had he managed to spot any one *inside* a train!) his relief was so great that he broke down and wept. Publicly; and not caring who saw him.

But the reason for his summons he refused to disclose till late in the evening. "Wait . . . wait!" was his only answer to her searching eyes. Wait, that was, till the children slept, the house was still, and any chance of disturbance over. Outwardly he was in wild spirits; he danced round her, cracked jokes, talked nonsense. But Cosima was not deceived. She saw that he was merely putting off the evil moment; and her heart fell.

So she was not surprised that when he did speak it was bluntly and even roughly. He strode up and down the room, dealing out his shocks, concerned mainly with getting them out. She did not interrupt him by a syllable; she could not; sat there feeling as if she were being turned to stone.

And having said his say he planted himself in front of her, legs apart, and challenged her numb silence.

"We've always known something of the sort *might* happen. Now, it has. And this is the only possible way out."

Her lips were so dry that she had to tear them apart. "But . . ."

"Well?"

"But . . ."

He clucked impatiently. *"Ach!* do you think *I* haven't gone through all the buts?—and for us both? No need to waste your breath on them. You can tell me nothing I haven't told myself. But the time for sentimental waverings is past."

"Hardly for me, Richard. How could it be? . . . now."

He pounced on the last word.

*"Now?* What d'you mean by that?"

Her colour rose; but she met his look without flinching.

"I mean having once gone back." And as he turned away with a snort: "Ah, Richard, *don't* be angryl Try and put yourself in my place. Hans needs me, he does indeed, perhaps more than ever before—think what his life in Munich is! To desert him, leave him again, would be cruel. It might even ruin him."—Her eyes were swimming.

"Ha! *as* usual, all your thought's of him.—Well, suppose it does? Surely to goodness it's better for one than for three of us to be ruined? For that's what it'll come to. You talk of *his* need, but what is it compared with mine? While as for you . . ."

"Ah, leave me out. I don't matter."

He threw up his arms, let them drop with a clap to his sides, and finally lost his temper.

*"God!* this craving for self-sacrifice. This morbid desire to be the victim!—But you're reckoning without me. I'*ll* not stand by and see the best and noblest woman I know broken on the wheel. Haven't I made it plain to you that you c*annot* go on living in Munich? The King's suspicions, once roused, will never be allowed to slumber. They'll be fed and watered like the costliest of plants. From now on your life—bah! what am I talking about? Even as things are, you don't know what it is to live, you merely exist.

Between a firebrand of a husband and an insupportable old woman, who's got her knife in you already, and won't scruple to use it at the first chance. For all your strength, my girl, you're only human; and one day you'll crack—mark my words you will!"

Strength?—it was her present strength she trembled for; his anger always sucked it out of her. Defenceless she sat, with drooped head, afraid of him, and still more afraid of herself. And there was a longish pause before she managed to ask, in a low voice: "Will you please say again, Richard, quite clearly, what it is you want me to do."

"To write to Hans and tell him plump and plain that you are not going back to him. Make the break here and now. Then, if he's half the man I take him for, he'll bow to the inevitable and agree to a divorce."

The dreaded word was out. She could only gasp: "But . . . but my *father!* My children, Richard!"

But it was not the children that fired the mine.

"My father, *my father!* The way you say it, he might be the Lord God Himself.—*Ja, ja!* tears for him, and tears for Hans; I alone go bare."—And turning on her: "Answer me this. Do you intend, your whole life long, to be domineered over and dictated to by your father? Go on letting yourself be treated like a child? You, a grown woman, and yourself the mother of childrenl—Oh, out upon these antiquated notions, these obsolete ideas, these totems, these shibboleths!—Besides, was *he* so filial? Did he stop to ask 'may I' when the love-fever took him? And not once only: I've always understood that twice one make two!" And with a raucous laugh: "To my mind what's sauce for the gander—oh well, there, there, I'll say no more."

For she was crying bitterly. She sobbed: "Ah, no, Richard, it's nothing like that. My father is more to me than anyone in the world—but you. And for him such

a thing as divorce doesn't exist. I *cannot* so wound him.''

"Hokum-pokum! And the sooner you shake yourself free of such medieval doxies the better.—But all this is wide of the mark. The plain, unvarnished truth is, I'm asking you to do in cold blood what you could only have . . . Ah, well, I'm to blame for it, it's nobody's fault but mine. I ought to have stuck to you when I had you—when I *really* had you!"

