Karen

Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ANNE LULWORTH
SALT AND SAVOUR
LAMORNA
ANTHEA'S GUEST
THE SEVERINS
CYNTHIA'S WAY
IN OTHER DAYS

Etc. Etc.

KAREN

BY

MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK

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Karen

I

‘I am going to Germany,’ I said, looking up from my letters.

‘What for?’ said Dad. He never wasted words.

‘Eugenie Gutheim is going to be married and wants me to come to her wedding. I promised her I would if she won her bet.’

Dad and I were sitting opposite to each other in our flat in Sloane Gardens. It was the end of April 1913 and I had various engagements for the month of May. But when Eugenie’s letter came, I decided as I read it that I would throw them all to the winds and go to Reichenstadt. I was accustomed to see Dad fly off to the ends of the earth at a few hours’ notice and not appear again for months: but I had never been with him. In fact I had never been abroad. Mother had been an invalid for some time before her death two years ago and unable to travel: and while I was at school I spent the holidays at English seaside places or at home. It was time for me to see a foreign country and enlarge my mind. I had to decide such things for myself because Dad had other things to think of, and even when he talked to me had an absent look in his eyes and an appearance of fixing his thoughts with difficulty on my trivial affairs.

‘I am going to Germany, Dad,’ I said again, for he was opening his *Times* and would, I knew, be immersed in it in another moment.

‘By yourself?’

‘Yes. Why not?’

‘Can you speak German?’

‘A little. Enough to get to Reichenstadt.’

‘Eugenie Gutheim! that bouncing, good-looking girl who stayed here one Easter! What do you mean by saying she has won her bet?’

‘We had a bet together when she left school. I said she would marry a business man, and she said she would marry an officer, however difficult it was.’

‘Why should it be difficult?’

‘Because the Gutheims are Jews. Eugenie told me that no officers visited at their house. Yet she has pulled it off.’

‘Doesn’t she tell you his name? If some Captain Snooks wants to marry you, which heaven forbid, you won’t talk of him as “an officer,” will you?’

‘His name is Eduard von Gösen. Noble, too, you see. No wonder Eugenie is excited. Shall I read you her letter?’

I read a page of it, and then Dad said he would imagine the rest. There was too much ecstasy in it for his taste. Eduard was in raptures about Eugenie and Eugenie was in raptures about Eduard. His godly beauty! his martial bearing! his tender heart! and ‘oh! his kiss!’

‘But that last is a quotation,’ I explained, for Dad looked rather sick. ‘And Eugenie’s father is giving her all the furniture and twenty thousand pounds. In marks it sounds stupendous.’

‘H—m,’ said Dad. ‘You can have your jaunt to Germany if you have set your heart on it, but don’t bring a lieutenant back with you.’

I thought I could promise Dad not to do that. I meant to marry an Englishman if I married at all, but I was in no hurry. I was enjoying my present life too much to want to change it, and next time Dad went across the world I meant to go with him. I had told him so, and he had only stared and said nothing. When the time came I should pack my trunk and remind him to take two tickets instead of one.

A week later I was on my way to Reichenstadt. I knew that I was young and inexperienced to travel alone. At least I knew that other people would say so, and that if Mother had been alive I should never have been allowed to do it. But Dad never thought of little things like that, and luckily I had no old aunts and cousins to interfere. I did not take Wilkins, my maid, because I knew from Eugenie that there would be no room for her in their flat, and that if ever I was invited there I should be expected by myself. She had said that in Germany girls did not have maids of their own unless they belonged to the highest and wealthiest circles, and that you would hardly be accompanied by one on a visit unless you were a royalty or a millionaire.

Dad saw me off from Charing Cross, told me to take care of my keys and my ticket, and asked me to send him a wire when I got to Reichenstadt. He described Calais station to me and the two trains that would be waiting for Paris and Cologne, and he reminded me that I should have to change at Cologne. He did not expect me to have any difficulties.

‘The girl who came from Arabia looking for her lover knew how easy travelling was,’ he pointed out, ‘she just said “Thomas—London”—and got there.’

So when I arrived at Cologne I remembered the Saracen girl and said Reichenstadt to the first porter I saw: and he took me straight to a train waiting at a siding. I think our train must have been late, for he hurried me into a first-class compartment as if there was not a moment to lose, threw my dressing-case after me, took my tip, and banged the door as we got under way. There were two people in the train: an officer in a greyish uniform and a boy of about twelve, who wore spectacles and looked thin and ill. The officer seemed to be a most disagreeable man. As my porter opened the door he had commanded him in a hectoring voice to find another place for the lady as he wished to travel in peace. But there had been no time. I was on the step, the train began to move, several railwaymen were shouting indignantly at my porter and me, and all I could do was to stumble in. I might have gone along the corridor and looked for another seat, but I did not feel inclined to. I was not in the officer’s way, and I had as much right to my corner as he had to his. The boy and he both sat with their backs to the engine, and the boy sat opposite me. They did not speak to each other, and it did not occur to me that they were travelling together. The boy looked at me a good deal, but the man stared out of the window and seemed to be annoyed. He had a hard, arrogant profile, fine in its way, but cold. Presently two other officers looked in, stared at me, and asked him to come with them to the *Buffet*. He got up to do so, and then I realised how tall he was and how strongly made. Directly he had gone the boy in spectacles looked up at me and said:

‘*Gnädiges Fräulein* is English.’

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘how did you know?’

‘One sees it: besides, I heard you speak to the porter.’

‘I’m glad that odious man has gone. I hope he won’t come back. I think I’ll take his place.’

‘He will come back,’ said the boy, getting very red and uncomfortable.

‘Do you know him?’

‘He is my father. He is Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda, Rittmeister in the 2nd Reichenstadt Dragoons. I am Graf Max von Hohenroda.’

The boy stood up, put his heels together, made me a deep bow, and sat down again.

‘I’m sorry,’ I said; ‘you didn’t speak to each other and so I didn’t guess . . . besides, you are not at all alike.’

‘It does not matter,’ said the boy, who had charming manners. ‘You could not know. Unfortunately for me I do not resemble my father. My mother was an Eschenau, and all the Eschenaus are small and fair and delicate. It cannot be helped, but it makes life difficult.’

He looked downright ill, I thought: ill and melancholy. Probably the big arrogant man bullied him. I could easily believe it.

‘Life would be easier at the present moment if I could get some breakfast,’ I said; ‘I’m starving.’

II

‘You have only to ring that bell,’ said the boy, pointing to one I had not noticed. ‘The *Kellner* will bring you what you want here: or, of course, you can go to the *Buffet*.’

‘Have you had breakfast?’ I asked.

‘No,’ he said, with some hesitation and a blush that made him quite pretty for the moment. I felt sure that his mother had been pretty, with gentle blue eyes and fair hair: and she had been married to that big blood and iron man: and had died.

‘Let’s have it together . . . in here,’ I said; ‘I don’t want to go to the *Buffet*.’

The waiter came running along the corridor as I spoke, and before the boy had time to object I gave the order. In a few minutes we had an ingenious little table let down between us and a tray brought with delicious hot coffee, fresh rolls, and ambrosial butter. They do some things much better in the Fatherland than we do at home. But not everything.

By this time we were travelling through wooded hill country with deep valleys, winding rivers, and little towns set here and there. The boy knew the names of the towns and the number of their inhabitants and what they manufactured. He said that he took this journey every year in order to visit his maternal grandparents, who lived near Cologne, and that his father had told him all these facts about the towns and expected him to remember them.

‘When I travel I like to look out of the window and dream,’ I said; ‘I should hate to be told things that I was obliged to remember.’

‘My father says that dreams profit nobody,’ said the boy with a sigh. ‘A man must be well-informed and acquainted with facts.’

He buttered his third roll and I poured out a second cup of coffee for him. We both felt better for our breakfast, the sun was shining on the hills, the train lumbered slowly forward, and voices from the corridor reached us in fragmentary dialogue with laughter intervening. Presently the waiter appeared again and said something in an undertone to the boy who instantly got up.

‘My father has sent for me,’ he said, looking decidedly frightened. But before he went he made one of his ceremonious bows again, and said that it had been a great pleasure to him to have breakfast with me. When he had gone I paid the waiter for my breakfast, and found that the bearish man had paid for the boy’s.

Presently I fell asleep. I did not want to because we were going through such lovely country, but after a sleepless night, breakfast and the hot sun combined were too much for me. At first I fought against my drowsiness, stared out of the window, and tried hard to keep awake. Then I dreamed and heard voices through my dreams. Then I sat up suddenly, looked at my watch and found it was midday: so I must have been asleep for hours. Very annoying. The boy and his father sat opposite me again and the father looked as *point-device* as if he had been on parade: while I felt dazed and dishevelled.

‘Does this train go through to Reichenstadt?’ I said to the boy, for I was not sure. After all we had had breakfast together and made friends. But I shall always believe that he had been told not to speak to me, for he coloured painfully and turned to his father for instruction.

‘This train goes through to Reichenstadt,’ said the man. ‘Some do not, but this is the quick train from Cologne.’

‘My wig!’ I cried, ‘if this is a quick train, what is a slow one like?’

He almost thawed into a smile, but not quite.

‘Our train service is excellent,’ he said. ‘At least we think so.’ Then he turned his head again and resumed his study of the landscape. I took out a book and began to read and the boy watched me intently. Perhaps his father noticed this and did not like it, for in a few minutes he turned to his son and ordered him, in a harsh voice, to come to his side of the carriage and sit opposite him. I cannot convey his manner of speaking to any one who has not met Germans of his type, because in our country we hardly scold dogs in such a tone. The nearest thing to it that I know is the rasping voice of a sergeant drilling raw recruits: but he is addressing a number of men and not an individual. Besides, he has to shout to make himself heard. The boy moved at once, and as he did so stumbled a little over my foot. His father said something violent in so low a tone that I did not catch the words, but the boy looked as if he would cry in another moment and stopped short where he stood, his eyes fixed on mine.

‘You didn’t hurt me,’ I said.

‘Your foot should not have been there,’ said his father.

‘Perhaps not,’ said I, taken by surprise.

‘There is no doubt about it. I observed that your foot was at least two inches beyond your part of the floor.’

‘Then I must apologise to you,’ I said, looking up at the boy and smiling at him.

‘That is far-fetched,’ said his father. ‘A boy should take care not to be clumsy, and even if it is not his fault, he should apologise.’

I relapsed into my book again after this, for though the man had spoken to me his manner had been as arrogant and disagreeable as before. When the waiter announced dinner he got up at once and stalked out of the carriage without waiting to see whether I was coming too, and I hoped that I should not be placed at the same table. But I was. The two Hohenrodas sat on one side and I sat next to an enormous female who bulged over her seat and nearly edged me off mine. She wore a shiny grey alpaca skirt, a white blouse (such a one!), a sort of Paisley bolero, and a pork-pie hat perched on smooth, sandy hair done in a bun behind. When the waiter came round with the wine list she ordered Marcobrunner, and the Graf ordered Marcobrunner too. I don’t drink wine as a rule, but in spite of my sleep since breakfast I felt flat and tired, so I did what I thought was the safe thing and ordered Marcobrunner. But when the wine came, I found that whole bottles had been brought for the bearish man and me and a half bottle for the female at my side. They were uncorked so I did not try to change it. But I looked at it ruefully, and my neighbour looked at it severely, and the boy laughed.

‘*Gnädiges Fräulein* is assuredly very thirsty,’ he said mischievously.

‘Max!’ His father glowered at him.

‘Of course I wanted half a bottle,’ I said, ‘but it doesn’t matter.’

It didn’t in the least, for as I spoke the boy stretched out his hand for the *Speisekarte* and upset my bottle with the neck falling towards me and pouring a stream of wine into my lap. I jumped up to avoid being soaked, the stout female screeched like a cockatoo, every one near us stared, the boy turned as white as a sheet, and his father, after he had seized the bottle and set it on end again, said to him in that agreeable voice of his:

‘Away! If you can’t behave yourself you may go hungry.’

‘He didn’t do it on purpose,’ I said indignantly.

The man took no more notice of me than if I had not spoken, but turned to the boy, and with an imperious gesture, confirmed his order of dismissal.

‘Oh! do forgive him,’ I said. ‘I don’t mind in the least. Besides, I can get some more.’

Instead of answering, the man summoned the wine waiter, who stood a little way off and was looking on helplessly at what had happened.

‘A clean cloth and a fresh bottle of wine for this lady,’ he said. He spoke to the waiter much as we speak to a spaniel when we want it to come to heel, but I began to think it was his natural tone to inferiors and subordinates and did not mean much. But I was not going to fall in with his ideas.

‘You need not order fresh wine for me,’ I said. ‘If you drive your son away I shall go away too.’

‘On what grounds?’

‘I state a fact. You may guess at the reason.’

He turned on his son in a fury.

‘Are you here still?’

The boy fled before his father’s wrath, a trembling, piteous little figure. I was so angry myself that I could hardly speak, but I only had two words to say, and before I followed the boy I said them.

‘*Guten Appetit!*’ I flung at him. Eugenie had sometimes said it to me as we began to eat so I knew the phrase. Under the circumstances I hoped it would annoy him, and I believe it did. He looked like thunder.

III

At this point I am going to describe a portrait of my mother that hangs in the drawing-room at home. She was alluring and exquisite to the day of her death: but when this portrait was painted she had a spice of the devil in her eyes. ‘Green as green flames, blue-grey like skies, and soft like sighs,’ they were: and her hair was dark with bronze lights in it, and her hands were slim and white. That’s enough. You must imagine the rest. I’m not what she was, but I’m like her to look at. Dad says so. And, by the way, my name is Karen Gilfoy. Dad is what people call a financier. He rushes about all over the world and ‘operates’: but I can’t tell you much more about his ways of earning his bread. Sometimes we seem to be rich and sometimes hard up, but we get along. I’ve been as well or as ill-educated as an English girl is who goes to an expensive school and likes games better than work: and I’ve always had all the money I wanted for clothes. I was not called Karen after Hans Andersen’s dancing girl, but after a Danish friend of my mother’s who married an Englishman and was my godmother. So much for our family affairs.

I happened to be travelling in a very thin, fine tweed, and the wine had soaked me through to the skin. When I got back to the carriage the boy was crying, and I felt hungry again and damp and uncomfortable. So I lost my temper and rang the bell hard and repeatedly. The boy left off crying when I did that and looked at me in horror. Then he pointed to a notice just under the bell with *Verboten* in big letters and a whole rigmarole in small ones. However, I didn’t have to read it, because the noise I made brought an official in uniform who worked his arms up and down like a semaphore and talked nineteen to the dozen. My school German would not keep pace with his, so I said twice in a commanding voice:

‘Dinner for two. Here. Quickly. Do you understand?’

He was beginning the semaphore business again when I produced a large silver coin and pressed it into his hand, saying, as well as I could for laughing:

‘For you. Dinner. Quickly. Very hungry.’

All the while the boy was staring at me with eyes like tea-saucers. I believe he thought I should be clapped into prison there and then for disrespectful behaviour to an official in uniform. But, on the contrary, the man suddenly turned as sweet as honey, disappeared, and before long returned with a waiter and a tray. In a twinkling the little table was let down again between the boy and me and we were eating veal cutlets with a macedoine of vegetables that was delicious and most soothing to our spirits. I had some trouble at first to persuade the boy to eat. He said his father would not wish it. But when the cutlets and the macedoine were put before him he could not resist them.

‘Is your dress quite ruined?’ he asked with a sigh when he began to feel better.

‘I don’t suppose so,’ I said; ‘a good English tweed ought to be able to stand a little German wine.’

I put it in that silly way because his father had annoyed me so much and I was still out of temper.

‘You grow no wine in England,’ said the boy.

‘We buy a good deal,’ I countered.

Then we went on for a while in the same fashion, he saying teasing things about England, and I crowing as loud as I could about my country and country folk. But we did not vex each other because we were both laughing and in a happy frame of mind. I was trying to prove that a London fog was rather enjoyable if you were used to it, when back came the bearish man and saw his son before his son saw him. I believe it startled him to find the boy looking as a boy of that age should, cheerful and with a bit of mischief in his eyes. At any rate he stared hard at him, stared at the table still between us, and stared at me as if he hardly knew what to say. He had fine eyes.

‘You must ring,’ I said to the boy. ‘We want these things taken away.’

Then I got up and moved to the other side of the carriage, leaving my seat free for the bearish man, who could not have passed me. He sat down and spoke to the boy, on whose face a cloud of fear had now descended.

‘I told you to go hungry,’ he said.

‘I persuaded him to eat,’ said I; ‘it is not good for the young to go long without food. If he had not eaten he would probably have been ill.’

He acknowledged what I said by a stiffening of manner and by an inclination of his head that was too slight and frosty to call a bow. When the waiter came he threw a paper note on the table while I stood up and hurriedly gave the man a piece of gold. No doubt we both felt rather silly. Certainly I did. However, the waiter settled the matter by taking the price of my meal from me and the price of the boy’s meal from his father’s note. The table was cleared, the man resumed his former seat, I went back to mine, and we all travelled in silence. I tried to read, and fell asleep again. When I waked I looked at my watch and knew we must be near Reichenstadt. Before long the outskirts of the town appeared, and in a few minutes we drew up at the big station. As we did so I saw Eugenie Gutheim on the platform, and with her a small, fair-haired man in uniform with some roses in his hand, and a girl I guessed to be her sister Emma. They rushed up to the window when they saw me, and before I could get out Eugenie presented her bridegroom and he presented his roses. For a moment I blocked the way, and the last I saw of the bearish man was a profile that expressed his contempt of the people who met me, and who, even while they welcomed me, tried hard to attract his notice. Eugenie's little officer saluted him, Eugenie addressed him as her dear Graf, and her sister gazed at him in idiotic rapture, as if the privilege of seeing him deprived her of her wits and her speech. The Graf made me a stiff bow before he strode through the crowd, and the boy bid me good-bye as if he was sorry to part from me. Then they disappeared, and I imagined that I should never see them again.

Eugenie's sister was a shock to me, and so, to tell the truth, was her bridegroom. Eugenie had always assured me that Emma was extraordinarily handsome, and she had described Eduard von Gösen as a man of high lineage and godly beauty. But if it had not been for his uniform Eduard would have looked what, in fact, he was: a very ordinary, amiable little man with a snub nose, mild blue eyes, and a foolish smile. As for Emma, she had a parroty profile and the kind of mouth you see everywhere in Germany and never in England. I can see it as I write and I could draw it, but to put its distinguishing marks into words is difficult. The lips are rather thick and the corners are rather greedy and sulky, and the German gutturals suit it exactly. Eugenie had the mouth, but she was handsomer than her sister. Both girls were well dressed in a heavy way, but their hats were hideous. They were much more interested in the bearish man and his son than in me, and they asked me a string of questions about them.

'Did Graf von Hohenroda speak to you?' asked Eugenie in an awestruck voice.

'The boy and I made friends,' I said.

'The Graf will be present at our wedding, we hope. It is a great honour, but Eduard knew him as a boy. Did he converse with you, or was it only the little Graf who showed himself amiable?'

'It was only the boy. His father was decidedly unamiable.'

‘Ah! He has that reputation. He is highly exclusive and aristocratic. He visits with hardly any one in Reichenstadt. He is a great deal at court, and the Grand Duke is devoted to him.’

‘Does he live in Reichenstadt?’

‘He comes there. He lives at Hohenroda, in his father’s castle. Eduard has known him all his life, and at first he was very much opposed to our marriage.’

‘But when Eduard presented you to him he was very polite,’ put in Emma, ‘he said he was pleased to make your acquaintance.’

‘I have great hopes that he may come to our *Polterabend* as well as to our wedding,’ said Eduard.

‘Eduard! what are you saying?’ cried Emma in an ecstasy: and Eduard nudged his bride. We were all in a taxi by this time, and nudging was nothing to the endearments the betrothed pair had indulged in from the moment we started. At first I had looked out of the window because I did not want to embarrass them, but I found that Eugenie did not remove her head from Eduard’s shoulder when I turned mine their way: nor did my presence and Emma’s act as any check on the need they felt to press each other’s hands and to address each other in those diminutive terms of endearment for which we have no exact equivalent in the English tongue. I may tell you that he called her his little pigeon and that she called him her little treasure, but it doesn’t sound the same thing.

IV

The Gutheims had a handsome flat in what was evidently an expensive quarter of the town. I expected that, as at school Eugenie had talked overmuch about her father’s money and the luxurious way in which the family lived. The plain school fare had been a great trial to her, and so were the school regulations about clothes and jewellery. She had not been much liked at school, but not exactly disliked either; for though we thought her boastful and in some ways silly and touchy, we found her good-natured and amusing. Our friendship began accidentally in one of the short vacations when she was not going to Germany, and could not go as usual to her cousins in Manchester on account of measles. I asked her to stay with us and we gave her a good time. It was easy to do so, but she was grateful, and adopted me ever after as her bosom friend. I doubt whether the friendship would have lasted if we had remained together, because my fervour never equalled hers. But she went back to Germany at the end of the term, and since then we had not met. She had altered considerably in the three years that had elapsed, and was now a handsome, self-confident young woman who would some day be enormous unless she curbed her appetite and took plenty of exercise. I saw directly I arrived that she was a replica of her mother, who, however, belonged to a simpler generation and gave herself no airs. Frau Gutheim must have weighed about eighteen stone, and a man who made up his mind to marry her image could see the fate awaiting him. Moreover the lady had a temper and made use of it. Before I crossed the threshold she was having a row with the taxi-driver and the maid about muddy boots and my trunks. But her face was wreathed with smiles as she received me, and when she ushered me into the room I was to occupy she looked at me with appraising eyes, and said that she was delighted to have me as her guest because I had stood by her daughter when she was neglected and forsaken by her relatives.

‘But they couldn’t help it,’ I said, ‘they had measles.’

‘Perhaps!’ said Frau Gutheim, showing plainly that she did not believe in the measles, and then she looked round the well-furnished room with evident pride and apologised for its imperfections. As I assured her that I saw everything necessary to my comfort, Eugenie came in with a vase of lilies-of-the-valley which she was about to put on the dressing-table when her mother snatched it from her.

‘No, Eugenie!’ she said, ‘that I will not allow. Everything in reason. Flowers in a bedroom are not reasonable. They are unhealthy, and the vase would probably mark the highly-polished toilet-table. I consider toilet-tables ridiculous. A hanging glass behind the washstand is all I had when I was a girl. But you persuaded your father to buy this expensive suite, and my duty is to take care of it.'

'But, Mamma, it is the English custom. When I stayed with Karen I always found flowers on my dressing-table. Is it not so, Karenchen?'

'One can quite well do without them,' I murmured.

'To every country its own ways. Karen has roses already. She cannot need two kinds of flowers in order to fall asleep to-night in what I hope is a comfortable bed. Allow me to take your roses, my child. They shall be placed in a glass and the glass can stand on the marble top of the night table near your bed. Marble can be washed.'

'Mamma is very excited,' said Eugenie as her mother waddled out of the room carrying my roses with her. 'A wedding makes a great deal to do in the house, and even in ordinary times she has a hot temper. I shall be glad when it is all over and I get away with my Eduard, who is always amiable. Tell me, Karen, what impression has my Eduard made on you? Is he not a pearl amongst men?'

I was very glad the two questions were asked in rapid succession, because I was able to answer that Eduard was undoubtedly a pearl, but I could not honestly have said that he had made much of an impression. If Eugenie considered him a pearl he was a pearl as far as she was concerned, and in matrimony I suppose that is what matters. I hastily changed the subject by unlocking my big trunk and taking out of it the two presents I had brought for Eugenie: one for her wedding and one because I had lost my bet. The wedding present was a diamond pendant, and I paid my debt with a small travelling clock that had cost more than we wagered, and would, I hoped, be useful. I don't think she cared for it, but her eyes glistened over the pendant, and in a roundabout way she did her best to discover what it had cost. In the end I told her that I did not know because Dad had bought it, but I could find out if she wished.

'I can find out,' she said. 'At least, I can find out its value. Your father might feel surprised if you asked.'

'I believe he would,' I admitted.

When I had put away my things and changed my dress I was called to supper in the dining-room. The girls still wore their tweed skirts and silk blouses: and Frau Gutheim was packed into a black taffetas that creaked as she breathed because it was so tight. I thought she must be very uncomfortable, but I suppose use is second nature. She ate an enormous supper, and embarrassed me by getting quite ratty because I did not eat enough to please her. Eduard had stayed to supper too, and did his best to soothe his future mother-in-law by praising the food and the cooking. When I saw what was wanted, I said I had never tasted anything so delicious as the pickled cucumbers which they called *Salzgurken*, but that did no good because, as it happened, they had been bought in place of some home-made ones that had gone wrong. Soon after, I refused a second helping of *Filetbraten* because I did not want it, which seemed, to my mistaken English ideas, a sufficient reason. But Frau Gutheim's brow clouded ominously, and in a sulky voice she said to Eugenie that she feared their cooking was not good enough to please her friend.

'*Bei uns müssen Sie sich nicht geniren*,' said Herr Gutheim, and before I could stop him he had forked a large slice of meat out of the dish near him and plumped it on my plate. He was an amazingly ugly small man with friendly brown eyes and I rather liked him: but I did not quite understand what he had just said.

'*Nicht geniren*,' said Emma, who sat next to me and ladled little balls of buttery brown potatoes on my meat.

'They mean that you must eat as much as you like without feeling shy about it,' said Eugenie, and then told her family in German that in England your hosts never pressed you to eat.

'But how inhospitable!' said Frau Gutheim; 'how, then, can a guest eat himself satisfied?'

I tried to explain the English point of view, but I did not eat the meat and potatoes. I'm afraid I made a bad impression; but it was worth while, for in future Herr Gutheim did not put food on my plate: and Frau Gutheim often observed that it was useless to press me, since English people only considered their own comfort and could not bring the smallest sacrifice in order to please their hosts.

'Imagine, Mamma!' said Eugenie when the food question had been discussed sufficiently, 'Karen travelled in the same carriage with the Hohenrodas and they spoke to her.'

'I met the Graf in the *Stadtpark* the other day and he evidently did not know me, although Eduard had presented me a few days before,' said Emma; 'at any rate he did not greet me although I am sure he saw me.'

‘How can you be sure?’ said Eduard. ‘Hohenroda is very proud, but he has perfect manners.’

‘I was looking at him,’ said Emma coyly, ‘our eyes met. He has magnetic eyes.’

‘Were you very much attracted, Karen?’ said Eugenie.

‘Attracted!’ I cried, ‘attracted by that bearish, bad-tempered man! I thought him detestable. I never want to see him again.’

‘He will probably not remember you if you meet,’ said Emma snappishly.

