

FROM THE LIFE OF A GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

Chapter One

The wheel of my father's mill was once more roaring and booming right merrily; snow dripped busily from the roof, and sparrows twittered and darted around. I sat on the doorstep and rubbed the sleep from my eyes; I felt so at home in the warm sunshine. Then my father stepped out of the house; since the break of day he had been rumbling about in the mill, and, his nightcap skew-whiff on his head, he said to me:

"You good-for-nothing! There you are sunning yourself *again*, straightening and stretching your bones tired and leaving me to do all the work on my own. I can't feed you here any longer. Spring is at the door; you go on out into the world and earn your own bread."

"Right," I said, "if I'm a good-for-nothing, that's fine, I'll go out into the world and make my fortune."

Actually, I was really chuffed about this; for a short time earlier, I had hit on the notion of going travelling when I heard the yellowhammer – who in autumn and winter had kept up his sad song at our window, "Miller hire me, miller hire me!" – sing out proudly and lustily with the lovely springtime: "Miller, stuff your service!"

So I went into the house and took my fiddle – which I played pretty nicely – down from the wall; my father gave me a few pennies for the road, and then I strolled along the sprawling village. Secretly, it gave me great pleasure to see all my old friends and companions there, going off right and left to work, digging and ploughing – as they had done yesterday and the day before that, and as they will do for evermore – while there was I,

rambling out into the free world. Satisfied and as proud as punch, I shouted adieus on all sides to the poor people, but none of them took any particular notice. I felt as though every day was going to be Sunday. And when at last I came out into the open country, I took up my beloved fiddle; and walking down the highroad, I played and sang:

When God will show a man true favour,
He sends him into distant lands,
Where wood and mountain, field and river
All show the wonder of His hands.
No rousing flush of morning glows
On sluggards who remain in bed;
Their thoughts are filled with cares and woes,
With little mouths and little bread.

The runnels from the mounts fall springing,
Up high the darting larks rejoice;
Now what's there to stop me from singing
Full-throated airs with heartfelt voice?

I leave dear God to rule and reign;
Who brooks and larks and wood and lea
And Earth and Heaven can maintain,
I'll say he knows what's best for me!

While I was taking in all the sights, a splendid travelling-coach passed close by me; no doubt it had been travelling behind me for some time without my noticing it (my heart being so full of melody), for it was moving really slowly. And two distinguished ladies, having stuck their heads out, were listening to my song. One was especially beautiful, and younger than the other; but if truth be told they were both easy on the eye. Now when I stopped singing, the elder lady called a halt before sweetly addressing me:

“Well, my merry little man! You know how to sing some very pretty songs.”

As quick as you please, I answered: “Serving Your Ladyship, I could sing much lovelier ones.”

Whereupon she asked me: “And where exactly are you wandering to, so early in the morning?”

Then I felt ashamed, for I did not know that myself; so I boldly said, “To V.”

Then the two spoke together in a strange language I did not understand. The younger shook her head a few times, but the other one laughed incessantly, and finally called to me: “Jump up on the back, we too are going to V.”

Who was happier than I? Making an obeisance, I was up with one leap on the back of the coach; the coachman cracked his whip, and we flew along the shining road, the wind whistling through my hat.

Now villages, gardens and church towers disappeared behind me, and fresh villages, castles and mountains sprang up before; below me young crops, bushes and meadows flying past in a blaze of colour, above

me countless larks in the clear blue sky. I was shy of shouting aloud, but my heart was exultant, and I leapt and danced around on the footboard, needing little to lose my fiddle, which I held under my arm. But when the sun rose higher and higher, and heavy white midday clouds gathered around the horizon; when the air, and everything on the broad plain, became so empty and muggy and still above the gently waving cornfields – then, for the first time, I remembered my village and my father and our mill, and how cosily cool it was there by the shady pond, and how far, far behind me all that lay now. This put me in so strange a mood that I felt as if I had to turn back; I tucked my fiddle between my coat and waistcoat, sat down full of thoughts on the footboard, and fell asleep.

When I opened my eyes, the coach had come to a halt beneath some tall lime-trees, behind which a broad flight of steps led between pillars to a magnificent castle. Looking sideways through the trees, I could see the towers of V. The ladies, it appeared, had alighted a long time since; and the horses had been unhitched. It gave me a mighty shock to suddenly find myself sitting there all alone, so I ran swiftly into the castle – when I heard laughter from a window above.

I had some strange experiences in this castle. First of all, there I was, looking around in the wide, cool entrance-hall, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder with a stick. I quickly span around, there before me was standing a big man in gala dress, a broad, golden, silk bandoleer slung over his shoulder down to his hips, a silver-tipped staff in his hand and an extraordinarily long, hooked and electoral nose on his face; as stout and splendid as a puffed-up turkey-cock, who was asking me what I was doing

here. I was totally stunned and too shocked and astonished to find my tongue. Thereupon several servants came running from upstairs and downstairs; they said not a word, but just looked me up and down. Then a lady's-maid (as I afterwards discovered) came straight up to me and said: I was a charming youth, and the master wished to know if I wanted to serve here as gardener's lad?

I clutched at my waistcoat; my few pennies had gone, Heaven knows they must have jumped out of my pocket when I was dancing about on the coach; I had nothing but my fiddling, for which the gentleman with the staff, as he remarked to me in passing, would not give me a brass farthing. So, anxious at heart, I told the lady's-maid Yes, looking sideways all the while at the sinister figure who was wandering constantly up and down the hall like the pendulum of a tower-clock, and at that moment approaching majestic and terrible from the background.

At last the gardener arrived, muttered something in his beard about riff-raff and country oafs, and led me to the garden, giving me a long sermon on the way: how I must be nice and sober, and industrious, not stravaig around the world, not indulge in any labours of love or useless rubbish; then, perhaps, with time, I could come to something. – There were yet more very charming, well-chosen, and helpful nuggets of advice; I just seem to have forgotten nearly all of them in the meantime. Anyhow, I'm not actually certain how all this happened; I just kept saying, "Yes" to everything, for I felt like a bird whose wings have been drenched. – And so I had, thank God, a living.

Life in the garden was very pleasant; every day I had enough hot meals and more money than I needed for wine; it was just unfortunate that I had rather a heavy workload. As for the temples, pergolas and other leafy walks, they all really caught my fancy; if only I had been free to stroll around inside them and discourse rationally, like the ladies and gentlemen who entered there every day. Whenever the gardener had gone and I was alone, I straightaway pulled out my short pipe, sat down, and thought up some fine, courtly phrases with which I could entertain the beautiful young lady who had brought me along to the castle, if I were a cavalier walking around with her here. Or I would lie down on my back, on sultry afternoons when all was so still that only the buzzing of bees could be heard, and watch the clouds above me flying towards my village and the grass and flowers swaying, and think about the lady; and then it often happened that the lovely lady actually passed through the garden, in the distance, with a guitar or a book, as quiet and serene as an angel, so that I couldn't be certain whether I was dreaming or waking.

And one day, just as I was passing one of the summerhouses on my way to work, I sang to myself:

What sights my eyes may lure,
In wood and field and wold,
From mountain to the azure,
Then, lady fair and pure,
I greet you thousandfold.

Then I saw, sparkling out from between the half-opened jalousies of the cool, dark summerhouse and the flowers on the ledge, two beautiful, bright young eyes. I was quite startled; I did not finish my song, but went on to my work, without looking back.

One evening – it was a Saturday, and there I was, standing with my fiddle at the garden-shed window, in joyful anticipation of the coming Sunday, and still thinking about those sparkling eyes – when suddenly the lady’s-maid came sweeping up out of the twilight.

“Here’s something for you from our beautiful mistress, you’re to drink it to her health. And have a good night!”

With that she quickly set down a bottle of wine on the window-sill then immediately disappeared like a lizard between the flowers and the hedges.

I stood for a long time before the wondrous bottle, not knowing what had happened to me. – And if before that time I had bowed the fiddle merrily, now I *really* began to play and sing; I sang the song about the lovely lady to the very last note, and all the songs I had in my head, until outside every nightingale awoke and the moon and the stars had long been shining down on the garden. Yes, that *was* a good, a beautiful night!

No man’s fate is foretold at his cradle; the blind hen sometimes finds a grain of corn; he who laughs last, laughs longest; much of what’s been was not foreseen; man reflects and God directs – so I meditated when, on the following day, I was sitting again in the garden with my pipe and it almost seemed to me, as I attentively looked myself up and down, that I really was a right rogue. – By this time, in total contrast to my usual custom,

I would get up very early every day, before even the gardener and the other workers were stirring. It was so gorgeous out in the garden at that hour. The flowers, the fountains, the rose-bushes, indeed all the garden glittered in the morning sun like pure gold and gemstones. And in the tall beech avenues, all was yet as still, cool and solemn as a church; only birds fluttered about and pecked at the sand. Immediately before the castle, directly beneath the windows where the lovely lady lived, there was a blossoming bush. I always went there at the crack of dawn and ducked behind the branches, so I could look up at the windows; for I did not have the courage to show myself in the open. Every time, I saw the loveliest of ladies, still warm and half asleep, emerge in a snow-white dress at the open window. Now she plaited her dark-brown hair, her gracefully playful gaze sweeping over bushes and garden all the while; now she bent and bound the flowers which stood before her window, or she took her guitar into her white arms and sang along so wondrously, across and out of the garden, that even now my heart nigh turns over from melancholy when one of her songs returns every now and then to my remembrance – and oh, all that is long ago!

This went on for perhaps a week or longer. But then on one occasion – she was standing there at the window and there was silence all around – a cursed fly buzzed up my nose and I launched into a shocking sneezing fit that seemed to have no end. She leant far out of the window and saw me, miserable wretch, eavesdropping behind the bush. – Well, I was ashamed, and I did not go back for many days.

Eventually I dared to return, but this time the window remained shut; I sat behind the bush for four, five, six mornings, but she did not come to the window again. Then time hung heavy on my hands, so I took heart and started to walk, as open as you like, below the windows along the front of the castle every morning. But the dear, lovely lady was never, never to be seen. A little further on I always saw the other lady standing at her window. I had never seen her in so much detail before. She was actually pretty rosy and fat, and with a really splendid and proud appearance, like a tulip. I always gave her a low bow, and, I have to say, she thanked me every time, and as she nodded her eyes would twinkle in a quite extraordinarily courteous manner. – Only once did I think that I saw the beautiful lady standing at her window behind the curtains and furtively peering out.

However, many days passed without my seeing her. She no longer came into the garden, she no longer came to the window. The gardener called me a lazy rascal, I was morose, the tip of my nose was in my way when I looked out into God's free world.

So I was lying in the garden one Sunday afternoon, looking into the blue clouds rising from my pipe and getting annoyed at my not having settled on another trade, one that would at least have given me a blue Monday to look forward to on the following day. The other lads had all gone off, smartly decked out, to the dances in the nearby suburb. There everyone was surging and seething enthusiastically back and forth, in their Sunday best, between the bright houses and the turning hurdy-gurdies. Whereas I was sitting like a bittern among the reeds of a lonely lake in the garden, rocking myself in the boat that was moored there, while the

vesper-bells pealed over the garden from the city and the swans slowly glided up and down the water beside me. I was almost dead with yearning.

In the meantime I heard from afar all kinds of voices, cheerfully chattering all at once, and laughter, coming ever nearer; then red and white shawls, hats and feathers shimmered through the greenery, and suddenly a bright and breezy crowd of young ladies and gentlemen from the castle was heading towards me over the meadow, both my ladies in the midst of them. I stood up, about to leave, when the elder of the lovely ladies caught sight of me. “Well, here’s just the man we need!” she shouted to me with laughing lips, “row us across the lake to the far bank!” Now the ladies climbed cautiously and timorously into the boat, one after the other; the gentlemen gave them a hand and made themselves look rather consequential with their boldness on the water. When the ladies had all settled themselves on the side-benches, I pushed off from the bank. One of the young gentlemen, standing in the bows, began to surreptitiously rock the boat. Then the ladies turned anxiously from side to side; several even screamed. The lovely lady, a lily in her hand, sat close to the boat’s edge, gazing with a serene smile down into the clear waves, which she touched with the lily, so that her entire form was reproduced between the reflected clouds and trees, like an angel softly moving across the deep blue floor of Heaven.

And while I was looking at her, the other of my two ladies – the jovial, fat one – suddenly hit on the idea that I should sing them a ditty during the crossing. At once a very dainty young gentleman with a pair of glasses on his nose, who was sitting beside her, swivelled round, gently kissed her

hand, and said: “I thank you for your apropos suggestion! A folk-song, *sung* by the populace in the open field and forest, is an alpine rose on an alpine meadow – the Wonder-horns are herbariums, herbariums -, is the soul of the national soul.” But I said I knew no songs lovely enough for such polite society. Then the saucy lady’s-maid, who was standing close beside me with a basket full of cups and bottles, and whom I hadn’t noticed at all until that moment, said: “But you do know a really pretty ballad about a deeply lovely woman.” – “Yes, yes, sing that out nice and loud,” cried the lady the next instant. I went red all over. – Meanwhile the lovely lady suddenly raised her eyes from the water and fixed me with a look that shot through me, body and soul. So hesitating no longer, I plucked up courage and belted out gung-ho with swelling lungs:

Wherever my eyes may be,
In wood or field or wold,
From mountain down to the gay lea,
Then, pure and lovely lady,
I greet you thousandfold.

Within my garden are bands
Of flowers, fair and sought;
I wind them into garlands,
And weave a thousand snar strands
Of greetings, blooms and thought.

I dare not hand one *thither*,
She is too fair, too high;
Theirs is to fade and wither,
But love, one like no other,
Lives in the heart for aye.

I teem with merry chatter,
And bustle to and fro;
And, though my heart may shatter,
I dig and clunk and clatter
And help my grave to grow.

We ran against the shore, and all the company disembarked; while I was singing, many of the young gentlemen – oh yes, I noticed them – had been mocking me in front of the ladies with sly looks and whispers. The gentleman with glasses seized my hand as he was leaving and said to me – I can't remember what – and the elder of my ladies looked at me very approvingly. The lovely lady, having cast down her eyes for the duration of my song, now walked away without uttering a single word. – As for me, the tears were in my eyes before my song was ended, its lines led my heart to burst with shame and anguish; all of a sudden I clearly realised everything – how *she* is so beautiful and *I* am so poor and mocked and forsaken by the world -, and once they had all disappeared behind the bushes, I could hold out no longer, but threw myself down on the grass and burst into bitter tears.

Chapter Two

Close to the comital garden passed the high-road; only a high wall separated them. A really neat little toll-house with a red tiled roof had been built there; behind it was a little garden, enclosed by a brightly coloured fence which jutted through a gap in the castle garden wall into its shadiest, most secluded part. The toll-collector who had always lived there had just died. Then early one morning, when I was still lying sound asleep, the clerk from the castle called on me and ordered me to come to the steward on the double. I dressed quickly and ambled along behind the happy-go-lucky clerk, who broke off a rose now here, now there on the way and stuck it into the front of his coat, then fenced the air with a little walking-stick and wasted his breath prattling all kinds of things to me, none of which I caught, for my eyes and ears were still full of sleep. When I stepped into the office, where it was not yet quite light, the steward looked at me from behind an enormous ink-pot, piles of papers and books and an impressive wig, like an owl peering out of her nest, and began: "What is your name? Where are you from? Can you read, write, and count?" When I affirmed that I could, he retorted: "Well, the master, in view of your good behaviour and especial merits, has decided that you shall fill the vacant post of collector." I quickly ran over my previous behaviour and manners in my mind and, I had to admit, I myself came to the conclusion that the steward was right. – And so, before you could say Jack Robinson, I really was the toll-collector.

Then I moved into my new dwelling without more ado, and in no time at all I had settled in. I found some paraphernalia which the late collector had left his successor; among other things, a splendid red dressing-gown with yellow spots, a pair of green slippers, a nightcap and several long-stemmed pipes. I had wished to possess all of these in my days at home, whenever I saw the priest going around in such comfort. All day (I had nothing else to do) I sat on the little bench before my house, in dressing-gown and nightcap, smoked tobacco from the longest pipe the late collector had left, and watched the people walking and riding to and fro along the country road. I just kept wishing that a few people from my village, who had always claimed that I would never come to anything, would pass this way too, and see me in my present state. – The dressing-gown suited me very nicely, and indeed everything pleased me greatly. So I sat there and thought about various things, that the start is always the hardest part, that a more genteel life is actually right comfortable, and I formed a secret resolve to desist from travelling from that point on, to save money like other people, and assuredly achieve something great in the world with time. Meanwhile, my resolutions, concerns and duties did not make me forget the gorgeous lady in the slightest.

I threw out the potatoes and other vegetables I found in my little garden and planted the whole area with the most select flowers; which caused the porter from the castle, he with the large electoral nose, who had often paid me a visit since the time I came to live here and had become my intimate friend, to apprehensively give me a sidelong glance and take me for someone whom sudden good fortune had robbed of his reason. But

I didn't let that trouble me. For not far from me, in the comital garden, I heard the sound of refined voices, among which I believed I recognised that of my lovely lady, although I could not see anyone because of the thick bushes. So every day I would make up a bouquet of the most beautiful flowers I had; and every evening, when it grew dark, I would climb over the wall and lay the bouquet down on a stone table which stood in the middle of an arbour. And every evening, when I brought a fresh bouquet, the old one had gone from the table.