She was fumbling for her handkerchief; he tossed her his; and going to the window stood and glared out into the July night.

Again there was a silence before, with a wistful glance at his unyielding back, she ventured: "And then ... the King."

"The King, ah yes, the King! Don't let us forget the King!" And wheeling round: "I tell you this, child: I've had such a surfeit, such an over-surfeit of kings and their ways that it'll do me till the last trump sounds. I don't care *so* much!"—with a snap of the fingers—"what this particular one thinks or does."

"You may not always feel like that, Richard."

"I've yet to learn why!" He fell to tramping again, and a fresh storm broke. "Can a leopard change his spots? Or a blackamoor his skin? Oh, I'm no longer the nincompoop I was, my dear.—And even suppose the miracle *did* happen, do you think it could wipe out the memory of the past four years? This litter of shattered hopes, unkept promises? *Marchenkbnig* I once called him. Aye; and the name still fits. Though not in the sense I meant it. He a wonder-worker? Bah! merely chief shade in a tale of shades. There's no reality in him. Of all we looked for, nothing accomplished, nothing done. Semper's theatre? Put off from month to month and from year to year: and so drastically that the unlucky architect barely contrives to squeeze out the cost of his *plans.* (Though money flows like water for the

restoring of *Hohenschwangaul)* And to me the most heart-breaking thing of any is that I cannot regret it—the theatre, I mean. For to what end the most palatial building ever raised, if the same old jog-trot is to go on inside it, the same old mummies to direct it? And of that I haven't a doubt; my tribulations over the *Meistersinger* drove the last nail home. The King is temperamentally incapable of asserting himself. What's more, he doesn't care . . . *how* my works are produced! Understands as little to-day of my principles and ideals as at the beginning. All *he* wants is my music—to dream his hashish dreams in! No, I haven't a single illusion left about him; his own weakness and incompetence have stripped me bare.—And that's my answer to your 'but the King, the King!'"

Exhausted, he sat heavily down on the sofa and dropped his hands between his knees.

"Now, my one desire is for peace—peace and freedom —to sink myself in my work. Turning my back on the world, hoping nothing, expecting nothing.—But even this it seems is too much to ask. For the only living creature who can give me what I need has other and more urgent claims on her. Father, husband, children, each and every has a greater right to her than L I see the justice of it, I bow to it. But I also see that for me it is the end."—And here he made to rise, as if to clinch his words.

But she was too quick for him. Slipping to her knees she grasped his hand and clung to it.

"How can you, how *dare* you say that! *Siegfried*—think of *Siegfried!"*

*"Siegfried?"* He smiled, pityingly. "One of these days, child, I shall weight what exists of it with stones, and sink it to the bottom of the lake."

*"Richard!* Beloved!"

"It's no use. Without you, my Cos, I'm like a body from

which all the bones have been withdrawn." But here, his elegiac mood passing, he flared up: "Oh, why, why must it just be Hans who stands between us? *Why* did you ever marry him? . . . allow yourself to be juggled into it! Where was your foresight then, your marvellous prevision? Did nothing tell you that I was waiting and watching for you? —in as desperate a plight as my own unhappy Dutchman. —But there! Though I talk till my tongue sticks to my palate it won't help. You can never be mine." And pushing her away, ungently, he once more tried to rise.

But again she held him fast.

"Not *jours?* Yours and yours only. Bid me to, and *I* will go down and throw myself in the lake. For that . . . would harm no one but myself. But . . . but . . . Oh, Richard, Richard, I've been so blind, so foolish. I've believed it was possible to love you and to go on caring for Hans, at the same time. Yes, and cowardly, too. For I've shrunk from the suffering it would bring—not on myself, that I'd joyfully bear, but on all these others. Oh, help me to see clear; I *have* no one but you. Only, are you sure—are you quite, quite sure I could . . . could be to you all you need? Tell me again. Give me something to hold to."

He laid his hands on her shoulders and put her from him, so that she was forced to meet his eyes.

"Once more I swear it, by everything I hold sacred. Without you, I'm done.—But that's not all; iet me be honest, too. Peace is no peace that doesn't include your living, breathing self, your voice, your look, your touch, yes, every atom of you. And when this sort of thing happens to a man of my age . . . See! *jour* eyes are d?y; but what of mine? Look into them and tell me if you can, my Cosel, what the fate of any other living creature matters, so long as we two are one!"