V

The trousseau was on view in the living-room and the presents were in the *salon*. The entertainment on *Polterabend* was being given by Uncle Marcus, and the wedding dinner and reception were to take place at the Rheinischer Hof, the chief hotel of Reichenstadt. Frau Gutheim informed me of this programme next day at breakfast, and explained that a daughter’s wedding was a joyful event but troublesome, and that her nerves were all to pieces. She regretted that the dining-room was the only room left to the family just now because she knew that I was used to sit in a *salon* all day. She hoped that I was not drinking coffee, out of politeness, when I really preferred tea. No sugar! How economical! The attention of the family was drawn to the fact that I took no sugar, and that I actually preferred rolls and butter to almond cake, although the cake had been made in my honour with Emma’s own hands. The eggs were of the best quality. I need not be afraid to take a second. A German breakfast must seem painfully frugal to any one used to a heavy hot meal in the morning, but, for her part, she found it lasted her very well till ten o’clock, when we should all have buttered rolls and sausage.

I found these protestations and apologies tiresome, but I supposed they were the custom of the country, and I did not let them spoil my pleasure in being for the first time with foreign folk in a foreign town. The food was good, the room was sunny, my hosts were friendly, and everything looked a little different from what it did at home.

There were no flowers on the table, but there were large, well-kept palms and india-rubber plants in pots near some of the windows: there was the porcelain stove instead of the open fireplace: and there were embroideries of all kinds everywhere. The seats and backs of some chairs were embroidered and so were the footstools: so was a newspaper-rack, a pipe-rack, a cigar-box: photograph frames and moral sayings hung in conspicuous places. Eugenie told me later that Eduard and she did not mean to decorate their flat in this way, but that Mamma had old-fashioned ideas.

‘The world does not stand still,’ she said. ‘My mother wants me to have everything as she had it at the time of her marriage: but that is absurd. We have had terrible scenes, but luckily Eduard supported me. He has great courage. He told Mamma plainly that if she insisted on buying furniture that pleased her and not him he would go back on our engagement. He is highly artistic, and he said it would shatter his soul to possess chairs and tables he could not admire. That brought Mamma to reason: that and the sight of my tears which flowed unceasingly day and night.'

'But why didn't Eduard buy his own furniture?' I asked, for in some ways Eugenie's narrative puzzled me.

'My father buys all the furniture and linen and most of the silver,' she explained.

'As well as your clothes! And gives you a big dowry too. Then what does Eduard bring to the *ménage*?'

'Himself! For me, it is enough. I am not mercenary.'

But I knew Eugenie well enough to know that when she concluded a deal, even if it was a matrimonial one, she would not expect to lose by it: and I had gathered from her talk at school that in Germany a girl of Jewish birth often marries an impecunious officer in order to get a footing in army society. It seemed to me that the parent Gutheims were buying this privilege for their daughter at a high price, and I doubted whether the he parent was as pleased with his bargain as his wife and daughter were. Herr Gutheim was as ugly as one of Du Maurier's nightmares, but his eyes twinkled with intelligence. I was soon convinced that he took his future son-in-law's measure and saw him for what he was, a little coxcomb but harmless, and likely to be wax in the hands of his wife. For Eugenie had her mother's temper and let it loose on the smallest provocation. At school we had soon found that she took offence about nothing and either sulked or dissolved in tears, but on one occasion her whole body had trembled with fury, and we had been rather disgusted by the exhibition she made of herself. I had never had a quarrel with her, and when I accepted her invitation I remembered her agreeable side and hoped for the best. But before I had been under the roof twenty-four hours I knew that her home atmosphere had elements of storm in it that were easily brought into action and easily stilled. In England quarrels are rather serious and leave trouble behind. In the Neue Strasse quarrelling seemed to be an ordinary mode of intercourse and without any effect on the family affections. Any one who has seen *Potash and Perlmutter* will have some idea of the state of things there. I found such violent squabbles puzzling and distressing until I perceived that the principal parties were not really much upset by them, although they constantly referred to the failing conditions of their hearts and nerves. The worst of it was that the mother and daughters all took me into their confidence and expected my sympathy. Eugenie told me more than once that the flat had been in an uproar ever since she got engaged, and that the scenes over the trousseau had marred her pleasure in it. Mamma had such antiquated ideas, and was so much less inclined than other mammas to profit by the experience and knowledge of the young. One dreadful episode remained in Eugenie's memory, when a flimsy garment had literally been torn asunder in their hands because Eugenie vowed she would have it and Mamma screamed at her that she should not: in a big shop, too, so that strangers had stared and sniggered. But Mamma was known to be a hot-head, and every one forgave her because she was so efficient and such an admirable housekeeper. There was always a row when she preserved her apricots, but no one else had such good ones or such plenty: and so her family bore with her. Eugenie understood Mamma because she had the same temperament, but just on that account they did not live comfortably together. Emma was more pliable, but lately Emma had shown herself rather silly. She was working herself into a frenzy over Graf Wolfram v. Hohenroda, who would never look at her.

I was going to ask more about that, but just then Frau Gutheim took me to see her kitchen, and when we got there said she deeply regretted having sent Eugenie to an English school because she had come back full of ideas that were in the highest degree exaggerated and unpatriotic. She actually pretended that silver was better polished in England than in Germany, and she had given mortal offence to a wealthy and childless aunt by saying that her friend Karen kept house without any fuss and that her *ménage* was more comfortable than a German one.

'Her aunt is very excitable, and quarrels with her servants from morning till night, but she is a magnificent housekeeper,' said Frau Gutheim.

I would rather have a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith, but I didn't say so, because I was afraid Frau Gutheim would get excited if I disagreed with her. So I murmured something inane about every country having its own ways that I hoped would be sedative and non-committal. But if Frau Gutheim wanted a flare-up she would have one with anybody and on any pretext.

'Of course every country has its own ways,' she cried. 'That is what I am trying to point out to you. German housekeepers are the finest in the world. No one can deny it. They require no advice or assistance from Englishwomen, who know nothing whatever.'

I looked at Emma with gratitude, for she created a diversion just then by coming in to us with her hand pressed to her heart and her face white with emotion.

‘He is in Reichenstadt,’ she exclaimed. ‘I have just seen him. He is not at Hohenroda. He is probably staying here for the wedding. He will be present to-morrow night. I shall hear his voice. I may touch his hand. If he invites me to dance I shall swoon.’

‘Stupid goose,’ said Frau Gutheim, and waddled away.

‘Mamma is a pearl amongst women,’ said Emma turning her eyes heavenwards, ‘but she is not sympathetic with youth. Yet I suppose she was once in love with my father and idealised him. I must ask her.’

At that moment Frau Gutheim returned, evidently in a hurry and saying something about her keys and the provoking stupidity of people who borrowed them and did not give them back.

‘Tell me. Mamma,’ piped Emma, ‘when you married Papa did you not love him?’

‘Where are my keys?’ snapped Frau Gutheim. ‘You had them last.’

‘If you had seen him pass your door would your heart not have beaten faster? Would you not have agonised and rejoiced at the thought of meeting him? Tell me what you said when you first saw him?’

‘I said nothing would induce me to marry that ugly little man. So now you know,’ answered Emma’s mother. ‘And your father had his doubts too. He thought, as a young man, that he could never make himself happy with a woman who would become stout and heavy. No doubt we were fools: but we were never such fools as you. What have you done with my keys?’

VI

Eventually Frau Gutheim’s keys were discovered in her own petticoat pocket, but not before Emma and the parlour-maid had been reduced to tears. The parlour-maid wore a navy blue skirt, a checked apron, and a tartan blouse, open at the neck and fastened with an eighteen-penny diamond brooch, so she was not exactly smart: but she did not seem to mind being called a sheep’s head by her irate mistress, nor did she bridle and give notice when she was accused of stealing the keys in order to get into the store-room. She only wept copiously and noisily and talked about her service-book, in which any one, the English lady, for instance, could satisfy herself that Anna Schmidt had always had a character for perfect honesty.

‘What does she mean by her service-book?’ I said to Eugenie, who had come to take me into the rooms where her trousseau and wedding presents were on view, but had lingered to join in the fray.

‘Every servant in Germany has one,’ Eugenie explained. ‘They are all under police supervision, and have to produce their books on demand. If they lose them they are fined or imprisoned. The book contains a full description of a servant’s appearance and family circumstances and his or her character, signed by each successive employer.’

‘Then if a girl behaved badly on one occasion and it was recorded in her book, she could never live it down?’

‘Never,’ said Eugenie complacently.

‘It doesn’t seem fair.’

‘It’s convenient, and it gives employers a hold.’

My sympathies were all with the girl although she wore a tartan blouse, had the national mouth, and roared in an abandoned way. But I was glad to get out of the room with Eugenie, and while we were looking at her clothes, Emma came in and told us the keys were found and that Mamma was quiet again. I had not been twenty-four hours in the flat yet, but I had begun to think already that Papa had the best of it, because he was mostly at home at night when Mamma was presumably asleep. Her waking hours seemed to be too tempestuous for family comfort.

‘But where is your linen?’ I said to Eugenie when I had examined and admired the rest of her wardrobe, which was handsome, but on the whole heavy. ‘It is the linen I want to see. I have always heard that German brides have quantities of it.’

‘It is on view at the shop where it was bought,’ said Eugenie. ‘We will go there.’

‘How prosaic!’

‘But how practical! My great-grandmother spun her own. We still have some of it. My grandmother and mother made up their own and embroidered all the monograms. Months they must have worked at it. I went to Lange’s and ordered everything in a few hours. German girls used to begin to nil their linen chest when they were confirmed, but no one does that nowadays. We want to amuse ourselves while we are young.’

‘Tell me, Karen,’ said Emma at this moment, ‘am I better looking than Eugenie, or is she better looking than me?’

‘I can answer that,’ volunteered Eugenie. ‘I am better looking than you, of course. You have a fine colour and a good head of hair, but your profile is worth nothing. You will be the image of Aunt Rosalie in a few years.’

‘Eugenie!’ shrieked Emma, and I thought there was going to be a family row again.

‘It is of no consequence,’ Eugenie continued, ‘you have good looks enough to make a good *parti* considering what Papa can do for us. We are neither of us much to look at compared with Karen. Mamma is quite annoyed because I had not told her that you were of a dazzling beauty, Karen. I explained to her that I did not know it myself. In your school uniform one saw that you had long arms and legs and unusual eyes, but now . . .’

Eugenie blew me a little kiss, and Emma stared at me sulkily.

‘But what is your mother annoyed about?’ I asked.

‘Emma, shall I tell Karen about Oscar Strauss?’

‘It is all the same to me,’ said Emma sulkily. ‘I take no interest whatever in Oscar Strauss. He leaves me cold.’

Eugenie made a grimace at me that her sister must have seen and understood as well as I did. It meant that the subject would be resumed later when we were by ourselves. She had once described herself at school as a person of ‘enormous tact,’ a phrase that remained in our minds because we all thought that, however much she possessed she failed to show a vestige of it. I was not surprised when we were left by ourselves almost at once as Emma flounced out of the room saying that she did not wish to incommode us and that sisterly affection was at a low ebb when a stranger . . . I did not hear the end of the sentence. Perhaps Emma’s emotions impeded her speech.

‘My mother and sister are the noblest and finest natures in the world,’ said Eugenie in a voice that made me long to shake her because it was so charged with feeling. ‘They have only one fault. They are both insanely jealous.’

The last thing I wanted to do was to discuss Eugenie’s relatives with her. I hardly knew them, and I was their guest. So I said: ‘Really!’ or something equally dull, and asked if I might look at her presents now that I had seen her clothes.

‘We are all a little anxious about Emma at present,’ continued Eugenie without taking any notice of my request. ‘Her character is not as firm as mine. She is highly sensitive and excitable. Unfortunately, about a month ago she was in the post-office buying some stamps and dropped her umbrella. It might happen to any one. But Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda was there at the same moment, picked it up, presented it to her, and, as she says, looked at her in a way she cannot forget. The action was certainly that of a gentleman, but he should not have looked at her. It has had the most serious results.’

‘But who is Oscar Strauss?’ I asked.

‘He is the young man we all wish her to marry,’ explained Eugenie. ‘Certainly he is not an officer like my Eduard, but every girl in Germany cannot expect to marry an officer. The civilians want wives too. Oscar is very well off, singularly handsome, and highly gifted. I should be more than satisfied with him as a brother-in-law.’

‘But does he—does Emma——’ I stammered.

‘They do,’ replied Eugenie promptly, ‘or rather they did before the unhappy affair with Hohenroda. A month ago Emma came to me in the highest state of excitement and maidenly confusion and told me that Oscar had as good as declared himself. He had sung ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*,’ and had never removed his eyes from her face. She almost expected him to call on Papa next day.’

I said ‘Really’ again. Luckily Eugenie did not want me to say much. She was putting me *au courant* of the family affairs and would only have been annoyed by interruptions.

‘We knew what this meant,’ she continued when she had taken breath. ‘Last Christmas he was in love with Emma’s bosom friend, Jenny Cassell, and she told Emma that Oscar had sung ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*’ at their house at Sylvester, and had fixed his eyes on her with an intensity that caused her to blush.’

‘Did he transfer his affections then?’

‘He did. Emma is very attractive to men.’

This was hard to believe, but naturally I did not say so. Besides, I had only been a few hours in Germany and could not know what German men admired. Perhaps they liked a parroty profile.

‘Now you will understand why my mother was a little upset when she saw you,’ Eugenie went on. ‘I am sure she will get over it and like you immensely. I can see that my father does already and you have made an excellent impression on Eduard.’

‘I’m glad of that,’ I said.

VII

When we had looked at the presents, which were numerous and costly, we went out for a walk: my first walk in a German town. Eugenie took me through the *Stadtpark* and then back to the main street, where there were handsome shops and crowds of people. It is difficult to recall those first impressions of a country I know so well now. I seem chiefly to remember insignificant details, such as the lettering over the shops, which reminded me of the lettering over old nursery toys; the shiny hats worn by the taxi-drivers, trees in the streets, and everywhere the blue-grey uniforms.

When we got to Lange's we found that Frau Gutheim and Emma were there too, and that they were talking to an elderly woman and a girl, who stared hard at me when I was presented to them, and then resumed their conversation with Frau Gutheim. I understood from Eugenie that they were Frau Cassell and her daughter Jenny, and that they were especially interested in trousseaux, because Jenny had just become engaged to a Herr Veist and was about to order her own.

'Then she didn't mind being deserted by Herr Strauss?' I whispered. Eugenie shrugged her shoulders.

'Why should she mind? She has done very well for herself, or rather her parents have done well for her. She is making an excellent match.'

We were in a big room on the first floor, and as we talked we looked at Eugenie's things. There were a great many, and they were all of the finest quality. I thought her father's purse must be as deep as a well and as broad as a church door, but she said that Jenny Cassell meant to have more still. I was interested in various little embroidered bags and holders that I had to have explained to me. Some were to come between saucepan handles and Eugenie's hands when she went into her kitchen and cooked for her man: as she fully intended to at times. One was to hang outside the door every night and receive the morning rolls. Others were for hidden dusters. There were cushion covers, too, of fine embroidered lawn, and tea-cloths from a school of needlework in Munich.

'But there is a limit to everything,' I heard Frau Gutheim say to Frau Cassell. 'Eugenie wanted to have pink *crêpe de Chine* nightgowns trimmed with real lace. To that I would not give my consent. I have seen them, and I do not consider them respectable. One white one if your heart is set on it, I said: but pink! You are not going to play the part of the erring wife in a French drama, I hope. A certain luxury is seemly in those who can afford it and encourages trade. But we must never forget that we are Germans. In my opinion pink nightgowns do not go well with the national character.'

I had to turn away or I might have giggled: and I turned towards a big plate-glass window from which Emma and Jenny Cassell were watching a music shop on the other side of the street. Eugenie joined us there, but the two matrons went on talking about pink nightgowns and the scandalous impropriety of the present age. You could see by the horrified expression of their faces that they were enjoying themselves.

'Gauze, I tell you . . . mere gauze,' muttered Frau Gutheim. At the same moment Eugenie drew my attention to a young man near the music shop, saying, 'That is Oscar Strauss,' while Emma and Jenny startled us all by screaming simultaneously, 'There he comes!'

'Is the All-Highest in Reichenstadt, then, that you are so excited?' said Frau Gutheim tramping to the window and looking out of it. 'Right! The Hohenroda! I thought as much. Now we have all seen something and can go home to dinner. Otherwise I behold no one but Oscar Strauss in his new English suit, and very tasteless it is. I feel sure that if I crossed the Channel on a rough day and arrived in a country where all the men wore checks of that size and those colours I should be bilious for the rest of my visit. But I have never been to England because there is nothing to see there.'

'Why don't you tell your mother that Englishmen don't dress like that except for a comic turn in the halls?' I said to Eugenie.

'She wouldn't believe me. She has her own ideas.'

'But she has never been to England.'

'That only makes her more positive. Oscar has never been to England either. He asked me what I thought of this suit, and I told him. I am one who speaks my mind. We were not on nodding terms for a week. But he came round. He is quite a nice little man, and he sings like an angel. How heavenly it would be if Emma and he became *verlobt* while you were here. Every one would invite them, and you would be invited too.'

'But Emma does not seem much interested in him,' I said. 'Look at her now. Is she quite well?'

Emma was craning her thin neck towards the window until her face actually touched the pane, her eyes were rapturously gazing out of it, and her mouth had fallen open. The usual vacant silliness of her profile was accentuated, and I was not surprised to hear Frau Cassell say in an aside to her daughter:

‘Did you ever see the like? Such a fool! Does she flatter herself that the Hohenroda will ever look at her? He! so aristocratic and so *anti-Semit*!’

But Emma said in a voice of crooning ecstasy: ‘Twice to-day! A golden day!’

She then turned from the window, and with the air of one delivering an ultimatum said to Eugenie:

‘I am going to stand where he stood. Will you come with me?’

‘Not till this afternoon,’ said Eugenie.

‘At once!’

‘Certainly not. Eduard would consider it unmaidenly.’

‘I’ll come with you,’ I said, for Emma got so red in the face that she resembled her mother, and I thought there was going to be a scene.

‘You cannot do that,’ said Eugenie sharply, and appealed to her mother.

‘Mamma! Emma wants to go into Netter’s now and to take Karen with her. It must not be allowed.’

‘Unheard of!’ snapped Frau Gutheim, and both the matrons looked at me severely, while Jenny sniggered.

‘But I want to buy some German songs,’ I said.

‘Young girls do not go to Netter’s between twelve and two or even walk on that side of the street,’ explained Eugenie. ‘Only gentlemen go during those hours, and perhaps actresses. You must remember this when I am gone, for Emma is in such a state of *Schwärmerei* that she is reckless.’

‘What would happen if I went in now?’

‘Nothing. People would see that you were a foreigner. But if Emma went it would be all over the town, and Oscar Strauss would no longer think of her. That would be a tragedy.’

I gave in, of course: for who was I to set myself against the rigorous etiquette of Reichenstadt? and Emma gave in because I firmly believe that her mother would have boxed her ears if she had taken a step in the wrong direction; and not for the first time either. Frau Gutheim was a tiresome woman in some ways, but her determination in dealing with a goose like Emma was refreshing. The trouble was that she had always spoiled the girl because she believed her to be delicate, and still wavered between anxiety about her health and impatience with her follies.

Some of this I guessed, and some of it Eugenie told me as we walked home together. We left the others talking to Oscar Strauss in the street. He had been presented to me, and Eugenie had told him that I was to sing at her *Polterabend* to-morrow, and that he was to accompany me. They both seemed to take this as a joke for some unexplained reason, and Herr Strauss said that he hoped the accompaniment would not be too difficult for him. I said it would be quite easy, and that made them laugh outright. I must say that I do not like German manners. The young man never took his eyes off me while we stood together, and remembering what Eugenie had told me, I began to think that he would burst out with ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*’ then and there, on the pavement. So I reminded her that I wanted to see the fruit and flower market and we made away.

VIII

Eugenie told me that, compared with Uncle Marcus, her father was a poor man, and that the entertainment given by her uncle the night before her wedding would be everything she could desire. She called it her *Polterabend*. A *Poltergeist* is a noisy kind of hobgoblin, and in olden times on the night before a wedding the friends of a German bride used to gather outside her door and smash crockery against it. The idea was to keep evil spirits away. But now that Germans no longer believe in spirits they have given up the rite, or rather they leave it to the lower classes. A *Polterabend* is still observed with ceremony, but not with broken glass and china: and Eugenie's uncle was giving a variety entertainment of music, dancing, and recitations. The recitations were all to be home-made and topical. Eugenie read them to me beforehand and explained the family allusions, some of which were touching and some facetious. They were printed in an elaborate booklet containing portraits of the bride and bridegroom and their families, a programme of events, and a menu of the supper and the wine.

My name was down for a song, and I found that Oscar Strauss was to accompany me. Eugenie said it was not necessary for us to try it over beforehand, because he was such an accomplished musician that he could play the most difficult accompaniment at sight better than other people after practice. But when we went to Lange's in the afternoon and I bought Schumann's '*Frühlingsnacht*,' she changed her note a little and said she hoped he would be able to manage it.

However, I explained that I was not going to sing a German song to a German audience. She agreed that my accent was not all it should be, and she seemed to have doubts about my style: for all her friends and relations were extraordinarily critical and artistic. I said that I did not particularly wish to sing, and that she could strike my name out of the programme without hurting my feelings. But she refused to do that because, she said, the very idea of an English amateur standing up to sing an English song to Germans was amusing: and she was sure every one would be in an amiable mood and listen kindly. In fact, her tone showed her enormous tact to such a degree that I got annoyed with her, as we used to do at school, and I refused to tell her the name of the song I meant to sing. We spent the rest of that day and most of the next in packing her clothes and tearing to the station to meet various von Gösens and Gutheims who were coming to the wedding. Any one could see that the two strains did not mix well. The von Gösens were poor and frumpish, gave themselves airs, and in my hearing uttered asides about *Juden*. The Gutheims were evidently monied people, and most of them seemed to be brainy and more civilised than Eugenie's mother. I liked them. They evidently thought, as I did, that Eugenie's little lieutenant was no such matter, and that she would have done better for herself if she had married a prosperous man of her own race. But they brought her handsome presents, and appeared at her *Polterabend* wearing the jewels of Golconda on their necks and in their hair. One of the women had a diamond bird as big as a thrush perched on her raven locks, and I heard an acidulated von Gösen spinster whisper that a bird of that kind was truly Jewish. Poor thing! She looked as if one of the stones in the bird's tail would have fed her for a year and done her good.

Eugenie wore blue brocade of a hard blue that did not become her. Emma was in virgin white, and Frau Gutheim had squeezed herself into a plum-coloured velvet that must have been of the best quality to bear the strain. I drove to the party in a cloak like Monna Vanna's that shrouded me completely, and just to tease them I would not tell them what I had on.

'Your shoes are the colour of flames,' said Emma. Then she looked at my hair. A *friseur* had been at the house to do the family hair but I had refused his services: I was glad I had when I saw their unnatural heads.

'You do your hair very plainly, but it looks *chic*,' Emma went on. 'It is a curious colour. I suppose you call it black, but there are bronze lights in it. You have a great deal. Isn't that very unusual in England?'

We arrived at the house before I had time to answer, and the moment we entered it I saw Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda, who must have arrived just before us. Eduard von Gösen was there too, and the host and hostess, who were welcoming the Graf with the greatest *empressement*. A maid took our cloaks, and as mine fell from me I knew that I made an effect.

'Fire—the colour of fire! How strange a choice for a young girl!' murmured Frau Gutheim with doubtful approval.

'The colour of those deep red nasturtiums that you love,' said Eugenie also eyeing me. 'You said you would wear it some day.'

'Chiffon!' said Emma, fingering it in a manner I thought particularly ill-bred. 'Layers of chiffon! You must have paid a great deal for it, Karen, or did your maid run it up?'

I would not tell her. I'm not cattish about my clothes as a rule, but Emma's way of touching everything I wore and trying to find out what I had paid for it annoyed me. In fact, I was beginning to think already that I should not be able to stand a whole month of Emma. I had been invited for at least a month in Eugenie's letter.

Directly Graf Wolfram saw me he bowed to me, but for some time he could not escape from the attentions of his hosts and speak to me. Crowds of people were arriving, but he remained a centre of attraction and attention. He might have been a German Lord Kitchener, he was so tall and quiet and stern looking. I'm sure he hated the fuss made over him, and I thought he treated some of the odd-looking creatures presented to him with scant courtesy. Emma had managed to edge herself near him soon after we had entered the *salon*, and she was gazing up at him in a way that made me feel ashamed of my sex. At last she managed to catch his eye, he greeted her stiffly, she turned the colour of beetroot, and made him an absurdly deep curtsy. He turned his back on her and walked away. Towards me! But I made him no curtsy. I drew myself up rather rigidly and looked him straight in the eyes without smile or welcome: because I felt so angry with Emma.

'I have a message to you from my son,' he said.

I waited for him to deliver it. My silence seemed to disconcert him slightly, and perhaps he misunderstood it. At any rate he turned to Eduard von Gösen who was hovering near, and said, 'Present me to this lady.'

'My son greatly wishes to see you again,' he began when the introduction had been performed and Eduard dismissed. There was no doubt about the dismissal either. Eduard had shown signs of lingering, and had been sent off with a glance that he had obeyed as a dog obeys a blow.

'Why do you look amused and surprised? Why do you stand there so silent and incredulous?' he went on in a low tone. 'I suppose you judge from what you saw, and think that my son's wishes could not prevail unless they were my wishes too.'

His lowered tone and his eyes startled me more than his words.

'Do you visit with the Gutheims?' I said primly.

He was so far from prim, and I was so taken by surprise that I just said what came into my head. It annoyed him evidently, but I could not help that.

'I do not visit with the Gutheims,' he answered. 'I am here to-night because von Gösen is the son of old friends. But I consider these mixed marriages a mistake.'

'Most of the Gutheims seem to think so too,' I said; 'I heard several of them say that Eugenie might have done better for herself.'

Instead of flying into a passion, as I expected, he looked straight into my eyes again and smiled. He had wonderful eyes, blue-black with fire in them at times: and when he smiled the usual hardness and arrogance of his expression vanished for the moment.

‘Why should we quarrel?’ he asked. ‘For my son’s sake I want to make friends. He invites you to Hohenroda.’

I stared at him.

‘So do my mother and father,’ he added hastily. ‘You would be their guest.’

‘But the other day in the train you were downright uncivil,’ I blurted out.

He did not deny it. He did not apologise. But he looked at me, and again I found that his eyes had compelling fires in them. I lowered my own before his glances, and felt vexed with myself for doing so.