One evening the society had gone riding on the hunt; the sun was just setting, bathing all the land with a radiant shimmer; the Danube meandered splendidly along, like pure gold and fire, into the far distance; from the mountains, deep into the land, sounded the vintagers' jubilant song. I sat with the porter on the little bench in front of my house, taking pleasure in the mild air and the merry day which was darkening and fading away so slowly before us. Suddenly the horns of the returning hunters were heard in the distance, answering one another delightfully at intervals from the mountains opposite. I was delighted in my heart of hearts and I leapt up and shouted, as if bewitched and enraptured with joy: "Aye, that's what I call a profession, the noble sport of hunting!" The porter, however, calmly knocked out his pipe and said: "That's just how you imagine it to be. But I've taken part in one; you barely earn the cost of the soles you wear through, and you simply can't shake off the coughs and colds, they come from eternally having wet feet." – I don't know why, I was gripped by a foolish anger which made me quake all over. Suddenly, everything about the man – his boring coat, his everlasting feet, his snuff, his big nose, and

the rest – was repellent to me. I seized him by the breast, as if beside myself, and said: “Porter, either you beat it back home right now, or I’ll thrash you on the spot!” At these words the porter was struck by his old opinion that I had lost my senses. He looked at me anxiously and with secret fear, freed himself from my grasp without uttering a word, and walked, casting sinister looks back at me all the while, with long strides back to the castle, where he breathlessly announced that, this time, I was mad for certain.

In the end, though, I had to laugh out loud, and I was heartily glad to be rid of my know-all companion; for it was precisely the hour at which I used to lay the bouquet in the arbour. And today was no exception; I quickly sprang over the wall and was just heading towards the little stone table when I heard the clapping of horse’s hooves at a little distance. It was too late to make my escape, for my lovely lady herself, in a green hunting-habit and with nodding plumes in her hat, was at that moment riding down the avenue, slowly, and apparently in deep thought. I felt as I always used to when reading about the beautiful Magelone in the old books at my father’s, how she would emerge from between the tall trees, with the huntsmen’s horns resounding ever nearer, and the changing evening light – I was rooted to the spot. She, however, gave a violent start when she suddenly noticed me and, almost involuntarily, came to a halt. I was drunk with fear, palpitation and great joy; and when I noticed that she was really wearing my yesterday’s bouquet on her breast, I could restrain myself no longer, but said, totally flustered: “My dear, beautiful lady, take this bouquet from me, along with all the flowers in my garden and everything I

have. Oh, if only I could jump into fire for you!” Right at the outset she had looked at me so gravely, almost crossly, that it shot right through me; but then, while I was speaking, she kept her eyes cast fixed on the ground. Just at that moment the sound of voices and horses’ hooves could be heard in the bushes. Then she quickly snatched the bunch out of my hand and presently, without saying a word, disappeared at the far end of the curving road.

After that evening I had neither rest nor respite. My mood was constantly as it always used to be when spring was dawning – so restless and joyful, without my knowing why, as if there were a great piece of good fortune or some other extraordinary occurrence in store for me. In particular, I just couldn’t get my head round the odious calculations any longer, and when the sunshine fell through the chestnut-tree before the window in green and gold upon the figures, and added up from Brought Forward to Total, and up and down again, so quickly, I had extremely strange thoughts, so that I sometimes became utterly confused and was truly unable to count up to three. For the Eight always appeared to me as my fat, tightly-laced lady with the wide head-dress, the wicked Seven was the spitting image of a signpost pointing eternally backwards, or of a gallows. – The Nine afforded me the greatest fun, merrily turning itself onto its head as a Six before I realised what was happening, while the Two, like a question-mark, looked so sly, as if she wanted to ask me: What’s going to happen to you in the end, you poor Nought? Without *her*, this slender One and everything, why, you will remain nothing for ever!

Sitting outside in front of the door no longer gave me pleasure, either. To have a more comfortable time of it, I took a stool out with me and stretched my legs out on it; I mended an old parasol of the collector's and spanned it over me, like a Chinese summerhouse, against the sun. But it was no use. It seemed to me, as I sat there smoking and speculating, that my legs were growing gradually longer and longer from boredom and my nose grew from doing nothing when I looked down at it for hours on end. – And then, when a post-chaise on occasion came by before day had even broken, and I stepped out into the cool air half asleep, and a sweet little face, of which only the sparkling eyes could be seen in the twilight, bent forward inquisitively out of the carriage and cordially wished me good morning; in the villages all around the cocks crowed so cheerily across the lightly waving cornfields, and some larks, awakened too early, were already roving between the stripes of morning high in the sky, and the postilion took his post-horn and drove on and blew and blew – then I stood a long time following the coach with my eyes, and I felt that I just had to go away at once, far, far into the world. –

In the meantime I continued to lay my bouquets on the stone table in the dark arbour as soon as the sun had set. But that was precisely the problem: it was all over with this since that evening. – Nobody troubled themselves with them; whenever I went to look in the early morning, the flowers still lay where they had been the previous day and looked at me really sadly with their wilted, drooping little heads, which dew-drops clung to, as if they were crying. This irked me sorely. I did not tie another bouquet. The weeds in my garden were free to flourish as they liked, and I

left the flowers in peace to grow until the wind scattered their petals. After all, everything was just as wild, confused, and disturbed in my heart.

Then, at this critical juncture, it so happened that one day, just as I was lying by the window in my house and gazing out morosely into empty space, the lady's-maid from the castle came mincing across the road. Seeing me, she quickly headed towards me and stopped before the window. – “The master returned from his travels yesterday,” she said zealously. “So?” I retorted, astonished – for I had cared about nothing for several weeks now and did not even know that the master had been on a journey – “then his daughter, the young lady, will be greatly pleased.” – The lady's-maid looked me over from top to toe, so strangely that I really had to reflect on whether I had dropped a stupid remark. – “You don't know *anything*,” she said at last, turning up her little nose. “Now,” she continued, “this evening, to honour the master, there is to be a dance and a masquerade in the castle. My mistress will also be masquerading, as a gardener – understand this clearly – as a gardener. Now the lady has seen that you have especially beautiful flowers in your garden.” – That is odd, I thought to myself, for at present you can hardly see any flowers for weeds. – But she went on: “Now, as the lady requires beautiful flowers for her costume, but quite fresh, just picked from their bed, you're to bring her some this evening, after dusk, and wait with them under the big pear-tree in the castle-garden; then she'll come and collect the flowers.”

I was quite stunned with joy at this news and ran, in my delight, from the window out to the lady's-maid. – “Ugh, that nasty dressing-gown!” she exclaimed, on suddenly seeing me in this get-up out of doors. That

annoyed me; not wanting to be found behind in gallantry, I cut some fancy capers to grab and kiss her. But unfortunately, the dressing-gown, which was far too long for me, got tangled up under my feet in the process, and I fell down flat on my face. By the time I had picked myself up, the lady's-maid was far away; and even over that distance I could hear her laughing so hard that she had to hold her sides.

Now, however, I had something to make me ponder and rejoice. She still thought about me and my flowers! I went into my little garden, hastily tore all the weeds out of the beds and threw them away, high over my head into the shimmering air, as if I were pulling out all evil and melancholy by the root. Now the roses were like her mouth, the sky-blue bindweed like her eyes, the snow-white lily, with its head bowed in melancholy, looked exactly like *her*. I piled them all together in my little basket. It was a still, lovely evening, without a cloud in the sky. A few stars already shone in the firmament, the murmuring Danube could be heard from afar across the fields; in the tall trees in the comital garden beside me numberless birds sang merrily all at once. Ah, I was so happy!

When night finally fell, I took my little basket on my arm and made my way to the great garden. Everything in the basket was in such a colourful and charming muddle, white, red, blue and fragrant, that my heart laughed soundly at the sight.

Full of cheerful thoughts, I walked in the lovely moonlight down the silent, clean and sand-strewn paths over the small white bridges, under which the swans sat sleeping on the water, past the elegant arbours and summerhouses. I found the large pear-tree in no time at all, for it was the

same tree I would lie under, when I was the gardener's lad, on sultry afternoons.

It was so dark and lonely here. Only a tall aspen shook and whispered incessantly with its silver leaves. Sometimes dance music rang over from the castle. I also heard human voices from time to time in the garden; they often came up quite close to me, then all was suddenly silent again.

My heart pounded. I felt uneasy and strange, as though I meant to rob someone. For a long time I stood stock-still, leaning against the tree, and listening on all sides; but because no one showed any signs of ever appearing, I could bear it no longer. I hung my basket on my arm and quickly climbed up the pear-tree, to draw breath in the open again.

Up there, the dance music *really* rang out towards me over the tree-tops. My gaze passed over all of the garden and directly into the brightly-lit castle windows. There the chandeliers revolved slowly like wreaths of stars, countless spruce ladies and gentlemen surged and waltzed and reeled in a colourful, indecipherable confusion, like figures in a shadow dance; at times some leaned against a window and looked down into the garden. In front of the castle, the lawns, bushes and trees seemed to be bathed in gold from the many lights in the room, so that the flowers and birds actually appeared to wake up. Further away, around and behind me, the garden lay so dark and silent.

She is dancing there now, I thought to myself, up in the tree, and has no doubt long forgotten about you and your flowers once more. Everybody is so happy, and no one has a thought for you. – And this is what happens

to me everywhere and always. Everyone has marked out his own little spot on the Earth, his warm stove, his cup of coffee, his wife, his glass of wine in the evening, and is quite content with that; even the porter is quite comfortable in his long skin. – I don't feel at ease anywhere. It is as if I always arrive a second too late, as if all the world had utterly failed to take me into account. –

As I was philosophising thus, I suddenly heard something rustling along below me in the grass. Two refined voices were speaking softly together in the near distance. Soon afterwards the branches in the bushes parted, and the lady's-maid stuck her little face between the foliage, looking around on all sides. The moonlight sparkled directly on to her sly eyes as they peeped out. I held my breath and gazed fixedly down. And I had not long to wait before the 'gardener', dressed exactly as the lady's-maid had described to me yesterday, did step out from between the trees. My heart thumped fit to burst. She was wearing a mask and looked around her, it seemed to me, in astonishment. – Then it occurred to me that she might not after all be so slim and dainty. – At last she walked up quite close to the tree and took her mask off. – It was actually the other, older lady!

How glad I was now, when I had recovered from the initial shock, that I was situated up here in safety. How on earth, I thought, has *she* come here just now? When the dear, beautiful lady comes to collect the flowers – that will be a fine how-do-you-do! In the end, I could have cried with vexation at the whole affair.

Meanwhile the disguised gardener below began: "It is so suffocatingly hot up there in the hall, I had to come to cool down a little in

the lovely open country.” As she spoke she fanned herself continually with the mask and puffed vigorously. In the bright moonlight I could clearly see that the tendons in her neck were very swollen; she looked quite furious and brick-red in the face. The lady’s-maid, in the meantime, was searching behind all the hedges, as though she had lost a pin. –

“And I urgently need more fresh flowers for my disguise,” the gardener continued anew, “now where *is* he!” - The lady’s-maid went on with her search, giggling to herself the whole time. “Did you say something, Rosette?” the gardener asked pointedly. – “I say what I’ve said all along,” replied the maid, looking serious and innocent, “that collector is and always will be a downright oaf; I don’t doubt he’ll be lying fast asleep behind one of these bushes.”

Every part of me itched to leap down and save my reputation – when suddenly a great drumming and playing of instruments and noisemaking came from the castle.

Now the lady could control herself no longer. “The company,” she flared out, “are giving the master the vivat. Come, we shall be missed!” – And with this she quickly put on her mask and walked furiously away towards the castle with the lady’s-maid. The trees and bushes pointed strangely after her, as if with long noses and fingers; the moonlight danced rapidly up and down over her broad figure, as over a keyboard; and so she made, just like the divas I have occasionally seen on the stage, a hasty exit, with a fanfare and a flourish.

Whereas I, up in my tree, really was not entirely sure about what had happened to me, and from that point on I fixed my gaze steadfastly on the

castle; for a circle of tall lanterns at the foot of the entrance steps cast a peculiar light over the flashing windows and far out into the garden. It was the servants, who were in the process of serenading their young master. In their midst the porter, splendidly decked out like a minister of state, stood before a music-stand and zestfully emptied his lungs into a bassoon.

Just as I was settling myself to listen to the harmonious serenade, the double doors up on the castle balcony were flung open. A tall gentleman, handsome and imposing in uniform, with many sparkling stars, stepped out onto the balcony, holding the hand of – the beautiful young lady, dressed all in white, like a lily at night, or like the moon passing across the clear heavens.

I could not wrest my eyes from the scene, and gardens, trees and fields sank from my senses as she stood there, tall and slim, so wondrously lit by the torches, now talking pleasantly with the handsome officer, now nodding amiably down to the musicians. The people below were beside themselves with joy, and in the end I too could contain myself no longer, but kept shouting vivat with them as loud as my lungs would allow.

But when, shortly afterwards, she disappeared from the balcony, then down below one torch after the other went out and the music-stands were cleared away, and now the garden all around fell dark again and rustled as before – then, then I realised everything – it suddenly sent my heart plunging, that it was really only the aunt who had ordered my flowers, that the fair one hadn't spared me the slightest thought, was married long since, and I, myself, was a great fool.

All of this made me tumble deep into an abyss of cogitation. I curled myself together, like a hedgehog, in the spines of my own thoughts; the dance music sounded over from the castle less frequently, the clouds drifted, lonely, over the dark garden and away. And so I sat up in the tree, like a night-owl, in the ruins of my happiness all night long.

The cool morning air aroused me at last from my reveries. I was thoroughly amazed when I suddenly looked around me. The music and dancing were long over; in the castle, and around the castle on the lawns and stone steps and pillars, everything looked so peaceful, cool and solemn; the fountain before the entrance kept up a lonely splashing, but that was all. Here and there in the branches beside me birds were already awakening; they shook their colourful feathers and, stretching their little wings, looked with curiosity and wonder at their strange sleeping companion. Sparkling beams of morning light roved merrily over the garden and on to my breast.

Then I sat up straight in my tree and, for the first time in a long while, I looked out really far across the land, and I saw several ships sailing down the Danube between the vineyards and the yet empty highroads sweeping out over mountains and valleys into the far distance like bridges over the gleaming land.

I do not know how it came about – but all of a sudden my old wanderlust gripped me again; all the old melancholy and desire and great expectations. At the same time it occurred to me that the lovely lady was now slumbering between flowers and under silken covers up there in the castle, and an angel was sitting at her bedside in the peacefulness of

morning. – “No,” I cried, “I must get away from here, farther and farther away, as far as the sky is blue!”

And with this I took my basket and threw it high up into the air, so that it was really delightful to see how the flowers lay around in a blaze of colours between the branches and on the green lawn below. Then I myself quickly descended and walked through the silent garden to my house. Many times I would stop and stand at a place where I thought I had once seen her, or had lain in the shadows and thought of *her*.

In and around my little house everything was just as I had left it the previous day. The square of garden had been plundered and was desolate; in the room the ledger lay open, my fiddle, which I had almost totally forgotten, hung covered in dust on the wall. But a morning ray passed flashing through the window opposite and landed directly on the strings. That struck a real chord in my heart. Yes, I said, come to me, my faithful instrument! Our Kingdom is not of this world! –

And so I took my fiddle from the wall, left ledger, dressing-gown, slippers, pipe and parasol lying there and wandered out of my house, as poor as I had entered, and away along the shining highroad.

I looked back often; I felt quite strange, so sad and yet again so exceedingly happy, like a bird tearing out of its cage. And once I had covered a considerable stretch, I took out my fiddle, in the open air, and sang:

I leave dear God to rule and reign;
Who brooks and larks and wood and lea

And Earth and Heaven can maintain,
I'll say he knows what's best for me!

The castle, the garden, and the towers of V. had already become immersed behind me in the morning mist; above me, high in the air, countless larks sang joyfully; and so I moved on, between green hills and past merry towns and villages, down towards Italy.

Chapter Three

But this was awful! I hadn't given the least thought to the fact that I did not actually know the correct road. Moreover, there was no sign of anyone anywhere in the quiet morning hour whom I could have asked; and not far ahead of me the highroad divided into many new highways, which went far, far away over the highest mountains, as if they were leading out of the world, so that I felt quite dizzy when my gaze tried to follow them.

At last a farmer came along the road, on his way, I believed, to church, today being Sunday, in an old-fashioned frock-coat with large silver buttons and a long cane with a solid knob which could be spotted from afar sparkling in the sun. I at once asked him most courteously: "Could you perhaps tell me which is the way to Italy?" The farmer halted, looked at me, reflected, his lower lip thrust far forward, then looked at me again. Once more, I said, "To Italy, where the bigarades grow?" "Ah, what have thy bigarades to do with me?" said the farmer, and he strode doughtily away. I had credited the man with more manners, for he had presented a really distinguished appearance.

Now what was I to do? Turn on my heels and go back to my village? Then the people would point at me, and the lads would leap around me: “Well, a thousand welcomes back from the World! And how are things in the World? Hasn’t he brought us gingerbread back from the World?” The porter with the electoral nose, who actually had an extensive knowledge of world history, often said to me: “Highly-esteemed Collector! Italy is a beautiful land, where the good Lord provides for everyone, where a man can lie on his back in the sunshine and grapes will fall into his mouth; and when a tarantula stings you, you dance with tremendous agility, even if you’ve never danced a step before.” – “No, to Italy, to Italy!” I cried out with joy and ran, without thinking about the various ways, down the road at my feet.