"Nothing . . . less than nothing."

But even as she said it she freed herself, and sitting back buried her face in her hands. He let her be; and after a little came the muffled whisper: "Only give me time. I *must* have time. I'm such a slow thinker. And always I need to work out things for myself . . . in my own way. Please, please, give me time."

And time she had. Three full months passed before he saw her and her little flock off to Munich; letting her go as into a den of lions, where every jaw was a-stretch to devour her. But on one point she was firm. Only from her own lips should Hans learn his fate.

## XI

*A* ND all veils down at last, the two of them stood **face** A to face.
A . Not however before she had had time to doubt her wisdom in returning. (Richard had known best.) For from the moment she crossed the home threshold, home cares beset her; in the shape of unpunctual meals, refractory servants, leakages in the kitchen monies. Automatically she took control again—now, to the harrowing thought: who will see after these things when I am gone?—and though, by doing so, she was making it harder for every one.

Time, too, to sense afresh the smashing weight of the blow she had to deliver. If, that was, she ever found the moment, the right moment to do it. Hans was hardly visible, had never been so preoccupied. (Or, alas for herl better pleased with himself.) Rushing from rehearsal to rehearsal, perched at his director's desk in the Conservatorium, or toiling deep into the night in his private, strictly private workroom.

It was here, stifling her qualms, that she determined to beard him: one evening when it had struck eleven, when the rest of the house slept, the rumble of traffic was stilled, his special bugbear, the concert in the coffee-house across the street, muted by the double windows of October.

Knocking and entering in one, without waiting for his *"Entrez"* she said bluntly: "Forgive me for disturbing you. But, as I wrote you in my letter, there is something I have to tell you."

He had looked sharply up at the door's opening. On seeing who it was, he merely lengthened and deepened **the**

look, then dropped his eyes and went on with his work. However, she had not expected to be welcome, and his impoliteness left her cold. Besides, as she stood there gazing down at him, studying him more closely than she had yet had a chance to do, all she could think of was: how he has changed, how terribly changed he is! (Or did it only come from her having been so long away from him? Or because to see a face from a higher level made one more keenly aware of the marks of time?)

He meanwhile had drawn a bulky volume to him, and was demanding curtly: "Well, what is it? Kindly be brief. I've two scores to get through before I go to bed." And as she hesitated, confused at being thus driven, the indignation with which he was simmering boiled over.

"My good Cosima, if you've come here with any idea of enlightening me on your recent doings, you may save yourself the trouble. The news your letter contained was no news to me. I had already been informed of it . . . by others. To whom Richard Wagner's least movement is of interest. Let alone a journey to Italy."

"I am sorry, very sorry it reached you at second hand. I meant, and still wish, if I may, to tell you about it myself." And relinquishing her hold on a chair-back she sat down.

There was no response.

"Well ... as you will," with a slight shrug, and a little prayer for guidance. "Though if it hadn't been for this, for our journey"—he winced so patently at her plural that she came to a standstill. But only momentarily; and recovering herself went on: "For it was there, when we were in actual danger of our lives from flood and storm, that I saw light. Saw that truth was all that mattered."

*"Truth? You* . . . and truth?"

"Yes, even I . "

With a husky sound that was meant for a laugh, he threw

open his tome and took up a pencil. Sadly she regarded him; and almost at once her thoughts were back in their former groove. No, it's *not* the same face: it looks almost as if it bad been re-made.—Who was it said that every man was his own sculptor? That, out of youth's plump meaninglessness, he carved for himself the visage he deserved? She couldn't remember; but now she saw it come true. These thinned and sunken cheeks, with their finer lines and more delicate moulding, the deeper set of the eyes under a brow which now appeared in its imposing fullness; all this gave the face before her a new dignity, a chastened beauty that was strange to it—and ohl how much worthier of the man.

But here she pulled herself up. Thoughts of this kind would get her nowhere. And laying her hand flat across his open page she said in a firm tone: "You must listen to me, Hans."

"Listen? To what? The time for explanations—and quibbles and prevarications—is past, long past. All that remains to *us* is silence." And his bottled wrath once more exploding: "I'm none of your saints. It's not in me either to forgive *or* forget."

"I know that. And I accept the suffering it means for me as my due."