IX

Soon after we were all herded into the big music-room to listen to the programme of music and recitations. A small platform had been put up for the occasion, and on this there was a grand piano. There were no rows of small chairs but groups of all sorts and sizes: so that you could sit where you chose. Eugenie had told me of this arrangement, and said that it had been decided on after much consideration, because if they had small hired chairs every one would have wanted the front rows, and some would have felt mortified by finding themselves in back ones. As it was, I saw the host carefully conduct certain female von Gösens to one sofa, while his wife settled the most important-looking Gutheims on another. Most people had found seats before I did, because I wasted time by hovering somewhere near Eugenie and then finding that I could not sit with her. Twin chairs, garlanded with roses, were placed in a conspicuous position for the bride and bridegroom, and before long Eduard and Eugenie took their places. Every one was talking and laughing at the top of their voices, and when Emma came across the room to speak to me she had to scream as you do in a high wind before I could hear her, and I had to scream when I answered. We sat down on a large ottoman that no one had occupied yet, and she put her face close to mine, a trick I particularly dislike.

‘Our dresses go well together,’ she bawled; ‘Oscar thinks yours is very *apart*, but that not every one could wear it.’

‘I might say the same about his tweeds,’ I answered.

Some way off Graf Wolfram stood amongst a group of men. I saw that his eyes were aware of me, and I wished Emma had not glued herself to my side.

‘We see him very well from here,’ she simpered. ‘He spoke to you in the other room. What did he say?’

‘He invited me to Hohenroda,’ I replied unwarily.

I thought Emma would have exploded like a rocket and disappeared in little stars of fury. She jumped back as if I had struck her, and said:

‘Those are manners I cannot understand. How is it possible to accept an invitation that is not extended to your hosts?’

‘I’ve not accepted,’ I said, ‘don’t worry!’

‘You’ve refused!’

‘No. I’ve not answered.’

‘But one must answer an invitation.’

‘Must one?’

‘Ordinary politeness ordains it: but perhaps German ideas about these things are peculiarly civilised.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘Always secrets! I am open and honest. It is our good German way. But you, dear Karenchen—first your song—then your dress—now this most unexpected invitation! But perhaps your fancy runs away with you—perhaps you said you had heard of the beauties of Hohenroda—yearned to see it—and he in ordinary tones—a gentleman could hardly do otherwise—said he hoped you some day would. It is an expedition like another. We can take you there if you desire it, and show you what all the world can see—the castle from outside—strangers are not admitted when the family is in residence—and some parts of the garden and the forest. But perhaps, now that his old friend has married my sister, we shall be invited there as friends too, and if it should happen while you are with us I promise you that you shall accompany us. I would make a point of it.’

I didn’t have to answer because some one now mounted the platform and recited a long poem all about the Gutheim family. The von Gösens looked down their noses, which were small and snub, and the Gutheims bridled with delight. If the von Gösens were the salt of the earth as the Kaiser told them, the Gutheims were the butter and the cheese. They looked like it, too, for their faces were fat with good living, and their short, stout bodies were clothed like Solomon in his glory. After the recital some one played a piano solo, then Herr Strauss sang two songs by Brahms, then there was another home-made poem and then a trio for string instruments. The poems were tosh, but the music was good. Nevertheless, when Emma screamed into my ears that she supposed I had never heard anything like it in England I screamed into hers—‘Fiddlesticks!’

Unfortunately, just as I made my remark a dead silence fell upon the room, and so every one heard it and laughed. A duologue extolling both families followed, and at last, when it ended, Emma got up and inflicted herself on some one else. The moment she did so Graf Wolfram came across the room and took her seat.

‘What was fiddlesticks?’ he asked.

‘She thought I had never heard good music before: and I live in London.’

‘What are you going to sing? I see your name down next.’

‘I’m going to sing some nursery rhymes.’

‘English or German?’

‘English. Are there German ones?’

‘Isn’t that a silly question? Where there are children there are songs.’

‘As yet I have only spoken to one German child,’ I reminded him. ‘He did not look as if he had ever had songs sung to him. He seemed ill and sad.’

‘If you mean my son, he has to work hard. That cannot be helped. The struggle for life is severe nowadays, and Germans must keep abreast. Either hammer or anvil. You know that saying.’

I got up then because it was time for my song, and I wondered, as I faced the audience, how they would like it. It seemed worlds away from overworked children and men of blood and iron.

‘Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,
When the wind ceases the cradle will fall,
Down will come baby, cradle and all.’

I stopped a moment at the end of the verse and then sang the refrain, which is set to a haunting tune:

‘These are the songs my mother sang
With an old-fashioned melody.
There are no songs in all the world
Like the songs my mother sang to me.’

The Germans liked it, wonderful to say. I saw that by the way they looked at each other and waited for more.

‘She sang “Chip, Chip,” my little horse,
    Chip, chip again, sor,
How many miles from Dublin Town?
    Three score and ten, sor.
Chip, chip, my little horse, chip, chip again, sor,
Can I get back by candle-light?
    Yes, and back again, sor.’

And then the refrain again, and then the dirge-like third verse:

> ‘All round my hat, I wear a green willow,
> All round my hat for a twelvemonth and a day,
> And if any one should ask me the reason of my sorrow,
> I would tell them that my true love’s gone far, far away.’

And for the third time the refrain.

Well! it just happened to please them. They clapped and clapped and swarmed about the platform, making much of me and crying for an encore. So I sang it again, and they made more fuss after the second hearing than after the first. *Innig, gemüthvoll, reizend, frisch.* They did say nice things, and no mistake about it. I felt frightfully bucked up.

‘But why?’ I said to the Graf. ‘There is nothing in it.’

‘There is you in it,’ he told me. ‘When will you sing to us at Hohenroda?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said; ‘I see difficulties.’

‘Why should there be difficulties?’

‘I’m not here on my own.’

He frowned as if he did not, or would not, understand. The performance was over. The host and hostess were both fluttering near their most distinguished guest as if they wished to attract his notice: and at last the hostess, a stout, very Jewish-looking woman in gold brocade and diamonds, sidled up to him and said:

‘Dear Graf! Supper is served in the dining-room. Will you——’

He looked at her, turned to me, and offered me his arm.

‘You shall not run away from me to-night,’ he said.

‘But I believe you were meant to take in your hostess,’ I pointed out.

‘She didn’t say so.’

‘You gave her no chance. I’m sure you were not meant to take me.’

He made no answer, but marched into the supper-room with me on his arm and went straight to a little table set for two. It was in a corner and we had a good view of the company from it, and especially of Emma, who sat beside Oscar Strauss, but paid more attention to us than to him.

‘How unpleasantly that girl always stares,’ said my cavalier, and he moved his chair a little so that he faced me and had his shoulder turned to Emma. I saw that she was watching him and noticed what he did. At any rate she changed colour, and shot a glance my way that ought to have put me on my guard.

X

It was an excellent supper, but not in the least like a ball supper at home. It consisted of four or five courses, and all of them except the ice-pudding at the end were hot. Rhine salmon came after the meat and mountains of giant asparagus after the salmon. The Germans did enjoy it. Every one sat down in groups at little tables, and there were long speeches about the bride and bridegroom and their families. At the end of each speech every one got up and clinked glasses with every one else, and perambulated the room so as to miss nobody. I didn't understand the etiquette of the occasion, but I thought the glass clinking and the walking about were festive, so I mixed with the crowd and held up my glass to any one whose looks I liked, old or young, male or female. I wondered why some of them looked amused. But they all clinked. The only person who stayed in his place most of the time was Graf Wolfram. He went once to the central table where the bride and bridegroom sat, and after that he remained in our corner and looked on.

'What a heavenly party this is!' I said when I got back after unusually loud huzzas and prolonged clinks; 'I am enjoying it.'

'So am I,' he said, and filled my glass with champagne again.

'You don't show it. Why don't you run about and clink?'

'I know no one here except von Gösen,' he said stiffly; 'I have offered him my good wishes.'

I suppose I turned as red as my dress. I felt like it.

'Do you mean to say that you can only clink glasses with some one you know?' I cried.

'There is no set rule——' he began.

'Why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me make a fool of myself?'

'I liked watching you.'

I didn't speak for at least two minutes, and next time a health was drunk I sat still.

'To-morrow I shall bring you an invitation from my mother,' he said. 'At least I will bring it if you will promise to come.'

'I should love to come,' I said.

He looked as pleased as Punch.

‘But it may be impossible,’ I added.

‘Why should it be impossible? I would fetch you in my car and bring you back the same day; unless you would come for one of your English week-ends. That I should like better still.’

We *were* getting on. But I saw breakers ahead that he ignored.

‘Can I get back by candle-light?
Yes, and back again, sor,’

I sang to him under my breath, and he lifted his glass and clinked to me.

‘Will you come for a week-end?’ he said. ‘I will take you long walks in the forest or, if you like, we will ride together. Can you ride?’

‘Yes, I can,’ I said. ‘Is Hohenroda an old castle or a new one?’

‘Most of it is old: some of it is twelfth century: some not so old. You must come soon.’

‘Why?’

‘I am naturally impatient. I want to see you there.’

‘Of course,’ I mused more to myself than to him, ‘it could easily be managed if I could bring some Gutheims. Even one Gutheim might suffice, for instance Emma.’

‘Is Emma the young lady whose eyes are always fixed on us, and whose mouth is not as completely shut as a mouth should be?’

I nodded; and in order to placate him I said:

‘She is rather romantic, you know, and she admires you.’

‘I do not wish to be admired by that young lady,’ he said.

‘They are going to dance now,’ I told him, for every one was streaming out of the room, and I thought it was time to move. ‘I hope I shall get some partners. I don’t feel like a wallflower to-night.’

‘You don’t look like one.’

‘It’s the music and the supper and the champagne and the glass clinking,’ I said; ‘they get into one’s head.’

I believe that under his breath he said, ‘You do,’ but I can’t be quite sure. The next moment we followed every one else into the music-room, which had been cleared for dancing; and he asked me to dance.

‘How little one can guess at what is coming,’ I observed, when we stopped for a moment. ‘I thought I had seen the first and last of you the other day in the train.’

‘You set me down for a bear.’

‘I did. You were a bear.’

‘Well, bears dance,’ said he, ‘they are known for it,’ and we went round again. He danced extremely well.

There is a custom at German dances that enables a man to invite you away for an extra tour: which means that you have a turn with him, and then come back to your partner. Of course this custom may suit you or annoy you according to circumstances. I was annoyed when Herr Oscar Strauss came up and asked me to dance with him, but although Graf Wolfram looked stiff and displeased he relinquished my arm at once, and I had to acquiesce.

‘You dance very lightly,’ said Herr Strauss in a condescending tone. ‘Englishwomen are usually heavy.’

‘Have you danced with many?’ I asked.

‘You are the first: but one hears things.’

‘Then listen to me, Herr Strauss. I’ve only been two days in Germany, but I’ve found out that when it comes to talking of England you all have the ears of King Midas. I’m going back now to my partner.’

He stared and seemed affronted, but I paid no further attention to him. On the way home I thought the female Gutheims were rather stuffy, but Emma said her head ached, and Eugenie said she was too tired to talk.

At the wedding next day Graf Wolfram singled me out again, but he was not allowed to sit next to me at the interminable *Hochzeitsmahl*. The places were carefully arranged, and he had to sit between two important elderly females who talked to him with assiduity, although he looked to me as if he was in a bearish mood and hardly answered them. The moment we all rose from the table he came to my side, and asked me again if I would pay his mother a visit at Hohenroda. He said that this time he brought me a definite invitation for any day I chose to fix next week.

‘I must ask Frau Gutheim,’ I said; ‘I am her guest.’

‘Ask her now, then. There she is. I will come with you.’

‘You think I am afraid?’

‘I see you are.’

We went straight up to Frau Gutheim: I knowing that I was going to make trouble for myself, and he quite incapable of understanding that any one called Gutheim could matter to a Hohenroda or to a person a Hohenroda chose to honour.

‘The Gräfin von Hohenroda asks me to pay her a visit one day next week——’ I began, but it was difficult to go on because Frau Gutheim turned her back on me, and how can one make arrangements with a back? However I’m quick in my movements and she is not, so I managed to corner her and say more or less to her face that I thought Tuesday would be a good day.

‘*Meinetwegen*,’ said Frau Gutheim, ‘you must please yourself.’

‘There! You see!’ I said, as she tramped from us in dudgeon. ‘They don’t like it. If you had asked them too——’

‘My mother doesn’t receive Jews,’ he said.

The Germans are queer. In some ways they take one back hundreds of years, and in others they are ahead of the world. At that very moment, when Graf Wolfram talked of Jews as if he lived in the reign of King John, other Germans were making the big guns at Essen that smashed up Liége and Namur.

XI

I nearly packed my trunks and went home the day after the wedding, but I tried to make excuses for Frau Gutheim and Emma and tell myself that they were overtired, and therefore not in their right minds. It was an unpleasant experience. Frau Gutheim went about with a pursed-up mouth and a heated face, while Emma sulked over her embroidery, and hardly answered when I spoke to her. I thought they had taken a violent dislike to me, and I wished myself back in London. But every day I hoped that a good night's sleep would restore them to reason. I did not want a violent break with them if I could help it, and at any rate I wanted to stay on till I had been to Hohenroda. Neither of them had spoken of this forthcoming visit to me, but I knew it rankled in their minds by the way they answered Jenny Cassell when she came in one afternoon and asked us to coffee on the following Tuesday. They said they would come with pleasure, but that I must speak for myself, as I made my own engagements without regard to them. Of course this way of putting it was most unfair, and gave Jenny a wrong impression, but I could only say that next Tuesday I should probably be going to Hohenroda. Jenny first looked as if she thought I was making game of her, and then she seemed to take the Gutheim point of view, and find something unfriendly in my accepting such an invitation. I had not meant it to be, but on looking back now I can see that it was rather like visiting at Windsor from a house that Windsor would not receive; and it was complicated by the fact that Graf Wolfram had actually been the guest of the Gutheims and their relations on two successive days. I think, perhaps, that he ought to have asked them, or that I ought to have refused to go unless he did; but at the time I did not see the matter in this light. I thought he knew his own business, and that they were two tiresome, silly women: and I still think they behaved abominably in the end.

Herr Gutheim was as amiable as ever, but that did not help much, because he was only present at meals, and because he talked to me his wife soon began to imply that I set my cap at him. One evening when he brought me a box of chocolates she looked daggers at us, and dashed down some silver spoons she had been counting, as if she wished she could throw them at our heads. I opened the chocolates and offered them to her and to Emma, but they both refused in a glacial manner and flounced out of the room.

'My poor wife is still in an excited state,' said Herr Gutheim, 'her nerves are highly sensitive, and she feels Eugenie's departure. In a few days she will be normal again.'

I hoped so: otherwise I began to think that I should have to stampede and give up the visit to Hohenroda. However I was still there on Sunday when I knew that Herr Oscar Strauss was expected to supper, and when we were to go to an open-air concert in the *Stadtpark* in the afternoon. The day was fine and warm. The restaurant near the band-stand was crowded, and I was well amused in spite of the two women, who were still in a bad humour.

‘Next Sunday we will go to the Zoological Gardens,’ said Herr Gutheim to me. ‘They have good concerts there, and one can look at the beasts as well as at the people.’

Frau Gutheim and Emma exchanged glances, and their glances said: ‘Next Sunday! Does she mean to stay for ever, then?’

‘I expect to hear from Dad to-morrow,’ I answered, ‘he may want me back any day.’

They looked sourly at their coffee cups and were silent.

‘But you have promised to stay a month,’ said Herr Gutheim with the guilelessness of his sex. ‘You would not have taken the long, expensive journey from England unless you meant to stay at least a month. I remember that was the time fixed, because my wife said there would be ample time for your visit before her cure at Marienbad even if you wished to extend it a little.’

‘We shall see,’ I said, watching the faces of the women, and feeling sorry for the extent to which Herr would get it when he arrived home. ‘Dad may want me.’

‘If your father wants you it is only right that you should go,’ said Frau Gutheim; ‘you came for Eugenie’s wedding and that happy event is now over. My husband is not acquainted with English customs. Our cousins in Manchester inform me that a week-end is the usual limit of a visit.’

‘But that was when you wanted them to have Emma for three months,’ put in Herr Gutheim. ‘On two occasions Eugenie went to them in the holidays, and it was only when they were prevented by measles——’

‘Measles!’ snorted Frau Gutheim, nearly as red in the face as if she was suffering from the disease in question; ‘the English, I say, are incapable of hospitality because they are all egotists. Why, then, should they expect to receive it?’

It really was uncomfortable, you see. I hate repeating and describing such behaviour, but unless I did so you would not understand what happened. At supper, with Herr Strauss there as guest, things got worse and worse. The two women were determined to pick up a quarrel, and whether I spoke or whether I was silent they found some cause of offence. I had never encountered anything like it before. When the talk turned on music they became furious because, as it happens, I have heard a great deal, and was able to interest Herr Strauss. We discussed the Russians and the most modern Frenchmen, and they were stupid enough to maintain that no music composed or even performed out of Germany could be music at all. When I spoke of Ravel, Emma said Ravel was *nix*, and if I pretended to know good music from bad, why had I sung that childish stuff the other night? Of course I kept my temper and said that after supper I would sing a German song if she liked, but she only shrugged her shoulders, and said that it would be painful to hear her native tongue pronounced with a foreign accent. That reminded me of a German singer I had once heard, who sang:

‘Dooglas, Dooglas, dender oond drue,’

but they all got frightfully angry when I told them about him, and said that German singers pronounced English perfectly, and that at any rate they could not hear any difference between my pronunciation of the words and his.

When supper was over we went into the living-room, and Emma, saying we would now have some music, sat down and played a pot-pourri from *Lohengrin*. I detest pot-pourris and she played badly, so I was glad when it came to an end. So was Herr Strauss quite obviously, and he asked me to sing. So I sang and he applauded, and Frau Gutheim handed me a cup of coffee as if she had been Queen Eleanor and I had been Fair Rosamond. I wished I knew how to pacify her, but I only seemed to make matters worse when I asked Emma to sing a duet with Herr Strauss. She said that she did not feel in a sufficiently harmonious mood, so Herr Strauss sat down to the piano by himself, and what do you think that silly little man did? He sang ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*’ from beginning to end with his eyes fixed on my face; for he sang from memory. It was all I could do not to laugh till I found it was not going to be a laughing matter. When he began Emma and her mother gave violent starts, rather too violent to be natural, as he went on Emma showed signs of increasing agitation, and when he started the third verse she brought him to a full stop by breaking into hysterical sobs and tearing out of the room.

XII

‘Is anything the matter with Fräulein Emma?’ asked Herr Strauss getting up from the piano and looking rather perturbed.

Frau Gutheim made no reply, but got up and followed her daughter out of the room. When she came back her manner was constrained and unfriendly.

‘Emma begs to be excused,’ she said, ‘she is suffering and will go to bed.’

Herr Strauss murmured something regretful and polite, and asked if music would disturb her, as he would now like to try a duet with me. Frau Gutheim said that she was very sorry, but she feared that Emma’s head was in a state when every sound was painful. Perhaps to-morrow then, said Herr Strauss. It must depend entirely upon Emma, said Frau Gutheim. The doctor would be consulted, and if he ordered a cure of any kind the cure would be undertaken at any cost to Emma’s parents in money and discomfort: but in that case—— Frau Gutheim did not continue, but she looked darkly at me. Herr Strauss, half-amused, half-mortified, and plainly incredulous, took his departure. I felt very uncomfortable. I made up my mind that the next letter from Dad should contain my immediate recall to England, and hoped it would arrive to-morrow morning, but in the innocence of my heart I thought that I must wait for some excuse to end my visit in such an abrupt way. The two women had behaved atrociously, but I wanted to preserve appearances, and took for granted they would want to also. I did not allow for the violence of their tempers and the boorishness of their manners when annoyed. Herr Strauss had hardly closed the door after him when Emma dashed into the room again, and standing in front of her father, said:

‘I like not serpents in my bosom.’

Poor Herr Gutheim looked ruefully at his daughter’s clouded, tear-stained face, and thought to mend matters by calling her his sweet child, and advising her to take a *Brausepulver* and rest her strained nerves. He meant well, but he only made Emma worse. What she wanted was a firm hand and a straight tongue just then.

‘Either she goes or I do,’ she burst forth.

‘Emma, control yourself,’ adjured her mother. ‘Be not so excited. You will suffer for it to-morrow.’

‘I will not sleep under the same roof with her. I cannot trust myself. I might commit an action that would blight my young life. Suppose that in a moment of ungovernable temptation I seized a knife——’

Frau Gutheim threw up her hands in horror, but the horror was mixed with admiration. Herr Gutheim shook his head gloomily.

‘Such things happen every day,’ continued Emma. ‘Why should they not happen to us? Am I not flesh and blood then? One of us spends the night in a hotel. That is my last word.’

‘Are you talking about me?’ I asked, for the girl was in such a crazy state that I could hardly believe my eyes and ears. Her whole body shook with fury, and her eyes looked half their natural size, and wild.

‘Both have you stolen,’ she shrieked. ‘Both. Nothing is left for me except to die.’

‘What is it all about?’ inquired Herr Gutheim.

‘You may well ask,’ said I, and probably I looked disdainful.

I know nothing of medicine, so I cannot tell you whether the exhibition that followed was genuine hysterics or put on. It was most unpleasant anyhow, and I should think wearing to the performer. Emma behaved exactly as a child of five does when it is in a tantrum and knows its parents are too doating to spank it. She screamed, she laughed, she sobbed, she lay on a sofa and kicked: and all the while she railed against me, and said that I had broken her heart and ruined her prospects. Her father sighed and said it was very unnerving. I could tell by the way he took it that Emma had led him this kind of dance before. Frau Gutheim hung over the little wretch with *Brausepulver* and eau-de-Cologne, imploring her to be calm, and to reflect on the obligations of hospitality from the exalted German point of view. A young girl of my age could not be asked to turn out at a moment’s notice and Emma should certainly not sleep by herself at a hotel.

‘I will, I will!’ she said.

‘Only over my body,’ said Frau Gutheim.

‘I don’t mind sleeping at a hotel,’ I said, ‘I’ll go to the Rheinischer Hof to-night and to England to-morrow.’

A piercing scream from Emma startled us all and she sat up as if she had been jerked by strings.

‘Shameless!’ she began, and then her fury actually seemed to choke her.

Herr Gutheim did what was in him. He slapped his head and said that never, never would he survive the disgrace of seeing a young girl who was a foreigner and his guest leave his house in such a way. He implored his wife to bring Emma to reason, and he even proposed to call Eugenie back by telegram to deal with the crisis. Also, he asked again what it was all about.

‘Dear Herr Gutheim, I cannot stay here,’ I began.

‘Papa too!’ screeched Emma and fell flat again. ‘You hear, Mutti? She calls him dear Herr Gutheim.’

An hour later I was at the door of the Rheinischer Hof, asking if I could have a room for the night. Herr Gutheim had wished to accompany me, but I would not let him. I thought he was needed at home; for his wife seemed to be nearly as excited and unhinged as his daughter. She didn’t kick, but she wept and wrung her hands.

‘I am terribly upset,’ she wailed, ‘I am afraid that Emma will have a serious illness. I will let you know every other day how she goes on.’

‘That is quite unnecessary,’ I said, and went my ways.

But as I stood in the vestibule of the hotel I suddenly understood why Emma had been so flustered by the prospect of my coming to the Rheinischer Hof, for Graf Wolfram came up to me with an air of surprise.

‘*Gnädiges Fräulein*,’ he said, ‘what can you be doing here by yourself?’

‘I have left the Neue Strasse,’ I answered, and turning to the hall porter who came forward, I told him that I wanted a room for the night and to find out about my journey to England next day.

‘But what has happened?’ asked Graf Wolfram visibly concerned, ‘are the Gutheims ill or called away?’

‘Is there such a thing as a lounge or a room where we can talk?’ I said, for I could not stand there with him. At least I did not feel inclined to. The hotel servants could hear what we said and looked more interested in us than I liked. He said there was a *salon* and showed me the door, so I went in there and he followed me. I thought that I must give him some explanation of my sudden departure because I should not now be able to go to Hohenroda.

‘It is not fitting that a young lady of your age should come by herself to a hotel,’ he said, when he had shut the door. ‘What does it mean?’ I saw that he was very angry, and I cast about for what I could say without making him still more angry with the people whose roof I had just left under such peculiar circumstances.

‘It doesn’t matter at all, you know,’ I began. ‘I shall be at home again by Tuesday morning and Dad will be delighted to have me back.’

‘But I am not delighted to see you go,’ he said. ‘Have you forgotten that you were to spend Tuesday at Hohenroda?’

‘If I were to stay here over Tuesday,’ I said reflectively, wondering whether I ought, and what Dad would say if I did: but I was interrupted before I got any further.

‘That is quite out of the question,’ said Graf Wolfram speaking with authority. ‘You must go home at once. You have no idea of the scandal there would be in a town like Reichenstadt if you stayed on in such a way.’

‘I don’t know that what Reichenstadt says of me is worth considering,’ I argued. ‘I shall probably never see the place again.’

There was a moment of tense silence, and then I had the surprise of my life.

‘The moment I saw you I loved you,’ said Graf Wolfram. ‘I hope you will come back here as my wife.’

We seemed to measure glances as men measure swords before I answered him. His eyes had told me a good deal lately, but I had not expected this direct avowal.

‘Is it Yes?’ he asked.

‘I must think it over,’ I said.

‘I’ll come to England for my answer . . . if there is a chance.’

‘I didn’t like you at all in the train.’

‘But you like me now.’

I did, more and more every time we met: partly because he liked me so much. He was an ardent, irresistible lover, and in spite of his pride an appealing one. He was very certain of himself with the rest of the world but not quite so certain with me; and there was a quality of straightness in him that I valued above anything. We understood each other from the first in ways that mattered, although we had different points of view and never agreed on some subjects. But to come to him from people like the Gutheims was to come from a swamp to a hill-top. He breathed in clean air.

‘You have not told me yet why you left the Neue Strasse,’ he said when we had talked a little longer and he had amused me by saying that when people loved each other time was not a factor that counted as it could not be measured in an ordinary way.

‘That is true,’ I said, thinking of Emma Gutheim. ‘I know of a girl who fell in love with a man while he handed her an umbrella she had dropped.’

‘I was not talking of silly geese,’ he said, ‘I was talking of ourselves. But tell me, Karen . . . why did you leave the Gutheims so suddenly?’

‘Emma took a dislike to me and refused to sleep under the same roof.’

‘Emma! *So ein Judenmädel!* Took a dislike to you! On what grounds?’