When I had journeyed thus for some distance, I saw an extremely beautiful orchard on the right of the road, where the morning sun shimmered so merrily through the branches and tree-tops that it looked as though the lawn were laid with golden carpets. As I could not see a soul, I climbed over the low garden-fence and settled down quite comfortably on the grass under an apple-tree, for all my limbs were still aching from yesterday’s bivouac in the pear-tree. From there I could see far out into the land; and because it was Sunday, chimes rang out from the far distance across the still fields, and all around spruce country folk were passing between meadows and bushes to church. I was really happy at heart, the birds sang above me in the tree, I thought of my mill and the lovely lady’s garden, and how all that was so, so far away now – until in the end I fell asleep. Then I dreamt that the lovely lady came walking to me from the

marvellous region – actually, she came in slow flight between the chimes with long white veils which fluttered with the dawn. And then it seemed that we were not in a strange land at all, but near my village, in the deep shade by the mill. But there all was silent and empty, as on Sunday when folk are in church, and only the notes of the organ came through the trees, so that I was sad to the depths of my heart. The lovely lady, however, was very kind and friendly; she held my hand and walked with me, singing all the while in this solitude the sweet song she would sing, to her guitar, at her open window in the early morning; and as she sang I saw her reflection in the still pond, many thousand times more beautiful, but with strange, large eyes which looked at me so fixedly that I almost felt afraid. – When suddenly the mill began to turn, with slow and single revolutions at first, then ever faster and more fiercely until it was thundering; the pool darkened and broke into ripples, the lovely lady went quite pale, and her veils grew longer and longer, and their long peaks flapped appallingly, like streaks of mist, high into the sky; the roaring increased continually, it often seemed that the porter was blowing along on his bassoon, until I finally awoke, my heart pounding furiously.

A wind had indeed arisen and was blowing softly through the apple-tree above me; but the booming and rumbling was caused by neither the mill nor the porter, but by that same farmer who had just now refused to show me the way to Italy. He had taken off his Sunday finery and was standing before me in a white jerkin. “Well,” he said, while I was rubbing the sleep from my eyes, “so thou’rt after picking buggerades, trampling all over me lovely grass instead of going to church, thou layabout!” – Now I

was annoyed that the boor had wakened me. I leapt to my feet in a rage and quickly retorted: "What, thou dar'st upbraid me? I was a gardener before thou thought of such a thing, and a toll-collector, and if thou hadst travelled to town thou wouldst have had to doff thy greasy nightcap to me, and I had my house and my red dressing-gown with yellow spots." – But the clodhopper couldn't have cared less about this; placing his hands on his hips, he just said: "And what dost thou want? Heigh! Heigh!" By this time I had noted that he was, in actual fact, a short, stocky, bandy-legged fellow with protruding, goggling eyes and a red, rather crooked nose. And as he continued to say nothing more than "Heigh! – Heigh!", coming a step closer to me each time – then such a strange, horrible fear came over me that I quickly took to my heels; jumping over the fence, I ran, and ran, across the country, never once looking back, my fiddle ringing in my pocket.

When at last I came to a halt to recover my wind, the garden and all of the valley had disappeared, and I was standing in a beautiful forest. But I took little enough notice of that, for now I was *really* annoyed by the scene and the fellow's always thee- and thouing me; and I quietly cursed to myself for a long time. With such thoughts I passed rapidly on, moving further and further away from the high-road, right into the heart of the mountains. The logging-path I had been running along came to an end, and now there was only a narrow, little-trod footpath before me. All around there was neither sight nor sound of anyone. This aside, it was a really pleasant walk; the tree-tops swished, and birds sang very beautifully. And so I commended myself to God's guidance, took out my violin and played

through all my favourite pieces, sending a really cheerful sound ringing through the lonely forest.

The playing, however, did not last long, for at every instant I tripped over the cursed tree-roots; also, I finally began to grow hungry, and the forest seemed endless. So I wandered around the whole day long, and the sun was shining slantwise between the tree-trunks by the time I at last emerged onto a small meadow-clothed valley, completely surrounded by mountains and full of red and yellow flowers, over which countless butterflies were fluttering in the golden light of evening. Here it was as lonely as if the world were some hundred miles away. House-crickets were chirping, and a shepherd lay in the tall grass on the far side, playing such melancholy tunes on his shawm that the hearer's heart could have burst with yearning. Aye, I thought to myself, who has it so good as a layabout like that! The likes of us must struggle around through strange lands, constantly on our guard. – Because a lovely clear stream lay between us, and I could not cross over, I shouted to him from a distance: Where was the nearest village? But he refused to let me disturb him and merely raised his head a little from the grass, pointed towards the other forest with his shawm, and calmly resumed his playing.

Meanwhile I marched busily onwards, for dusk was already falling. The birds, who had all been making a racket as the last rays of sunlight glimmered through the wood, fell suddenly silent; and I almost began to feel afraid in the eternal, lonely murmurs of the forest. I upped my pace, the wood became ever more sparse, and a little later I was looking through the last trees at a lovely green lawn, on which a crowd of children were

dinning and romping around a great lime-tree standing in the dead centre. Further ahead, there was an inn on the lawn, with several farmers sitting around a table in front, playing cards and smoking tobacco. On the other side, before the door, sat young lads and maids, the latter with their arms rolled inside their aprons, chatting together in the cool evening.

Without a moment's hesitation I pulled my fiddle from my pocket and quickly struck up a merry country-dance as I stepped out of the wood. The maids were astonished, and the old folk laughed so hard that the forest depths echoed with the sound. But when I had reached the lime-tree and, leaning back against it, kept on with my playing, a secret murmuring and whispering passed between the young people; the lads finally put aside their Sunday pipes, each took his girl, and before I knew what was happening the young farmers were spinning with gusto around me, dogs barked, skirts flew, and the children encircled me, staring with curiosity at my face and my rapidly dancing fingers.

When the first round was over, I really learnt how good music goes to the limbs. The country lads, who had been spread out on the benches, pipe in mouth, stretching their stiff legs, were now suddenly like new men; letting their colourful handkerchiefs hang down low from their buttonholes, they caprioled so courteously around the maids that it was a downright joy to see. One of them, who doubtless considered himself to be of some consequence, poked around in his waistcoat pocket for a long time to catch the others' attention, then finally produced a small, silver coin which he wanted to press into my palm. This annoyed me, even though my pockets were empty at that precise moment. I told him to hold on to his pennies; I

was only playing from joy at being among people again. Soon afterwards, a trim maid came up to me with a large rummer of wine. "Musicians like a drink," she said with a friendly smile; and her pearl-white teeth gleamed really charmingly through her red lips, which I would dearly have liked to plant a kiss on. She dipped her little mouth into the wine, her eyes twinkling at me over the glass, and then handed me the rummer. I drained the glass and started to play afresh, and soon everyone was merrily revolving around me.

In the meantime, the old folk had broken off their game, and the young ones, beginning to grow tired, were dispersing; and so, little by little, all became silent and deserted before the inn. The maid who had handed me the wine also headed for the village, but she walked very slowly, looking around from time to time as if she had forgotten something. Finally she came to a stop and searched for something on the ground; but I could clearly see that, as she bent down, she looked back at me through the gap between arm and body. Having learnt manners at the castle, I quickly ran up to her and said: "Have you lost something, fair lady?" "Ah, no," she said, blushing all over, "it was only a rose – dost thou want it?" I thanked her and fixed the rose in my buttonhole. She looked at me with smiling eyes and said: "Thou playest really beautifully." "Yes," I replied, "it's a gift from God." "Musicians are very rare in this region," the maid began, then hesitated, her gaze fixed firmly on the ground. "Thou couldst earn a good sum of money here – my father plays the fiddle a little and likes hearing tales of foreign parts – and my father is very rich." – Then she burst out laughing and said: "If only thou didst not keep making those grimaces with

thy head when thou fiddlest!” – “Dearest maiden,” I replied, “first of all: do not keep thee- and thouing me; and as for the head-wagging, there is no getting away from it, it’s something we virtuosi all do.” – “Oh, I see,” replied the maid. She was about to speak further, but a dreadful rumpus suddenly arose in the inn, the front door opened with a bang and a thin fellow came flying out like a discharged ramrod, whereupon the door was at once slammed shut behind him.

At the first sound the maid had skipped away like a deer and disappeared into the darkness. As for the figure before the door, he quickly picked himself up off the ground and launched into a flurried volley of curses at the house which was really astonishing to hear. “What!” he yelled, “I’m drunk? I haven’t paid the chalk-marks on your smoke-darkened door? Rub them out, rub them out! Didn’t I, only yesterday, shave you over a cooking-spoon¹ and snick your nose, making you bite the rotten spoon in two? The shave crosses one stroke out – another stroke for the cooking-spoon – plaster on the nose, another stroke – how many of these currish strokes do you want payment for? But fine, no problem! I’ll leave the whole village, the whole world unshaven. For all I care, you can run around in your beards, and on Judgement Day the dear Lord won’t know whether you’re Christians or Jews! Yes, hang yourselves by your beards, you shaggy oafs!” At this point he suddenly burst out crying pitifully, then continued in a wretched, piping voice: “So I’m to swig water, like a miserable fish? is that brotherly love? Am I not a human being and an experienced army barber-surgeon? Oh, I’m in a rage today! My heart is full of emotion and love of

¹ A spoon was shoved inside hollow cheeks for the purposes of shaving.

mankind!” All this while he had been retreating, little by little, for nothing had stirred in the house. When he caught sight of me, he ran at me with open arms; thinking the madman meant to embrace me, I jumped aside, and he stumbled onwards; and for a long time I could hear him discoursing with himself, now coarsely, now elegantly, through the darkness.

Many thoughts were busy in my head. The maiden who had just now given me the rose was young, beautiful and rich – I could make my fortune there in the flick of a wrist. And mutton and pork, turkey and fat geese stuffed with apples – yes, it even seemed that I could see the porter advancing towards me: “Grab it, collector, grab it! no heart was ever wrung after marrying young; the lucky man leads his bride home, stay in the land and batten.” Sunk in such philosophical thoughts I sat down on a stone on the green – which was now totally deserted – for I did not dare knock at the inn door, having no money on me. The moon shone a splendid light; from the mountains came the sound of trees, rustling in the quiet night; now and then dogs would bark in the village lying further down the valley, seemingly buried beneath the trees and the moonlight. I looked at the firmament, where single clouds drifted slowly through the moonlight and the occasional star fell to earth in the far distance. The moon is shining just so, I thought, over my father’s mill and on the Count’s white castle. All has long been restful there; the lady sleeps, and the fountains and trees in the garden still murmur away as formerly; and it’s all the same to everyone whether I’m still there, or abroad, or dead. – And the world suddenly appeared to me as such an awfully large place, with I so totally alone in it that I could have cried from the bottom of my heart.

While I was sitting there, I suddenly heard hoofbeats coming from some distance inside the wood. I held my breath and listened; the sound came nearer and nearer, until I could hear the horses snorting. Soon afterwards two riders did indeed emerge from among the trees, but halted at the edge of the wood and began to whisper animatedly to each other – as I could see from the shadows which suddenly shot over the moonlit green, pointing long, dark arms now here, now there. – How often, when at home my late mother told me stories of wild woods and martial robbers, had I secretly wished to personally experience just such a story. And here now was the result of my stupid thoughts of derring-do! – I surreptitiously stretched myself as tall as I could against the lime tree I was sitting under until, having reached the lowest bough, I quickly swung myself up. But half of me still dangled down from the bough, and I was just about to fetch my legs up when one of the riders came steadily trotting across the green behind me. Now I screwed my eyes shut, among the dark foliage, and did not move a muscle. – “Who is there?” a voice suddenly cried close behind me. “No one!” I shouted with all my might, terrified that he had caught me after all. But secretly I had to chuckle to myself when I thought of the mistake the fellows would be making as they turned out my empty pockets. – “Well, well,” said the robber, “so who do those two legs hanging down there belong to?” – There was nothing else for it. “They’re nothing more,” I said, “than a pair of poor, lost musician’s legs”; and I let myself quickly down on to the ground, for I was ashamed to hang any longer over the bough like a broken fork.

The rider's horse shied when I slid down from the tree so suddenly. He patted its neck and said laughing: "Now we too have lost our way, so we are true companions; I would therefore think that you would give us a little help to find the road to B. It won't be to your disadvantage." Now it was all very well my averring that I had no idea where B. was and that I would rather enquire at this inn or lead them down into the village. The fellow simply would not listen to reason, but very calmly pulled a pistol, which glittered really prettily in the moonlight, from his belt. "My dear friend," he said most cordially, now wiping the barrel of the pistol, now testing the sights, "my dear friend, I think you will be good enough to lead the way to B. in person."

Now I was in a right fix. If I found the road, I was sure to end up among the robber-band and take a beating for having no money on me; if I did not find it – I would take a beating. So, without pausing for thought, I took the first road I came to, the one which came from the village and ran past the inn. The rider quickly thundered back to his companion, then both followed me slowly at a distance. Thus did we proceed, quite foolishly really, by guess and by God, into the moonlit night. The road ran through the wood, on a mountain-slope. Now and then you could look out over the tops of the fir-trees, which reached up darkly stirring from the depths, far into the deep, silent valleys; here and there a nightingale burst into song, and dogs barked in distant villages. A river murmured incessantly down in the valley and flashed every so often in the moonlight. And there was the monotonous clip-clopping and the confused buzzing of the riders behind me, who chatted non-stop together in a strange language, and the bright

moonlight and the long shadows of the tree-trunks intermittently flying over both riders, making them appear now black, now bright, now small, and now gigantic. My thoughts were thoroughly befuddled, as though I lay in a dream and was quite unable to wake up. I kept marching hard ahead. We must surely, I thought, eventually come out of the wood and out of the night.

At last, long rosy streams of light began to fly across the sky, from time to time, very faintly, like breath on a mirror; and a lark was singing high above the still valley. This dawn-greeting at once lifted the load from my heart, and all fear vanished. But both riders had a stretch and looked all around; and they now seemed to realise, for the first time, that we might not be on the correct road. They chatted a great deal, and it was obvious that they were talking about me; indeed, I had the impression that one of them was beginning to fear me, as though I were secretly a knight of the road planning to lead them astray in the wood. This gave me some amusement, for the lighter it grew all around, the higher my courage rose, particularly as we came out just then on to a beautiful glade. So I looked all around wildly and whistled through my fingers a few times, as rogues do when they want to signal to each other.

“Stop!” shouted one of the riders, so abruptly that I gave a proper start. When I looked around, both had dismounted and tethered their horses to a tree. One of them stepped rapidly up to me, stared me in the face, and burst into immoderate laughter. I must admit that I was annoyed by that stupid laughter. But he said: “Why, it is really the gardener – I mean, the collector – from the castle!”

I stared at him, but could not recall having seen him before; I should have had my work cut out to notice all the young gentlemen who rode to and from the castle. But he continued, with unending laughter: “That is splendid! You are taking time off, I see; now we need a servant, so stay with us, and your life will be one long vacation!”

I was totally stunned and said at last that I was just at this moment in the middle of a journey to Italy.

“To Italy?” the stranger replied, “that’s the very place we’re going to!”

“Well, in *that* case,” I cried; and I delightedly pulled my fiddle out of my pocket and stroked the strings, waking the birds up in the wood. The gentleman swiftly grabbed his companion and the two waltzed like madmen over the grass.

Then they suddenly came to a halt. “By Heaven,” cried one, “there I can see the church-tower of B.! Well, we’ll get down there in no time.” Taking out his repeater, he let it strike, shook his head, then let it strike again. “No,” he said, “that won’t do, we’ll arrive there too soon, things could get serious!”

After that they fetched cakes, meat and bottles of wine from their saddle-bags, spread out a handsome brightly-coloured cloth on the green grass, lay down on it, and enjoyed a very pleasurable feast; and they shared everything very generously with me, which did me the world of good, as I had not had a proper meal for several days.

“And so that you know – ” one began, “you don’t know us, do you?”

I shook my head.

“Well then, so that you know: I am the artist Leonardo, and this here is – again an artist – by the name of Guido.”

Now I looked at both artists more closely in the light of dawn. The one who called himself Herr Leonardo was tall, slim and brown with merry, fiery eyes. The other was much younger, shorter and more delicate, dressed in the old German style – as the porter called it – with a white collar and bare throat, over which hung down the dark-brown curls he often had to shake out of his handsome face.

When the latter had breakfasted his fill, he reached out for my fiddle, which I had laid on the ground by my side, sat down with it on a felled branch, and began to thrum its strings. Then he sang along in a voice as clear as a woodland bird’s, which echoed in my heart:

Dawn’s first ray flies down its path
Through the silent, misty strath;
Wood and hill both rustle wakening,
All the flying creatures take wing!

And the beaming goodman cries,
Cap tossed brightly to the skies:
‘Now, if song gives wings to sound,
I’ll sing out a joyous round!’

And the rosy light of dawn played so charmingly over his rather pale face and black, amorous eyes. But I was so tired that, as he sang, the words and music merged together more and more, until I finally fell fast asleep.

When I gradually came to myself, I heard, as in a dream, both artists still talking beside me and birds singing above me, and the rays of morning glimmered through my closed eyelids, making inside me that mixture of dark and light formed when the sun shines through red silk curtains. “Come è bello!” I heard someone exclaim nearby. Opening my eyes, I saw the young artist standing bent over me in the sparkling morning light, only his big, black eyes visible between his flowing curls.

I leapt to my feet, for it was broad daylight by this time. Herr Leonardo seemed to be annoyed; two angry furrows lined his forehead and he was hurriedly urging departure. But the other artist shook his locks out from his face and, bridling his horse, calmly warbled a ditty, until at last Leonardo burst out into loud laughter, quickly grabbed a bottle off the grass, and emptied it into the glasses. “To a happy arrival!” he cried, and they clinked glasses, giving rise to a beautiful sound. Then Leonardo hurled the empty bottle high into the air, where it glittered merrily in the morning light.

Finally, they mounted their horses, and I marched vigorously by their side. Directly before us lay a valley, stretching out further than the eye could see, into which we now descended. All around there was light flashing and shimmering, and the sound of rustling and joyful birdsong! I felt so cool, so happy, as if I were about to fly from the mountains into that marvellous land.

Chapter Four

Now adieu, mill and castle and porter! We were going so fast that the wind whistled around my hat. Villages, towns and vineyards flew past on the right and left, images which danced before my eyes; behind me both artists in the coach, before me four horses with a splendid postilion; and I up above, on the coach-box, being bounced yards high into the air.