"Suffering? What do *you* know of suffering? Why, the bitterest thought I've ever had about you was to wish *my* torments yours!"

"I know that, too. You can't tell me anything I don't know."

"Then why, in Christ's name, not let things be? Leave them where they belong—in darkest limbo."

"But you're mistaken. I'm not here to rake up the past. *Or* to exonerate myself, or ask forgiveness. All I've done I stand for. My sins—if sins they were—be on my own head."

"Words, words, words, mere empty phrases. Your fatal heritagel"

That stung. "It is surely unnecessary to drag my father —and his supposed weaknesses—in? Kindly let *him* be!— Oh, it's no use your looking at the clock, Hans. You've got to listen to me; I shall sit here till you do. Though you're making it so hard that soon I shall not be able to speak at all."

He leant back in his chair and eyed her, sardonically, tapping the table with his pencil. Tap, tap, tapping.

She sprang up, her fingers to her ears, and took a few hurried turns about the room, the silk of her full skirts swishing round her.

Then coming back, with the same impetuous movement, she dropped into her seat and laid her arms out over the table, imploringly.

"Oh, never should we have married, you and I, Hans— neverl It was all a mistake, a terrible mistake. There was no room for me in your life—for me or any woman. It was too full already of things far more vital and essential to you than I could ever be. And though I did my best— God knows I did!—I never succeeded in making you even passably happy . . . no, nor even content."

He might have been carved out of wood. Only the pencil tapped on.

"Yet I would have gone on with you till the end, happy to do the little I could to help you, to make life easier for you . . . if . . . if .. . But things have been too strong for me. Thqy've worn me down."—And laying her head on her outstretched arms she wept.

Her tears (these facile tears) enraged him.

"If . . . if1 Things too strong for youl With words like these women like you have sought to justify themselves since the world began. But what I want to know is"—

and here he leant across the table till she could feel his breath—"why, *why* did it just have to be Richard? Were there not others enough for your wandering fancy to fix on? And Richard was mine—*my* friend when I hardly knew of your existence!—the man of all men to me."

The "wandering fancy" dried her eyes. Hotly she flashed back: "And pray who but you taught me to love him? Yes, it's true, it's true. You could not rest till you had made me as fond of him as you were yourself."

"God in Heaven! Can a woman not love without—without ..."

"Could you have, if you'd been a woman? Loving Richard as you did, and loved by him in return?—Oh, be honest, Hans, be honest! You know he has always had first place in your heart."

But he was too deeply, darkly sunk in himself to heed her.

"What I forgot was that I was dealing with a man whose desires are as rampant as his genius—and as predatory. I ought to have *known*—for all its beauty his music is sensual to the core!—known that no woman was safe with him. Instead, poor fool—'pure fool,' ha-ha!—of trusting to his honour *{his* honour!) hugging the pitiful delusion that he cared enough for me, to keep his hands off my wife."

Her eyes were blazing; and without compunction she choked back denial and defence. Pain gave her the courage she needed. The courage to wound—as she had been wounded. Flinging up her head she said harshly: "Don't waste your breath in abusing him; it won't help you now. I'm going back to him, Hans—and this time for ever."

He sprang to his feet with such clumsy violence that his chair fell over; he had to kick it out of his way. And there stood as if about to hurl at her words so gross that they would have branded her: but none, nor even a sound came. Baffled by his dumbness, he felt the need of a support, and

fumbled aimlessly behind him: for a horrid instant she saw him falling into space, and herself half rose. But he bethought himself in time, and dragging another chair to him collapsed into it.

A long pause followed, which she made no move to break. The truth was out: it was now for him to find himself to rights with it. And there they sat, unstirring, but eye to eye, hers as steady as his and as relentless.

Coming out of his coma, he began to nod to himself with the small, slow nods of an old man.

"So *that's* it!" he said at last. "That's what the pair of you have been plotting and scheming—you, who come here to talk to me of truth!" And in a sudden burst of anguish: "Oh, infamy!—is there no end to it? No end this side the grave? What have I done, *what* have I done to deserve it?"

But even as he put the unanswerable question his voice was rising, growing thin and shrill; and so he went on, tumbling his words out faster than he could speak them: "But this is all *his* doing! He has bullied you into it, hammered at you till you didn't know whether you stood on your head or your heels; the man could talk the very dead alive—if he didn't prefer them where they are! But *I* know his tricks, I'm hardened to them, he can't get round me. You're mine, you bear my name, I have the right . . . have my rights——" and on and on, without a break, till it began to seem as if she would sit there for the rest of the night, to the pipe of this poor, undignified voice.