‘Well . . . it seems an inadequate reason,’ I said. ‘But Herr Strauss sang “*Du bist wie eine Blume*,” and looked at me instead of at her.’

‘How dare he look at you!’

‘It required no daring. He was at the piano and I was nearly opposite.’

‘You ought never to have visited these people,’ he exclaimed, and then added: ‘But if you had not done so, we should not have met.’

‘I wonder what will come of it,’ said I.

XIII

I wired to Dad that I was on my way back and he met me at Charing Cross. I had made up my mind on the journey that I would not tell him that I wanted to marry a German till we were seated quietly at home together and could talk undisturbed. I feared it might be rather a blow to him because his business never took him to Germany, and he probably would not like the idea of my spending the rest of my life so far away from him and amongst foreigners. But directly we were in our car he asked me why I had come home in such a hurry.

‘I didn’t get on with the Gutheims,’ I said. ‘We had a flare-up.’

‘What about?’

‘Oh! nothing much,’ I said, for it was impossible to convince a hard, weather-beaten man like Dad that such people as Frau Gutheim and Emma existed. He’d have done like the countryman who stared at a giraffe and said: ‘There ain’t no such animal.’

‘I wrote to you yesterday and told you to stay on in Germany for six months,’ he said. ‘I’ve let the flat.’

‘What for?’

‘I have to go to America and I can’t take you with me. I shall be running about all over the place.’

‘That *is* awkward,’ I exclaimed.

‘It is rather,’ he conceded. ‘You’ll have to stay with Mrs. Maitland, I suppose. I couldn’t leave you alone in the flat and I had a good offer for it at once, so I took it.’

This was all much what had happened before, so I was not surprised at it. But when my mother was alive and Dad made these sudden arrangements she had been able to temper them and adapt them to our needs.

‘Nothing will induce me to stay with Mrs. Maitland,’ I said, for though I was named after my godmother, I did not know much of her, and what I knew I disliked. She was one of those home-baked Marthas who hunt dust as if it was sin and make every one in the house tidy but miserable. I knew she thought that I had been terribly spoiled and was in need of reform.

‘She would want to improve me,’ I said.

‘But what will you do?’ said Dad beginning to look a little worried. I knew that in his heart he sympathised with me about Mrs. Maitland, because once he had stayed in her house and she had stood at the front door and told him to wipe his boots and pick up three matches with which he had lighted his pipe.

‘I think I’ll get married,’ I said in a small voice, for I did not know how Dad would take it.

‘You’ve not brought back a lieutenant!’ he cried in a startled way.

‘A Rittmeister!’ I said. ‘A Rittmeister in the Reichenstadt Dragoons. Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda.’

‘Shucks!’ said Dad. He had been to America before and probably used some of their expressions in a way no real American would recognise. But they seemed to come in handy.

At first he didn’t like the idea at all, and I firmly believe that if the American journey had not been in the offing and the flat let, he would have opposed us tooth and nail. But I wired the facts of the case to Wolfram, and by Sunday evening he was in London, having supper with Dad and me at the Carlton. He certainly showed himself an eager lover, and I was surprised to see how handsome he looked in civil clothes. Dad took to him directly, and though he still kept up some show of disliking a foreign marriage for me, he owned that my having arranged one for myself simplified the situation. I don’t think he ever tried to make any picture for himself of my future life and position. He had a talk to Wolfram next day about business matters, told me that everything had been amicably settled, and then left us to ourselves.

‘It will not be easy, but I shall go to our Embassy this morning and try to arrange it,’ Wolfram said when we had said a great deal that we had to say to each other and were ready to talk of mundane things.

‘What won’t be easy?’ I asked.

‘To get married before your father sails: but I shall see what can be done.’

‘We might very well wait till he comes back,’ I said. ‘It would give me more time to get my clothes.’

I must repeat that even when I called Wolfram the bearish man I liked his eyes. I had soon discovered that they altered the whole character of his face, which, seen in profile, is hard and proud. He tells me now that he fell in love with me the very first time he looked at me, and that in the beginning it was just a little feeling of attraction, but that it grew like a fire you light in a forest on a dry day. He found he could not put it out although it was really inconvenient because of his objection to mixed marriages. He wanted me so much that he could not let me go, but he still had qualms when he thought of me with my free ways and ideas at Hohenroda. However, he would not hear of waiting for me till Dad came back unless his Embassy positively refused to let him get married within a fortnight.

‘I might lose you altogether,’ he said. ‘You might change your mind.’

‘If I did that it would be better to lose me,’ I pointed out: but he assured me that when once a woman was married she would cleave to her husband unless she was the kind of woman who temperamentally did not cleave: in plain language, a coquette.

‘You are not a coquette,’ he said. ‘When you got into the train you were more interested in Max than in me: and when my friends looked into our carriage you took no notice of them. That pleased me.’

‘Why should I have taken any notice of them?’ I asked. ‘They were two plain little men.’

Wolfram nearly looked shocked, but in those days everything I said and did was right, and even when my sentiments were ‘free’ he put it down to my Englishness and forgave me. In a roundabout way though I gathered that a well-brought-up German girl would never allude to two lords of creation who were also in uniform as ‘plain little men.’ All those ideas of his are easy to explain and make fun of; but it is not at all easy to convey his charm to you or explain why I was ready to marry him. I can only tell you that his whole nature seemed to me like his looks. At first you saw what was hard and arrogant, but when you probed a little deeper you found depths of kindness and affection. I never quite knew which side of him was going to govern his behaviour, and I foresaw that he would not be easy to live with; but I believed in his love for me and hoped it would be enough. In fact, we married with our eyes open, both knowing that there might be breakers ahead, for he had his doubts about my getting on with his family and knuckling down to the traditions of Hohenroda.

‘But Hohenroda is your father’s house,’ I said.

‘Yes.’

‘Then we shall not live there.’

‘I thought we would go there at first. There is plenty of room.’

‘I shall want a home of my own.’

‘You shall have one later: but our little Jagdschloss is too far from the barracks and is inconvenient. Besides, you are not used to German housekeeping.’

‘I’m an excellent housekeeper.’

‘I am glad to hear it, but I never see you employed as my mother is, in affairs of the house.’

‘What sort of affairs?’

‘I cannot tell you exactly; but she is busy from morning till night and has little leisure for lighter employments such as reading and music.’

‘Is she short of servants then?’

‘Not at all: but she would not trust them with the things she performs with her own hands. Besides, even the supervision of a house like Hohenroda occupies much time and requires great patience and knowledge.’

‘But we might have a little house,’ I suggested. ‘I should like to go to Hohenroda for a time until we find a place of our own. I suppose we could find something a few miles from Reichenstadt, an oldish house, if possible, with a good garden. We’ll have Max with us and I’ll feed him up and see that he isn’t overworked.’

Wolfram looked stirred to the depths and more dissentient than I had ever seen him.

‘Max is at the Gymnasium every day,’ he said. ‘When he comes home he has several hours of preparation with his tutor. A boy must work.’

‘But not overwork.’

‘There can be no such thing as overwork for a boy of his age,’ he explained; and I had to leave it at that. But you must understand that when I married Wolfram I knew it would be pull devil, pull baker. We had quite different views of life, and time alone could show which prevailed.

XIV

I did love him though; and as I still knew very little of Germany I made light of the difficulties before me. I used to have an idea that people were much the same everywhere and that a really broad-minded citizen of the world could accommodate himself or herself to the habits and opinions of any other civilised nation. You know the kind of windy stuff that was spreading like an epidemic amongst the young before the war. I'm afraid that I went through a phase of exalting other countries at the expense of my own and feeling superior and generous when I did so. I was ready to think that the Germans did everything well and that we did everything badly, but even on the way out, as I talked to Max, I had discovered that my heart-strings were securely tied to my own country, and felt it tugging at them quite vehemently sometimes. Yet I married Wolfram, although I agreed with Dad and with him when they said that, as a rule, international marriages were a mistake.

'Ours will be the exception that proves the rule,' he assured me. 'You will become a good German.'

'Would you give up your country?' I asked, although I knew it was like putting a match to fireworks. He exploded at once.

'I! I am a man, a Hohenroda,' he exclaimed. 'If any one else asked me such a question I should consider it an insult.'

'You don't know English proverbs, do you? We say that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'

'It is not a proverb that carries one far,' he said after prolonged meditation. 'Nature has ordained otherwise.'

We were spending our honeymoon in Paris and enjoying ourselves immensely. Our wedding had not been all that Wolfram wished because none of his family and friends had come over for it and we, on our side, had not produced a great many people. The whole thing was planned and executed in a hurry because of Dad's American journey, so that the moment Wolfram got the necessary papers and permissions we just got married without any *Polterabend*, or home-made poems or banquets or bridesmaids or speeches. I wore a filmy white dress that was threaded with silver and I felt happy and excited about Wolfram, but down in the mouth about leaving Dad and England. It certainly was unlucky that Wolfram should be a German and unable to live in my country, but I was not without a hidden hope of persuading him some day to have a home here and divide our time between his land and mine. It seemed a fairer plan than wanting me to forsake every one and everything for his sake, although, of course, I knew that women are expected to do this when they marry. But a great many things are expected of women that they would rather not do if they could help it. However, when I expounded these sentiments to Wolfram he looked horrified and hoped I should never say anything so upsetting at Hohenroda because he was most anxious that every one there should have the highest opinion of me.

‘But I have married you and not every one at Hohenroda,’ I pointed out. ‘As long as we are happy together what does any one else matter?’

He evidently could not take that point of view, and as the time came near for us to go back to Germany, I often found him looking at me anxiously.

‘I should never forgive myself if you were unhappy,’ he said one day. ‘I fear that my first wife was not always happy, but then——’

‘What then, Wolfram?’

‘It was different. I married for family reasons. My father insisted, and I was a boy of twenty . . . it was a wrong to us both.’

‘Did your father and mother approve of your second marriage?’ I asked, for he had never told me, and I wondered why no one came to the wedding.

‘They did not,’ he said after a pause. ‘You may as well know it, and then you can apply yourself to winning their affection.’

‘H—m,’ I said. ‘Why did they disapprove?’

‘In the first place because you are English.’

‘What have they got against the English?’

‘I can’t tell you that in two words. The English are not liked in Germany.’

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that they were imitated, but I refrained, and I said I understood his firstly and now wanted his secondly.

‘You are “*bürgerlich*,” he said. ‘You are not *von Adel*, but they know that in England there is no strict dividing line as there is with us. It makes a difference.’

‘Does it?’

‘Of course it does. In England you can hardly say who belongs to the aristocracy and who does not.’

‘Wilkins knows exactly,’ I told him. ‘Before she came to mother she lived with a duchess. It has imparted an exclusive flavour to her views and conversation that has not worn itself out yet.’

‘I have told my mother that you are bringing your English maid,’ said Wolfram. ‘She mentions it in the letter I had this morning and asks if she will require a girl to wait on her?’

‘Why should she?’

‘The idea in Germany is that English servants do no work. I shall answer that those matters can be settled after our arrival. I am sure that you will soon adopt our ways and become a good German.’

I was so much in love with my husband that I was ready to do most things for his sake, and in theory, when you have given a man yourself, you may as well give him your patriotism too. But in practice you find that you cannot. Deep down beneath the new affection lived the old bias and the old ideas that had roots in heritage and hearsay as well as in experience. All my ancestors had been English. Every drop of my blood was English, and I knew that if I stayed in my husband’s country to the day of my death, I should die as I had lived, English to my heart’s core. But it was no use saying so. Wolfram would only have begun to argue, and in argument he always got the best of it because he was so well informed. He would have given me biological, psychological, historical, and legal reasons why a woman should always be of her husband’s country and faith, and why in cases where she is not born so she should change over to his side as quickly as possible: and I could neither have confuted his reasons nor have been affected by them, a state of mind that is disturbing to both parties. So I changed the subject and asked him to tell me as much as he could about our life at Hohenroda.

I had seen photographs of the castle and knew that it had quaint pointed turrets at various elevations, gabled roofs, dormer windows, and an imposing stone gateway. There seemed to be no park or garden near it, but only forest coming to within a stone’s-throw of its doors. But Wolfram said there were gardens on the side I could not see and that I could probably have a corner to myself if I wished and grow my own roses. He hoped that I should not find the life there dull.

‘I’ll tell you if I do,’ I said. ‘I should not like a dull life at all.’

‘One must make occupations.’

‘I can have a car of my own and go into Reichenstadt a good deal,’ I said.

‘When I said occupations I meant duties,’ he explained. ‘I should not like you to go in and out of Reichenstadt much without me.’

‘Why not?’

‘It would excite comment. A young married woman cannot be too careful.’

‘That does sound dull,’ I said.

XV

Wolfram's car met us at Reichenstadt and Max was on the platform with a bunch of roses that he presented to me when he had put his heels together and made the orthodox bow. I bent down and kissed him.

'Has Herr Putzer given you a holiday then?' said Wolfram.

The boy shook his head and looked at me.

'I saw the car starting and jumped in,' he said. 'It was a sudden idea.'

'How ripping!' I said.

'He will probably be punished when he gets back,' said Wolfram dryly.

'But you will say he is not to be punished.'

'I do not interfere between Putzer and Max. It is not fair to a teacher to do so.'

'It depends,' I began, and then I stopped; for by that time I was sitting next to Wolfram in the car so that I could only see his profile, and when that happened I usually got back to my first impression of something hard in his nature that his whole training had fostered and increased. Perhaps his being in uniform again assisted. At any rate he did not take my suggestion smilingly, but looked straight ahead in a way that showed me he was not pleased. So I turned to Max and asked him what he had been doing lately. In some ways I could see. He looked paler and thinner, and when the first excitement of meeting us was over he turned very quiet again as if he felt too tired to speak.

'When do the summer holidays begin?' I asked.

'They are over,' said the boy with a sigh.

'Over! In August!'

'I had holidays in May when I visited my grandparents in Köln.'

'In Germany boys have to work,' Wolfram said to me. 'They have difficult examinations to pass. Otherwise they cannot keep their place in the world. Max was so delicate as a child that he is seriously behindhand. It gives us cause for anxiety and we do not allow anything or any one to hinder his studies.'

I've had no sisters and brothers so I know little enough of children, but as I've eyes in my head I could see that Max was still delicate and that in all probability a breakdown of some kind would hinder his studies before long. However, I could not say so just then, so I sniffed at my roses, looked at the scenery, and made Max laugh by talking German to him.

‘You talk remarkably bad German,’ he said.

‘Max!’ exclaimed Wolfram, but the boy and I were giggling at each other and paid no attention to him.

‘I don’t think much of your English,’ I said. ‘I’ll give you lessons.’

He looked rather depressed at that and said it would be very agreeable to study English with me if his time-table would admit of it, but it was so full already that he would certainly have to sit up till midnight in order to catch up the time he had lost this afternoon. Then we both looked at the forest through which a winding uphill road was leading us, and I asked him if he knew his way about it and would take me for walks. I thought it looked a dull kind of forest, for the trees were all of the same sort and planted in straight rows so that you could fancy the forester telling them they must grow just as they were ordered or they would not keep their place in the world. There were no ragged edges and no undergrowth and no rocks or streams on the way to the castle, and Wolfram told me that this part of the property was of great value and the pride of his father’s heart, but that I should find wilder country a little way off where it was impossible to plant satisfactory forest because the rocks and caves and streams were unmanageable. I found the miles of silent, monotonous trees very stuffy and gloomy on this late, breathless afternoon, and I hoped that round the castle itself there would be more light and air. We came upon it quite suddenly, and I felt so thrilled that I turned to Wolfram and clutched his arm.

‘It’s lovely,’ I cried. ‘It’s a castle in a fairy tale. You are the prince and I am the princess and Max is our son. I hope there are no ogres.’

‘What are ogres?’ asked Max.

‘They eat children,’ I said, and then all my faculties were engaged in getting impressions of my new home and of the people assembled to receive us. We had driven in under the heavy stone gateway, and I saw that the castle itself was built on and into rock and commanded an unbroken view of the valley and the river Roda. But from the heights on which we stood until the eye reached the valley it rested on undulating forest. On the top of a high flight of ancient steps stood a group consisting of the Graf and Gräfin, Herr Putzer, the tutor, and various servants of the estate and of the household. I had a confused impression of glances, kisses, handshakes, courtesies, stammering German on my part and fluent, stilted English on the other. The Gräfin was large, fair, plain, and dignified. The Graf was like his photograph and his voice reminded me of Fafner's. He stared at my maid who was coming towards the steps, and said in a tone of surprise:

'Who is this, then?'

'It's only Wilkins, my maid,' I said. She had followed us in a taxi with my trunks and now stood at the bottom of the flight of steps clutching my dressing-case and looking forlorn.

The Graf turned on his heel and went inside. We followed him, but not until I had introduced Wilkins to a young woman Wolfram called the Mamsell. He said she would look after her, but as she evidently did not know a word of English I wondered what would happen. Wilkins was devoted to me and an excellent maid, but she had a tiresome side, and when I told her to say '*Ja*' if she meant 'Yes' had bridled in an irritating way and pointed out that she had been brought up to consider 'Yah' a vulgar expression only used by the lower classes.

'Of course you mustn't put your tongue out and say it in a defiant tone,' I explained. 'You just say "*Ja*" gently and firmly when you want a thing. When you don't want it you say "*Nein*." '

'Nine!' echoed Wilkins. 'What a peculiar language! Why not ten?'

I had brought Wilkins because she had been with us for years and wished to come. But I had my doubts of the experiment being a wise one or likely to last, for I knew she was hide-bound. I had told her she must understand that everything would be a little different, but she had only replied that she supposed German gentry were like gentry everywhere else and knew what was expected. She approved of Wolfram, especially when he got back into uniform, but she did not think much of his title. She had always understood, she said, that foreign counts were bogus or pinchbeck, and she hoped I should not find when I got to Germany that after all I was only a Mrs. Brown or Smith. You see Wilkins had been my mother's maid and known me as a child, so she took dreadful liberties.

The Gräfin had led us into a room that had a splendid view from its windows and was comfortably furnished in a solid, old-fashioned way. Max and his pasty-faced tutor had vanished, but the Graf sat down with us and lighted a cigar. Tea was brought in almost immediately with a variety of rich small cakes and savoury sandwiches that I thought delicious and ate hungrily. This evidently pleased my mother-in-law, and she said that if I would give her some recipes she would have some English cakes made for me so that I should feel at home. I said that I liked her cakes better than ours, and Wolfram smiled at me approvingly, and told me afterwards that I had been most tactful. For the first few minutes I got on extremely well.

But the Graf was not as kindly as his wife. He sat there and stared, smoked, cleared his throat, and looked as if something annoyed him. He was bigger than Wolfram and still more powerfully made, but his head was small for his body. He had a heavy jaw, beetling brows, and big ears that stuck out on either side of his cropped head. His neck was coarse and red, his big hands were hairy, and his eyes were aslant and watchful.

‘So you have been in Paris!’ he said, addressing us both.

‘Yes: we have been in Paris for a fortnight,’ said Wolfram.

‘I was there in 1871,’ said his father.

‘Have you never been since?’ I asked.

‘Never! What should I make in Paris?’

‘But in 1871 it must have looked unlike itself.’

‘It looked as we wished to see it . . . as we shall see it again.’

‘Oh! I hope not,’ I cried.

‘Why should you hope not? You are not French. What is Paris to you?’

Just then it was a crowded, vivid memory, gay, friendly, smiling. The thought of it at the mercy of such men as this made me feel creepy.

‘I will take you to your rooms now,’ said the Gräfin, who, no doubt, knew the signs of bad weather in her husband’s manner and wished to ward off a storm. We went through a large, stone-flagged hall together, where there were suits of armour and old wooden tables on trestles and then up a winding staircase to the first floor. I found that a whole row of rooms had been got ready for us and that we should each have a sitting-room of our own as well as bedrooms and dressing-rooms. There were some fine bits of old furniture about, but the rooms were so big that the general effect was bare and austere. There were no carpets but only small rugs here and there; and though the evening at this height was chilly, there were no fires. Wolfram had not come with us and Wilkins was nowhere to be seen, and for just a moment I felt chilled and strange. But I did not wish the Gräfin to see it, so I went up to a portrait in oils in the room she said she had arranged for her son and asked her who it was.

‘That is a portrait of my daughter-in-law, Helene,’ said the Gräfin. ‘My son’s first wife, the mother of Max. She was an Eschenau.’

Poor little thing! Unless the artist had maligned her she must have been extraordinarily plain and crushed looking.

‘Is it a good likeness?’ I asked.

‘An excellent likeness,’ said the Gräfin closing her lips tightly when she had spoken. ‘Her death was an irreparable calamity for our family.’

That was a difficult sentiment for me to comment on so I did not try, and while we were still standing silently in front of the portrait the little Mamsell burst into the room in a state of excitement that her respect for the Gräfin could not quite control.

XVI

‘She says *Nein*,’ cried the little Mamsell. ‘I offer her coffee and she says *Nein*: I lead her to her room and she stands in the doorway and says *Nein*: then she goes in and sits down: but so does she sit.’

And the little Mamsell plumped herself down on the edge of a chair with her hands folded in her lap, her chin at a defiant angle, and her mobile mouth trying to fix itself in imitation of Wilkins when she is most stiff-necked and disagreeable. I could not help laughing.

‘She feels strange,’ I said. ‘Where is her room? I will go and speak to her.’

‘Frau Gräfin understands German! I did not know!’

The little Mamsell looked disconcerted and apologetic.

‘Your maid’s room is in the servants’ quarters,’ said the Gräfin. ‘If you require her you will ring.’

‘Then some one will tell her that *Gnädige Frau* has rung, and she will immediately appear,’ said Mamsell.

I rang. We waited. Nothing happened.

‘She is probably saying *Nein*,’ murmured the little Mamsell.

I had sat down and was curious to see what the Gräfin would do. As she seemed unwilling to take me to Wilkins, I thought it was up to her to bring Wilkins to me.

‘It is very inconvenient,’ she murmured. ‘A foreigner makes much confusion in a house. The servants are busy at this hour and cannot spend their time as guides.’

‘I also am busy,’ said Mamsell. ‘Frau Gräfin knows how I am busy. Have I leave to go?’

My mother-in-law dismissed her with a nod and then turned to me. By this time we had all tried ringing the bell, but with no result.

‘I will take you to your maid’s room and we shall find out what has happened,’ she said, and I could see that she was annoyed.

It was a summer evening and quite light out of doors still, but not in the part of the castle through which I was now led. However it was all lighted by electric light, so I was able to follow the Gräfin through narrow corridors and down breakneck stone staircases without coming to grief. But I thought that if Wilkins was going to be established so far away from me she might as well be in England. At last we came to a row of little doors in a gloomy underground passage, and found Wilkins sitting in a room that had a bedstead and a hanging cupboard in it, but which on the whole looked like a prison cell in a very old prison. The floor was of stone, and the only window was a small one high up near the ceiling.

‘If you please, m’m, I should wish to return to England at once,’ said Wilkins, rising as we entered. ‘I could not sleep here.’

‘It’s a very interesting room, Wilkins,’ I said glancing round. ‘It is more than eight hundred years old.’

‘So I should think, m’m.’

‘It has a vaulted roof like the crypt of a church.’

Wilkins shuddered.

‘Bats!’ she said. ‘Bats and rats I feel sure. Besides, I have never lived where people had no washstands and were so put to it that they used tombstones. Poverty-stricken, I consider, and comfortless.’

I had not noticed the washstand, but now I saw that a jug and basin were placed on a slab of stone built against the wall and probably used at one time as a table.

‘Did no one tell you that your mistress had rung?’ said the Gräfin, looking at her with dislike, and speaking in a dictatorial manner.

Wilkins said gloomily that people had been in but she had not understood what they said. Some one had offered her coffee, but she was not accustomed to coffee at this hour in the evening, and if I pleased she would unpack my trunks and leave me comfortable before beginning her return journey. It would take her all night, but that did not matter since she would not be able to close an eye down here even if she went to bed, which, however, no one should persuade her to do.

Of course I knew Wilkins through and through. She no more meant to leave me than I meant to let her go. She only wished to inform me that she was not pleased with her room, that the staring, chattering foreign servants worried her, and that she badly wanted a cup of tea. I got her back to my quarters, and when Wolfram came up I explained the state of affairs, and asked him if he thought we might put her into one of the rooms close to our own. In fact there was one opening out of my dressing-room that would suit exactly.

‘Why not?’ said Wolfram. ‘We will explain to my mother that you wish to have her close to you.’

‘I must teach her German quickly,’ I said, ‘then she can talk to the little Mamsell.’

Wolfram said I need not give myself that trouble, because before Wilkins had learned a dozen words the Mamsell would be talking English to her. This would happen inevitably because all Germans were intelligent and industrious while all English people were ignorant and lazy.

‘I wonder whether I shall ever hear a pleasant thing said of my country in Germany,’ I said. ‘If you dislike us so much why do so many of you come to England?’

‘To make money.’

‘But you remain there, from generation to generation, and the second generation is as English in its sympathies as I am.’

‘Let us talk of something else,’ said Wolfram. ‘I want you to wear your flame-coloured dress to-night.’

I would not do that because it was quite unsuitable, but I put on a white, embroidered muslin with blue ribbons, and asked him if I didn’t look like an innocent woolly lamb in it to whom every one would wish to be kind, even though I said Baa in English instead of in German. We had a happy hour up there together, occasionally interrupted by Wilkins; and I am sure she was happy too, because she was able to have a real satisfying growl at every one and everything.

‘What is she so discontented about?’ said Wolfram, when she had been in to tell me that my valuable laces would certainly get mildewed if they were not protected from damp. ‘In Germany our servants have not so much to say. You spoil her, Karen. Let me speak to her next time she appears.’

I let him. I knew what would happen.

‘Vilkins!’ he began sternly, and she looked as pleased as possible and smiled. She always smiled when he addressed her as Vilkins. Wolfram spoke English easily and correctly, but he made v’s of our w’s and Wilkins took that as a joke. I am not going to attempt to reproduce his accent as a rule, because it would be tedious and misleading. I got so used to it that I hardly noticed it except in the case of a name or a misunderstanding.

‘Vilkins!’ he said, ‘vot are you crumbling about? Haf you never been in an old castle before?’

‘Not in one like this, sir,’ said Wilkins. ‘I lived with Lady Sawyer before I went to the duchess, but Lord Sawyer built his own castle and everything was most convenient. He was a gentleman who overlooked nothing from hot and cold in the servants’ rooms to model ruins in the park.’

‘Who is Lord Sawyer?’ said Wolfram turning to me.

‘Soap!’ I whispered, so Wolfram laughed, and I laughed, and Wolfram told Wilkins that she would soon get used to things, and that she was to sleep in the room next to one of mine.