This had come to pass as follows: on arriving before B., a long, scrawny, morose man in a green frieze coat came out towards us, kow-towed many times to the artists, and led us into the village. Under the tall lime-trees, in front of the post-house, was a splendid carriage with four horses. On the way Herr Leonardo opined that I had outgrown my clothes; so he swiftly took other garments out of his portmanteau, and I had to put on a brand-new tail-coat and waistcoat which were very stylish and becoming, apart from their being too long and broad for me and therefore hanging loosely in baggy folds. I received a spanking-new hat as well, which sparkled in the sun as though spread with fresh butter. Then the morose stranger took the bridles off the artists' horses, the artists sprang into the carriage, I on to the box, and then we flew away, just as the postmaster was sticking his nightcapped head out the window. The postilion gave a round of merry blasts on his horn, and thus we set off breezily for Italy.

I really had a marvellous life up there, like a bird on the wing but without the effort of flying. I had nothing further to do than to sit on the box night and day and occasionally fetch food and drink from the inn; for the artists never spoke a word, and by day they closed the carriage

windows so tightly you would think they were afraid of being stabbed by the sun's rays. Only now and then did Herr Guido stick his handsome head out the window, discourse amiably with me, then laugh at Herr Leonardo, who would not suffer this and grew angry every time we engaged in a long discourse. On a few occasions I almost quarrelled with my masters. The first time was on a lovely, starry night, when I started playing my fiddle up on the box; and another time because of sleep. Now that was quite astonishing! I wanted to get a thorough look at Italy, so I opened my eyes wide every quarter of an hour. But barely had I sat for a few moments gazing ahead than the sixteen hooves in front of me became so confused and tangled, backwards then forwards then crossways, like a net, that my eyes immediately closed, and finally I fell into such a dreadful and irresistible sleep that I was at my wits' end. It might be night or day, sunshine or rain, the Tyrol or Italy, I hung over the box, now to the right, now to the left, now on my back; why, sometimes I dipped my head towards the ground with such vehemence that my hat flew off and Herr Guido shrieked out loud in the carriage.

In this way had I travelled – exactly how, I myself do not know – through half of Italy, which the locals there call Lombardy, when we halted before a country inn one beautiful evening. The time for which the post-horses had been ordered to arrive from the adjacent village-station was still a few hours away, so the artists alighted and were conducted to a private room where they were able to rest a little and write several letters. As for me, I was very pleased with this and proceeded at once to the traveller's room, to finally get a bite to eat and a drop to drink in a little peace and

comfort once again. Everything there was on the slovenly side. The maids went about with tousy hair, their kerchiefs untidily hanging around their yellow hide. The house-servants sat in blue smocks at a round table, eating their supper and gawping sideways at me from time to time. They all sported short, thick pigtails and looked just as refined as young aristocrats. Now here you are, I thought to myself as I ploughed into my meal, here you finally are in that land from which strange people kept coming to visit our priest with mousetraps and barometers and pictures. What discoveries a man makes when he leaves his fireside behind!

As I was eating and meditating thus, a manikin who had been sitting over his glass of wine in a dark corner suddenly whisked out of his nook towards me like a spider. He was very short and hunchbacked, but had a large, hideous head with a long, aquiline Roman nose and thin red whiskers, and his powdered hair was sticking up on all sides as if a whirlwind had passed through it. What was more, he was wearing an old-fashioned, faded jacket, short, plush breeches and completely yellowed silk stockings. He had been to Germany once and thought that he knew German wonderfully well. Sitting down beside me, he asked now this, now that, taking snuff all the while: Was I the servitore? When we arreeve? Were we koing to Rome? But I did not know any details myself, nor could I in the least understand his double Dutch. In my anxiety I finally asked him: "Parlez-vous français?" He shook his large head – which was most welcome to me, for I knew no French. But it was all to no avail. He had firmly set his sights on me, and the questions kept coming; the more we exercised our tongues, the less the one understood the other, until at last we both grew

so heated that it sometimes appeared that the Signor was about to peck me with his eagle's beak, and the maids, who had been listening to our babelish discourse, laughed heartily at both of us. I, however, quickly laid down my knife and fork and walked out the front door. For I felt, in this strange land, as if I had sunk a thousand fathoms deep in the sea with my German tongue and all kinds of unknown critters were wriggling and hissing in the loneliness around me and goggling and snapping at me.

Outside it was a warm summer's night, ideal for a stroll. From the distant vineyards there came at occasions the sound of a vintager singing; in between these bursts, lightning flashed far away, and the whole region trembled and murmured in the moonlight. Indeed, I sometimes had the impression that a long, dark figure was slipping along behind the hazels in front of the house and peering through the branches – then all was still again.

Just at that moment Herr Guido walked out on to the inn balcony. He did not notice me, but began to play with great skill on a zither he must have found in the house; then he sang along like a nightingale:

Silence falls on man's loud zest;
Dreamlike Earth feels forces stir her
Forests with a magic murmur,
What the heart but glimpsed or guessed;
Distant ages, gentle grieving, -
Tremors shimmer softly heaving
Sheets of lightning through the breast.

I do not know if there was any more to his song, for I had lain down on the bench before the inn door and fallen asleep from sheer weariness in the mild night.

A few hours may well have flown by before I was awakened by a posthorn which had been blowing merrily into my dreams before I had quite come to my senses. At last I leapt up; day was dawning over the mountains and the morning air made my limbs shiver. Then it suddenly occurred to me that we should have been well on our way by this time. Oho, I thought, today the waking and laughter fall to me for once. How Herr Guido, with his sleepy, curly head, will jump up when he hears me outside! So I went into the little inn-garden, close under the window of my masters' room, had a good stretch in the morning light, and sang in high spirits:

When the hoopoe pipes his call,
Day's about to fall;
When the sun throws off night's hood,
Sleep still tastes so good!

The window was open, but all remained silent above me, except for the night-wind still passing through the vine-shoots that stretched up and through the window.

"Now, what is the meaning of this?" I cried, totally amazed; and I ran into the house, through the silent corridors, to the room. But there I was

cut to the quick. For when I flung the door open, all was empty inside – no coat, no hat, no boots. There was only the zither Herr Guido had played on the previous day, hanging on the wall; on the table in the middle of the room was a handsome, full purse with a note attached. Holding it up to the window, I could hardly believe my eyes – the writing really did say, in large letters: For the collector!

But what use was all of this to me if I did not find my dear, merry masters again? I shoved the purse into my deep jacket-pocket; it plumped as though dropped into a deep well, actually making me tilt over to one side. Then I ran out, made a great noise, and woke all the serving-lads and maids in the house. They had no idea of what I wanted and thought that I had gone mad. But they then felt no small astonishment, when they saw the empty nest upstairs. No one knew anything about my masters. Only one maid – as I could piece together from her signs and gesticulations – had noticed that Herr Guido, when he had been singing on the balcony on the evening before, had suddenly yelled out and dashed back into the room to the other gentleman. Later on, during the night, she woke up and heard the clopping of hooves outside. Looking through the small chamber-window, she saw the hunchbacked Signor, who had talked so much with me the previous day, galloping so hard on a grey across the moonlit fields that he kept flying heavenward out of the saddle and the maid crossed herself, for he looked like a ghost riding a three-legged horse.

I had no idea what I should do next.

Meanwhile, our carriage had been ready before the door for quite some time, and the postilion blew impatient blasts on his horn until he was

fit to burst, for he had to be at the next station by a certain time, his schedule having been arranged in advance to the minute. I ran around the house one more time, calling the artists, but no one replied; those inside the house gathered together and gaped at me, the postilion swore, the horses snorted, I, utterly nonplussed, at last sprang quickly into the carriage, the boots slammed the door shut behind me, the postilion cracked his whip, and out we went into the wide world.

Chapter Five

We now travelled over hill and dale, day and night, without stopping. I had no time to think, for wherever we arrived, fresh horses were standing harnessed and I was not given the opportunity to speak to the people there, despite my demonstrations; often, when I was sitting in an inn, just enjoying the tastiest part of my meal, the postilion would blow and I had to throw down my knife and fork and jump into the carriage once again, without having a clue as to where and why I was travelling with such exceptional haste.

Apart from that, this way of life was really not so bad. I would lie down as on a canapé, now in this corner of the carriage, now in the other, building an acquaintance with peoples and lands; and when we travelled through a town, I would lean on folded arms out of the coach-window and salute the people who courteously raised their hats to me, or I would greet the girls at the windows as though we were old friends, so that they were quite amazed and, in their curiosity, gazed after me for a long time.

But in the end I grew very afraid. I had never counted the money in the purse I had found; I had to pay large amounts to all the postmasters and innkeepers, and before I knew what was happening, the purse was empty. Initially I resolved to quickly jump out of the carriage and run away as soon as we arrived in a lonely forest. But then again, I would have been sorry to leave the beautiful carriage so alone, for in other circumstances I would have travelled in it to the ends of the world.

Now just as I was sitting full of thought, at my wit's end, we all of a sudden turned off the highroad. I yelled out the window to the postilion: Where on Earth are you going? But no matter what I said, the fellow would simply reply: "Sì, sì, Signore!" and continue driving up hill and down dale so fast that I was flung from one corner of the carriage to the other.

I really could not understand why he had done this, for the highroad ran straight through a resplendent landscape towards a setting sun, as into a sea of radiant sparks. But on the side we had turned into, there lay before us a desolate mountain range with grey gorges, long since interspersed with darkness. And the further we travelled, the wilder and lonelier the region became. Finally, the moon emerged from behind the clouds and shone at once so brightly down between the trees and cliffs that the sight was really terrible to behold. We could travel but slowly through the narrow, stony ravines, and the monotonous, endless rattling of the carriage echoed against the rocky walls far into the silent night, as if we were driving into an immense vault. There was a ceaseless roaring, coming from many waterfalls which were hidden from sight in the depths of the

wood; and the screech-owls constantly called from afar: "Come along! Come along!"

Moreover, it seemed to me that the coachman, who, as I now noticed for the first time, wore no livery and was no postilion, looked around uneasily a few times and began to drive faster; and I as leaned right out of the carriage, a rider suddenly sprang out of the bushes, thundered across the road a short distance in front of our horses, and straightaway disappeared into the forest on the other side. I was thrown into utter confusion, for, as far as I could tell in the bright moonlight, it was the same hunchbacked little man on his grey who had pecked his eagle's beak at me in the inn. The coachman shook his head and laughed out loud at this foolish riding, then turned quickly around to me, spoke a great deal with warm enthusiasm, of which I unfortunately understood not a word, then drove on even more rapidly.

I was pleased when, a short time after, I saw a light glimmering in the distance. Several more lights appeared, one by one, growing ever larger and brighter, until at last we passed some smoky huts which hung on the cliffs like swallows' nests. The night being warm, the doors stood open, and I could see into brightly-lit rooms where all kinds of ragged rabble crouched like dark shadows around the hearth. We rattled on through the soundless night up a stone road which climbed a high mountain. One moment the overhanging branches of tall trees roofed in the narrow pass, the next moment the whole firmament appeared and you could look over the wide, silent circle of mountains, woods and valleys far below. On the mountain-summit stood a large, many-towered old castle in brilliant moonlight.

“Now God be with me!” I cried, deep down quite high-spirited with anticipation about where they would eventually take me.

It must have been another good half-hour before we finally arrived at the castle-gates. The way led through a broad, round tower, whose upper levels were in quite a ruinous state. The coachman cracked his whip three times; the sound echoed far into the old castle, where a flock of startled jackdaws flew out of every hole and crack and circled with noisy caws. Then the carriage rolled into the long, dark gateway. The horses struck sparks from the cobbles with their hooves, a large dog barked, and the carriage thundered between the vaulted walls. The jackdaws kept shrieking at intervals – and so we came with a dreadful din into the narrow, cobbled courtyard.

A singular station! I thought to myself, as the carriage came to a stop. Then the carriage-door was opened from the outside and a tall old man with a small lantern looked at me morosely from under bushy eyebrows. He grabbed me under the arm and helped me, like a great lord, out of the carriage. Before the front door stood a very ugly old woman in a black camisole and skirt, with a white apron and a black bonnet, from which a long peak hung down to her nose. She had a large bunch of keys hanging from one hip, and in the opposite hand she held an old-fashioned candelabrum containing two burning wax-candles. As soon as she caught sight of me she began to drop deep curtseys, speaking and asking a great deal all at once. But I understood nothing of this, so kept making low bows before her, scraping a foot backwards; and I felt quite uneasy.

In the meantime, the old man had illuminated the carriage all over, and he growled and shook his head at not finding a trunk or any luggage anywhere. Then the coachman, not demanding a tip from me, drove the carriage into an old shed standing open at one side of the courtyard. The old woman asked me very politely, by means of various signs, to follow her. She led me by the light of her wax candles through a long, narrow corridor and then up a small stone staircase. When we passed the kitchen, a few young maidservants stuck their heads inquisitively round the half-open door and looked at me so fixedly, and furtively waved and nodded to each other, as if they had never seen a man before in their lives. At last the old woman opened a door on the top floor, and my immediate reaction was one of complete bafflement. For before me lay a large, beautiful, lordly room with golden decoration on the ceiling, and on the walls there hung splendid tapestries with all kinds of figures and flowers. In the middle of the room stood a table laid with a roast, gateaux, salad, fruit, wine and pastries – enough to make your heart leap for joy. Between both windows hung an enormous mirror, which reached from floor to ceiling.

I must say that this did me very nicely. I stretched myself a few times and walked genteely, with long strides, up and down the room. And then I just could not resist the urge to take a look at myself in such a huge mirror. There is no denying that the new clothes from Herr Leonardo became me very well, and I had acquired a certain fieriness of eye in Italy; apart from this, however, I was exactly the same milksop who had left home, except for the few downy hairs that were making their first appearance above my upper lip.

All this while the old woman was grinding her toothless mouth, so that it looked exactly as though she were chewing the tip of her long, curved nose. Then she pressed me to take a seat, stroked my chin with her scrawny fingers, and called me *poverino!* – looking at me so roguishly out of her red-rimmed eyes that one corner of her mouth was raised half-way up her cheek – and finally departed with a deep curtsy through the doorway.

I sat down at the full table and a young, pretty maid came in to wait on me. I tried to enter into all kinds of gallant discourse with her, but she did not understand me; she just cast me curious sidelong glances because I found the meal so tasty – for the food was delicious. When I had eaten my fill and stood up, the maid took a light from a table and led me into another room. This contained a sofa, a small mirror and a magnificent bed with green silk curtains. I asked her by signs if I was to sleep in it? Although she nodded Yes, I could not possibly do so at this moment, for she was standing rooted to the spot beside me. In the end, I fetched myself a large glass of wine from the dining room and cried out: “*felicissima notte!*” – for I had learnt so much Italian by this time. But when I tossed the wine down in one gulp, she burst out into suppressed giggles, blushed all over, went into the dining-room and shut the door behind her. ‘And what is so funny?’ I wondered, in total amazement, ‘I think that the Italians are all mad’.

My only fear now was that the postilion would begin blowing his horn any moment. I listened at the window, but all was silent outside. Let him blow! I thought, then undressed and lay down in the magnificent bed. It was just like swimming in milk and honey! Before the windows the old

lime-tree in the courtyard rustled, and on occasion a jackdaw would start up from the roof; finally, full of contentment, I fell asleep.

Chapter Six

When I awoke, the first rays of morning were playing over the green curtains. I could not think where I actually was. I half-imagined that I was still travelling in the carriage and I had dreamed of a castle in the moonlight, an old witch, and her pale little daughter.

At last I leapt out of bed and dressed, looking all around the room. Then I noticed a small secret door, which I had not seen the previous day. It was ajar, so I opened it and espied a neat little room which looked very homely in the morning sunshine. Female garments had been thrown untidily over a chair; on a bed beside this lay the maid who had waited on me at table the evening before. She was still sleeping peacefully, her head, with its flowing black locks, resting on her bare white arm. "If she knew the door was open!" I said to myself and returned to my bedroom, closing and bolting the door behind me to spare the maid from shock and shame when she awoke.

Outside there was as yet no sound to be heard, but for an early-waken wood-bird who sat before my window, on a shrub growing out of the wall, singing his morning song. "No," I said, "you won't put me to shame, praising God so early and fervently on your own!" And quickly grabbing my fiddle, which I had laid on a side-table the previous day, I went outside. All was deathly silent in the castle, and it was a long time before I found my way through dark passages out into the open air.

When I emerged from the castle, I came into a large garden which sloped down half of the mountain in broad terraces, each one deeper than the last. But this was sloppy horticulture. The paths were all overgrown with high grass, and the ornamental box-trees had not been pruned; they stretched out ghostly long noses or yard-high pointed caps into the air, presenting a terrifying spectacle in the twilight. On a few broken statues over a dried-up fountain there was even washing hung up; here and there in the garden, cabbages were being cultivated, then came a few ordinary flowers, all of them in disorderly confusion and overgrown with high, wide weeds, among which brightly-coloured lizards snaked their way. Between the tall, old trees was a broad, solitary prospect all around, one mountain-peak behind the other, as far as the eye could see.

After I had walked around in the wilderness for a little while in the dawn, I espied on the terrace below me a tall, slender, pale youth in a long, brown, cowled coat, his arms folded, walking up and down with great strides. He behaved as if he had not seen me: he presently sat down on a stone bench, pulled a book from his pocket, read very loudly, as if he were preaching, looked up to the heavens every so often, then rested his head on his right hand in deep melancholy. I watched him for a long time; at last, curious to know why he was making such peculiar faces, I walked quickly towards him. Having just heaved a deep sigh, he sprang up in affright at my arrival. He was thoroughly embarrassed, as was I; neither of us knew what to say, so we kept bowing to each other until he finally took to his heels and disappeared among the bushes. In the meantime the sun had risen above the wood; I leapt up onto the bench and fiddled from sheer joy, sending

music resounding far down into the quiet valleys. The old woman with the bunch of keys, who had been anxiously searching for me all over the castle to call me to breakfast, now appeared on the terrace above me and was amazed that I could play the fiddle with such skill. The morose old man also appeared and was likewise amazed; finally, the maids came as well, and everyone above stood astonished as I swung and flourished my bow with ever more artistry and swiftness, playing cadenzas and variations until I was fit to drop.