Pity got the better of her. And when his breath failed and he stuttered into silence, she said gently: "Nothing of all that is true, Hans; and you know it. I am acting entirely of my own free will. And to decide, to distinguish where my real duty lay, has cost me nights of misery—misery and doubt. Ah, Hans, dear Hans, I *cannot* pretend to a regret I don't feel. Either for what I have done or

what I am going to do. I look on it as my fate; and from one's fate there is no escape. But for the pain, the bitter pain I have caused and still must cause you, I shall suffer till my life's end."

Her hand stole out to find his; but he met it half-way and drove it from him.

"No, no, none of that, please."

Reddening, she stiffened. (Oh, unlucky Hans! Why had he always to say the wrong thing?)

With his fingers he made a shade for his eyes; and from under it looked hard at her.

"Have you, as a woman, any . . . have you the least idea what you are letting yourself in for, if you throw off the protection which I ... or rather which my name has so far afforded you?"

About to speak she hesitated, and only bowed her head.

"That, I find difficult to believe."

"Richard needs me. He *needs* me," she said in a low voice.

"He needs you . . . Richard needs you!" he echoed; but with an inflexion of his own. "And so it is just the old, old story. But that you, my poor, good Cosima, you, with your intelligence, your *savoir-faire,* your *savoir-vivre,* should be taken in by it!" And with a jovial and offensive laugh: "Of course, he needs you . . . does the Master. There's never been a time when he hasn't needed—some onel And now more than ever: to share his exile, take the edge off his loneliness, soothe the tantrums his unnatural life engenders. But *any* woman by nature fool or saint enough to fall in with his whims would do equally well. Shall I tell you who it was, and not so very long ago, he was trying to induce to join him?—to fill the post you now aspire to? Shall I name names? No? Well and good. But this you *shall* hear; for your own sake. In his whole scrabbled existence, Wagner has loved—truly, passionately,

desperately loved—but once. Never before and, at his age, I think it's safe to say, never after.—Ohl I know what I'm talking about. I was his confidant, his sole confidant. I stood by him, I helped him to man himself in what were perhaps the most critical hours of his life. For those who have ears to hear, he has told the full tale of his passion in bis greatest, most deathless work. One woman, and one only, was the nerve that set the fatal cadences, the soul-sick harmonies of *Tristan* vibrating. And the sooner other women get this into their heads, the better for them."

For the first time that evening, he had dropped into German; and in German he now went on.

"But alas for poor mortality! Even as the Master penned the divine phrases, the heat of his fever abated; longing and desire found the exit marked 'for genius only!' And if such was the fate of feelings bordering on idolatry, what chance of survival have those that go but skin-deep? Not one in a hundred! I won't say more; the chapter of Richard Wagner's amours is not one I'd care to read to any woman; but this you can take from me: it isn't *in* him to be faithful. His heart is like his genius, perpetually in renewal. No more to be relied on than a rope of sand. And I, knowing this, am to stand by and watch you wreck not only your own future, but the futures of those who are nearest and ought to be dearest to you? God! the tragedy of it—the madness!"

The blood had scorched her cheeks as she listened. (Oh, Hans, that you could stoop to this!) But her eyes remained cold and unblinking: said all she did not trust her tongue to say.

And in time her contempt got him down. His face began to work and went on working, till there was nothing to do but to hide it and keep it hid.

"Forgive me," he said after a little, "forgive me. I

should have known better . . . than to say such things to you. But. . . but. . . You see for so long, *so* long, my life has turned solely round you and him. To part from you will be like hacking off a live limb. For it's no use trying to deceive myself: of you the Master will not tire. And in him you will at last find one worthy of your devotion. At long last!—Yes, yes, my poor wife, you did your best for me, your generous, noble best; but the task went beyond even your powers. I remained the poor fish, the small fry, the irretrievably second-class mortal I was born to be.—And yet . . . I am afraid for you. Your own principles are so strict, your standards so high; and in him, outside his genius, is so much that is only . . . clay. I am thinking now of the small things, the lesser virtues, in which, God be thanked, you and I have always seen eye to eye. The Master has no such respect for them; and with the years, as custom stales, this . . . this weakness of his will surely jar and grate on you. Are you strong enough to bear it?—Bah! why do I ask? Do I not know you?—for the strangest compound of emotionalism and will-power that ever took woman's form."