‘I suppose I shall have to find out about these,’ she said, looking with great distaste at the majolica stove in one corner of my sitting-room.

‘There is nothing to find out,’ said Wolfram. ‘You put fuel in and they warm the air day and night as your English grates never do. You will discover what it is to have a room evenly and comfortably warm.’

‘What about hygiene, sir?’

‘Nothing about it. If you had good health in England you will have good health in Germany. Do we look as if we were sick? And when winter comes you must leave your door open at night, because we burn a great deal of turf, and old Michael comes round at three o’clock to make up the fires.’

‘He won’t make up my fire, sir. I should consider it indelicate.’

‘Don’t be silly. He comes in as quiet as a mouse and you won’t even wake.’

Wilkins gave a shriek and retired hastily to the neighbouring room.

‘Now you’ve done it,’ I said; ‘she will bar and bolt her doors.’

‘The woman is a fool,’ said Wolfram.

XVII

Supper was served in a small pleasant room that Wolfram told me they used when they were by themselves; and Max with his tutor Herr Putzer had it with us. Max was subdued and Herr Putzer was both obsequious and aggressive, a combination I particularly dislike. He was a badly-dressed, weedy young man with a thin, ragged beard, black eyes and spectacles. I dare say he did wash, but he looked as if he had never washed quite enough. His manners at table were far from good, and I was surprised that the Hohenrodas should like their boy to be under his care. But when I said so to Wolfram he laughed, and told me that Herr Putzer's testimonials had satisfied them as to his learning, and that they had not asked how he ate his soup and his cheese.

'He shovels things into his mouth with his knife. It is unpleasant to watch him.'

'But one need not watch him.'

'I was afraid he would cut himself.'

'You need not be afraid. He has eaten in that way since he was a child.'

'It is such a bad example for Max.'

Wolfram said that Max never took his eyes off me, and was more likely to imitate me than Herr Putzer. Every one in Germany admitted that the English had good manners at table, although in other places, such as theatres and railway carriages, their conduct left much to be desired.

We had an excellent supper, and when the sweets were served we had champagne in which our health was drunk politely, but without enthusiasm. Herr Putzer made a little speech to the honour and glory of the Hohenrodas, but the only allusion to me in it seemed to compliment me on my extraordinary luck in belonging to such an ancient and highly placed family. The perversity of human nature made me want to reply that there was luck on their side as well as on mine, but I could not trust my German to carry on an argument yet, or to express any sentiment more complicated than a desire for mustard with beef or salad with chicken. I did talk more or less, but every one knows how easy it is, comparatively, to make yourself plain about concrete objects in a foreign town, and how difficult it is to hold your own when it comes to a diversity of opinions. Wolfram's father nodded his head once or twice in approval of the speech when it referred in flowery language to the departed saint, who had been Wolfram's first wife and a true daughter of Germany, toiling night and day as a woman should for the welfare of the men she served; and the Gräfin looked as if she was being stroked the right way when she was described as the noble lady whose blessed duty it had been to mother two generations. It was a very rambling speech, and touched on many subjects I knew nothing about, such as Max's future career at a university and Herr Putzer's hopes of an extraordinary professorship. In those days I didn't even know that according to the German jargon it is easier to be an extraordinary professor than an ordinary one, and that the difference is actually that between a free lance and a fixed post. I thought he was a conceited little man and was reminding us of his extraordinary learning, but I am sure I did him no injustice in other ways.

The linen and glass and silver on the table were all lovely, but the only flowers were cornflowers, and they were stuffed into a vase in a tight bunch such as you see in our cottage windows. Wolfram's father, who was built like a giant, ate like a giant, and he took no trouble to entertain me although I sat next to him. He consumed mountains of food and a whole bottle of light wine, and when he did look at me or speak to me I thought he was not over-friendly. My ten days' visit to the Gutheims had not given me much insight into German opinion, and I had no idea of the extent to which hatred of England had become a cult with all classes. I knew that in England people watched the growth of the German navy with misgivings, but I had never heard Germans talked of with eyes darting gleams of fury and lips that were trembling with rage. When I told Wilkins that Germans did not eat rabbits, she had sniffed and said, 'Ho! I shouldn't have thought they were so particular,' and that about expressed the English view of Germany in the Wilkins class before the war. It was a country where the working man ate black bread and had to serve in a conscript army, and where women did field work and were harnessed with horses to a plough. In a more educated class it was a country of great progress and learning that wanted outlets for its surplus populations and unfortunately seemed to want them at our expense. That made things difficult, but we were too busy with our own affairs to trouble much about the grievances and possible designs of a foreign country. The Germans were a long way off and the militant suffragettes were becoming unmanageable. Sometimes we quoted Bismarck's saying about a war between England and Germany being like a war between a dog and a fish, but we very rarely thought of the matter at all. It was astonishing to find that in Germany people thought of it morning, noon, and night, and that a little nonentity like Herr Putzer was boiling over about us. At least I made the mistake of thinking him a nonentity. I know now that he came of the pastor and professor tribe who have done more than any other to foment the spirit the governing class required for its plans. He was a poison bag, poor wretch: always in a fizzle and always charged with hatred. It must be a distressing temperament, bad for both body and mind. We had some deep red cherries for dessert and he ate them, but he ate them as if he were demolishing an enemy, and I cannot believe that he really enjoyed either their colour or their taste. He had a way, I found, of asking Max questions at meals about what had been learned in school hours, and Max had just put his foot into it by saying that Lagos was in the Cameroons and belonged to Germany. However he thereby gave Herr Putzer a good jumping-off place for a jaw about the crimes of England and her policy of grab.

‘Why don’t you tell him he is talking rubbish?’ I said to Wolfram. ‘You know that we don’t spread plague in India in order to exterminate the natives.’

‘It is generally believed in Germany,’ said Wolfram.

‘Then you must be generally much on a level with Wilkins.’

Wolfram fired up at that, and told me that no other nation in the world was so highly educated and civilised as the German nation, and that a man like Herr Putzer was packed with knowledge to an extent that I, in my ignorance, could not gauge. History was his special subject, history and contemporary politics; and if he said we let loose plague and famine in India I might rest assured that he had chapter and verse to prove his charge. Could I disprove it?

I could not, of course. I could only say it was not true and that carried no conviction. They always argued like that; making the most infamous accusations against England, and then saying I could not prove them to be unfounded. I had heard one version, and they had heard or invented another, and how could I show that my faith was founded on fact and theirs on fiction? We had purposely spread measles amongst Boer children in our internment camps during the Boer War, for instance. Herr Putzer said that one of the most eminent professors in Berlin had told him so, and what the professor said was true. I felt inclined to tell him that what the professor said was not evidence, but you couldn’t make fun of Herr Putzer’s idols. He spluttered with rage if you did and launched into invective that I could hardly follow as yet. I used to think of Rudyard Kipling’s line about ‘the meanest breed of all’ whenever I saw the man. But I took his learning for granted, and I began to wonder whether the British Empire had really shaped all its trade and all its politics for more than a hundred years with a view to crushing Germany, because if we had greedily stolen the greater part of the world why should we want to crush?

‘It must be annoying,’ I conceded on that first evening when I first drank of that peculiar vintage made known to my country later in the Hymn of Hate and other similar explosions.

‘What do you imagine annoys us, Karen?’ said my husband.

‘To come too late. To see us in possession where you wish to possess yourselves. I wonder what can be done.’

‘Before long you will see what can be done,’ said Herr Putzer, and waggled his hand at Wolfram’s uniform. ‘Eight millions of those eagles will show you. Blood will be shed. We shall wade through blood to our rightful place in the world.’

I shivered. The sun had set, and we were lingering round the table in a twilight that had been beautiful but had turned chill and sad.

‘I’ll sing Max a Scotch song after dinner,’ I said. ‘It goes:

“I’ll tak’ the high road,
And you’ll tak’ the low road.” ’

‘Max still has work to do,’ said Herr Putzer. ‘He went out without permission this afternoon and must make up for lost time.’

‘Putzer is very thorough,’ said the Graf when the horrid little man had departed with the boy in tow. ‘He does not spare himself.’

‘He doesn’t seem to spare Max either,’ I said bluntly.

The Graf looked at me morosely but did not speak, and soon after left the room. His wife said something about coffee and followed him.

‘You give your opinion too freely,’ said Wolfram with a sigh. ‘I feared it would happen.’

‘It will happen over and over again as long as I see Max looking ill and miserable. Haven’t you eyes in your head, Wolfram?’

‘Certainly I have eyes, but as I have told you already Max is an Eschenau.’

Of course I wanted to say ‘Damn the Eschenaus,’ but I was too prudent. I can be prudent. I tried to convince Wolfram that Max was going to the dogs and failed utterly. He said I knew nothing about the education and the health of the young, and that I must always remember that Max was an Eschenau.

XVIII

At first I liked everything and every one at Hohenroda except Herr Putzer. That is an over-statement. I never liked the Graf, but I saw nothing of him except at table, when his persistent grumpy unfriendliness created a chill. He was busy all day with his land, and seemed to know a great deal about forestry and farming. If I could have taken an ardent interest in potatoes I might possibly have made friends with him, but unfortunately we had a difference of opinion about some of his new ones that he never forgave me. They were floury, and I said I did not like new potatoes that were floury. How was I to know that we had been eating a kind in which he took an especial pride and had called after himself, Hohenroda? I was asked if I liked them, or I should not have given an opinion. I don't hang my happiness on potatoes, and it annoyed me to find that in future when Hohenrodas were cooked for the family, a different kind was dished up for me. I had hurt the Graf's feelings forsooth, and he was not going to let me forget it.

His wife did her own housekeeping to an extent that an Englishwoman in her position does not do, and was busy most of the day in regions to which I was never invited. It was only as time went on that I discovered what my absence implied in German eyes: and how the whole household pitied poor Graf Wolfram, because he had brought home an English wife who would let his domestic affairs go to rack and ruin when his excellent mother was put under the earth.

'But our households don't go to rack and ruin,' I said one day when Herr Putzer tactfully shed a light on the general point of view. 'English homes are extremely comfortable.'

Wolfram was the only person present who had been in England and he agreed with me. His parents maintained a sceptical silence, and Herr Putzer began one of his arguments from a concrete instance in which he delighted.

'Have you ever bought a goose?' he said to me.

'Every Michaelmas,' I said. 'At Christmas we buy turkeys.'

'What you do at Christmas is beside the question. What happens to your goose, Gnädige Frau?'

'He is stuffed and eaten—with apple sauce.'

‘I ask you for the preliminary operations—not for the final one. What, for instance, do you do with the feathers?’

‘I suppose you’ve always lived in the country,’ I said. ‘In cities you don’t buy birds with feathers. They arrive ready for the cook.’

‘Just so. That is what I maintain. In England you buy a goose, you put it in the oven, and you eat it. I guessed as much. And you call yourselves housekeepers.’

I didn’t know what he was driving at, but the Gräfin looked pleased, and the others were smiling, and by degrees I was told of all the things Germans do with geese that we Londoners certainly do not do. I had heard of giblet pie but I had not yet tasted it. At Hohenroda a little later in the year we should have giblet stews slightly flavoured with garlic, and the breasts of geese smoked and hung for winter eating, and the livers served like *pâté de foie gras*, but whole and without truffles. I had to own that in the matter of geese I was a child compared with the Gräfin, but I assured him that nevertheless English homes were comfortable, clean and civilised.

‘How can a home be civilised when a nation is not?’ he asked. ‘How can a home be comfortable when the women in it are lazy and ignorant?’

I didn’t try to answer him. I was looking at Max who was sending his food away untasted, and evidently had one of his bad headaches.

‘What are you going to do this afternoon?’ I said to the boy, for it was a half holiday at the Gymnasium and he had come back to dinner.

‘Algebra and Latin,’ he answered. His voice sounded tired and dead, and his eyes met mine with a painful effort. I could see that it hurt him to look up.

‘That boy is ill,’ I said to Wolfram, when Herr Putzer had hurried Max off.

‘He has a headache,’ said the Gräfin placidly. ‘The young frequently have headaches. They outgrow them.’

‘He ought to be in bed,’ I said.

The Graf looked at me as if he would gladly have crushed me there and then with his foot, had I only been of a convenient size and material for crushing.

‘In Germany a boy must learn to be a man,’ he said. ‘If he suffers in the process it cannot be helped. Max is soft and nervous. That must be overcome.’

‘Can’t you interfere?’ I said to Wolfram when we were by ourselves. ‘It makes me miserable to think of that boy shut up with that horrid man this afternoon. I should like to bring him to our rooms and put him to bed.’

‘Impossible!’ said Wolfram. ‘If we once began to interfere with Putzer in that way there would be an end to all discipline. A girl may be petted and spoiled perhaps, though I should not approve of it; but unless you train a boy in the way he should go you ruin him.’

‘I don’t want to pet and spoil any one,’ I cried in despair. ‘It is a case for a doctor—ask any doctor if that boy ought to be at work this afternoon.’

But it was of no use. I was trying to batter my head against a system, and the system was harder than my head. The Hohenrodas always had been brought up in this way, and in spite of the regrettable Eschenau strain Max was a Graf of Hohenroda, and must go through the traditional mill.

‘Or succumb,’ I said.

‘He will not succumb,’ said Wolfram, and of course I knew that he was displeased. In fact, he reminded me that Max had been in his grandparents’ care for twelve years, and that I should only give umbrage if I tried to interfere with them. I said I would risk that if I could make things pleasanter for Max, and that we ought to have the boy more under our eyes. Wolfram could not agree to that, however. He said that his parents doted on Max, and was it likely that they would allow him to be ill-treated? They had complete confidence in Herr Putzer, whose conception of his duty as a teacher was exalted.

What could I do? Here were four people all with more experience and authority than I had, and all meaning well by the boy according to their lights. No doubt Herr Putzer’s view of a pupil was much like a crammer’s view of poultry. His business was to cram, and not to ask whether the process was painful or pleasant. I was not surprised when supper time came to find that Max did not appear, but had gone to bed because he was ‘a little suffering.’ ‘Headache!’ said Herr Putzer, ‘headache is nothing. To-morrow he will be normal.’

‘A cut finger or a broken leg I can understand,’ said the Graf; ‘but this everlasting *Weh und Ach* I do not understand. One expects a woman to be for ever wailing but not a boy.’

‘When, then, have I wailed?’ said the Gräfin indignantly. ‘Never unless there was an excellent reason for wailing.’

‘Most women wail,’ said the Graf with a side glance at me, and I made up my mind that if ever I felt ill in that house I would shut myself up and, when necessary, wail to myself or Wilkins. But I was beginning to wonder how long Wilkins would bear the change of conditions. In those early days she was as tiresome as she could be, and even Wolfram could not put reason into her. She had never lived with people who did not have bacon for breakfast, she said, and until she came abroad with me she had not imagined that such people existed. Eggs, in her opinion, were not a substitute for porridge, bacon, toast, and marmalade, all of which she was used to every morning at nine o’clock after her early tea at half-past seven. Mamsell had brought her a small single egg this morning and Wilkins had said: ‘Do you take me for a fool?’ and Mamsell had only smiled and said, ‘Freestick!’ What that meant Wilkins could not say, but it was now eleven o’clock and she had a sinking feeling such as she had never expected to suffer from in a nobleman’s house. When she lived with the duchess she had cocoa at eleven, and when she lived with me in London she had coffee and cake.

‘I’ve only had coffee and rolls for breakfast,’ I told her. ‘It’s the Continental custom. But I’ll see what can be done.’

So I had to speak to the Gräfin and explain to her that Wilkins was used to tea and bread and butter at half-past seven, porridge, tea, bacon, and marmalade at nine, cocoa and cake at eleven, and a solid early dinner at one; and that she would feel faint if she was supplied with less than this.

‘Then let her feel faint,’ said the Gräfin. ‘Such demands I will not satisfy.’

So I had to wrap up this ultimatum in different language and deliver it to Wilkins as well as I could.

‘A large and satisfying meat sandwich at eleven you may have,’ I told her, ‘but you have come to a country that gets along somehow without bacon for breakfast.’

‘I never saw so many pigs about anywhere,’ said Wilkins with a scepticism she did not attempt to conceal. ‘They come nearer the house too than they ought to in my opinion. What happens to ’em?’

‘I suppose that eventually they are killed.’

‘Then how can you have pigs without bacon?’

I could not tell her. I felt sure that every bit of a pig was put to the most profitable use, but I did not know the ins and outs of the pig industry at Hohenroda yet; and Wilkins then changed the subject by asking me whether she was to have the same outings here as she had been used to in London, and if so, where was she to go?

This was a poser, and I could not solve it offhand. When I consented to bring Wilkins to Germany I had never given a thought to her afternoons and evenings out and what she would do with them.

‘There are lovely walks,’ I said.

‘Not of a kind I should care to take by myself. I wouldn’t trust those forests. Besides, my corns have been troubling me lately.’

‘What do you like when you go out?’ I asked.

‘Shops and people. Something to see. There’s nothing to see here that wouldn’t give me the ’ump. I generally useter go to my aunt at Kilburn. You come back refreshed. I only gave up the duchess because she was so much in the country, and even there you could get to a little town on a bike. Why here, what’ll I do if I want a reel of cotton or a packet of hairpins?’

‘Wolfram!’ I said, for he came in just then, ‘what is Wilkins to do if she wants a reel of cotton or a packet of hairpins?’

‘Go without,’ he said at first, and she smiled as if life was a joke after all, and left the room. Then he told me that I could have the car when I wanted it for shopping in Reichenstadt, and that if I took Wilkins with me it would be better than if I went by myself.

XIX

I have not said a word yet about the south side of the castle, the side you could not see on arrival and which faced the river and the valley. The gardens had been made here, but they were not attractive. Plenty of vegetables were grown, and I suppose, if you have the true gardening spirit, you can take a warm interest in vegetables and be roused to enthusiasm by rows of peas and patches of cauliflowers. I was too ignorant to know how skilful the head gardener was in this way, but I wished for a great deal that was not there. The whole had been planned by one of those orderly minds that like a pattern as regular as a chessboard; but luckily nature can confound the most housemaidish gardener ever created, and by the end of July the blazing summer days had done away with some of the symmetry aimed at by withering what should have flourished and encouraging what should have been kept in bounds. The rambler roses sprawled over the big verandah where our meals were served as if there was no such thing in the world as a pruning knife, in the borders the lupins distressed the Gräfin by running to seed, mignonette began to sprawl, escholtzias sprawled, and the heat finished some of the gayest annuals before any one expected them to finish. I believe the Gräfin's tidy soul never got real pleasure out of the garden, for when we walked about it together she could only see the weeds and the little things that run underground and come up where no one wants them, and the pushing, greedy things shouldering their neighbours. She said the gardener was so much absorbed in his vegetables that the flowers were neglected, and that, as this was the kind of gardener she desired, she could not complain. But as he had two men under him she thought he might keep the place tidier. I thought so too; but I did not know enough of gardening to give an opinion. I wished there were more trees and shrubs and better-kept lawns. The whole effect in my eyes was regular in plan but unkempt in upkeep, and I much preferred the forest. I used to go long walks there with the Gräfin's brown dachshund Fritz. Wolfram was away a great deal at the barracks, and Max I hardly saw.

Wilkins had settled down resignedly to a world where bacon was not, and looked as if she was gaining weight rather than losing it. She even admitted that she usually had a sufficiency at her meals. My trouble was that the meals put more before me than any one but a cormorant could require, and that though the Hohenrodas did not get offended with my want of appetite as the Gutheims had done, they sometimes seemed to think I was a wet blanket at a feast, if it is at feasts that wet blankets are supposed to be uncomfortable. However I enjoyed those summer months at Hohenroda, and I especially enjoyed having all our meals on the verandah instead of indoors.

I had not forgotten the Gutheims all this time, and though I never wished to meet Emma again I had kindly memories of Eugenie, and expected to see something of her. Wolfram had made the round of his friends with me in tow, so I knew that Eduard von Gösen would appear sooner or later at Hohenroda with Eugenie, for in Germany new-comers and newly married couples call on the people with whom they wish to visit. You can imagine the comments Wilkins made when she heard of this topsy-turvy custom, and her allusions to what the duchess would have said to it. I rather enjoyed these expeditions myself. Wolfram and I used to set out in state in his car, I having made myself as smart as I knew how, and he looking as he always did, *point-device* and personable. Sometimes we just paid a formal call and came away again; sometimes we stayed to coffee; sometimes to coffee and supper too. I got impressions of various interiors big and small, but there was as much pride of caste in the smallest as at Hohenroda itself, and no one that Wolfram knew visited with the Gutheims.

However, one day Wolfram came back with the news that if it suited his mother Eduard von Gösen would present his wife to her on the following Saturday; and the Gräfin did not look overjoyed, but said that she supposed it must be, and that as they had such a long way to come, and would have the expense of a conveyance to come in they would naturally stay to supper, and she would naturally sacrifice ducks to them. Luckily she had ducks asking to be sacrificed, so greedy and so fat they were. I asked Wolfram whether his mother would write and tell Eugenie about the ducks and their being expected to stay and eat them or whether I should do so; because from my short experience of German nerves and their extreme susceptibility I thought that if the ducks were there and the von Gösens were not there would be trouble. I had found our own visits most uncertain in this way. At one house you would be asked to tea or coffee and given tea or coffee, and there was an end of it, while at another house you left wounded feelings behind you if you did not stay to a supper to which you had not been invited.

Eugenie had been married some weeks before me, and had presumably paid most of her wedding calls before she came to Hohenroda. We were within calling distance, for we were only seven miles from Reichenstadt, but the road was hilly. However, Wolfram said that Eduard meant to hire a carriage and make a day of it, and that I need not write about the ducks because they would be taken for granted. It would be a moonlight night, and the drive home would be highly romantic but chilly.

I wondered what version of my rupture with her family had been put before Eugenie, and how the Gutheims had received the news of my marriage. I knew it must have reached them directly it took place, for everything that happened at Hohenroda was known at Reichenstadt, but none of them had written or sent me a wedding present. We were all on the verandah on Saturday afternoon when Eduard and his Eugenie arrived, and directly Eugenie had been presented to the family she turned to me with an exaggerated display of friendship and affection, called me her beloved Karenchen, and put a parcel she was carrying into my hands. I found it contained a small red plush tablecloth embroidered with gold braid, and unfortunately I recognised it for one she had received herself from an elderly aunt, and shuddered at, because it did not reach the high standard of taste set up by Eduard and herself in their new home. But she explained when I opened it that she knew the Hohenrodas were old-fashioned in their ideas, and that probably it would harmonise with their decorations. I said she was very kind to bring it, and that was all I could say. She looked much as she used to do, rather florid, rather handsome, and very well pleased with herself. She did most of the talking, and the more she talked the more monosyllabic the Hohenrodas became, so that soon she was carrying on a monologue punctuated by invitations from the Gräfin to drink more tea and eat more cakes. When we had finished eating I walked her round the garden, which she said she had never seen, and then took her up to my own rooms. I think perhaps she perceived when she saw them that the red plush tablecloth would not harmonise with anything there: for she looked round her with a sort of reluctant admiration and said:

'You've made yourself quite at home here.'

'For the present I am at home here,' I pointed out.

'English cretonnes—an English carpet—pictures, flowers—silver—books—one might be in Sloane Gardens——'

I laughed at that and beckoned her to the open windows.

'Come and look at this view,' I said.

But she was not interested in the view.

'Tell me, Karenchen,' she purred, 'how do the Graf and Gräfin take it?'

'Take what?'

'All this,' and she waved her hand at the room. 'And the marriage of their son with a foreigner belonging to the middle classes. They, who are so proud, so aristocratic!'

‘The Gräfin likes the carpet,’ I said, after a pause during which I decided that Eugenie was not feeling as amiable inwardly as she appeared outwardly. ‘I am going to give her one for her birthday.’

‘Ah!’ said Eugenie. ‘Money reconciles people to most things. Did your father give you a large dowry?’

‘Pretty well,’ I said, but I wouldn’t tell her how much. She looked rather discomfited for a moment and then began to talk again, telling me what her family had said about my sudden departure, which they apparently represented as an impulsive adventure of my own, following on an unimportant seizure of nerves upsetting Emma.

‘My mother tells me that Emma was very excited and crying bitterly, and that you took offence and left the house in spite of all she could say.’

‘That is one way of putting it.’

‘My father always speaks of you in the most friendly way. Some day there must be a reconciliation. Certainly there must be a reconciliation. It will be quite easy. You will all meet at my house and behave as if nothing had happened. I am sure that I have tact enough to manage a little difficulty like that. But now, tell me, Karenchen—for we are old friends—are you happy with your husband? as happy as I am with mine?’

‘I am perfectly happy.’

‘Are there no drawbacks?’

‘What do you mean?’

I should have said ‘What the devil do you mean?’ if I had not been properly brought up. I felt that way.

‘I am perhaps peculiarly sensitive. I could not live in my father-in-law’s house, one in which my mother-in-law ruled.’

‘Couldn’t you?’

‘Certainly not. Young married people should be by themselves. You cannot contribute enough to your husband’s happiness under such circumstances. For instance, what he eats is neither ordered nor prepared by you.’

‘We don’t mind that.’

‘It is not everything, perhaps. But I could not bear to see the portrait of my predecessor hanging in his room and her son always opposite me at table. Curious that these things should not disturb you.'

I took her downstairs again as soon as I could, and I was not sorry when the ducks had been eaten and the moment of departure arrived. I think the Hohenrodas breathed more freely, too, when their guests had gone; and the Graf, who hardly ever made a personal remark, said to Wolfram as they smoked together:

'Von Gösen has made an ass of himself.'

'*Gelt!*' said Wolfram, and the word might mean either Money or Truly! so it was a joke and his mother smiled.

'Such a Jewess!' said the Graf.

'She talks too much,' said Wolfram. 'She knows too much! A type that fills me with antipathy!'

Poor Eugenie! For I who knew her well, knew that she had done her best to please them.

'She wants us to eat with them one day,' I said.

'Then we must make it plain that we will not meet her family.'

'But she wants us to meet her family and be reconciled.'

'That is out of the question,' said Wolfram.