Now this was the strangest of situations at the castle! Nobody gave a thought to travelling further. And the castle was no inn, but belonged, as I learned from the maid, to a wealthy Count. If I ever inquired of the old woman what was the Count's name, where did he live? – Then she just smiled, as on the evening of my arrival, and pinched me and winked at me so sharply that it seemed she had taken leave of her senses. If, on a hot day, I drank a bottle of wine to the last drop, the maids were sure to snicker when they brought another; and when, on one occasion, I longed for a pipe and tobacco, and described my wish by signs, then they all burst out into loud and senseless laughter.

Most amazing of all was the music, which on many nights, and always on the darkest ones, sounded beneath my window. The occasional single, very soft note, was being plucked on a guitar. Once it seemed to me that somebody was calling, "Pst! Pst!" from below. So I sprang out of bed and, my head out of the window, called down: "Hello! Hey there! Who is out there?" But no reply came, and all I heard was something running quickly away through the bushes. The big dog in the courtyard barked a few times

when it heard me, then all fell silent again; and after that, the night-music was heard no more.

Otherwise, I led a life here such as anyone in the world would wish for. The good old porter – oh, he knew what he was talking about when he said that in Italy, the grapes fall into your mouth. I lived in the secluded castle like an enchanted Prince. Wherever I went, the people showed me great respect, even though they all knew that I did not have a penny in my pocket. I had only to say, “Table, set yourself!” and at once glorious dishes, rice, wine, melons and parmesan cheese appeared there. I let this please my palate, slept in the magnificent four-poster, went for walks in the garden, made music, and sometimes even lent a hand with the gardening. Often I would lie for hours in the long grass in the garden, and the slender youth (a student and relation of the old woman, here just now during his vacations) walked in his capote, describing wide circles around me, and mumbling words from his book like a magician, which always sent me to sleep.

In this wise passed one day after another, until at last the good food and drink began to make me feel quite melancholy. My limbs were coming loose from their joints with this eternal inactivity, and I felt as if I would fall apart at the seams from sheer idleness.

At this time I was sitting, one sultry afternoon, in the top of a high tree on the slope, rocking slowly on the branches over the still, deep valley. The bees buzzed amidst the leaves around me, otherwise the scene was deserted; there was no one in sight between the mountains; far below me, in the quiet glades, cows lay at rest in the long grass. Then, from a great

distance, the sound of a posthorn came over the wooded peaks, now barely audible, now louder and clearer. All of a sudden an old song, which I had learnt at home in my father's mill from a travelling journeyman, came into my mind, and I sang:

When a man feels the urge to wander,
He must journey with his heart's own;
The locals make merry, while yonder
The stranger is standing alone.

You gloomy tree-tops, you are blind
To the glories of yesteryear;
Ah, my homeland lies behind
These peaks, so far from here.

My greatest joy lies in star-gazing,
They shone when I visited her;
The nightingale sets my heart blazing,
It sang by my loved one's door.

Now morning is such a delight!
I climb in the hour of hush
To the view from the topmost height,
And my heart sends my country his wish.

It seemed as if the posthorn was blowing an accompaniment from afar. As I sang, it came between the mountains, nearer and nearer, until at last I heard it resounding up in the castle courtyard. I swiftly leapt down from the tree. The old woman was coming towards me with an opened parcel. "Something arrived for you as well," she said, handing me a neat little letter. There was no address; I quickly broke it open. But then my face blushed as red as a peony, and my heart beat so violently that the old woman could not fail to notice, for the letter was from – my beautiful lady, whose writing I had often seen on notes to the steward. It was very brief: 'Everything is alright now, all obstacles are removed. I secretly make use of this opportunity to be the first to write you this joyful message. Come, hurry back. It is so dreary here, and I can barely face life since you left us. Aurelie.'

On reading this, my eyes overflowed with delight, shock, and inexpressible joy. I felt ashamed before the old woman, who was smirking abominably at me again, and flew like an arrow into the loneliest corner of the garden. There, I threw myself down into the grass under the hazel-shrubs and read the note again, repeated it to myself until I had learnt it by heart, then read it over and over again, and the sun's rays danced through the spaces between the leaves over the letters which intertwined before my eyes like golden and light green and red blossoms. Is she not married after all? I thought – was the strange officer perhaps her brother, or is he dead by now, or am I mad, or – "None of that matters!" I cried at last, leaping up, "it's quite clear now, she loves me, she *loves* me!"

When I crept out from under the bushes, the sun had begun to bow farewell to day. The sky was red, the birds sang merrily in the woods, the valleys were painted with shimmering light, but all was many, many thousand times lovelier and happier in my heart!

I shouted into the castle that they should bring my dinner out into the garden this evening. The old woman, the morose old man, and the maids, they all had to come out and sit with me at the laid table under the tree. I pulled out my fiddle and played, ate and drank in turn. Then everyone grew merry; the old man smoothed the morose furrows on his brow and sank glass after glass; the old woman chattered incessantly, about God knows what; the maids began to dance together on the lawn. In the end even the pale student came out, drawn by curiosity; after throwing several contemptuous glances at the spectacle, he made to genteely move on. I, however, quick as you please, jumped up, caught him, before he had time to realise what was going on, by his long frock-coat, and waltzed him energetically around. He now exerted himself to dance in a refined and new-fangled fashion, and tripped his feet so eagerly and artfully that the sweat poured off his face and his long coat-tails flew around us like a wheel. But there were occasions during this dance when he looked at me so oddly, with rolling eyes, that I really began to fear him and suddenly let my grip go.

Now the old woman would have dearly liked to discover what was in the letter and why I suddenly happened to be so merry today. But it was far too complicated a story to explain to her. I just pointed to a few cranes which were flying high over us, and said: I too now had to move away, away, to a distant land! – At that she opened her shrivelled eyes saucer-wide and

stared like a basilisk now at me, now at the old man. Then I noticed that whenever I turned away, they both secretly put their heads together and talked very animatedly, giving me sideways glances the while.

This struck me as strange. I mused a great deal over what they could possibly have planned for me. With this, I grew more quiet; the sun had long set; and so I wished everyone goodnight and walked up to my bedroom in deep thought.

Inwardly I was so happy, and so restless, that I paced up and down my room for a long time. Outside the wind rolled heavy black clouds over the castle-tower and into the distance; the nearest mountain-peaks were barely discernible in the thick darkness. Then I thought that I could hear voices below in the garden. I snuffed out my light and positioned myself by the window. The voices seemed to draw nearer, but spoke together in very quiet tones. Suddenly a little lantern, which one of the figures carried under his cloak, threw a long beam. Now I recognised the morose steward and the old housekeeper. The light flashed over the old woman's face, which had never appeared so hideous to me as now, and over the long knife she was holding in her hand. Moreover, I could see that they were both looking up at my window. Then the steward drew his cloak more tightly around him, and all was once more dark and silent.

What do they want, I thought, out in the garden at this hour? And I shuddered, for there came into my mind all the murder stories I had heard in my lifetime, of witches and robbers who butchered people to eat their hearts. While my thoughts were running in this vein, I heard footsteps, first coming up the stairs, then down the long corridor very softly, softly

towards my door; and it seemed that, every now and then, I caught the sound of voices secretly whispering. So I rushed to the far end of the room and took my stand behind a large table, which I intended to lift up before me, the moment that anything moved, and make a dash for the door for all I was worth. But in the darkness I knocked over a chair, making a dreadful din. Then all fell instantly silent outside. I listened from behind the table and stared at the door so intently, as if my gaze would bore a hole through it, that my eyes were starting from my head. A little while later, when I had kept so quiet that you could have heard flies moving on the walls, I heard someone outside very gently sliding a key into the keyhole. Now I was just about to sprint forward with the table – when the key turned slowly three times in the lock, and was carefully pulled out; then there was a soft humming along the corridor and down the steps.

I drew deep breaths. Oho, I thought, now they have locked you in so that it's nice and easy for them, when you're in a sound sleep. I swiftly examined the door and found I was correct, it was securely locked; the other door likewise, behind which the pretty, pale maid was sleeping. That had never happened before during my stay at the castle.

Now here I was, a prisoner in a strange place! The lovely lady was no doubt standing at her window looking out over the quiet garden to the highroad, to see if I was not sweeping along by the tollhouse with my fiddle; the clouds flew across the sky, time was passing – and I could not get away from here! Oh, I was so sore at heart, I just did not know what to do. And whenever the leaves rustled, or a rat nibbled on the floor, it was as if the

old woman had secretly entered through a hidden door and was softly stealing through the room with her long knife.

As I sat, so full of care, on my bed, I heard for the first time in a long while the night-music beneath my window. At the first note of the guitar it felt exactly as if a shaft of daylight suddenly shot through my soul. I flung open the window and called quietly down that I was awake. "Pst, pst!" came the reply from below. Without a moment's hesitation I put the note and my fiddle into my pocket, swung myself out of the window, and clambered down the crack-ridden old wall, keeping my hands gripped on the shrubs which grew out of the cracks. But a few rotten bricks gave way, I began to slide, faster and faster, until I finally plumped down so hard on both feet that my brain-box rattled.

Hardly had I thus arrived down in the garden when someone embraced me with such vehemence that I cried out loud. But my good friend quickly pressed his finger to my mouth, seized my hand, and led me through the shrubbery out into the open. There, to my astonishment, I recognised the good, tall student, with his guitar hanging from a broad, silk ribbon round his neck. I explained to him in the greatest haste that I wanted out of the garden. But he seemed to have already been aware of that, and he led me through all sorts of secret byways to the lowest door in the high garden wall. But now the door was securely locked too! However, the student had planned in advance for this; and drawing out a large key, he cautiously unlocked.

Now as we stepped out into the wood and I was just about to ask him the best way to the nearest town, he suddenly plunged down on one

knee before me, raised a hand high in the air, and began to swear and make oaths which were really terrible to hear. I had no idea what he was after, I only heard the incessant cry: *Idio & cuore & amore & furore!* But when, in the end, he began to quickly crawl towards me on both knees, coming nearer and nearer, an awful sensation flashed through me; clearly perceiving that he was mad, I fled, never once looking back, into the thickest part of the wood.

I could hear the student shouting like a maniac after me. Soon, another rough voice answered from the castle. I felt quite certain that they could come in search for me. The way was unfamiliar, the night dark, I could easily fall into their clutches again. So I climbed to the top of a tall pine-tree to wait for a more favourable opportunity for escape.

From there I could hear one voice after another coming to life in the castle. Several lanterns appeared high up and threw their wild red light over the old castle-walls and far beyond the mountains into the black night. I commended my soul to the good Lord, for the confused tumult was growing ever louder and drawing ever nearer. Finally, the student dashed past my tree with a torch, his coat-tails flying far behind him in the wind. Then they all seemed, by degrees, to make for the other side of the mountain; the voices rang out at an ever greater distance, and the wind murmured through the silent wood once more. And I quickly climbed down from the tree and ran breathlessly out into the valley and into the night.

Chapter Seven

Day and night I sped on my way, for there continued a buzzing in my ears, as if the people on the mountain were still pursuing me with their calls, their torches and their long knives. On the way I discovered that I was only a few miles from Rome. This made me jump for joy. For I had heard, as a child, many wonderful stories about the splendour of Rome; and when, on Sunday afternoons, I lay in the grass before the mill and all around was so quiet, I conjured up an image of Rome in the clouds drifting overhead, with marvellous mountains and chasms by a blue sea and golden gates and high, glittering towers where angels in golden robes were singing.

Night had fallen long ago, and the moon shone resplendently when I finally emerged from the wood onto a hill and saw the city there before me in the distance. The sea glinted from afar, the vast sky flashed and twinkled with innumerable stars; beneath them lay the Eternal City, of which only a long streak of mist was visible, like a sleeping lion on the quiet earth; and mountains stood at the side like dark giants keeping guard.

At first I came to a large, lonely heath, as grey and silent as the grave. Here and there stood some old ruins or a dry, strangely winding bush; sometimes a night-bird whizzed through the air, and my own shadow, long and dark, brushed through the loneliness beside me. The legend goes that an ancient city and Lady Venus are buried here, and the old pagans, to this day, will on occasion rise up from their graves and walk the heath, in the silence of the night, leading wanderers astray. But I walked straight ahead, letting nothing concern me. For the city rose ever more clearly in its magnificence before me, and the tall castles and gates and golden domes

shone superbly in the bright moonlight, as if angels in golden robes were really standing at the top and pouring song through the quiet night.

After passing some small houses, I at last entered, through a splendid gate, the famous city of Rome. The moon shone between the palaces with a light as bright as day; but all the streets had emptied, apart from the odd ragged creature lying like a dead man on the marble steps and sleeping in the mild night. The fountains murmured in the quiet squares, and the gardens lining the streets rustled, filling the air with refreshing scents.

Now as I was strolling along, too absorbed in pleasure, moonlight and fragrance to know where to turn my steps, the sound of a guitar came from the depths of a garden. My God, I thought, the mad student in the long, cowled coat must have secretly followed me! And then a lady in the garden began to sing extremely delightfully. I stood, totally bewitched, for it was the lovely lady's voice, and the same Italian song she had so often sung by the open window at home.

Then the good old times suddenly struck my remembrance so forcefully that I could have wept bitterly; the quiet garden in front of the castle in the early morning, and how I had been so blissfully happy behind the bush until that stupid fly flew up my nose. I could contain myself no longer. I clambered up the gilded scroll-work over the iron-barred gate and swung myself down into the garden whence the strains of the song were floating. Then I noticed a slim, white figure standing behind a poplar, first watching me climb over the bars in astonishment, then flying all at once through the dark garden towards the house so swiftly that I could hardly see its feet moving in the moonlight. "That was *her!*" I cried, and my heart

beat a joyful tune, for I recognised her immediately by her small, quick little feet. It was just a pity that I had somewhat twisted my right foot in jumping down from the garden-gate and so had to shake my leg a few times before I was able to run towards the house. But the door and windows had been securely locked in the meantime. I knocked very humbly, listened, and knocked again. Then it was just as if there was a quiet whispering and giggling inside; indeed, I once had the impression of two bright eyes sparkling in the moonlight between the blinds. And suddenly silence fell again.

That is because she doesn't know it's *me*, I thought; and pulling out my fiddle, my constant companion, I walked up and down the path in front of the house playing and singing the song about the lovely lady; and I joyfully went through all the songs I used to play on beautiful summer nights in the castle-garden, or on the bench before the tollhouse, with a vigour that sent the sound ringing far over into the castle windows.

But it was all to no avail; nothing moved or stirred anywhere in the house. So in the end I tucked my fiddle sadly away and lay down on the front doorstep, for I was very tired from my long walk. The night was warm, the flower-beds before the house shed a sweet fragrance; further down in the garden a fountain kept an incessant splashing. I dreamt of sky-blue flowers, of beautiful, dark-green, lonely valleys where springs murmured, rills flowed and brightly-plumaged birds sang marvellous airs, until I finally fell fast asleep.

When I woke up, my limbs were shivering in the dawn air. The birds, awake by this time, were chirruping in the trees as if they took me for a fool.

I sprang to my feet and looked around on all sides. The fountain in the garden splashed on, but all was silent in the house. I peeked through green jalousies into one of the rooms. There was a sofa and a large, round table covered with a grey cotton cloth, and the chairs were standing in a very orderly arrangement against the walls; on the outside, however, the jalousies had been lowered over every window, as if the entire house had been unoccupied for years.

Then a proper horror at the empty house and garden and the white figure of the previous day came over me. So I ran, never once turning my head, through the silent arbours and alleys and quickly climbed the gate. But there I sat still, as one enchanted, when I found myself looking down from the high barring over the magnificent city. The morning sun flashed and sparkled so, over the roofs and into the long, still streets, that I had to shout out loud; and then, filled with delight, I sprang down onto the road.

But where was I to turn to in the large, strange city? Furthermore, the confused night and the Italian song the lovely lady had sung on the previous day were still buzzing around in my head. Finally, I sat down on the stone fountain in the middle of the empty square and washed my eyes bright in the clear water while I sang:

Now if I was a little bird,
I know what song I'd make me;
And if I had two little wings,
I know where I'd betake me!

“Hey, my merry friend, you sing just like a lark at dawn’s first light!” suddenly said a young man who had walked up to the fountain while I was singing. Now to me, so unexpectedly hearing someone speak German, it was just as though the bell in my village was ringing to me across a quiet Sunday morning. “God, welcome, my dear compatriot!” I cried, jumping delightedly down from the stone ledge. The young man smiled and looked me up and down. “But what exactly are you doing here in Rome?” he at last asked. Now I did not know quite what to reply, for telling him that I was, well, running after a lovely lady was out of the question. “I’m on the roam, seeing some of the world.” “So, so!” he replied, laughing out loud. “Then we two follow one profession. I am doing precisely the same, in order to see the world and paint it afterwards.” “You’re an artist!” I cried joyfully, for this brought Leonardo and Guido to my mind. But the man did not give me a chance to speak. “I think,” he said, “that you will come home and breakfast with me, and I’ll paint a portrait of you which will be a joy to behold!” This suited my wishes perfectly, so I wandered with the artist through the deserted streets where the odd shutter was now being opened here and there, and a pair of white arms appeared, followed by a sleepy face peeping out into the fresh morning air.

For a long time he led me hither and thither through a muddled mass of dark, narrow alleys, until we finally slipped into an old, smoky house. There we climbed one gloomy flight of stairs after another, as if we intended to ascend to Heaven. At last we stood, with the roof over our heads, before a door, and the painter began to hastily search his pockets inside-out. But he had forgotten to lock up that morning and had left the

key in the room. For he had, as he had told me on the way, taken a walk out of the city before the break of day to observe the region at sunrise. And shaking his head, he kicked the door open.