Her tired eyes still clung to his face; but again she made no reply. To her, his words were a mere beating of the air. What she waited for—in fear, in trembling—was the question that would bring her torments to an end.

And here and now it came.

"What are your plans? What do you propose to do?"

She drew a deep breath. "I propose to turn Protestant, Hans."

"You *what?"*

"To become a Protestant. And then . . . to ask you to release me."

For a moment he sat open-mouthed. (While to their death sped all his romantic notions of a woman's supreme

sacrifice. Not *she,* no, the rest of them—they, *ces autres!*—were to be laid on the altar.)

Back in French as befitting his theme he cried hoarsely: "But your *father?* Great God! your father. Oh, have you taken leave of your senses? Liszt—the Reverend Abbe Liszt!—housing at the very door of the Vatican, to be involved in so atrocious, so abominable a scandal? To see his daughter not only a renegade, from the faith in which he has found his vocation, but held up before the world, publicly branded as . . . as an .. . no! my tongue jibs at the word.—And by whom? By *whom,* I say? By one he looks on as his son, and has treated like a son, ever since those early Weimar days. Is *this* to be my thanks for all I owe him, my gratitude for all he has done for me? Oh, how little, how little you know me! For whose sake but his, have I put up with the shame and degradation of the last two years? Yes, I would shrink from harming a hair of his head, and you come here and demand that I shall deal him this blow. Christ! hasn't he suffered enough already? Has he not sunk low enough? Can the hardest heart look on unmoved at the wreck made of his life by one who, for many of us, was the greatest man of his day?"

In speaking he had gone furiously to and fro. Now, he came and stood over her.

"And so I say: ruin your own life if you must—you, not yet thirty!—forsake your children, see me pointed at with fingers as the complaisant husband who owes the very post he holds to his moral strabismus; but think, think, and think agair, before you bring fresh misery on this old, unhappy man!—What's that? What do you say?"—for by now he had her weeping so distractedly that she was almost inaudible. "You'll go to Rome yourself and see him, and tell him how things stand? By all means, by every manner of means, and as fast as your legs will carry you—before

there's time for you to be bullied out of it!—Ah, if you, had *only* gone when I wanted you to. Then, as now, it was the one right and proper thing to do. But because the idea was mine, because the suggestion came from me . . .

But Cosima could bear no more. Pressing her handkerchief to her disfigured face, she got up and unsteadily made her way to the door. It fell to behind her; and he heard her steps (the steps he would have known among a thousand) go down the length of the uncarpeted corridor. In the distance another door closed—then stillness. The stillness, the nothingness, the nevermore and never-againness that was soon to be his.

To workl—work alone could save him. Tremblingly he swished over page after page of the score, in an attempt to find his place in it. But the thick black note-sown lines ran to a blur; he could not tell one from another. With an expletive that was half a sob, he folded his arms across them, buried his face in his arms, and broke into convulsive weeping.

Oh, Richard . . . Richard!

The days that followed were like an evil dream: one of those dreams from which a man comes to with relief and thanksgiving. But for him there was no awakening. In the clutches of this nightmare he had to go out and about his business: confront his orchestra, teach, grant interviews, debate, oppose: reading the while a sinister knowledge and its accompanying pity or contempt into every handshake, each friendly or unfriendly word. Nor was he any better off at home. The house seemed to swarm with prying, spying eyes and pricked-up ears; was haunted by the apparition of an old face wolfish with anxiety to learn (and savour) the worst. And just when he felt he had reached

breaking-point, to all this was added the presence of Wagner himself.

For a mere hint of Cosima's proposal to seek out her father in person had been enough to throw Richard into a frenzy. If Munich stood for a den of lions, what of Rome and* its reptilian influences? Did the girl once become entangled in these Laocoonish Catholic coils, he would never see her again. He bore down upon her like a whirlwind, demolishing her pleas, cursing his own folly in letting go of her, haranguing and imploring. She wept, he wept: and was only to be pacified by her solemn promise to give "the Holy City and its nostrums" a wide berth.

"I'll thank people to keep their fingers out of my affairs. Putting such morbid nonsense into your head. *Fathers* don't die of their daughters* misplaced affections! If they did, the earth would be strewn with corpses."