XX

When I look back to those early weeks at Hohenroda so many facets of my life there present themselves that I find it difficult to decide which to show you as the most characteristic. I have not told you how much I was alone most of the day while Wolfram was away at the barracks. I have said very little about the people Wolfram took me to see, and the return visits they paid after a proper time had elapsed, nor have I owned yet that if it had not been for Wolfram I should have felt unwelcome and unhappy. He was my friend in the house; he and poor little tormented Max, who was hardly allowed to see me; and Wilkins, who meant well but growled. The Gräfin was stolidly kind, but I think she did not like me; or else she liked me, but so much disliked the English that she could not warm to one of my race. She was a dull-witted, conscientious woman, hard on herself in some ways and hard on others. She had no sympathy with frail bodies and frail nerves, and dismissed servants who could not do the work exacted of them. Wilkins was up in arms about the work men and women had to do in that house, their stinted outings, and their wretched pay. She had learned enough German or the little Mamsell had learned enough English to commune with each other on such matters, and no doubt one stumbling-block between my mother-in-law and me was her dislike of my maid. She called her my Fräulein and made no bones about telling me that she was greedy, idle, and presumptuous. In fact, one day there was a little scene at tea that made me feel as if I had got back to the Gutheims and their storm area. We were all sitting on the verandah when Mamsell, looking ready to drop with fright, came out to us and whispered to my mother-in-law that there was no sugar. The Gräfin asked for what sugar could be required at that time of day.

‘For the English Fräulein—for her tea,’ murmured Mamsell, and later on she explained to me that what the Frau Gräfin left out for the day was so *knapp* that it frequently would not go round.

When Wilkins had the audacity to ask for sugar for her tea the Gräfin took up a plate, put two lumps on it, and with black displeasure handed them to Mamsell. It was, of course, uncomfortable for me, and when I went upstairs I told Wilkins that we would go into Reichenstadt and buy some sugar for her private consumption, because in Germany it was not considered good manners to ask for anything, and that she must not offend in this way again. But Wilkins said that she hoped she knew what was due to her, and that she had never expected to live with gentry who kept the food under lock and key to the extent prevailing in this house. Besides, they were having a deal too much boiled beef and horse-radish sauce for her taste, and no one downstairs ever made a decent cup of tea, and why couldn't the Germans eat their loaves white as other Christians did, instead of that horrid grey colour, tasting sour and not a shape any one could cut with any elegance. Such sandwiches as went upstairs to tea she had never seen before, and hoped never to see again. Great clumsy things, more fit for ploughboys than for ladies and gentlemen! Or else uncovered morsels with blobs of anchovy or caviare on them—not sandwiches at all.

I wished I had trained Wilkins not to talk while she dressed me or brushed my hair; but unfortunately she had done the training when I was a little girl, and she never realised as fully as she should have done that I was a little girl no longer. However, I arranged to have the use of Wolfram's car next day and to take Wilkins to Reichenstadt with me. The Gräfin did not like cars, and still drove about in an old-fashioned carriage, with a bearded old coachman whose livery did not fit him; and she very rarely got as far as Reichenstadt. When I think of the Hohenroda household as I first knew it I see everybody flourishing, well-fed, on the whole well treated, making grievances for themselves if so inclined, and jogging along together with about the amount of friction you would usually find in a household so big and composite. But in the heart of that little world I see the tragic figure of Max being ground into shape by a system too rigid for him, and suffering as no one else near him suffered. He was a son of the house, on his shoulders the mantle of tradition and dignity must fall if he survived the treatment that was to make him worthy of it; but no one seemed to see that the treatment was crushing him. His grandparents and Wolfram had found a formula that explained his unsatisfactory traits to their satisfaction. When he had headaches they were Eschenau headaches; when he was apathetic and slow of understanding, he resembled some uncle or aunt or cousin on his mother's side. I told Wolfram that as they were so persuaded that he was an Eschenau they might as well give up the attempt to make him a Hohenroda; but Wolfram could not accept my point of view. He would be a Hohenroda if he lived, he said.

When I talk of dinner at Hohenroda, I mean the satisfying meal served at one o'clock. In the evening we had supper, which was also satisfying but differently constructed. At dinner, on the day when I was going to Reichenstadt, Herr Putzer was not present, and I was told that he was eating with his Pastor and his wife because they had just killed a pig and had invited him—Herr Putzer, not the pig.

‘I’ll take you to school,’ I said to Max; for he usually went to and fro in a small two-seater kept for his use.

‘I’m not going back to school to-day,’ he told me.

‘Come with me for the afternoon then,’ I said; but he shook his head wearily, and said that Herr Putzer had left directions about the work that was to be done in his absence.

I said no more just then, but at five o’clock Max, Wilkins, and I were seated at a little table at the Krokodil, the best restaurant in Reichenstadt, and were having chocolate, cakes, and ices. We were rather exhausted, because we had explored every likely shop in the Kaiser Strasse and had failed to find the kind of hairpin or the make of cotton that Wilkins considered necessary to her happiness. There had been interludes in shops where I had bought Max some games he did not know and some story books he had not read. But neither of us wanted anything as ardently and obstinately as Wilkins wanted the hairpins and the cotton she could not get. You cannot imagine how our pilgrimage amused Max, and how his eyes twinkled as he explained to the shopkeepers what we wanted, and to us that we could not have it, and why. I had persuaded him to come by telling him that I wanted an interpreter, and that I would take the blame if any one was angry. As Max was my stepson I could not see why I should not take him out for an afternoon for once. I knew it would do him good to get away from Herr Putzer and to have the giggles when Wilkins and I talked German. I knew very little about Reichenstadt, and had to ask Max where to go for our chocolate. He did not know much either, but said that his father had once taken him to the Krokodil and that it had been *famos*. We found a large, crowded restaurant, and as we were looking for a table Eugenie von Gösen hailed me and made room for us at hers. She was there with her mother and Emma and a whole tribe of friends and relations. There must have been at least a dozen of them, and they netted us in the most determined and amiable way. Frau Gutheim and Emma congratulated me on my marriage and said they were rejoiced to see me, and hoped that I should soon pay them a visit. They were here, they said, to celebrate Emma’s nineteenth birthday, and they expected that Herr Gutheim and Oscar Strauss would shortly join them. I saw that Wilkins puzzled them, but she sat between Max and me and behaved with the chilly decorum she put on as armour when necessary. I could see her taking stock of the ladies’ dresses, which were all very fashionable and expensive. I dare say she took stock of their manners too. These were, perhaps, a little noisy, and drew the glances of quieter folk. But every one was friendly, and some were amusing and alive. Just as we had settled down to our chocolate, however, Wolfram came in with his Colonel and another officer; and as he walked up the room he saw me sitting with a whole clan of Gutheims and with me Max, who ought to have been at home trying to make a Hohenroda out of an Eschenau. It was an awkward and distressful moment.

XXI

If I could have pretended not to see Wolfram I would have done so, but unfortunately that was impossible. I confess that I was taken aback, because directly he came in I knew better than I had done before that I ought not to have lured Max from his dictionaries, or be sitting in a public place with him surrounded by Jews. In England you could never feel as I did that afternoon in Reichenstadt, and that shows you how impossible it is to live in a place and not breathe its atmosphere. You may not like what you breathe, but you are influenced. However, Wolfram solved the question by following his friends to another part of the room and sitting down there.

‘But he saw you, Karenchen,’ said the tactful Eugenie. ‘He certainly saw you. Why, then, does he walk away?’

It was impossible to tell Eugenie why he walked away, but I thought she might have guessed. She knew all about the impassable gulf fixed between Hohenrodas and Gutheims. My offence smelt to heaven. All the way home I was reconstructing the scene of my crime, and I could not omit the flamboyant and ingratiating figure of Aunt Rosalie bending over Max with a plate of cream cakes and saying in her kindest but oiliest voice that he was a *reizender Junge* and she was sure he could eat yet another, just that little one. Max had not taken the cake, but he had looked up at his father with those terrified eyes that I wished I need never see in the boy’s face again; and the father was my Wolfram whose armour of blood and iron I did not fear, but who was assuredly not a man any one would flout. The escapade that had begun light-heartedly was turning to earnest, and I wondered rather anxiously what our reception would be when we got home. I knew Herr Putzer would be fuming, but I thought that I could bear that.

When I’m in a hole I like to fix my mind on one point and attend to it if I can. I had to see that Max was not made to suffer for my sins, and with this idea in my mind I went with him to the schoolroom directly we arrived. Herr Putzer rose and bowed before he let loose the vials of his wrath, which I saw were full to overflowing. In fact, they impeded his speech when I bid him good evening. He clicked his teeth, but did not reply. I think he must have had false teeth that did not fit very well, for you always heard them click when he was excited or annoyed. The crimes of England, for instance, would set them off at any moment. But when you read of people gnashing their teeth you think they ought to be getting the worst of it, and Herr Putzer was not getting the worst of it. On the contrary, he had certain trump cards in his hand and meant to play them.

‘Good evening, Herr Putzer,’ I said as airily as I could. ‘I took Max out with me for the afternoon and I have brought him back safe and sound; but he is too tired to do any more work to-day.’

Looking back, I wonder at my own audacity. I, a mere female and a foreigner, to suggest that the boy’s work for next day’s school could be set aside because he was tired. But Max had explained to me that he could prepare what was actually necessary for school by getting up an hour earlier in the morning, and that what took it out of him most was as often as not extra work imposed by the tutor.

‘The boy will do the work he was commanded to do,’ cried Herr Putzer. ‘Instantly will he begin to work—and he will be punished, severely punished.’

‘Punished!’ I said, pretending to be surprised. ‘Why should he be punished? What has he done that is wrong?’

The man’s eyes seemed to start from his head, and he hammered on the table with his clenched fist to emphasise what he had to say.

‘It is not allowed,’ he screamed; ‘the sooner the Frau Gräfin understands it the better. It is not allowed to interfere between me and my pupil—to teach him habits of idleness and dissipation—to take him away without permission—on the *Bummel*. I say it. Such lightness cannot be endured. We are Germans, thanks be to heaven.’

‘That’s all right,’ I said in English, ‘I don’t mind your getting into a tantrum with me; but I’m not going to have Max punished for doing as I told him. You seem to forget that I am his stepmother.’

I dare say you will be surprised when I tell you that Herr Putzer answered by snapping his fingers at me and puffing away an imaginary object with his lips as if it were thistledown; but if you are surprised or incredulous it only shows that you have never encountered a German of Herr Putzer’s class and temperament in a towering passion. I turned to Max and saw that his poor haggard face was pale and drawn with dread, and his eyes wide with amazement at what must have seemed to him my daring.

‘Come with me,’ I said to the boy, taking him by the arm, ‘I will ask your father to explain to Herr Putzer that if I choose to take you out for a few hours I can do so.’

But the tutor flew towards us and seized his pupil’s other arm.

‘*Nicht mucksen*,’ he screamed in his cracked treble. ‘I forbid you to go. A German am I and faithful to my duty. The gracious one must try her wiles elsewhere—not on me.’

Wiles indeed! and the silly little man making such a spectacle of himself that I felt ashamed, inasmuch as he was an adult and was literally foaming at the mouth in the presence of a child. I had read of people foaming at the mouth, but I had never seen any one so afflicted before, and I hope I never may again.

‘We can’t tear the boy in two, can we?’ I said.

‘The boy stays here.’

‘Not at all. He comes with me. You forget yourself, Herr Putzer.’

My blood was up and Max did go with me, but not without a scuffle. I was a head and shoulders taller than the tutor and more muscular than you would think to look at me, and I took him by surprise. I—well I just pushed him and he fell down. I did not mean him to fall, but naturally I seized the moment when he chose to do so and got Max away to my own quarters. The whole incident was deplorable and my behaviour most unladylike. I see it now.

‘There will be the devil to pay,’ I said when I had taken breath and I told Wilkins what had taken place. Her view was that it served Herr Putzer right, but that I was old enough to know better. Max fidgeted about the room and hoped Herr Putzer was not dead. At least he said so and suggested that he ought to go and see. Into the gloom of our afterthoughts came Wolfram in battle trim. I saw that by his eye. Wilkins disappeared.

‘Why is Max here?’ he asked.

‘I brought him here,’ I said.

‘Away!’ he said to Max, speaking to him just as he had done that day in the train.

When he had gone I looked at Wolfram to find out how angry he was and then I looked at the tips of my toes, because for the moment my courage had descended there, and I sighed.

‘I know,’ I said, ‘I’ve kidnapped Max, and I’ve broken bread with a whole tableful of Jews—at least it was cream cakes, and they wouldn’t even let us pay for them—and when I got back I knocked Herr Putzer down.’

‘WHAT!’ cried Wolfram, quite bowled over himself by the heinousness of my conduct.

I sighed again. It really was a trying moment.

‘I hardly touched him,’ I said, thinking it was time to present my case. ‘He went down—like a ninepin.’

‘In Germany one does not treat learned men who consent to educate our sons—as if they were ninepins,’ said Wolfram sternly.

‘I never did it before.’

‘It should not have happened at all.’

‘It was not in my programme, Wolfram, any more than the cream cakes and the Jews. These things came on me unawares. My idea was to take Wilkins to Reichenstadt and buy her sugar and hairpins. Even Max was an afterthought.’

‘I have told you from the beginning that Max is not your affair. Where he is concerned you have nothing to say.’

‘I don’t accept that position.’

‘But, Karen, be reasonable,’ said Wolfram, sitting down beside me. ‘Max is not your child. My parents have always had the care of him. They will not brook your interference, and they will support Putzer.’

‘Then heaven help Max,’ I said, and got no further. For whatever I said, Wolfram would return to his old argument about his parents’ prior rights over the boy, and Herr Putzer’s methods as a teacher, and my ignorance of what German children had to endure, so that they should grow up German and not anything inferior; and when we had come to a standstill over these ideas he made a fresh move with the undeniable fact that I had knocked Herr Putzer down, and that somehow or other amends must be made to him.

XXII

After discussing what it was best to do, Wolfram and I decided that we would pay a visit to Herr Putzer, inquire after his injuries, if any, and possibly apply balm. At least that was Wolfram's idea. I thought that Herr Putzer would be more offended than ever if we suggested that a stain on his honour could be wiped out with money, and Wolfram said I must leave it to him, and that he had not thought of money, but perhaps of a gold watch and chain.

'To commemorate the occasion,' I said, 'and you'll inscribe my name and his in the lid, with the date.'

Wolfram said that something must be done to appease him, and that he hoped I was not going to make a practice of treating people like ninepins, because if I did I should land him sooner or later in a duel. I felt sure that he did not really like Herr Putzer much, because he spoke of him once or twice as *der Kerl*, which is equivalent to our talking of a man as the fellow. He wanted to go and speak to him at once, so as to get it over, but I still wore the blouse and skirt I had on when the regrettable incident took place. I thought they would remind him of it. Besides, the sleeve of my blouse had got torn where he clawed it and I snatched it away. I put on a frock I had not worn before, and which I knew would please Wolfram, because I looked like a dove in it. It was dove colour and filmy, and I wore Dad's row of pearls with it, the row he had given me on my wedding day.

'But unless you behave like a dove it is useless to look like one,' said Wolfram, when I pointed out my likeness to the gentle bird on the way to the schoolroom.

I made him a curtsy, and blew him a kiss to show him I knew how doves conducted themselves, and just as I did so the Graf came upon us from another corridor. I saw by his scowl that he was in a rage, and I wondered instantly whether his rage was with me, and whether he knew of all the dreadful things I had done or only that I had taken Max to Reichenstadt without permission. I asked Wolfram in an undertone if he had seen his father since his return, and he shook his head, so I knew that at any rate the Graf had not heard about the Jews and the cream cakes.

'Where are you going?' he said to Wolfram. He took no notice of me, unless you can call an extra special scowl notice.

'We are going to speak to Putzer,' said Wolfram.

‘So am I,’ said the Graf. ‘I am going to apologise to him.’

‘Have you annoyed him too?’ I cried, and got a quite new energetic scowl in reply.

‘I am going to tell him it will not happen again,’ he said, glaring at me so that I understood what he meant. At least I thought I did. ‘Otherwise——’

‘I don’t suppose it ever will happen again,’ I said as soothingly as I could. ‘I’ve never done such a thing before.’

‘You have attempted it.’

‘Never! I’ve never touched Herr Putzer before, except when he shook hands and wished my dinner might agree with me or said good night, and then you’ve all been present.’

‘What is she chattering about?’ said my father-in-law rudely, and then he opened the schoolroom door and we went in.

The air of that room was always stale and close, for Herr Putzer would not have any windows open. Max sat at a table with books in front of him, and the look of haggard weariness on his face that always made me long to put my arms round him and carry him away. Herr Putzer got up when we went in and received the two Hohenrodas with the obsequious politeness both parties seemed to take for granted. He pretended to ignore me, and I could hardly blame him for that when I saw a large bruise near his right eye. The Graf must have seen it too, and certainly Wolfram did, for he looked at me ruefully.

‘What have you to say for yourself?’ the Graf asked Max harshly. ‘How dare you absent yourself from the house and from your work without permission?’

I thought this was a singularly impolite way of stating the case in my presence.

‘He had my permission,’ I said, ‘no one is to blame for what happened this afternoon except me.’

‘Since when has my grandson been under your orders?’ said the Graf with a withering glance.

‘Since I married his father,’ I said.

‘Karen!’ said Wolfram in a low warning voice.

‘So it is,’ said Herr Putzer, stretching out his hand in my direction much as a preacher does when he wishes to emphasise a point in a sermon. ‘So it is. Since the gracious one arrived there is an end to order and authority. But it may not be.’

‘Assuredly it may not be,’ said the Graf.

‘In my own kingdom I will reign: otherwise I will no longer——’

‘My good Putzer,’ began the Graf soothingly.

‘I will not be made an object of laughter—of frivolous, thoughtless laughter.’

‘But who laughs?’

‘And attacked—bodily attacked—taken unawares—before I could defend myself.’

The Graf looked puzzled, as well he might. Wolfram took up the word for him.

‘It was an accident,’ he said in a tone of stiff apology. ‘We have come to explain to you that it was an accident.’

‘I have been insulted.’

‘You should have left Max alone,’ I said, for my apologetic feelings were evaporating and I was getting annoyed again. ‘If you had not behaved badly too it would never have happened. I wonder you care to dwell on it. I don’t.’

‘But what has happened?’ said the Graf.

‘The gracious one pushed me violently and I fell down,’ said Herr Putzer, pointing a hand trembling with rage in my direction. ‘No doubt my falling was accidental. Her strength cannot be greater than mine. But to push is not allowed. I have been insulted.’

‘*Himmelkreuzdonnerwettersacrament*,’ said the Graf: or something like it.

‘You certainly fell down very easily,’ I said. ‘You must have slipped. I hope you didn’t hurt yourself.’

‘Of course I hurt myself. How can one fall on a hard floor and not hurt oneself? When one is no longer a child and therefore not accustomed to falling.’

‘I am sorry,’ I said, and then nearly choked with my effort not to laugh: for the absurd little man first pointed to his bruise, and then showed us where he had been hurt by rubbing himself, and if Wilkins had been there she would have called him indelicate.

‘It is also the shock to the nerves,’ he grumbled, ‘and the blow to one’s dignity.’

Then the Graf startled us all by hammering on the table with his fist and shouting that he was here to give Max the thrashing he deserved, and would not have his time wasted any longer.

‘Wolfram!’ I cried, ‘don’t let the boy be thrashed. Look at him. He isn’t fit for it. Whatever has happened is my fault.’

‘Another time before you lead the boy into mischief you will perhaps remember that he will suffer for it,’ said my father-in-law; and Herr Putzer nodded malevolently.

‘Don’t cry, Karen,’ said Wolfram when he got me back to my room. ‘My father won’t hurt him much, but discipline must be.’

‘You are all cruel,’ I sobbed, ‘cruel and stupid: and I can’t make you see it.’

‘You certainly will not make us see it. Max is being brought up as I was brought up, and I have survived.’

‘You are of a different grain, a different constitution. He cannot stand what you did.’

‘A boy must know how to resist temptation when it conflicts with his duty. Max should not have gone with you.’

‘I’m glad he came. I’m glad he had a happy afternoon anyhow, and five cream cakes and two cups of chocolate. Poor little chap! I wish I could pick him up and carry him to England and leave him there.’

‘What nonsense you talk, Karen. In English schools the big boys thrash the little ones when they deserve it. That is well known. You evidently know nothing about the bringing up of boys. You have not had brothers. If heaven blesses us with sons——’

I believe I startled Wolfram by the horror in my eyes as I looked at him: for he had startled me.

‘Heaven forbid that any child of mine should ever suffer as Max suffers,’ I said with passion. ‘I would rather bear no child.’

XXIII

After this I kept my eye on Max as well as I could, but I was unable to help him except by being of the same opinion still and presenting that opinion to Wolfram as I saw a chance. At any rate he no longer went about his own concerns blind to those of his son, and I sometimes saw him look at Max uneasily, wondering, I suppose, why the system seemed to be grinding the life out of his boy while it only turned other people's boys into the men of blood and iron necessary to the leading world-power. All the more necessary because the leading, or, perhaps, one might say, driving world-power was not recognised yet as it should be by other powers that wanted to exist on an equality instead of in their proper place, under the German heel.

It was only gradually, of course, that the prevalent German view became clear to me as I got to know more German and listened to every one saying the same thing in slightly varying words. When I asked them what they thought England would be doing while they were establishing themselves in the topmost place by the simple but, of course, painful process of kicking every one else into a lower one, they either looked surprised at my joining in a discussion on politics, and turned what I said into a laugh or some silly personal compliment, or they assured me that at the first threat of war the British Empire would go to pieces like fruit that is of a large size but soft and rotten at the core. This would not matter to me, they said, because I had married a German and would naturally rejoice when the day came that made my husband's country, and therefore my country, the most powerful in the world as it was already the most civilised and intellectual.

'I had no idea that Germans boasted so much,' I said to Wolfram one day when we had been to the von Gösens and heard a great deal of this kind of thing in its crudest form.

But he said it was not boasting. It was just a statement of fact. Other countries were all behind Germany in morals, comfort, art, science, education, philanthropy, industry, and war: especially in war; and some day it would become necessary to give other countries a lesson and raise them to the German standard whether they wanted to be raised or not. They had a mission in the world, he said, and I as an Englishwoman ought to understand that when you have a mission you must fulfil it, even if it costs you and those you propose to benefit much money and suffering. Besides, there was the famous place in the sun waiting somewhere for the children of Germany to take and occupy. He would not say where yet, but India, for instance, under firm German rule would be a very different and a far more profitable country to its owners than India now.

The only effect of this kind of talk on me was to make me homesick. I did not find I got a bit more German because I had married Wolfram. On the contrary. When I lived in England I saw things that I did not like, but when I lived in Germany even the imperfections of my country pulled at my heart-strings. The life at Hohenroda was agreeable on the whole, but I felt a stranger within the gates as long as I was there. No doubt it was trying for Wolfram's parents to have a foreign daughter-in-law suddenly thrust upon them; and the trouble was that I did not become less foreign as time went on. I was willing to fall in with their ways but not with their ideas, and that did not satisfy them. Besides, my attitude towards Max gave umbrage and I could not change it. They saw me look at him uneasily and that offended them: if he spoke to me they pricked up their ears, and on his birthday, which fell in October, on a Sunday, there was another row. This time it was not Herr Putzer who made it but the Gräfin, who was a placid person as long as the meals went well and we were all there to the minute to eat them. The birthday dinner had been a most successful affair beginning with *Nudelsuppe*, continuing with roast goose, and finishing with *Meringuetorte*, all of which dishes Max had himself chosen, because, in spite of being Hohenroda and Eschenau, he had a bourgeois palate and liked them. So did I; but when I saw the sun shining out of doors I wanted some air and exercise, especially as I had just been told that there would be chocolate and whipped cream at five o'clock instead of tea, because for a birthday tea was considered thin. I could see that the roast goose had acted as a soporific on every one except me. Herr Putzer had bowed, murmured *Mahlzeit*, and disappeared. The Graf and Wolfram were smoking big cigars and drinking black coffee and liqueur brandy; the Gräfin had closed her eyes although she had her knitting in her hands, and her brown dachshund was licking his lips drowsily, and making up his mind that he felt inclined for a nap. He had had his share of the roast goose by means of standing on his hind legs and pulling its savoury remains off the dish when it had been taken outside. The old butler who waited on us had found him enjoying it and had rated him in such loud, indignant tones that we should have guessed what had happened if he had not told us all about it when he brought the coffee. He added that he had luckily been able to rescue most of it, and that some had gone up to the Fräulein as his gracious lady had desired. I looked at Max, for in that house if I wanted to twinkle I had to. I suppose it was the Eschenau blood in him. The Hohenrodas had magnificent qualities, but none of them twinkled.

‘She will never know,’ he whispered. ‘Besides Fritz is a very clean dog and such a nice one. I would rather eat after him than after Herr Putzer.’

‘So would I.’

‘Shall we take him with us?’

‘Will he come?’

Max snapped his fingers at Fritz, attracted his attention, and persuaded him to rise slowly and lazily.

‘Where are you going?’ said Wolfram, watching the three of us make off together, like stage conspirators, softly and cautiously.

‘For a walk,’ said I.

‘After a meal one should sit still and digest,’ said the Gräfin, ‘if it has been a meal.’

It had been a meal and no mistake about it: a fat, luscious one, clogging body and brain.

‘There will be another meal in three hours,’ I said. ‘Unless I walk off the effects of this one. . . .’

I saw by their faces we had permission to go.

‘We have three hours,’ I said to Max. ‘We have never had three hours together since we came except when I ran away with you to Reichenstadt.’

‘That was heavenly,’ said Max. ‘I wish we could have had the car to-day.’

‘I don’t want the car. I want you to take me to the caves.’

‘That is very far.’

‘How far?’

‘Perhaps an hour.’

‘We have three.’

‘That is true, but the way there is rough. It is a walk for summer. Now the paths are wet and slippery with fallen leaves.’

I said I didn’t mind that. I had not had a scramble for days. In fact unless you went right beyond the forest surrounding the castle you couldn’t have a scramble, but only dull, decorous walks on well made, well kept roads. I wanted to get beyond the forest amongst the rocks, which were limestone and very fine. From the car I had seen the bit I proposed to get to this afternoon, and I had been told that there were some stalactite caves there, and that when summer came again we would have an *Ausflug* and visit them. But why wait for summer if they were within an hour's walk? Max could not answer this question to my satisfaction, but he looked doubtful and said something about wet paths again.

'We are not sugar,' I told him. 'We can't melt,' and with his little air of chivalrous anxiety to do anything I wanted, and to afford me his protection while we did it, he started in the direction of the caves, saying that for his part he did not mind wet paths at all but rather liked them.

'I like everything out of doors always,' I said rashly, and then remembered hating an east wind in London streets with gritty dust blowing into one's eyes.

'But even that is better than sitting indoors with the windows shut.'

'But if windows are open there must be a draught.'

'Let there be a draught. What is a draught? A current of air. Bracing and refreshing.'

'It gives earache.'

'I've never had earache in my life.'