It was a long, large room, in which you could have danced if only the floor had not been so littered. But there were boots, papers, clothes and overturned paint-pots lying all over the place; in the middle of the room stood large trestles, like those used for picking pears; and all around there were large pictures propped against the wall. On a long, wooden table was a dish on which, beside a blob of paint, lay bread and butter. Next to it stood a bottle of wine.

“Now eat and drink first, my countryman!” cried the artist.

I wanted to butter some slices of bread at once, but there was no knife. We had to rustle around for a long time among the papers on the table before we finally found it under a large packet. Then the artist threw open the window, and the fresh morning air cheerfully filled all of the room. There was a glorious view stretching far out over the city to the mountains, where the morning sun shone merrily on white country houses and vineyards. “Vivat our cool, green Germany beyond those mountains!” the artist cried; and he took a drink from the wine-bottle before handing it on to me. I respectfully drank to his health and, in my heart, I greeted the beautiful, distant homeland thousands upon thousands of times.

In the meantime, the artist had pushed the wooden trestle, on which there was spread out a very large sheet of paper, closer to the window. On the paper an old hut had been skilfully drawn, simply with large, black strokes. The Blessed Virgin sat therein with an utterly beautiful, joyous, yet

deeply melancholy face. At her feet, in a little bed of straw, lay the Baby Jesus; very friendly, but with wide, serious eyes. Outside, before the opened door, kneeled two shepherd boys with their crooks and pouches.

“You see,” said the artist, “I intend to put your head on that shepherd there, then your face will gain wide recognition; and if God wills, people shall still take pleasure in it when we are both long gone to the grave and kneeling as peacefully and joyfully before the Holy Mother and her Son as these happy boys here.” Thereupon he grasped an old chair, but when he tried to lift it half of the back came away in his hands. After quickly fitting it back together, he pushed it in front of the trestle, and I had to sit down and turn my face half-side-on to the artist. I sat thus for a few minutes, not moving a muscle. But, I just don’t know – in the end I could bear it no longer; first I itched here, then I itched there. Moreover, directly opposite me hung half of a broken mirror, which I had to stare into the whole time; and while he was painting I made, from sheer boredom, all kinds of faces and grimaces. The painter, having noticed this, at last laughed out loud and motioned me with his hand to stand up. My face, on the shepherd’s shoulders, was finished; and it looked so clear that I rather took a shine to myself.

He continued to draw industriously in the fresh, cool morning air, singing a ditty the while and casting the occasional look through the open window out into the splendid surroundings. Meanwhile, I made myself another slice of buttered bread and, taking bites, walked up and down the room, quite content, throwing an eye over the pictures that were stood up against the walls. I liked two of them uncommonly well. “Did you paint

these as well?" I asked the artist. "And why not?" he replied. "They are by the famous Masters Leonardo da Vinci and Guido Reni – but you won't know anything about that." "Oh," I stated, as cool as you like, "both Masters and I are hand in glove." He opened his eyes wide. "How come?" he asked quickly. "Well," I said, "didn't I travel with them day and night – on horseback, on foot, by carriage, till the wind whistled past my hat – and lose them both in the inn, and then journey on and on alone in their carriage with the express post, so fast that the rattling carriage flew over the dreadful stones on two wheels, and –" "Oho! Oho!" interrupted the artist, looking fixedly at me as if he took me for a madman. But then he burst out into loud laughter. "Ah," he cried, "now I begin to understand. You travelled with two artists named Guido and Leonardo?" When I confirmed this, he leapt up and looked me over from head to foot again. "I do believe," he said, "perhaps – do you play the violin?" I slapped my jacket pocket, making the fiddle inside clang. "Now, actually," said the artist, "there was a German countess here who had made enquiries in every corner of Rome after those two artists and a young musician with a fiddle." "A young German countess?" I cried with delight, "was the porter with her?"

"Well, I don't know the whole story," the artist replied, "I saw her only a few times at a lady friend of hers, who however does not live in the city either. – Do you know her?" he continued, suddenly lifting the canvas-cover from a large picture in the corner. Then I felt as you do when you open the shutters in a dark room and the morning sun sparkles over your eyes, it was – the lovely Lady! – she stood in a garden in a black velvet dress,

lifting the veil from her face with one hand and gazing with a kind and calm expression out into a distant, splendid region. The longer I looked, the more it seemed to me that it was the garden of the castle, and the flowers and branches were swaying gently in the wind, and far below I saw my little tollhouse, and the high road stretching through the country, and the Danube, and the distant blue mountains.

“It’s her, it’s her!” I cried at last; and snatching up my hat, I raced out of the door, down the many stairs, and just caught the astonished artist shouting after me that I should come back towards evening, then we might possibly find out more!

Chapter Eight

I ran with great haste through the city to immediately put in another appearance at the summerhouse where the lovely lady had sung on the previous evening. In the meantime, the streets had sprung to life; ladies and gentlemen were strolling in the sunshine in a brilliant confusion of greetings and bows, magnificent coaches rattled through the throng, and from every tower the bells rang for mass, the medley of tones resounding wonderfully in the clear air over the crowd. I was intoxicated with joy and the din, and in my merriment I ran straight ahead until I ended up without a clue as to where I was. Everything seemed bewitched, as if the quiet square with the fountain and the garden and the house had been just a dream, and with the light of day everything had vanished once more off the face of the earth.

I could not ask anyone, for I did not know the name of the square. In the end it began to get very sultry; the sun's rays shot down on the cobbles like scorching arrows, the people crept into their houses, everywhere the jalousies were closed once more, and suddenly the streets were deserted. At last, sunk in despair, I threw myself down in front of a large, beautiful house, before which a balcony on pillars threw broad shadows, and observed now the quiet city, which looked downright eerie in the sudden solitude of the bright midday, now the deep-blue, cloudless sky, until at last, from sheer weariness, I fell asleep. Then I dreamt that I lay on a lonely green meadow near my village, a warm summer rain sparkled and shone in the sun which was just setting behind the mountains, and as the raindrops fell to the ground they changed to flowers, beautiful, colourful flowers, which soon covered me entirely.

But how amazed I was when, on waking, I really did find a heap of beautiful, fresh flowers lying over and around me! I jumped to my feet, but noticed nothing remarkable, other than a window above me, right at the top of the house, full of fragrant shrubs and flowers, behind which a parrot was chattering and screeching incessantly. I picked up the scattered flowers, bound them together, and stuck the bunch in my buttonhole. Then I began to discourse a little with the parrot, for it gave me pleasure to watch him climbing up and down his golden cage with all kinds of grimaces, clumsily stepping over his big toe as he did so. But before I knew what was happening, he called me "furfante."² Now, it may have been only a senseless beast, but I was annoyed nonetheless. I cursed him in return, we

² "Scoundrel".

both raised our hackles; the more I cursed in German, the more he gurgled back at me in Italian.

Suddenly I heard someone laughing behind me. I span quickly around; it was the artist from this morning. “What crazy capers are you up to now?” he asked. “I’ve been waiting for you a good half-hour. The air is cooler now, let us go to a garden before the city; there you will find several fellow-countrymen, and perhaps glean some more information about the German countess.”

This proposal delighted me beyond measure, and we started off on our walk at once, accompanied for a long stretch by the curses the parrot screeched after me.

After leaving the city, and spending a long time ascending narrow stony footpaths between villas and vineyards, we arrived at a small, high-lying garden, where a number of youths and maidens were sitting at a round table in the open air. The moment that we entered, they signalled to us to keep quiet and pointed to the other end of the garden. There, in a large, creeper-covered arbour, two beautiful women sat facing each other at a table. One sang, and the other accompanied her on the guitar. Between them both, on the further side of the table, a pleasant man stood beating time with a little baton. The evening sun sparkled through the vine leaves, now over the wine-bottles and fruits with which the table in the arbour was full, now over the full, round, dazzlingly-white shoulders of the woman with the guitar. The other lady, seemingly in raptures, sang in Italian with such exceptional artistry that the tendons in her neck stood out.

Now just at the moment when, with eyes uplifted to the heavens, she was holding a long cadenza, and the man beside her was waiting, his baton raised, for the instant when she would rejoin the beat, and not a soul in the entire garden dared to draw breath – then the garden doors suddenly flew open, and a hot and bothered young woman, followed by a youth with a noble, pale face, burst in, quarrelling furiously. The startled musical director stood still, his baton raised, like a petrified sorcerer, even though the singer had long since closed her lengthy trill with a snap and angrily stood up. Everyone else hissed lividly at the new arrivals. “Barbarian!” one of the company at the round table shouted at the youth, “you have just burst right into the middle of the uplifting tableau-vivant of the beautiful description given by Hoffmann of blessed memory on page 347 of the *Woman’s Pocketbook for 1816* of the exquisite painting by Hummel which was on view at the Berlin Art Exhibition in autumn 1814!”

But all this was in vain. “Oh, what do you want with your tableaux of tableaux!” retorted the youth. “Her image I painted for others; but my girl is for me alone! That’s the way it must stay! Oh, you faithless, you false one!” he began, turning again on the poor girl, “you critical soul, seeking only the flash of silver in the art of painting and the golden thread in poetry, and having no loved one, only mere darlings! I wish on you henceforth, instead of an honest brush of a painter, an old *Duca* with a whole mine of diamonds on his nose, bright silver on his balding pate, and gilt edging on his few remaining hairs! Yes, out with that loathsome note you concealed from me just now! What have you set in motion this time? Who is this bump from, and who is it for?”

But the girl put up a staunch defence, and the more eagerly the others surrounded the infuriated youth, noisily seeking to console and pacify him, the more heated and wild he grew at the clamour, especially as the girl could not hold her tongue, until in the end she flew in tears out of the tangle of bodies and quite unexpectedly flung herself on my breast to seek my protection. I at once adopted the proper posture, but as the others were paying no attention to us right then, owing to the turmoil, she suddenly turned, lifted her little head to me and, with a perfectly calm face, whispered very softly and quickly in my ear: “You abominable collector! It’s for your sake that I have to suffer all this. Here, stick this cursed note in your pocket double-quick, you’ll find our address on it. So to the appointed hour – when you pass through the gate, keep walking down the deserted street to the right!”

I could not loosen my tongue for amazement; for now that I had a proper look at the girl, I recognised her at once: she was actually the pert lady’s-maid from the castle who had brought me the bottle of wine on that lovely Saturday evening. She had never appeared so beautiful to me as she did then, leaning against me in a deep flush, her black locks flowing down over my arm.

“But, my dear mamselle,” I said in utter astonishment, “what are you doing –”

“For Heaven’s sake, just be quiet, be quiet!” she replied; and she rushed away to the far side of the garden before I had really taken everything in.

Meanwhile the others had almost entirely forgotten the original subject of their quarrel, yet squabbled merrily on, attempting to prove to the young man that he was in fact drunk, which was not at all seemly for an artist with a care to his honour. The plump, brisk man from the arbour, who – as I later learnt – was a great connoisseur and friend of the arts, and whose love of the sciences led him to take a willing part in everything, had thrown his baton away and sauntered eagerly around in the heart of the hurly-burly, his fat face shining with cordiality, in order to mediate and appease everyone, while between times mourning the long cadenza and the lovely tableau he had taken so much trouble to put together.

In my heart the stars were shining as brightly as on that blissful Saturday when I played my fiddle by the open window, before the bottle of wine, deep into the night. As the racket showed no signs of ever diminishing, I whipped out my violin and, without pausing for thought, struck up an Italian tune which they dance to in the mountains, and which I had learnt in the old, secluded forest castle.

At this they all craned their necks. “Bravo, bravissimo! A delicious idea!” cried the merry connoisseur of the arts, and he immediately ran from one person to the next to arrange a rural divertissement, as he called it. He himself led the way by offering his hand to the lady who had played the guitar in the arbour. Then he began to dance with exceptional skill, describing all sorts of figures on the grass with his toes, making his feet sing, and, every now and then, cutting quite passable capers. But he soon had his fill of this, being somewhat corpulent. After making ever shorter and clumsier leaps, he finally walked right out of the circle, puffing and panting

violently, and constantly mopping the sweat from his brow with his snow-white handkerchief. In the meantime, the young man, who had returned to his senses by this stage, had fetched castanets from the inn, and in the twinkling of an eye everyone was dancing in a muddle of colour beneath the trees. The setting sun threw a handful of rosy gleams between the dark shadows, over the old ruined walls and the half-sunken pillars wildly overgrown with ivy at the back of the garden, while on the other side, far below the vineyards, the city of Rome lay lit in the glow of evening. There they all were, dancing charmingly on the grass in the clear, still air, and my heart leapt with joy to see the slim maidens, with the lady's-maid in their midst, sweep through the foliage with arms raised like pagan wood-nymphs, lustily clicking their castanets in time. Then I could restrain myself no longer, but leapt into their midst and danced, fiddling all the while, some very neat steps.

I may have jumped around in the circle for quite some time and failed to notice that the others, having begun to tire, were disappearing, one by one, from the dancing-green. Then someone gave my coat-tails a vigorous tug from behind. It was the lady's-maid. "Don't be a fool," she said quietly, "you're leaping like a billy-goat! Study your note carefully and follow on soon, the beautiful young countess is waiting."

And with that she slipped through the twilight out of the garden-gate, soon to disappear between the vineyards.

My heart was pounding; I would dearly have liked to run after her at once. Fortunately, it having grown dark by now, a waiter had lit a large lantern by the garden-gate. I walked up to it and hastily pulled out the note.

On it, scribbled in pencil, was a description of the gate and the street, much as the lady's-maid had said. Then there was written: "Eleven o'clock at the small door."

That was some long hours away! But notwithstanding this, I wanted to set out at once, for it was all over with my peace; but then the artist who had brought me hither came up to me. "Did you speak to the girl?" he asked. "I can't see any sign of her now; that was the German countess's lady's-maid." "Quiet, quiet!" I replied, "the countess is still in Rome." "Well, so much the better," said the artist, "come and drink her health with us!" And with these words he dragged me, struggle as I might, back into the garden.

By now it had become quite empty and desolate. The merry guests, each with his sweetheart on his arm, were wandering off towards the city; in the still of evening they could still be heard chatting and laughing between the vineyards, ever further and further away, until finally, in the depths of the valley, their voices faded away into the rustling trees and the murmuring river. I was left alone up there with my artist friend and Herr Eckbrecht – such was the name of the other young artist, who had been squabbling so earlier. The moon shone brilliantly between the tall, dark trees down on to the garden; a candle on the table before us flickered in the wind and shimmered over the spilt pools of wine. I had to take my seat with the others, and my artist friend chatted with me about my background, my journey, and my future plans. As for Herr Eckbrecht, he had taken the pretty young maid from the inn, once she had set some bottles on the table, and seated her on his lap, placed the guitar in her arms, and began to teach

her to thrum a tune. Her little hands soon got the hang of it, and they sang an Italian song together, taking the verses in turn, which sounded splendid in the lovely, still evening.

When the maid was then called away, Herr Eckbrecht leaned back on the bench with the guitar, rested his feet on a chair in front of him, and sang many marvellous German and Italian songs to himself, not taking any further notice of us. And the stars shone superbly in the clear heavens, the whole region was painted silver by moonlight; I thought of the lovely lady, of my distant homeland, and so completely forgot my artist beside me. From time to time Herr Eckbrecht had to tune his guitar, which always sent him into a rage. In the end he screwed and yanked at the instrument until a string suddenly snapped. Then he threw the guitar away and leapt to his feet. Only now did he notice that my artist friend, with his arms laid on the table and his head resting on them, had fallen fast asleep. He quickly threw a white cloak, which had been hanging on a branch close to the table, round his shoulders; then he suddenly thought again, threw a few sharp glances first at my artist friend, then at me, whereupon he wasted no time in sitting down directly opposite me, cleared his throat, straightened his cravat and then began to address me: "Dear listener and compatriot!" he said, "as the bottles are almost empty, and morality is indisputably the citizen's first duty when virtue is on the decline, then I feel myself driven by compatriotic sympathy to turn your thoughts to a little morality. – One could certainly think," he continued, "that you were just a youth, although your coat has seen its best days; one could, perhaps, suppose that you have just been making wondrous leaps like a satyr; indeed, some might well even

claim that you are a vagabond, because you fiddle your way through the land; but I care nothing for such superficial judgements, I place my trust in your finely pointed nose, I consider you to be a vagabondising genius.” These insidious locutions annoyed me; I was ready to reply. But he did not give me the chance to speak. “You see,” he said, “a little praise and you’re already puffing yourself up. Retire into yourself and reflect on this dangerous profession! We geniuses – for I too am one – make just as little of the world as it makes of us; rather, we stride, without any particular fuss, in the seven-league boots we soon bring to the world, straight towards eternity. Oh, most wretched, uncomfortable, stretched, straddling position, with one foot in the future, full of dawn and the faces of children to come, and the other foot still in the middle of Rome, on the Piazza del Popolo, where the entire saeculum, wanting to come along at the first favourable opportunity, clings to one’s boots so tightly that they could tear one’s leg out! And all the jerking, wine-drinking and hunger-entertaining merely for undying eternity! And look at my colleague, on the bench there, likewise a genius; *time* hangs heavy on his hands, so how will he cope with eternity? Yes, my highly-esteemed colleague, you and I and the sun, we rose together early this morning and have brooded and painted all day, and everything was beauty – and now sleepy night passes with furred sleeves over the world, wiping all colours away.” He kept talking on and on, his hair tousled from dancing and drinking, and his face pale as death in the moonlight.

I had long since began to feel terror at him and his wild words, and when he formally turned around to the sleeping artist, I used the

opportunity to steal round the table, without his noticing, and out of the garden; then I descended by the vine trellis, alone and happy at heart, into the broad, moon-illuminated valley.