His meeting with Hans—little as they knew it, it was to be their last—was a stormy one. (Contrived, foresightedly, in the remotest room of the flat, where Richard could shout at will.) To Hans, his daring to show up at such a moment was an outrage: while Richard frothed at what he considered a new trick to balk him, and was jealously aggrieved to see Liszt's welfare set above his own. (And by Hansl) Cosima, pacing agonisedly, out of earshot of their words but not of their voices, breathed a prayer of thanks when they emerged, livid but scatheless; and when Richard continued his interrupted journey north, leaving it to her to bend "that wild-bull Hans" to *his* will.

On the oad to the station he let out the dregs of his anger.

"All this wish-wash about feelings—his own and others' •—frankly, I don't believe a word of it. It's just of a piece with his usual inability to say yes and amen to a thing. What *he's* out for is to delay matters, gain time, allow him-

self room for hope. The hope that your father will succeed where he has failed. Or that, by then, you and I will have bad enough of each other. That you ll have found me out for the whited sepulchre I am, whose fair exterior—*ja, fa!*—conceals the corruption within."

The fond smile, the assurances he looked for were his. None the less a part of her—a stupid, obstinate, childish part—found itself ranged with Hans. And in the lull that now fell she brought all her woman's arts, her inborn astuteness to bear on finding a way out of the impasse. Alone with her, Hans was quieter and more amenable; though not to the exclusion of many a rabid outburst.

"God! why haven't I the courage to end it?—this wretched life of mine. That would solve everything. Where are my friends? Will no one give me what I most need, a few drops of Prussic acid?"

Or again, in a very different mood: "That I, I alone, should be debarred from -defending my honour—I, a Bulowl It's enough to make one's forbears turn in their graves . . . or weep tears of blood."

That was what her own tears felt like, they came from so far down, were so salt and stinging hot. Yet, though at moments she thought her heart would break, she never ceased to guide and propel him along the road, the Via Dolorosa he had to follow. But it was a Sisyphus task. And in the end all she got out of him was a half-promise, if possible, to arrange a meeting with her father, due in Germany soon after Christmas, and there inform him of what impended. By word of mouth somethig might be done to blunt the blow; and, "rid of his octopus," Liszt could at least be counted on to give one a hearing. But even so small a boon had a condition attached to it. Did she meanwhile persist in taking the irrevocable step—and he knew nothing *be* could say would move herl—then her

presence *in* Triebschen must remain a secret, be kept close as the grave. And this was his last word.

Would that it had beenl For just as she began to feel a stir of gratitude came the taunt that turned her cold again.

"I haven't a doubt Richard's practical mind will see the advantage of this. For if the news of your . . . shall we say flight? . . . came to the ears of *le roi de Baviere* before they've been properly keyed up, I wouldn't put it beyond him to avenge himself by cutting off supplies." And with a meaning laugh: '"Everything being fair in love and war."

To hear her own dread spoken aloud was torture. Hurriedly she rose, thinking to make her escape, put distance between them before he could say more. But he was too quick for her.

"From all the portents, Madame de Bulow, I foresee that you will find it as difficult to get your neck out of the marriage-noose as once you did to struggle into it.—Still, whatever happens, I'm sure you'll be generous and give me my due. Will remember me in your devotions as the humble yet effective tool—the dupe and the cat's-paw!—that served you as a means to your end."

From the door she turned to fling out: "Rest assured, I shall not—shall never forget what . . ." But at the sight of his poor broken face she faltered; and crying: "Oh, Hans, my poor, poor husband, what am I doing to youl" even took a step towards him.

But again the hands she held out were not met, and had to be let drop.

Her preparations made: they were simple; besides the barest necessaries, she was taking with her only her books, a few precious mementoes of brother and sister, money enough for her fare (no more; her private income was to go on being used to help run this over-large flat.) Now,

**there** was nothing to detain her. And at dusk one November afternoon she threw a last look round the familiar rooms, kissed her elder children good-bye, making light of it, though well she knew she might never see them again; and with the two little ones ("Loldi is still so young, I cannot be parted from her") crept out like a thief on her journey. Pale, trembling, exhausted; but unshrinking. For she had heard what she believed to be a "call;" had found her life-work. And whether she went towards it in joy or in pain was not hers to decide.

Under cover of darkness Triebschen was reached; and its door swung to behind her.

**THE END**

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