'He has had much earache lately. He thinks his ear received a shock when—you know when——'

Max's eyes were twinkling again. We both knew when Herr Putzer's ear was supposed to have received a shock, and we both felt the reminiscence curiously consoling.

'He hasn't forgiven me,' I said.

'He never will.'

'But, Max, it was unintentional. It was an accident. I should not do a thing like that on purpose.'

'I would,' said Max. 'Often I think of it, and when I think of it I believe he knows. Then he gets angry.'

'But that is bad for you.'

'I have my pleasure out of it,' said the boy.

XXIV

Beyond the forest, immediately surrounding the castle, the land was wild and broken: a hill country with huge rocks standing amongst tracts of bilberry and heather: in some places treeless and in others having trees of various kinds planted by the birds and the winds. The autumn colours were beautiful in this uncultivated region, for the bilberry leaves were the colours of flames, the bracken, having drunk of sunshine all the summer, seemed now to give it back to us in the glowing warmth of its brown fronds, and on the trees leaves, faded to gold, glistened in the moist air, and fell like sighs about us. I asked Max if he was sure of the way, and he said that he could not miss it because the path we were on led to the caves and nowhere else. I asked him if he knew when it had been made, hoping for some romantic story of hiding and escape, but he knew of none. It was old, he said. No one used it much now, and in some places it was out of repair.

‘Are there stories about the caves?’ I asked.

‘I never heard any.’

‘Did people never hide in them?’

He could not tell me. It was not the kind of thing Herr Putzer taught him or encouraged him to find out. Here he stood on land that had belonged to his ancestors since the time of the first Crusaders, and all he knew about this part of it was that his grandfather said it was unprofitable.

‘I’ve only married your father,’ I said, ‘but I believe I take more interest in your family than you do. Don’t you want to know what Hohenrodas were doing here seven hundred years ago?’

‘It would be dreaming. If I dream I shall fail, and if I again fail——’

‘Fail! How are you going to fail? how have you failed?’

‘Has my father never told you?’

‘No.’

‘He will not speak of it. He felt it too deeply. I bring shame upon him.’

‘My dear boy, how?’

‘By missing my promotion at school. By remaining in a lower class at school. Once it has happened. It may not happen again.’

The look of despair on the boy’s face startled me, although I had become used to the idea that he was overworked and out of spirits, if you can be said to be used to the idea that some one near and dear to you is suffering. I suppose the degree to which you can become used depends on your temperament. I put my arm round his shoulders and we walked together for a while along the narrow path.

‘Don’t worry,’ I said, ‘if you fail you can try again.’

‘You don’t understand,’ he muttered. ‘The disgrace would be unbearable.’

‘How can there be disgrace without wrongdoing?’

But he could not take my point of view. He went on talking like a little old man about the importance to his future of his school career, and of the dreadful trouble there had been in the house last year when it was known that he was *durchgefallen*. He told me that this had happened to a cousin of his three times, after which he had been expelled from the Gymnasium, and that the stain of this boy’s failure remained like a blight on the family and would do so till Max wiped it out if he could.

‘But you will be Graf Hohenroda anyhow,’ I said, and I would not have said it if he had been an idle, unconscientious boy.

‘It is not enough,’ he said.

‘What is your cousin doing?’

‘I cannot tell you.’

We walked on in silence, and I saw that Max had something that he was half anxious to communicate and half inclined to keep to himself. I did not want to influence him either way, and I was just going to talk of something more cheerful when he said:

‘He is dead.’

His manner was so agitated that I thought he had better tell me the whole story, so that I could judge how far it was weighing on his mind and share the burden of it with him if I could.

‘How did he die?’ I asked.

‘He drowned himself.’

‘How old was he?’

‘Fifteen. Two years older than I.’

All the melancholy of the dying year seemed to enfold us as we walked on amongst those fluttering, golden leaves, and watched the flight of migrating birds across the October sky. For the first time I seemed to understand the tragic background of Max's thoughts and to see the spectre that brought terror into his eyes: a terror that had never been explained by anything I saw in his treatment, harsh and grinding though that was.

'Had he a father and mother?' I asked.

'Yes.'

'He had brought a great sorrow on them.'

'He had no choice. It is better to die than to live dishonoured. My grandfather said so when he heard of it.'

I argued with him till we were nearly at the entrance to the caves, but I made no impression. It was no use to say that a man can do good work in the world even if his classics and mathematics have been weak at school, because a German can only enter the world by way of the army, and a Hohenroda cannot enter the army by the appointed gate if he has been cast out of school. I could have understood the state of things better if all the officers I had met had been men of ability and intellect. Some obviously were, but some others were conspicuously stupid and vain. Eduard von Gösen, for instance. How had Eduard von Gösen with his silly laugh and vacant mind managed to do better at school than my little Max who had a soul and a brain? Max could not explain it, but he told me that he was sleeping badly, and that at night when he lay thinking of next day's work he could do it, but that when he was in class his mind seemed to refuse and give way. The masters complained that he did not attend and looked asleep when he should have been most awake; and they condoled with Herr Putzer for having such a dull, unpromising pupil.

'It is very unfortunate,' he said, 'I know I am stupid.'

'You are not stupid,' I said indignantly. 'You'd be all right if you went to Eton.'

'But then I should learn nothing,' he said, too anxious and unhappy to remember that a remark of that kind was not a courteous one to make to me. 'At least Herr Putzer says that in English schools nothing is taught at all. The boys play games all day.'

'When Herr Putzer talks about England he makes a fool of himself,' I said bluntly. 'Besides, games are good for boys. I wish you played more and worked less. You'd probably work better.'

Then we went into the great cave formed in the limestone ‘fault,’ and I found it was like one I had seen in Yorkshire years ago. Max had brought an electric torch with him, which we used when we got beyond the daylight, and it lit up the stalactites hanging like icicles from the roof. It was very beautiful in the depths of the cave, but eerie and damp and chilly, so that I was glad to reach the end and turn back. Max was determined that I must see the end or I should not have persevered. If I had a poetical soul I could describe the gloom and the silence and the glimmer of light we threw on the huge crystal spikes that had been forming there for ages, and would still be there when we and the generations to come were dust, but as I’m the most matter-of-fact of Londoners, in fact a Cockney, I could not help thinking of pantomime caves and of the principal boy and girl lost in one. Perhaps the thought came because Max’s torch seemed to get fainter and fainter, so that we stumbled over the uneven ground getting little help from it. It went out altogether before long, but by that time we could see the entrance and what was left of the daylight beyond. Fritz kept beside us soberly, and Max said that he had been brought to the cave before and hated it.

‘We must be quick,’ said Max anxiously, but we could not be quick inside the cave, and on the way home we had to go carefully wherever the path was rough or the trees close enough on either side to shut out the dusk. In the pine forest near the house it was pitch dark by the time we reached it, but luckily the path was so well made there and the trees so regularly planted that we could feel our way. We should not have minded anything if the thought of the birthday celebration and our lateness for it had not ridden us like a nightmare. For there was to be an enormous birthday cake baked and iced for the occasion. Thirteen candles would be burning on it, and all the servants of the household were coming in to wish the little Graf happiness, and to receive a slice of cake at his hands. It really was dreadful of us to be unpunctual on such an occasion, and though I meant to put the blame on the torch it would not be the torch who encountered angry glances and rebuke.

Max had turned very silent. I think he had a clearer vision than I had of the family group awaiting us. The cake was cut, the candles were burnt down, the Graf and Gräfin looked as if we had done them an injury we could never expiate, and Wolfram had the air of a man whose belongings have let him down badly.

‘Max’s torch went out,’ I said breathlessly. ‘We are so sorry. We were as quick as we could, but it was dark as night in the forest and pretty dark in the cave.’

‘At the end of October one does not visit caves,’ said the Gräfin.

‘*Verrückt*,’ said Wolfram.

‘One goes in summer and takes candles . . . plenty of candles. One does not fly off without any preparation and be an hour late for an occasion that the servants consider important and look forward to with pleasure.’

‘One is attentive in these matters,’ said the Graf severely, ‘if one is properly brought up.’

The worst of it was that they were right. Max and I both felt inclined to crawl under the table, but as we could not do that we sat there humbly and drank cold chocolate and ate slices of cake that choked us. At least we felt so at first, but our walk had made us forget the goose and be glad of the chocolate and cake. We were both dishevelled and muddy and in disgrace again. But the glow of exercise sustained us and the chocolate and cake restored us. We looked at each other over the brim of our cups and I winked at Max, and Wolfram saw me.

XXV

First Wilkins and then Wolfram! and I a married woman with a will and a temper of my own. Wilkins's heart had gone pit-a-pat because I had stayed out after dark . . . in those forests.

'Hearts always do go pit-a-pat,' I said.

'Not mine, Ma'am, unless I am put out. Fright does it or being upset.'

'You need never be frightened about me. I can take care of myself.'

'Not in the forest after dark. You might sprain your ankle or you might be murdered. Either would be unpleasant.'

'My dear woman, who do you suppose wants to murder me?'

'You never know. Some of the people I meet look as if they would do any one in for a shilling. I dunno how it is. They keep telling me no one in Germany is allowed to be idle or poor, but such tramps I never did see anywhere, never. Scarecrows aren't in it,' said Wilkins, and turned her attention to my boots and skirt, which were sopping, and to my hat which was sopping too, though there had been no rain.

'There was a drip in the cave,' I said, and told her where Max and I had been. She listened with interest, but said she hoped I wouldn't do it again because it put out people so. She had felt quite sorry for the Gräfin when she went in to see the birthday cake and the thirteen candles burning on it, for thirteen was an unlucky number, and on that account if you were upset at all you would be more upset than usual. She had heard the Gräfin say something to the Graf about the darkness which would soon descend and hide the path, and he had answered gruffly in German. Wilkins guessed from his manner that he had said let it descend, and she felt sure that if she had suggested sending out a search-party she would have had her head snapped off. That was why her heart had given her so much trouble. She had stood at the window staring into the dusk, watching and waiting for me to come, and I did not come. If she had been in England she would have sent off two men with lanterns without saying with your leave or by your leave. But in this house if you winked an eyelid when eyelids were not supposed to be winked, you were told that it was forbidden. Only the other morning at eleven the Gräfin happened on her when she had made a cup of tea for the little Mamsell and herself; and looking daggers drawn had said she did not allow tea to be taken at that hour. Thereupon Wilkins had explained that it was her own tea and her own sugar and her own biscuits and that the only thing supplied by the establishment was a drop of milk.

‘Did that smooth matters?’ I asked.

‘Not at all. Poor Mamsell got it in the neck because she was wasting her time and something was said of me the reverse of complimentary. I may not understand much German but I know when a lady with a short temper is annoyed. The little Mamsell is a nice little thing but too sentimental. She has a young gentleman whom she calls her *Schatz*. You should hear her carry on about him. In England we should think it silly and bad for the men. She asked me if I’d ever had one?’

‘What did you say, Wilkins?’

‘I said certainly . . . several . . . but that I kept ’em in their places, and recommended her to do the same. I made no impression though, for next day she was sighing and singing just the same. There’s a song she sings about him, ma’am, I wonder if you know it? One line is: “He’s so mild, he’s so good.” I told her I didn’t like mild men, and that put her out. They’re very easily put out I find, don’t you, ma’am?’

I thought so the next moment when Wolfram appeared, and after dismissing Wilkins with a look carried on the exhortations she had begun. His heart had gone pit-a-pat, it seemed. Anyhow he had been anxious and angry and I was never to do it again on any account. Never. Did I understand?

‘I shouldn’t have done it this time if Max’s torch had not failed us,’ I said. ‘That delayed us more than an hour.’

When Wolfram was on the high horse he would not listen to reason, and he then and there laid down the law that I was not to go beyond the Hohenroda domain unless he knew of it. I quite understood that this decree was promulgated for my good, but it made me feel like a bird in a cage and I told him so. He said that if I had foolish feelings he could not help it and that at any rate I must do as I was bid.

‘Why must I?’

‘Because you are my wife. You promised to.’

‘If I had not promised, we could not have been married?’

‘No.’

‘And we wanted to marry each other.’

‘More than anything in the world we wanted it.’

‘I would have promised anything . . . it isn’t fair is it?’

‘What is not fair, Karen?’

‘For men to make a marriage service that suits them and say that women must either be married by it or not to be married at all.’

‘These sentiments are subversive and unworthy of you, Karen. You have only to observe Nature to discover that the male is the dominant animal.’

‘Not always, Wolfram. For instance spiders——’

‘We are not spiders. We are highly civilised human beings. At least we are in Germany, and as my wife you now count socially and politically as a German.’

‘Then politically I don’t count at all,’ I said. ‘You are frightfully behind the times in that way.’

In half a minute we were talking about Suffragettes, and when Wolfram got on to that subject we joined issue. He seemed to think that their existence was a reflection on the English race and an irrefragable proof of its decadence.

‘In Germany they would not be tolerated,’ he maintained; ‘if they committed crimes they would be treated as criminals and put in prison.’

I pointed out that we did that, but he seemed to think we didn’t do it enough; and he came back to the prevalent German belief that there was something rotten in the state of England.

‘Are you sure there is nothing rotten in the state of Germany?’ I said.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked, ready to bristle at once. So I told him what Max had told me that afternoon about the suicide of his cousin after he had been expelled from school.

‘He should not have spoken of it,’ said Wolfram. ‘You are a foreigner and cannot understand. The poor boy was highly nervous and unbalanced: in fact an Eschenau.’

I felt inclined to remind Wolfram that his own son was an Eschenau, but it would have dotted the i’s rather brutally just then; and perhaps he was right about foreigners. To hear Germans talk of us was an object lesson in misunderstanding, and I could not help wondering whether we ever made fools of ourselves to the same extent when we talked of them.

‘Only we never talk of you at all,’ I said to Herr Putzer that night at supper. ‘Until you built a navy you were not on our tongues or in our thoughts except when we listened to a Wagner opera or bought a German sausage.’

‘So much the better for us,’ said Herr Putzer, helping himself largely to a chicken mayonnaise.

‘Our navy is built for commercial defence,’ said the Graf. ‘I suppose we are allowed to protect ourselves without asking England’s permission.’

I said I didn’t know much about it, which was not quite true. In 1913 you couldn’t live three months in Germany without knowing some things no one at home seemed to know, and the chief one was the German state of mind. But I got so tired of having it exhibited that I would have said almost anything to get it put away. I had reached the point of letting Herr Putzer win the battle of Waterloo hindered rather than helped by the English, who were in the last stage of panic when the invincible Prussians arrived and turned defeat into victory. All his history was like that. I found that Max had the most peculiar ideas about any event that gave us the glory. You cannot imagine the ‘facts’ he had been told about Nelson and his piratical career, and I should like to draw you the picture I found on one of his copy books of Boer children tied to the wheels of an English gun, some crushed by them and some just going to be. German children are taught English history in this way, and I told Herr Putzer it was as unscrupulous as the use of leaded weights. But he clicked his teeth and said that all the history he taught was true, and that Germans were too noble and honest to falsify facts, and that I probably had never heard the German proverb about lies having short legs.

‘You probably don’t expect the legs to reach beyond your own frontier,’ I said. ‘Do you mean to say that you believe we tied Boer children to our guns?’

‘Such things happen in war.’

‘Not in our wars. We don’t murder children.’

‘You did in South Africa . . . in thousands.’

‘Stuff and nonsense.’

That did it. He said I had insulted him again, but that it perhaps served him right for condescending to discuss questions of history with a lady, and one who came from a country where the serious study of history was unknown. I reeled off the names of some of our leading historians, and said they didn’t tell silly lies about foreign countries, but he only clicked his teeth and made that peculiarly irritating noise you can hardly convey in writing, but which sounds like Tscha.

‘Little treasure,’ said Wolfram drawing me aside, ‘when you fizz over like a *Brausepulver* about England, you seem as childish as Max, and how can you who know nothing expect to convince a man like Putzer, whose learning is stupendous?’

‘But what is the use of knowing everything if you know it all wrong?’ I asked, and Wolfram shook his head, and said that I was wanting in reverence.

XXVI

The winter at Hohenroda was much colder than winter ever is in London, but it was crisp and bright and indescribably beautiful. If I think of London about five o'clock on a December afternoon, I see flashing lights, unceasing traffic, mud, mist, crowds, paper boys, big policemen, and perhaps a young moon sailing amongst the clouds. If I looked out of my windows at Hohenroda I saw a fairyland of snow lying like a soft fleece in the valley, snow on the hills, snow weighing down the forest trees, and often enough snow falling, falling without pause and without sound, for it was not a windy country. The car was put away till the roads should be clear again; and well wrapped up we went about in furs which I thought delightful.

There was a village of Hohenroda, and I wondered if there was distress amongst the villagers and why the Gräfin did not visit them if they were her tenants, and find out if they wanted coal and soup and blankets. In fact, I had some idea of starting the kind of mothers' meetings and clothing and coal clubs you read of in English novels about country life. I had no experience of such things because I had always lived in London, but Wilkins told me that the duchess had been most active and energetic on her estates, and had dismissed any families who refused to fall in with her views about religion, politics, thrift, hygiene. But I pointed out to Wilkins that England is a free country, where even a duchess can do as she pleases while probably here the Hohenrodas had to make the best of the families happening to live on their lands. However, I talked to the Gräfin about it and she explained that her husband had no more power over the peasants than they had over him in this part of Germany. It was different north and east, where the Junkers owned enormous stretches of land and still talked of the villagers as *meine Leute*. There the labourers were still not much better off than serfs. But here the farming folk owned their land and distress was unknown amongst them unless brought about by drink. Many of them were very well-off and sent a son to a university, so that he might become a doctor or a pastor or even a professor as learned as Herr Putzer. I was rather surprised, because I had been reading some celebrated German plays about people bestially poor and degraded; but the Gräfin said they described life in the villages of Silesia and some parts of Saxony where there was great poverty amongst the industrial population. Certainly all the peasants I met on the roads trudging beside their carts or in their sleighs, all these hefty men and buxom women looked prosperous and solid. They wore the most attractive clothes, especially on Sundays. The men were big-boned and mostly had dark, clean-cut faces, rather like our legal type. They turned out in long, black velvet coats, beaver hats, scarlet waistcoats and knee breeches. The women wore short, full, brightly-coloured skirts, black velvet boleros over elaborate chemises, and heavy silver chains, and most becoming black gauze caps with wired blinkers like little wings. They lived in old wooden houses, with deep-thatched eaves and outside staircases. The brown of the thatch and the timber was mellow with age, the rooms on the first floor were large, and furnished for the most part with solid, plain furniture, some of it having come down to the owners through generations. When I peeped into a bedroom I saw two wooden bedsteads neatly made with homespun linen and a plumeau like a mountain. Then there would be a dark, roomy, wooden press for clothes, a couple of chairs, a hanging glass, and a washstand with a basin and a glass bottle in the basin for water. But I suspected that the washstand with its insufficient appurtenances was a sacrifice to fashion, and that when the goodman and his wife washed at all they probably preferred the warmth of the kitchen. The ground-floor of these houses was occupied by stables and the attics by granaries, so that when the son who was studying at Tübingen or Heidelberg came home on a visit his nose, which had become sensitive in the city, suffered from the home-like smells of his youth. I got to know these things through making friends with the Hohenrodas's chief forester and going to see his wife one afternoon. They gave me coffee and cake and told me about their Carl who was going to be a pastor, and how it worried him to hear the cows lowing just under his feet while he was pursuing his studies, and I, looking through a wide crack in the floor, could see a cow and her calf quite plainly, and could account for the curious thick air of the room and the compound smell of peat, milk, hay, rank tobacco, and clothes worn in the forest and on the farm.

Another day I went to see the pastor and his wife, and there, too, I was regaled with coffee and cakes and treated as if I was a personage from a higher sphere. The pastor was nearly as unpleasant as Herr Putzer, a smug, conceited man, who preached unctuous sermons, had an insufferably condescending manner to his wife and all other women, and was on edge about England. Wasn't it strange to find a minister of the Gospel living a sequestered life in Central Europe bubbling over with wrath about a nation he no more knew than I know the Red Indian? His wife was a mousey woman, with black hair brushed smooth, and tight, beady, black eyes, an expression as self-complacent as her husband's, and the kind of black dress a housekeeper wears on the stage. She stared at my clothes as if they were crimes, and informed me that she had a married sister in Berlin who was the glass of fashion, and that nowadays Berlin exceeded Paris and Vienna in elegance. London, she told me, never had counted and never would count, because English women had no taste in dress and no grace and no figures. It was a tirade, not a conversation, and I did not dispute anything she said. I just sat there and I suppose annoyed her by existing. It was a bitter cold day, and I had naturally put on a long fur coat, fur gloves, a fur hat, and a big fur muff. They were new furs, too, that Dad had brought me from America, and I guessed by the look of them that his deals had been successful. The Gräfin had been quite solemn in her appreciation of them; but she had no envy in her composition, and went out contentedly in a sealskin worn to the bone in places and of a shape that I should say was new when men wore side-whiskers. Wolfram and I had decided that we would give her a new one for Christmas, and that it must be made for her in order to be big enough. When I took off my coat at the *Pfarrhaus* I had on a mole-coloured crêpe de Chine, which Frau Mink informed me her sister would consider correct in summer but not when snow was on the ground: and Wolfram’s diamonds were flashing on my fingers because I had taken off my sea-otter gloves. I think myself that you must have a withered soul if you are upset because another woman happens to be better dressed than you are yourself; and I was glad that Wilkins had trained me to accept the fact that my possessions were not worth mentioning compared to those she had been accustomed to while with the duchess and Lady Sawyer. For instance, I knew that the duchess had ropes of pearls as big as marrowfat peas, so I thought nothing of my single row. It had not occurred to me that Frau Mink would glare at it while we drank our coffee, and in the end ask me if the pearls were real. I had to admit that they were, and then the pastor improved the occasion by a little impromptu exhortation. He told us that the only jewel a virtuous wife should wish to possess was the esteem of her husband and that this could only be gained by unceasing self-forgetting service. He maundered on so long about the joy we ought to find in rising early and working late in order to please our men folk, and how we ought invariably to submit to them and bear with their infirmities that even his wife got snappish and said that the stove needed replenishing, and that she must interrupt him to do it: while I made his eyes start out of his head by saying that if you had to humour a man as if he were a child you could not also bow down to him as if he were a god. I thought the double attitude was impossible, but he said every virtuous German woman adopted it at marriage and held to it through life.

‘She must feel tired sometimes,’ I argued.

‘Why should she not feel tired? Am I not tired when I have performed the day’s duties? An honest German woman is not a butterfly.’

‘But I wouldn’t have a world without butterflies, would you?’

‘The world is as our great German god made it,’ said Herr Mink. ‘Butterflies have their place, but not on the hearth. There we wish to see a helpmate weaving roses.’

‘How does one weave roses and why does one do it on a hearth where there is often a fire?’ I asked. ‘Besides in Germany you have no hearths. You have stoves.’

The husband and wife looked scandalised by my ignorance, and the pastor there and then took down a volume of Schiller, and read me the poem about women weaving heavenly roses into the lives of men. I thought I saw what he meant. A German wife spends a good deal of her time on the kitchen hearth, and the roses she weaves are the succulent dishes she cooks for the delectation of her husband. But when I said this the pastor shut the book with a snap, and muttered something about women being unpoetical, and always having their thoughts on the material side of life.

‘If it were not so it would be uncomfortable for the men,’ said Frau Mink. ‘Some one must cook and clean, unless one is rich and has many servants.’

She looked at me with an air of disapproval. I got up to go and began to put on my fur coat.

‘The Gräfin can cook. She likes it,’ I said. ‘She is making some wonderful cake to-day that has nuts and raisins in it and all kinds of spices.’

‘Have you then no desire to learn? Did you not wish to stay at home and watch her and perhaps assist?’

I said ‘Not much,’ in polite German, and bid good-bye, but I had the impression that they were both overflowing with sympathy for the Gräfin, because she had such a frivolous and useless daughter-in-law.

‘She is a very tolerant woman,’ one of them said with a moan.

XXVII

The school examination that Max dreaded took place before Christmas and he failed in it. I cannot tell you much more about it because I was told so little myself and I could not question Max. As for the others, they all blamed the boy for qualities of mind he had inherited, and for a state of mind and body that a little sense would have prevented. I know he did not sleep for nights beforehand, and that by the time his ordeal was at hand his brain lacked the freshness and power of concentration needed to make the most of such knowledge as he possessed. Whether he was on the border line or hopelessly below the required standard I never knew, and I certainly did not care. It is impossible to tell you how little I cared. The boy had told me that in class he had found himself forgetting easy things he knew quite well, and that his head ached so badly that he felt sick and unable to eat. For some time before the end of term we all seemed to be in suspense, and no one talked about Christmas which was nearly upon us.

We were having tea in the Gräfin's sitting-room when Max returned from school with the report that meant so much to them all. The half-hour before he appeared had been dreadful. It reminded me of the time when I waited with Dad, while a great consulting surgeon met our own doctor, and looked at mother, and decided that she could not live. Dad and I had hardly spoken to each other, and I stared out of the window and watched people go about as usual, and thought it strange. If it had been a question of life or death, Wolfram could hardly have been more worried, and his mother's hands trembled as she poured out tea, and the Graf brooded gloomily. Herr Putzer had gone in the car to fetch Max from school, and the moment they came in together we knew that the worst had happened. Max looked as I imagine people must have looked in those tumbrils that took victims to the guillotine. He did not speak, but shook hands with us as German boys do when they come back from school, and then handed his father the report. Wolfram opened it.

'Max has failed,' he said. '*Durchgefallen.*'

The Graf snatched the paper from his son's hands and stared at it. The Gräfin began to cry, not noisily, but as if her affliction was more than she could bear. Herr Putzer buried his head in his hands and groaned. I went up to Max and put my arm round him.

'Does it mean you won't get your promotion?' I asked.

He nodded, but did not lift his eyes from the floor. He seemed overcome with shame, just as he might have been if he had done something infamous and had been discovered.

Herr Putzer raised his head from his arms and began to defend himself, for he took Max's failure as a reflection on his capacity as a teacher and felt it keenly. Being the kind of man he was, he was naturally occupied with his own discomfiture and not with the effect on his pupil.

'I have striven,' he said, 'I have done my duty. The shame is not mine.'

'No one blames you, Putzer,' said Wolfram. 'You have done your best.'

'Untiring have I been. *Ohne Rast, ohne Ruh!* That I must say for myself.'

'What is to be done?' exclaimed Wolfram hopelessly.

'Every day I have exhorted him. Every day I have reminded him of all this hour would mean; of the disappointment, the disgrace, the scandal . . . there he stands and can look none of us in the face . . . so he must go through life . . . while we who are innocent suffer also.'