From the city came the sound of the clocks striking ten. Behind me, I could hear, sounding from afar through the still night, the occasional twang of a guitar, and sometimes the voices of both artists, also now on the homeward trail. So I ran as fast as my legs would carry me, to avoid being questioned further.

At the gate I immediately turned into the street on the right and walked rapidly with pounding heart between the silent houses and gardens. But how astonished I was when I suddenly emerged into the square with the fountain which I had not been able to find at all during the day. There was the lovely summerhouse, in resplendent moonlight, and the lovely lady was in the garden singing the same Italian song as on the previous evening.

I ran in raptures first to the small door, then to the front one, and finally for all I was worth against the large garden-gate; but they were all locked. Only then did it occur to me that the hour had not yet struck eleven. I was annoyed at the slowness of time, but good manners prevented me from climbing over the garden-gate as I had the night before. So I paced up and down the lonely square for a little while, before finally sitting down on the stone fountain, full of thought and quiet anticipation.

The stars were twinkling in the sky, all was empty and still in the square; I listened with great pleasure to the lovely lady's song which reached my ear from the garden through the splashing of the fountain. Suddenly I espied a white figure emerging from the opposite side of the

square and heading straight for the small garden-gate. I peered hard through the shimmering moonlight – it was the wild artist in his white cloak. He hastily drew out a key, unlocked, and before you could say knife he was in the garden.

Now I already had a peculiar grudge against the artist because of his senseless conversation. But now I was beside myself with fury. That dissipated genius is drunk again, no doubt, I thought; he has the key from the lady's-maid and he is now going to creep up on the lady, betray her, attack her. – And so I dashed through the small, open gate into the garden.

When I entered, all was silent and deserted. The French windows of the summerhouse were open, and from them issued forth a milk-white light which played on the grass and the flowers before the door. I looked in from a distance. There, in a splendid green chamber, faintly lit by a white lamp, lay the lovely lady, her guitar in her arms, on a silken couch, oblivious in her innocence to the dangers outside.

But I had no time to stand there gazing, for I noticed the white figure cautiously creeping behind the bushes on the far side towards the summerhouse. All the while the lady sang so dolefully that it quite cut me to the quick. And so I did not take time to think but broke off a hefty bough and bore down with it on Whitemantle, yelling “Mordio!” at the top of my voice until the garden trembled with the sound.

The artist, seeing me approach out of the blue, quickly took to his heels, screaming dreadfully. I screamed even more frantically, he ran towards the house, I in pursuit – and I was just about to nab him when my

feet got entangled in some cursed flower-stalks and I crashed down flat on my face before the front door.

“So it’s you, you idiot!” I heard a voice above me exclaim, “you almost frightened me to death!” I swiftly picked myself up, and once I had wiped the sand and earth from my eyes, there was the lady’s-maid standing before me, the white cloak having slipped from her shoulders with her final bound. “But,” I said in total stupefaction, “was the artist not here?” “Why, certainly,” came her pert reply, “at least his cloak, which he wrapped round me just now when I met him at the gate, because I was freezing.” While we were chatting, the lady had jumped up from her sofa and come to the door. My heart was pounding fit to burst. But what a shock I had when, on looking more closely, I saw, instead of the lovely lady, a total stranger!

She was quite a tall, corpulent, solid lady with a proud aquiline nose and sharply-arched black eyebrows, with a beauty that was quite startling. She looked at me so majestically with her large, sparkling eyes that I was overcome with awe. I was thoroughly bewildered, made one bow after another to her, and eventually took her hand to kiss. But she hastily snatched it away and began to speak to the lady’s-maid in Italian; I did not understand a word.

In the meantime, the outcry had brought the whole neighbourhood to life. Dogs barked, children yelled, in between times men’s voices could be heard coming ever nearer. Then the lady shot me another look, as if she wished to pierce me with fiery bullets, and turned back to her room with a burst of proud and forced laughter, slamming the door in my face. The

lady's-maid grabbed me without further ado by the coat-flaps and dragged me towards the garden-gate.

"Once again, you've acted like a right idiot," she maliciously remarked on the way. I too became vitriolic. "Damn and blast!" I said, "and didn't you yourself summon me here?"

"That's just it!" cried the lady's-maid, "my countess meant so well by you, threw flowers from her window to you, sang arias – and *this* is her reward! But you're just a dead loss, you trample over your luck."

"But," I replied, "I meant the German countess, the lovely lady..."

"Oh," she interrupted me, "she's back in Germany long since, together with your mad amour. Now you run along there too! After all, she's pining for you; there you'll be able to play the fiddle together and stare at the moon – just don't ever let me clap eyes on you again!"

Now a dreadful din and brouhaha arose behind us. From other gardens, people with cudgels were clambering hurriedly over the fence; others swore as they scoured the passages; anxious faces under night-caps appeared in the moonlight now here, now there, peeking over the hedges; it was as if the devil had suddenly enticed a rabble out of the hedges and bushes.

The lady's-maid did not shilly-shally. "There goes the thief, there!" she shouted to the people, pointing to the other side of the garden. Then she quickly shoved me out of the garden and banged the gate shut behind me.

So there I was, standing under God's clear sky back in the quiet square, as utterly alone as I had been on my arrival the day before. The

fountain, which had shimmered so merrily in the moonlight such a short while ago, as if little angels were rising and descending inside, murmured ever on, but all my joy and pleasure had fallen into the fount.

I now made the firm resolve to turn my back for ever on Italy the False, with its mad artists, bitter oranges and lady's-maids; and I wandered, that very hour, out through the city-gates.

Chapter Nine

The challenge rolls down from the skies:

'What dawn-lit figure this, that darts

Across the heath from foreign parts?' –

I meet the mountains with my eyes

And joyous laughter thrills my bones

As I belt out in ringing tones

The password and the battle-cry:

Austria for ever!

With that, the land around me knows;

Then stream and bird and woods all say

Soft welcome in my country's way,

The Danube flashes as it flows,

St. Stephen's, distant many miles,

Peers over the peaks, sees me, and smiles –

And if that's not him, he'll soon be nigh:

Austria for ever!

I was standing on a high mountain that affords the first sight of Austria, singing the last verse and gleefully waving my hat, when suddenly, in the wood behind me, a wonderful chorus of wind-instruments joined in. Spinning quickly around, I saw three young companions in long blue coats; one playing an oboe, the second a clarinet, and the third, who wore an old tricorne on his head, a French horn – they all accompanied me until the wood rang with the sound. I, needing little encouragement, pulled out my fiddle and played and sang afresh. Then they looked thoughtfully at one another; the French hornist let his puffed cheeks cave in and unshouldered his horn; presently they were all silent and looking at me. I stopped in amazement and returned their gaze. “We thought,” said the hornist at last, “that as sir is wearing such a long tail-coat, then sir must be a travelling Englishman, walking here to admire the beauties of nature; we thought to earn a viaticum. But it seems to me that the gentleman is himself a musician.”

“Actually a toll collector,” I replied, “coming hot-heeled from Rome; and as I haven’t collected anything for some time, I have struggled along the way on my violin.”

“Doesn’t bring in much nowadays!” said the hornist, who had by this time walked back into the wood and was fanning, with his tricorne, a small fire they had lit there. “You’re better off with wind instruments,” he continued, “when the master and mistress are eating a peaceful midday meal and we enter the vaulted hall without warning and every one of us begins to blow with all his might – a servant comes rushing out at once with

money or food, just to get rid of the noise. But will sir not take a collation with us?”

It was a fresh morning. The fire was now blazing merrily in the wood; we sat around it on the grass, and two of the musicians lifted a small pot containing coffee and even some milk from the fire, took some bread from their coat-pockets, and dunked and drank alternately from the pot with such relish that it was really a delight to watch.

The French hornist, however, said: “I can’t stomach that black swill,” and handed me half of a large, folded buttered sandwich before producing a bottle of wine. “Will the gentleman not take a drink as well?” I took a hearty swig, but quickly had to put the bottle down and grimace hard, for it tasted like Traminer³. “A local wine,” said the hornist, “but the gentleman has had his German taste spoiled in Italy.”

Thereupon he rummaged busily about in his pocket, eventually pulling out, among all kinds of junk, a tattered old map, on which the Kaiser could be seen in full regalia, the sceptre in his right hand, the imperial orb in his left. He spread it out carefully on the ground, the others drew nearer, and they began to discuss what kind of route-march they should follow.

“The vacation is almost at an end,” one said, “we must turn left at Linz, then we’ll arrive in Prague in good time.”

“Now really!” cried the hornist, “and who are you whistling that tune to? Nothing but forests and charcoal burners, no artistic taste, no sensible free board and lodging!”

³ A low-quality, sour wine, also known in German as: *Dreimännerwein* (“Three Men’s Wine”) – for it takes three men to drink it; one to drink, a second to hold him still, and a third to pour it down his throat.

“Oh, stuff and nonsense!” replied the other, “it’s the peasants that I like most of all; they know best where the shoe pinches, and don’t take it so seriously if you blow the odd false note.”

“That means that you have no point d’honneur”, remarked the hornist, “odi profanum vulgus et arceo,” as the Latinist says.⁴

“Well, there must be churches on the way, no?” opined the third, “so we can call in on the priest.”

“Your most obedient servant, I’m sure!” said the hornist, “they give short money and long sermons on how we should not rove so uselessly around the world but should apply ourselves more to learning, especially when they scent a future confrater in me. No, no, clericus clericum non decimat.⁵ But why all this great rush, anyway? Our professors are still in Karlsbad,⁶ and they won’t keep to the exact day.”

“Yes, distinguendum est inter et inter,” replied the other, “quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi!”⁷

By now I had realised that these were students from Prague, and I had begun to feel a deep respect for them, especially as Latin flowed like water from their mouths.

“Is sir an intellectual as well?” the hornist then asked. I humbly replied that I had always felt an especial desire to study, but had never had any money.

⁴ “I hate the unholy rabble and keep them away.” Horace, Odes: Book 3, Ode 1.

⁵ “The priest does not prey on the priest.”

⁶ Taking the baths.

⁷ “One must distinguish between cases” and “What is permitted to Jupiter is not permitted to the ox” respectively.

“That doesn’t matter in the least,” he cried, “we do not have money or wealthy relations either. But a man of brains must needs know how to help himself. *Aurora musis amica*,⁸ which in German means: waste not much time on breakfast. But when the bells peal midday from tower to tower and over the city from mountain to mountain, and the students burst out of the dark old theological college with vigorous yells and swarm through the sunlit alleys – then we betake ourselves to the Capuchin monastery and Father Chef, and find a table laid for us, and even if it is not laid there is still a full pot for each of us on it; we do not ask many questions, but eat and perfectionate our spoken Latin. Let the gentleman understand: this is how we study from one day to the next. And when at last the vacation arrives, and the others drive and ride home to their parents, then we wander with our instruments under our coats through the alleys and out of the gate, and there we have the whole world at our feet.”

I don’t know – but with the manner of his narration – it rent my heartstrings to think that such learned people should be so utterly alone in the world. Then my thoughts turned to myself, how my case was really no different – and the tears welled up in my eyes. The hornist stared at me.

“It really does not bother us,” he continued, “I would not at all like to travel in this way: with horses and coffee and beds with fresh sheets and nightcaps and bootjacks ordered in advance. This is precisely the best part of it, that when we step out in the early morning, and the birds of passage are flying on their way high overhead, we have absolutely no idea which

⁸ “Dawn is the friend of the Muses.”

chimney is smoking for us today, nor can we foresee what special stroke of fortune may come our way by the advent of evening.”

“Yes,” said the second student, “and wherever we turn up and take out our instruments, everyone becomes merry; and when we set foot in a country house at the midday-hour and begin to play in the entrance-hall, then the maids dance together before the front door, and the master and mistress have the hall-doors opened a little so that they can hear the music more clearly inside, and through a gap comes the clatter of plates and the aroma of roasted meat to merge with the joyous sound, and the waiting-maids at table almost twist their heads off to see the musicians outside.”

“True,” cried the hornist, his eyes shining, “Let the others repeat their compendia, while *we* study the great picture-book that the dear Lord has opened for us outdoors! Why, believe me sir, we shall make just the right kind of fellows with a tale or two to tell the peasants, and we shall beat our fists on the pulpit until the hearts of the clodhoppers below us are ready to burst with edification and remorse.”

Hearing them talk in this way raised my spirits to such a pitch that I wanted to start studying with them on the spot. I could not hear enough, for I enjoy conversing with educated persons; one can draw some benefit from this. But there was no opportunity to move on to a really sensible discourse. For one of the students had become anxious, with the vacation coming to an end so soon; as a result, he had promptly screwed his clarinet together, laid down a sheet of music on his drawn-up knees, and begun to drill himself in a difficult passage from a Mass in which he was to play on their return to Prague. And there he sat, with fumbling fingers, sometimes

piping such a discordant note that it set our teeth on edge; and we often could not hear ourselves speak.

Suddenly the hornist cried out in his bass voice: "There, I've got it!" and he cheerfully smacked the map on a spot by his side. The second student desisted for a moment from his busy blowing and looked at him in amazement. "Listen," said the hornist, "not far from Vienna lies a castle, at the castle is a porter, and the porter is my cousin! My dear condisciples, we must go there and present our compliments to my cousin, and you can rely on his taking care of our arrangements from there on in!"

When I heard this I started up. "Does he play the bassoon?" I cried, "and is he of a tall, straight physical constitution, and has he a large, aristocratic nose?"

The hornist nodded. I embraced him with delight, so heartily that his tricorne fell from his head, and we immediately decided to sail together down the Danube, on the mail-packet, to the castle of the beautiful countess.

When we arrived at the river-bank, all was ready for departure. The fat host, by whose inn the boat had berthed over night, stood broad and contented in his doorway, filling up all the space, his voice ringing out all kinds of jokes and dicta, while a maid's head popped out of every window and gave friendly nods to the boatmen who were just that moment carrying the last parcels to the boat. An elderly gentleman in a grey overcoat and black scarf, who was also about to take part in the trip, stood on the bank talking animatedly to a slender young lad in long leather breeches and a tight scarlet jacket who was sitting on a splendid cob. It

seemed, to my great astonishment, that the two of them occasionally looked across at me and were talking about me. In the end the old man laughed; the slender lad cracked his whip and thundered through the morning air, racing the larks overhead, into the sparkling landscape.

During all this the students and I had been pooling our money together. The captain laughed and shook his head when the hornist counted out our fares to him from the kitty, entirely in the copper coins we had with great difficulty collected from the depths of our pockets. I gave a whoop of joy on suddenly seeing the Danube so close before me; we swiftly ran on board, the captain gave the signal, and we sailed down the river, between mountains and meadows, in the beautiful, glittering morning.

Birds were singing in the woods, and from both sides came the sound of morning-bells ringing in distant villages; at times larks could be heard singing high in the air. On the boat a canary warbled along so jubilantly that it was quite delightful to hear.

It belonged to a pretty young girl who was also on board. She had placed the cage close beside her; on the other side she held a neat bundle of clothes under her arm. She sat perfectly still, looking with deep satisfaction now at her new travelling shoes, which peeped out from under her skirt, and now down into the water before her; and as she did so the morning sun shone on her white forehead below her very neatly parted hair. I could plainly see that the students would have liked to enter into a courteous discourse with her, for they passed back and forth in front of her, the hornist clearing his throat each time and pulling at either his cravat or

his tricorn. But they did not possess any real courage; and the girl lowered her eyes every time they approached her.

They were especially shy of the elderly gentleman in the grey overcoat, now sitting at the opposite side of the boat, whom they straightaway put down as a priest. He had a breviary in his hands, which he was reading; but often he would lift his eyes to gaze at the beautiful scenery, while the book's gilt edging and wealth of highly-coloured holy pictures flashed splendidly in the morning sun. At the same time he noticed exactly what was happening on the boat, and he soon knew the birds by their feathers; for little time elapsed before he was addressing one of the students in Latin, whereupon all three went up to him, raised their hats, and answered him in that tongue.

I had seated myself right at the front, on the prow of the ship, where I happily dangled my legs over the water; and I looked, while the ship flew onwards and the waves rushed and foamed beneath me, ever into the blue distance, watching a tower, then one castle after another, rise from the green banks, growing and growing, until it finally disappeared behind us. If only I had wings *today!* I thought; at last my impatience led me to pull out my dear violin, and I played through all of my oldest pieces, which I had learnt while yet at home or at the lovely lady's castle.

Suddenly someone tapped me on the shoulder from behind. It was the ecclesiastical gentleman, who, having laid aside his book, had been listening to me for a little while. "Well," he said, laughing, "well, well, Sir Master of Revels, you have forgotten about food and drink." Then bidding me put my fiddle away and partake of a snack with him, he led me to a

cheerful little harbour which the sailors had constructed amidships from birch and pine saplings. He had had a table set up there, and I, the students, and even the young girl, were made to sit down around it on barrels and bundles.

The ecclesiastical gentleman now unpacked a large roast and slices of buttered bread, which were carefully wrapped in paper; pulled from a case several bottles of wine and a silver goblet, gilt on the inside; poured out, tasted, smelt, tested again, and then served each one of us. The students sat bolt upright on their barrels, eating and drinking only very little out of great reverence. The girl also merely dipped her little mouth into her mug while casting shy glances first at me, then at the students; but the more often she looked at us, the bolder she slowly became.

Finally, she told the ecclesiastical gentleman that she had left home to enter into service for the first time, and was even now travelling to her new mistress's castle. I blushed red to the roots, for she named the lovely lady's abode. So here is the future lady's-maid! I thought, and I stared at her with a growing feeling of giddiness.

"There will soon be a great wedding at the castle," said the ecclesiastical gentleman. "Yes," rejoined the girl, who would gladly have heard more about the matter, "the rumour runs that it's an old secret amour but the countess would never admit to it." The priest replied only, "Hm, hm!" while he filled his hunting-goblet to the brim and sipped from it with a thoughtful mien. Resting my elbows on the table, I had leant far forward to catch every word of their discussion. The ecclesiastical gentleman noticed this. "I think I can tell you," he began, "that the two

countesses have sent me out to ascertain if the bridegroom had yet arrived in the neighbourhood. A lady in Rome has written that he left there long ago.”

When he brought up the lady in Rome, I blushed again.

“So does Your Reverence know the bridegroom?” I asked, totally confused.

“No,” replied the elderly gentleman, “but he is said to be a merry bird.”

“Oh yes,” I said hastily, “a bird who breaks out of every cage as soon as he can, and sings merrily when he has his freedom once more.”

“And gads about in foreign lands,” the gentleman calmly continued, “saunters about alleys at night and sleeps on doorsteps by day.”

That irked me sorely.

“Reverend Sir,” I exclaimed with some heat, “you have been falsely informed there. The bridegroom is a moral, slim, promising youth, who has lived the high life in an old castle in Italy, who has kept company with none but countesses, famous artists and lady’s-maids, who well knows how to husband his resources, or would if he had any, who...”

“Well, well, I was not aware that you knew him so well,” the priest here interrupted me, laughing so heartily that he went quite blue in the face and tears rolled down his cheeks.

“But I heard,” the girl piped up, “that the bridegroom was a great and extremely rich gentleman.”

“Oh God, yes, of course, yes! Confusion, nothing but confusion!” cried the priest, and he could not have his fill of laughter, until he ended up

coughing himself hoarse. When he had recovered a little, he raised his goblet high and cried: "Long live the bridal pair!"

I really did not know what to make of the priest and his gossip; I was too ashamed, on account of the Roman affair, to tell him here before all the others that the lost, blissfully happy bridegroom was I.

The goblet was passed busily around, while the ecclesiastical gentleman spoke in cordial tones to each one of us, so that we all soon grew fond of him; and in the end everyone was talking merrily all at once. The students also became more talkative and told stories of their travels in the mountains, until at last they even took out their instruments and began to blow lustily. The cool water-vapour streamed through the arbour branches, the evening sun was bathing in gold the woods and valleys which flew past us, and the river-banks echoed to the sounds of the French horn.

And as the music made the priest happier and happier, and he recounted amusing stories from his youth: how he, too, had roamed over mountains and through vales, often hungry and thirsty, but always happy; and how the whole span of a student's life was actually a long vacation between the narrow, gloomy school-time and the serious duties of office – then the students drank another round and, in high spirits, launched into a song which rang out far into the mountains:

To southern countries winging,
The flock of birds takes flight,
Above blithe rovers flinging
Their hats to catch dawn's light.

The students are these rovers,
They leave the city's bounds;
Their bookish term now over,
They blow a farewell round:
Adieu to all, from spires to gates,
Oh Prague, the whole wide world awaits!
Et habeat bonam pacem,
Qui fedet post fornacem!

At night we stroll through townships,
The windows shine out wide,
And many a smart gown slips
And turns and whirls inside.
We play before the grating,
And soon thirst grips our throats –
That comes from musicating,
Fresh drinks all around, dear host!
A small beer will do fine,
Beside a stoup of wine!
Venit ex sua domo –
Beatus ille homo!

Now Boreas is blowing
Cold blasts to make woods sway,
It's raining and it's snowing,

We wander on our way;
Our cloaks fly in the flurry,
Our shoes each show a foot,
So we play in a hurry
And sing along to boot:
Beatus ille homo
Qui sedet in sua domo
Et sedet post fornacem
Et habet bonam pacem!

I, the sailors and the girl, although we understood no Latin, exultantly joined in the last lines of each stanza; but I was rejoicing the loudest of all, for just then I could see my little tollhouse, followed soon afterwards by the castle, appearing over the trees in the light of the evening sun.

Chapter Ten

The boat bumped against the bank, we quickly jumped ashore and then scattered in all directions across the land, like birds whose cage is suddenly opened. The ecclesiastical gentleman bade us a hasty farewell and headed with great strides for the castle. The students, on the other hand, hastened to a remote thicket, there to beat the dust from their coats, bathe in the nearby stream and shave one another. The lady's-maid, finally, went with her canary and her bundle under her arm to the inn at the bottom of the castle hill, whose landlady I had recommended to her as a good sort of woman, to change into some more suitable clothes before she

presented herself up in the castle. As for me: the beautiful evening shone straight into my heart, and when all the others had dispersed, I needed little time for thought, but ran at once towards the comital garden.

My tollhouse, which my route led me past, was still standing in the same place; the high trees in the comital garden still rustled above it; a yellowhammer, which had always sung his evening hymn with the setting sun on the chestnut-tree before the window, was singing again, as if absolutely nothing had happened in the world in the meantime. The tollhouse window was open; I joyously ran over and poked my head into the room. There was nobody inside, but the wall-clock was pecking quietly away, the writing-desk was by the window and the long pipe in a corner, just as in the past. I could not resist the urge, but leapt through the window and sat down at the desk before the large accounts-book. Again, the sunshine slanted through the chestnut branches, lighting the numbers in the open book in golden-green; again, bees buzzed to and fro at the window; and all the while, the yellowhammer sang merrily on the tree.

But suddenly the room door opened, and a tall old collector, wearing my spotted dressing-gown, walked in! Catching sight of me so unexpectedly, he halted in the doorway, then quickly removed his spectacles and fixed me with a fierce stare. Not a little startled at this, I jumped up, without uttering a word, and ran out the front door and away through the small garden, where I came close to entangling my feet in the cursed potato leaves which the old collector, as I saw, had planted on the porter's advice in place of my flowers. I could hear him hastening out through the door and following me with curses, but by now I was sitting on

the high garden wall, looking down with pounding heart into the castle garden.

Down there was fragrance, and shimmering light, and the joyful song of many birds; the lawns and walks were empty, but the gold-tinged tree-tops bowed before me in the evening breeze, as if to bid me welcome; and to one side, from a great depth, the Danube intermittently flashed up between the trees.

All at once I heard, some distance away in the garden, a voice singing:

Silence falls on man's loud zest:
Dreamlike Earth feels forces stir her
Forests with a magic murmur,
What the heart but glimpsed or guessed;
Distant ages, gentle grieving, -
Tremors shimmer softly heaving
Sheets of lightning through the breast.

The voice, and the song, struck me as so wondrous, and yet again as so well-known, as if I had heard them sometime in a dream. I thought for long; for long.

"That is Guido!" I at last cried out in delight, and I jumped quickly down into the garden – it was the same song he had sung that summer evening on the balcony of the Italian inn, where I had seen him last.

His song continued while I sprang over flowerbeds and hedges towards the sound. Now when I emerged from among the final rosebushes,

I suddenly stopped as though bewitched. For on a stone bench on the lawn by the swan-lake, bathed in the glow of the setting sun, there sat the lovely lady, in a magnificent dress, a garland of red and white roses in her black hair, her eyes cast down; while the song lasted, she toyed with her riding crop on the lawn, exactly as she had done in the boat that time when I had had to sing the song of the fair lady before her. Opposite her sat another young lady, the brown locks over her plump white neck turned towards me, singing to a guitar, while swans slowly circled on the quiet lake.

Then the lovely lady suddenly raised her eyes and cried aloud on espying me. The other lady swiftly turned her head round, her curls flying into her face; and once she had taken a proper look at me, she burst into immoderate laughter, then sprang up from the bench and clapped her hands three times. Immediately a large crowd of small girls in short, blossom-white frocks with red and green bows slipped out of the rosebushes, so many that I really could not imagine where they had all been hiding. Holding a long flower-garland in their hands, they quickly formed a circle around me, dancing and singing:

We tender you the maiden's crown
With violet-blue silk threading,
To sport and dance we'll lead you down,
The pleasures of a wedding.
Lovely, verdant maiden's crown,
Violet-blue silk threading.

That was from *Der Freischütz*.⁹ I now began to recognise some of the little singers – they were girls from the village. I pinched their cheeks and would have liked to escape from the circle, but the pert little things would not let me out. I had absolutely no idea what all this was meant to signify; and I just stood there, utterly baffled.

All of a sudden a young man in a fine hunting-habit stepped out of the bushes. I could hardly believe my eyes – it was happy Leonardo!

The small girls now opened the circle and stood perfectly still, as if spellbound, on one leg, the other one stretched out in the air, holding the garlands of flowers high above their heads with both hands. Leonardo took the hand of the lovely lady, who was standing quite motionless, only glancing across at me from time to time, led her over to me, and said:

“Love – and all scholars are agreed on this point – is one of the most courageous properties of the human heart; it smashes the bastions of rank and class to the ground with one fiery look; the world is too narrow for it and eternity too short. Indeed, it is really a poet’s mantle, which every visionary dons once in this cold world in order to migrate to Arcadia. And as the separated lovers wander further apart, and the travelling wind blows the iridescent mantle aloft at their backs in an ever greater curve, then the fall of the folds becomes ever bolder and more surprising, the talar grows ever longer behind them, so that a dispassionate person cannot walk out without suddenly treading on a pair of these trains. Oh, my dearest collector and bridegroom! although you had rustled along in this cloak to the strands of the Tiber, yet your future bride’s little hand held you fast

⁹ Opera by Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1862).

from the other end of the train, and though you jerked and fiddled and rumbled around, you had to return to the silent spell of her beautiful eyes.

“So now, as this has happened, you two dear, dear, foolish people! wrap the blessed mantle around you, so that the other world goes under – love one another like turtle-doves and be happy!”

Leonardo had barely finished his sermon when the other young lady – the one who had just been singing the ditty – came up to me, swiftly placed a fresh myrtle-wreath on my head, singing very archly while she fixed it in my hair, her face close before mine:

“Your head is decorated so,
My heart is your heart’s capture,
Because the fiddling of your bow
Has set my soul in rapture.”

Then she took a few steps back – “Do you remember the robbers who shook you out of the tree that night?” she said, dropping me a curtsy and giving me such a charming and merry look that my heart leapt for joy. And then, without awaiting my answer, she began to walk around me. “Truly, still exactly the same as before, with no trace of an Italian tinge! But no, just take a look at those fat pockets!” she suddenly cried to the lovely lady, “violin, linen, razor, travel-case, all in a muddle!” While saying this she turned me round, and round, and could not have an end of laughing. The lovely lady had kept still all this time and dared not raise her eyes for shame and confusion. I often had the impression that she was secretly

angry at all this talk and foolery. Finally tears streamed down her cheeks, and she buried her face in the other lady's breast. This lady first looked at her in amazement, then warmly threw her arms around her.

I stood there totally taken aback. For the more closely I observed the strange lady, the more clearly I recognised her: she was in truth none other than – the young artist Guido!

At a complete loss for words, I was just about to make closer inquiry when Leonardo walked over to her and exchanged whispered words. "Does he still not know?" I heard him ask. She shook her head. Thereupon he took thought for a moment. "No, no," he said at last, "he must be told everything at once, or fresh gossip and confusion will arise.

"Collector," he said, turning to me, "we do not have much time right now, but do me the favour of wondering yourself back to your senses as quickly as possible, so that you do not at some future time rake up old stories among people and shake out new fabrications and conjectures through your questions, your look of amazement, and your head-shaking."

With these words he drew me further into the bushes, while the young lady made passes in the air with the riding crop the lovely lady had laid to one side, tossing her curls low down over her face; but I could nevertheless see that she was blushing furiously.

"Now then," said Leonardo, "Fräulein Flora here, who is making believe that she hears and knows nothing of the whole affair, had with the utmost swiftness exchanged her heart with somebody. After that another comes along and, with speeches, fanfarades and flourishes, offers her *his* heart and wants hers in return. But her heart is already with somebody,

and somebody's heart is with her, and this somebody does not want his heart back or to return her heart. Then everyone began to shout – but I don't suppose you've ever read a novel?"

I answered in the negative.

"Well, you have nonetheless taken part in one. In short: there was such confusion about the hearts, that somebody – that is I – ended up having to intervene in person. On a mild summer evening I leapt onto my steed, lifted the lady as the artist Guido onto another, and off we rode to the south, to hide her in one of my isolated castles in Italy until the fuss about the hearts had died down. But on the way our trail was followed, and from the balcony of the Italian inn, before which you slept watch so superbly, Flora suddenly caught sight of our pursuer."

"Ah, the hunchbacked Signor?"

"A spy. Therefore we passed in secret into the woods and let you travel on alone along the post-course we had reserved. That deceived our pursuers, and my servants in the mountain-castle into the bargain, who were expecting the disguised Flora any hour and, with more zeal than acumen, took you to be the Fräulein. Even here, at this castle, it was believed that Flora was living on that mountain; they made inquiries, they wrote to her – did you not receive a note?"

At these words I pulled out the paper in a flash. "This letter?"

"Is mine," said Fräulein Flora, who had not appeared to be paying any attention to our conversation up till then; she hastily snatched the note from my hand, glanced over it, then thrust it down her breast.

“And now,” said Leonardo, “we must go quickly into the castle; everyone is awaiting us there. So in conclusion, as is only to be expected, and as befits a novel of good breeding: discovery, repentance, reconciliation, we are all together and merry once more, and the day after tomorrow will be a wedding-day!”

While he was talking, there erupted in the bushes a tremendous racket of kettledrums and trumpets, horns and trombones; small cannon were let off amid cries of Vivat, the little girls began to dance anew, and from every bush there popped out one head over another, as if they were growing out of the earth. I leapt hip-high from one side to the other of the buzzing round of figures, but as it was dark by this time I recognised familiar faces only gradually. The old gardener beat the drums, the Prague students, wrapped in their cloaks, musicated in the middle, and beside them the porter fingered his bassoon like a man possessed. On spotting him so unexpectedly, I at once ran up to him and embraced him heartily. He lost his rag at this. “Now I’ll tell you this, even if he travels to the ends of the Earth, he is, and he always will be, a fool!” he shouted to the students; then he reprised his furious blowing.

In the meantime, the lovely lady had surreptitiously escaped from the racket and was flying over the lawn deeper into the garden like a startled deer. I saw her just in time and rushed in pursuit. The musickers were too absorbed to notice this; perhaps thinking that we had started for the castle, the entire band likewise began to march thither with music and a terrific tumult.

We had arrived, almost simultaneously, in a summerhouse on the garden-slope, with open windows looking out across the wide, deep valley. The sun had long since set behind the mountains, leaving only a reddish haze shimmering over the warm, quiescent evening; the murmuring of the Danube rose ever more clearly as all else around slowly fell to silence. I gazed steadfastly at the beautiful countess, who was standing, hot from running, so close before me that I could hear the beating of her heart. But now that I found myself suddenly all alone with her, I was tongue-tied with respect. Finally I plucked up the courage to take her little white hand – when she quickly drew me to her and flung her arms around my neck, and I clasped her tightly in my arms.

But she swiftly freed herself and, quite flustered, moved over to the window to cool her burning cheeks in the evening air. “Ah,” I cried, “my heart is ready to burst, but I still cannot get my head around everything, it all still seems like a dream to me!”

“And to me,” said the lovely lady. “Last summer,” she added after a while, “when I came from Rome with the countess and we had happily found the Fräulein Flora and brought her back with us, but not heard a whisper of you either there or here – I did not think, then, that everything would turn out like this! Not until today, at noon, when Jokei, the good, quick lad, thundered breathlessly into the yard to bring the news that you were coming by the mail-packet.” Then she laughed quietly to herself.

“Do you remember,” she said, “the last time you saw me, on the balcony? That was just like today, such a still evening with music in the garden.”

“So who exactly has died?” I asked hastily.

“Who?” said the lovely lady, looking at me in astonishment.

“Your Ladyship’s husband,” I replied, “who stood beside you on the balcony that time.”

She blushed red to the roots. “What peculiar notions you have!” she cried, “that was the countess’s son, newly returned from his travels; and as it was also my birthday, he took me out on to the balcony with him so that I too would receive a vivat. – But is that perhaps the reason why you ran away?”

“Oh, God, of course!” I exclaimed, slapping my brow. She shook her head, laughing heartily.

It felt so good, having her chatting so merrily and intimately beside me; I could have listened till dawn. As happy as a sandboy, I drew a handful of crack-shelled almonds, which I had brought from Italy, from my pocket. After she had taken a few, we cracked them, then gazed contentedly out into the quiet country.

“You see,” she said after a short while, “the small white castle over there, shining in the moonlight – that is our present from the count, together with its gardens and vineyards; that is where we shall live. He has known for a long time that we are keen on one another, and he is very well-disposed towards you, for if you had not been there when he abducted the Fräulein from her pensionnat, they would both have been caught before they could have made their peace with the countess, and everything would have taken a different turn.”

“My God, most beautiful countess,” I cried, “I no longer know whether I’m coming or going, with all this unexpected news – so he is Leonardo?”

“Yes, yes,” she broke in, “that was the name he went by in Italy; the estates over there belong to him, and now he is to marry our countess’s daughter, the lovely Flora. – But why did you call me countess?”

I stared at her.

“I’m no countess,” she went on, “our kind countess took me in at the castle when my uncle, the porter, brought me here as a small child and a poor orphan.”

Now I felt just as if a load had fallen from my heart! “God bless the porter,” I exclaimed, absolutely enchanted, “for being our uncle! I have always held a high opinion of him.”

“And he means well by you,” she replied, “if you only behaved with a touch more refinement, he always says. And you must dress with greater elegance now.”

“Oh,” I cried with sheer joy, “English tailcoat, straw-hat, knickerbockers and spurs! and right after the wedding, we’ll travel to Italy, to Rome, the finest fountains play there, and we’ll take the Prague students and the porter along!”

She smiled softly and looked at me with such happiness and warmth; and all the while the strains of music carried from afar, and fireworks flew from the castle over the gardens into the peaceful night, and the song of the murmuring Danube rose through the air – and everything, everything was so right!