'Better he had never been born,' said the Graf, speaking for the first time. 'Better to be dead than to bring disgrace upon the name of one's fathers.'

He looked at me as he said this and I looked at him, and we understood each other. He was not ashamed of his sentiments, and I thought him callous and brutal, and wished him to know that I thought so. His outburst had so shocked and startled me that I had taken a step towards him with some idea of upbraiding him, for by this time my anger had reached boiling-point, and when you are angry you do not fear people even if they are bullies and twice your weight. As I moved I took my arm from Max's shoulder, and I saw him look at his father, hoping against hope I now believe for some sign of forgiveness and encouragement. But Wolfram sat there, the image of stern disappointment and displeasure, his hard profile towards us and his eyes turned away. His father's misery seemed to overwhelm the boy, and with an ashen pallor in his face that came there like a seizure, he stumbled towards the door. My first impulse was to follow him, and then before I went I spoke, but not till he had closed the door behind him.

'For shame!' I said, to the Graf, and I dare say I spoke like a fury for I felt like one. I know I clenched my hands, and I only do that when I'm in such a passion that I hardly know what I'm doing. But he only scowled and looked at me as a large, fierce boar might look at an indignant butterfly. One gobble, he seemed to say, and where would the butterfly be?

‘I’m going after him,’ I said. ‘I’m going to tell him he is not to blame.’

‘When a boy has not the energy and the ambition necessary in the young ——’ droned Herr Putzer.

I could have slain the man.

‘The boy has been overworked,’ I said, turning on him, ‘steadily and brutally overworked. There is no sense in it.’

The Gräfin held her breath and looked at me. The three men looked at each other, and their look was as much as to say, She is crazy.

‘Therefore you are to blame,’ I went on, ‘you and his father and grandfather and your precious German State that oppresses children and destroys them.’

‘The gracious lady raves,’ said the Graf. When he disliked me more than usual and wished to be sarcastic he would call me *die gnädige*, which means the gracious lady. ‘A State that requires men to defend it from a host of envious enemies does not destroy men-children. If she cannot talk more sensibly than that it would be well if she did not talk at all.’

‘I have still to learn that an English lady is an authority on education,’ said Herr Putzer. ‘No one can understand what does not exist, and one may say that what we Germans understand as education does not exist in England.’

‘Max is being killed by overwork,’ I said steadily. ‘He has not failed because he is idle or stupid but because he is ill.’

‘You give your opinion too freely,’ said the Graf.

‘Certainly,’ said the Gräfin; ‘what can Karen know of German school life and the demands it makes?’

‘Nothing,’ said Herr Putzer, spreading out his hands palm downwards; ‘nothing at all can the Frau Gräfin know.’

‘I’m going to find Max,’ I said, and as I went I looked at Wolfram, hoping that he would come with me. Thank God he did.

‘The boy’s heart is broken,’ I said as we hurried along, ‘we’ve got to mend it somehow.’

‘But, Karen, you’ve no conception of the trouble such a failure brings on us all. My friends will pity me, my enemies will rejoice. That little worthless Hohenroda boy is *durchgefallen* again they will say. He will come to no good in the world.’

‘They say! Let them say! What do they matter. No one matters to us just now except Max.’

‘He will have to work harder than ever.’

‘Then he will have a breakdown and not work at all.’

‘You exaggerate.’

We got to the schoolroom wing as Wolfram spoke, and at first our voices and our footsteps were the only sound we heard. But as we reached the door of Max’s bedroom we both heard something else that struck at our hearts. To my dying day I shall remember that moment, the sickening fear and the interval before we reached the handle and turned it. My knees seemed to give under me though I rushed forward; but Wolfram was quicker than I. The horrible, choking gasps had hardly startled us when he fled past me and was inside the room and supporting the writhing figure of his son. He shouted to me to go away but I did not. I could not, for he needed help. The moment was too awful to feel in my marrow as I felt it later. You don’t think or shudder when you are flung into tragedy because you have to act. One moment I stood in the corridor ordinarily anxious and angry: the next moment I was helping Wolfram to cut down the body of his son. Max had hanged himself. There was a hook in the ceiling from which a lamp had been suspended when lamps were used in the castle; and it had been put in with German thoroughness, for the boy’s weight was not too much for it, and if he had hung there a minute longer he would have been stone dead.

XXVIII

In a moment Wolfram had jumped on the chair by which Max must have reached the hook and taken his son down. I had seen a pair of scissors on the toilet-table, and we cut through the silk handkerchief that was strangling the boy. It was a big one that he wore as a muffler and he had made a noose of it. We neither of us had any medical knowledge, and till we could get a doctor we had to do as best we could. At first we both thought Max would die. He was quite unconscious and his face looked dreadful. The veins stood out on his forehead, and there were signs of suffocation in his colour and his starting eyes. After a time they closed, and he lay there inert and breathing with difficulty. I fetched another pillow and a hot-water bottle for his feet, and when I got back to the room with these things I found Wolfram sitting by his son watching him anxiously. We hardly dared look at each other for we should have broken down.

‘I have ’phoned for Dr. Marwitz,’ I said, and then I too sat down, but not for long. I felt restless and furiously angry. To see that highly-strung, delicate boy lying there between life and death, and to dwell on what he must have suffered when he ran up here this morning resolved to die; to imagine his despair and picture the deliberation of his deed roused me to just the white heat of anger that since then German cruelty has roused in all men and women who have any heart or any understanding for pain they do not feel themselves.

‘Stay here with Max,’ I said to Wolfram. ‘I am going to tell them.’

He looked at me, and his look gave himself and his boy into my hands.

‘I may speak for you?’ I said.

He sighed.

‘Putzer must go,’ I told him.

‘Must he? Can’t we regulate things?’

‘No. Max hates him. He is a pedant and a bully.’

Wolfram looked quite broken down, and turned to his son again as if he did not care what happened outside this room, and he told me later that that was how he had felt. He put his affairs in my hands for the time being, and only asked to be left in peace. I suppose we had been away about half an hour when I returned to the Gräfin’s sitting-room and found her still there with the two men, and still looking afflicted by Max’s defeat. They were all so self-centred in their different ways that they did not see as I came into the room that I had passed through a furnace and come out of it white hot and ready to consume them. They were not over-pleased to see me, and showed it by an exchange of glances and a sudden silence. The Graf and Gräfin were on the sofa and Herr Putzer was on a straight-backed chair. He never took an easy-chair in the presence of his employers unless specially invited. I took one near the window and I did not speak at once. I wanted to hurt them because they deserved to be hurt, and I wondered how I could do it effectively.

‘You look very pale,’ said the Gräfin, beginning, I suppose, to suspect that something was wrong. ‘Does it go well with you?’

‘It goes well with me,’ I said.

‘Where is Wolfram?’

‘He is upstairs.’

‘We require his presence,’ said the Graf. ‘He is the boy’s father.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘he is the boy’s father.’

‘Therefore he must give his consent to the arrangement we are now making, by the advice of our honoured Herr Putzer.’

Herr Putzer bowed.

‘Have you been making arrangements?’ I asked.

‘Yes. We intend to send Max to our little Jagdschloss for the holidays to mark our displeasure with him. Herr Putzer is good enough to say that he will accompany him there and superintend his studies. There will be no distractions and no untoward influences——’

‘Am I an untoward influence?’

‘Decidedly,’ said Herr Putzer.

‘Max will not go to the Jagdschloss,’ I said.

There was a moment of petrified surprise. That I should dare to contradict them and dispute their plans was incredible. They could hardly believe their ears.

‘Our grandson——’ began the Graf.

‘My stepson,’ I interrupted.

‘Our grandson will go where we send him.’

‘If I had not gone after Max as quickly as I did——’

‘It would have pleased us better if you had not gone,’ said the Gräfin.

‘It was uncalled for,’ said the Graf. ‘Where Max is concerned you have nothing to say. Nothing at all.’

‘The Gräfin Wolfram is too impulsive,’ said Herr Putzer. ‘Education is not a field for sentiment and impulse. If you allow such motives to weaken your will power you cannot produce Germans of the highest type, such as we turn out of our schools year after year.’

I let them all finish and then I began again.

‘If I had not gone after Max he would now be dead.’

They looked incredulous, and the Graf muttered some thing about hysterics and exaggeration.

‘He had hanged himself.’

‘No! No!’

‘From a hook in his room.’

That did upset them. The Gräfin, who had screamed a shrill denial, began to weep again, and all three invoked their deities in a scared way.

‘We cut him down,’ I went on, for I was in no mood to spare them. ‘A moment later he would have been strangled. He did it with that big white silk muffler he has been wearing at school. When we found him he was choking and black in the face——’

The Gräfin put out her hands to stop me, but I would not be stopped. I wanted them to hear what I had heard and to see what I had seen.

‘He may still die,’ I told them. ‘He is unconscious and he breathes heavily.’

‘A doctor——’

‘A doctor is on his way.’

‘There was no reason,’ said the Graf uneasily.

‘I only did my duty,’ said Herr Putzer.

‘No one blames you,’ said the Graf.

Then I spoke out and said what I thought again. I told them they were all to blame, and Wolfram more than any one else, because he was the boy’s father and ought to have interfered. I also said plainly that Wolfram and I wished to relieve Herr Putzer of his duties whether Max lived or died. It was an unpleasant thing to say, but it had to be done, and I thought I might as well get it over.

‘Did you engage Herr Putzer?’ thundered the Graf.

‘No, indeed.’

‘Then you cannot dismiss him. Who engages also dismisses.’

‘If I am not wanted I shall go,’ said Herr Putzer, very angry and very huffy. ‘To-day rather than to-morrow. I have my pride.’

‘I wish to see the boy,’ said the Gräfin stumbling to her feet, and I felt sorry for her and offered her my arm as she went towards the door.

‘I too would see him,’ said the Graf, and came with us.

Herr Putzer clawed at his straggly beard and watched us sulkily.

‘It appears that I am not wanted,’ he said, and as he addressed no one in particular no one answered him.

XXIX

Max did not die but he had a long illness. He was all to pieces the doctor said. Nerves shattered, lungs wrong, heart wrong. No question of school for months to come. The Hohenrodas, who never had anything the matter with them, went about with faces as long as kites and worried about the boy's future. Luckily Dr. Marwitz was a man who knew his business, and was an autocrat into the bargain. He explained to them that the boy would have no future unless they understood that he had been nearly killed by their folly in the past. If he didn't lose his life he would lose his reason next time. But there should be no next time. Wolfram and I were determined about that, and the Gräfin came tearfully to our side. And I was determined that Herr Putzer should go, for I knew how Max dreaded and disliked him. There was a personal repulsiveness about the man that I felt and understood that Max felt too. The fuggy air he breathed, his ear-aches, the click of his teeth, his way of eating and sniffing as he ate all got on our nerves. You would have thought that after what had happened he would have taken himself off; but he did not do so as quickly as I could have wished. The Graf protected him, and would have committed Max to his care again. Even before the doctor arrived I had a row with my father-in-law about this.

When I went back to the room where Max was lying I had a good look at it, and I saw that, like the schoolroom, it faced north and was dark and stuffy. It had one of those depressing brown wall papers Germans are so fond of, a bare floor, and an iron bedstead. But you would have thought that if there had been a grain of sense or sympathy amongst them they would have known it would do the boy no good to be staring at that hook in the ceiling, with Putzer to look at as an alternative. Anyhow I asked no questions, but left my mother-in-law and Wolfram to watch Max while I went to my own quarters, and with Wilkins' help, got my dressing-room ready for him; a sunny, cheerful room, with a view of the valley and the hills. We both worked like blacks, removing my clothes, and bringing in a bedstead and making the bed. Mamsell helped us. The news had got about that the little Graf was ill, but no one outside the family except the doctors ever knew what had happened. When we had finished the room was warm and gay and comfortable. The rose-coloured carpet had been a wedding present, and Wilkins had made me curtains and covers of a flowery cretonne that went with it. I put a silk eiderdown on the bed instead of a plumeau, and I brought in some chrysanthemums that Wolfram had given me the day before. Then I went back and told Wolfram what I had done, and said that if he would carry Max in, Wilkins and I would undress him and put him to bed. Wilkins was an excellent nurse, because the duchess had been an invalid and a termagant and had put her through the mill for three years. She had nursed my mother in her last illness, and I liked her about when anything ailed me. But the Graf and Gräfin did not know all this, and when I proposed to take Max out of his own room they looked offended and annoyed. No doubt they thought me officious, because they had never recognised that I had any interest in Max, or any right to a concern in his affairs.

‘The boy stays here,’ said the Graf.

‘Why should he?’

‘Because he belongs here. This is his room.’

‘Karen wishes to have him close by,’ said Wolfram. ‘If he is ill——’

‘Why should he be ill? There was nothing the matter with him this morning. A man who tries to shoot himself and misses is not ill.’

‘Can’t you see?’ I cried.

‘He is ill,’ said the Gräfin, who sat beside her grandson and watched him intently. She looked very sad and very anxious.

‘Is that a reason for dragging him out of bed and putting him into a strange room? Here he feels at home, and with Putzer next door——’

‘Wolfram, if you leave your boy in this miserable room with that hateful man near him I’ll never forgive you,’ I said to my husband. ‘Your father knows nothing whatever about children or about illness.’

‘How!’ bellowed the Graf.

‘None of you know anything. Is this a room for a delicate, nervy boy? It’s a prison cell. Look at the windows high up in the wall so that he can’t see out. Look at the walls. It’s bitter cold too. And now you want him to lie there staring at that hook. A set of sheep would have more understanding.’

You must please believe that I had not been brought up to rage at people in that way, and in England I had never wished to do it. But the Graf made me think that I knew what David felt like when he saw Goliath. The giant had his sword and his spear, but the boy had stones and knew how to sling them. My father-in-law expected every one to be afraid of him and I was not afraid; but he would have thought I was if I had given in. Besides, for Max’s sake I could not.

‘Woman, hold your mouth,’ the Graf shouted at me in German, so you see his manner of speech was not refined; and he took a step towards me.

‘Make not so much noise,’ said the Gräfin reprovingly. ‘You will disturb the boy. This room is certainly dark and sad, and I think Herr Putzer is not used to the care of one sick; but in Karen’s dressing-room there is no bed.’

‘There is,’ I said. ‘Wilkins and I have carried one in. Come and see.’

The Gräfin got up and came with me, and when she saw the room we had prepared for Max she nodded in a relieved way and said I had done well. But she added that she would not venture to move the boy without the doctor’s permission, even if her husband consented to his removal.

‘I’ll take the responsibility,’ I said, and when we went back I asked Wolfram to carry Max to his new quarters.

‘Am I the master of this house or am I not?’ said the Graf in his most formidable manner. He made me tired.

‘Come on, Wolfram,’ I said, but Wolfram had to make a little speech before he defied his father.

‘I am not forgetful of all you have done for Max,’ he said, ‘and I shall not let him forget it either.’

‘They have done for him nearly,’ I said in an undertone. ‘We are not likely to forget it.’

At that moment Herr Putzer came in, treading gingerly and looking afraid. When he saw the recumbent figure of Max still lying helpless on the bed, still unconscious and breathing heavily he turned paler than before and was about to back out of the room again. The Graf, however, recalled him.

‘Putzer,’ he said, ‘my confidence in you is unshakable. No intrigues, no foreign *intriguante* shall shake it. With our good doctor’s help you will watch over my grandson, and doubtless in a few days he will be restored to health.’

The Gräfin shook her head sadly. She had more sense than her husband and was more kindly inclined; but she never stood up to him. Herr Putzer remained close to the door, neither in the room nor out of it.

‘What is the man doing?’ exclaimed the Graf. ‘I’m telling you, Putzer, that my grandson will remain under your care.’

‘He will not,’ said Wolfram. So far he had hardly spoken, but now he spoke decisively. ‘Max will not be under Herr Putzer again. I shall make different arrangements.’

The Graf glared at us both and gobbled, and finally did not speak. I understood his look at Wolfram and then his look at me. Wolfram had been more or less dependent on his father financially till his second marriage, for his first wife had only brought about a hundred a year to the exchequer. But Dad had given me an income that would have made us comfortable in England and was wealth in Germany. We could leave Hohenroda to-morrow if we wished and live independently. However Herr Putzer unexpectedly came to our assistance.

‘I am not used to illness,’ he said with a shudder, ‘the normal I can deal with, but illness and insanity are not normal. A boy who acts as Max has is not sane.’

‘You are afraid!’ exclaimed the Graf.

I had seen in a moment that the man was afraid. His function had been to destroy Max not to rescue him, and when he saw his work nearly accomplished he trembled and ran away.

‘The boy requires medical care and the service of women,’ he stuttered. ‘In a sick room women are in place.’

‘We waste time,’ said Wolfram sternly, and without looking at his father or at Herr Putzer again, he took his son tenderly into his arms and carried him to our wing. There we found Wilkins waiting for us, and before the doctor arrived we had undressed the boy and put him comfortably to bed.

XXX

I had looked forward to a German Christmas, but when Christmas came Max was still dangerously ill, and none of us were inclined for festivities. By that time Herr Putzer had departed. Baron Osthofen, one of Wolfram's cousins, had engaged him for his sons, two bull-necked lusty boys who did not look as if they could be overworked or intimidated. The Osthofens lived in a villa just outside Reichenstadt, and they thought a great deal of themselves. I did not like them, because their arrogance was like a London fog, not to be matched anywhere for impenetrability and disagreeableness; and they disliked me because I was English, and did not fully understand the place of Osthofens in the universe. I thought that Herr Putzer would suit them very well, and he evidently did, for whenever we met they sang his praises. I knew well enough that he had not sung mine to them. In fact they let me know it by observing that they had dismissed their English nursery governess because Herr Putzer considered that any one English or American had a disintegrating influence in a German family, and invariably upset the perfection of its discipline and balance. However in those days I did not expect ever to be much mixed up with the Osthofens, and I never gave them a thought except when I was in their company and wished myself elsewhere.

Just before Christmas Wolfram and I went into Reichenstadt to buy presents for various people, so I saw the crowded shops, the Christmas fairs in the marketplace, and the rows and rows of Christmas trees in any of the open places where there was room for them. But we were both too heavy-hearted to enjoy ourselves as we might have done if Max had only turned the corner. We bought him presents, but we knew that it was uncertain whether he would live to see them. By that time I had had an English nurse sent out, who took the night work, while Wilkins and I divided the day. It must have been trying for the Graf and Gräfin to have no less than three Englishwomen in their German home; but they were really very good about it. When Herr Putzer left he seemed to take a hostile miasma with him, and though the Graf still looked like an ogre in a fairy tale, he had quieted down wonderfully. The efficient way in which Max was nursed pleased the doctor, and his praises impressed the Graf and Gräfin. It did upset them a good deal at first to see Max have inflammation of the lungs, with the windows open in winter weather, but they got used to it. They sat in rooms from which every breath of fresh air was excluded, and the heat and staleness of the fumes they breathed used to turn me faint. But it seemed to suit them. They never ailed anything, and never lost their appetites all through those anxious weeks, and when they saw me getting rather worn their one idea was to give me more food and more wine. I told them I wanted less than usual because I was taking less exercise, but they did not believe me.

When Wolfram and I went to Reichenstadt for our Christmas shopping we had to make a day of it, because there was so much to do. I had sent to England for a great many things, but still our list was a long one. You see that although Max was ill and there were no children in the house, there had to be a tree, and though a German tree is not usually as loaded as an English one, you want little sweets and toys for it that it takes time to choose. The Gräfin would not go out in the snow herself, because she said that the *Schneeluft* gave her sciatica. Wolfram was as hurried and impatient over his shopping as other men, but to go into a Reichenstadt shop with him was like going with a royalty. We were served, whoever else had to wait, and I felt quite embarrassed sometimes by the obsequious civility shown us everywhere. Wolfram took it for granted, and on occasion gave himself airs. At least it seemed so to me when we went into the Krokodil for lunch, found it crowded and allowed two luckless civilians to give up their table to us. However one of them was Herr Oscar Strauss, and I, forgetting the German social law which forbids that inferior creature a woman to speak to a man till she is spoken to, held out my hand to him, asked him if he remembered me and presented him to Wolfram. Apparently our notice conferred such honour on him that the head waiter came up at once and said he would find room for the gentleman at a neighbouring table; and Herr Strauss himself beamed all over his face, and asked me whether I ever sang about ‘Chip, Chip, my little horse,’ now, and how I liked living in Germany and whether I had seen the von Gösens lately. I said that I had not seen them lately, because we had illness in the house, and then, observing that Wolfram and the head waiter were both lying in wait for me with the *Speisekarte*, I parted from Herr Strauss and sat down.

The room was heated to a degree we never heat rooms in England, and I had taken off my long fur coat. Underneath it I was wearing a thin ninon blouse to match my coat and skirt, which were of a shade you see in some modern roses but not in many materials. You know the kind of rose that seems to have sunset colours on it, and you hardly know whether to call it pink, orange, copper or yellow. The result in cloth was rather veiled and quiet, but very uncommon. Dad had sent it me from Paris the week before, to cheer me up, he said, and Wilkins found it hardly needed a stitch. It went well with Wolfram’s grey-blue uniform, but I should not have worn it if I had known that every one in the restaurant would stare at me as they did.

‘They would stare at you if you wore grey or brown,’ Wolfram said; and he seemed to enjoy his lunch and not to mind the staring. But there was an awkward moment when we got up to go, because the restaurant was still crowded, and the head waiter hurried forward with two women who were to take our places, and the women were Frau Gutheim and Emma. When they saw us they looked as if they wanted to turn tail, but the head waiter benignly urged them on. *Hier meine Damen*, he said, and the *Damen*, who were probably hungry, had to pass us. I had to make up my mind in a moment, and without consulting Wolfram who, I saw, had his stony face on, and was going to stalk past them as if they were strangers. I didn’t feel like doing that, for I had spoken to both of them when I met them here before; so I held out my hand to Frau Gutheim, feeling rather uncertain whether she would take it or make a scene. For she had evidently noticed Wolfram’s want of cordiality. But she seized my hand, her whole manner seemed to melt, and her voice had the squashy softness in it that you must hear to understand, and that always sounded insincere to me. As for Emma, she stared open-mouthed at Wolfram, and heaved a sigh that touched him about as much as it would have touched a pyramid.

‘Karen!’ cried Frau Gutheim, ‘my dear child, how happy it makes me to see thee!’

Yes! she said ‘thee’ to me, though she had turned me out of her house and had never said it during the week that I was her guest. I had only meant just to shake hands civilly, say a word or two, and pass on; and I did it partly for the sake of Herr Gutheim whom I had liked, and partly because I was bound to run across them sometimes, either at the von Gösens or in public places. But I was not prepared to make friends again, to be warmly invited to the house and to be gushed over in the presence of strangers.

‘When will you come?’ she cooed, and the more frosty my replies were the more dove-like her wooing of me became; and there is nothing more uncomfortable than to be wooed by a person whose attentions you do not desire.

‘I cannot come at all,’ I said, ‘there is illness in the house.’

‘I know. Little Graf Max—poor child—I will send him some grapes.’

‘Thank you very much, but he has grapes.’

‘These are quite unusual grapes. I get them at Egler’s.’

‘We get our grapes there.’

‘But you are not always with him. You have left him to-day.’

‘We had to do some Christmas shopping.’

‘Of course; and shopping is very exhausting. You will require tea or coffee before you return home. If you and Graf Wolfram would do us the honour—my husband would be overjoyed to see you again——’

‘Karen! I cannot wait any longer,’ said Wolfram, and cutting Frau Gutheim short, I said hurriedly that I could not come to coffee, and fled from her presence with my husband. He listened to what I had to say, and told me that I need not feel worried or uncertain, as it was a matter for him to decide and he had decided it. Nothing would induce him to enter the Gutheim’s house or to allow me to enter it.

‘They will be fearfully hurt,’ I said.

‘Let them be hurt!’

‘But I don’t like hurting people.’

‘You are not doing it. I am.’

When Wolfram was in that mood I never argued with him. I waited for the clouds to roll by. Besides, in this case I was not profoundly in disagreement. The Gutheims did not deserve anything at our hands. And sometimes a man simplifies a difficult situation by putting his foot down. All married women know that one of a husband’s duties is occasionally to play the part Mr. Jorkins played to Mr. Spenlow.

XXXI

Behold Max, Wilkins, and me at Ilgesheim, a German *Kurort*, doing a German *Kur* under the orders of a German doctor who would stand no nonsense, and was of a thoroughness in his instructions that Wilkins considered indelicate. But she admitted that he seemed to know what he was about, although his eyebrows did tickle her when he looked at her throat with his shortsighted eyes.

Max was doing the *Kur* in order to complete his recovery and be as strong as a lion when he went back to school, and I was doing it because Dr. Marwitz, who had attended Max at Hohenroda, said I must. German doctors are autocrats, and no well-conducted German thinks of resisting the advice of the one in whom he puts his faith. I suppose I had rather overdone myself, helping to look after Max. At any rate I was losing weight and looking so thin that Wolfram took fright.

‘She eats nothing, she drinks nothing,’ he said to his mother at dinner one day.

‘I have noticed that for some time,’ said the Gräfin.

‘What is to be done? Karen, you must see Dr. Marwitz to-morrow and do what he advises.’

‘ “Joy and temperance and repose,
Slam the door on the doctor’s nose,” ’

I quoted.

‘Starvation is not temperance,’ said the Graf. ‘When there is food on the table it is folly.’

‘But I eat and drink what I want,’ I argued. ‘It cannot be good to eat and drink what one does not want.’

‘A young woman of your size should eat more,’ said the Gräfin in a final tone; and next day Dr. Marwitz, who came to look at Max, looked at me too.

I was rather glad really to put myself in his capable hands, for I knew that I was out of sorts, and when he said that Max and I, attended by Wilkins, were to go to Ilgesheim and take the baths and waters there my spirits rose sky high at once. The winter and the spring had been beautiful at Hohenroda, beautiful exceedingly. When the snow melted and the young green began to come in the forest I thought that I had never seen spring in its glory before. One day Wolfram took us up to the little Jagdschloss to look at the view from there, and for miles round I saw forest and nothing but forest; and every tip of every branch had put out a pale green shoot in sign of spring, and the sun shone on all that green world and the streams dashed foaming over rocks, full and hurrying to the river, and the larks were singing as they do at home. The forester and his wife who lived in the Schloss and took care of it gave us lunch on a table outside, and I thought the place such a paradise that I wished we could spend the summer there. But it was impossible, because Wolfram could not have gone to and fro to the barracks, and Dr. Marwitz could not have spared the time to visit Max there. So we went back to Hohenroda, and Max felt a little better every day while I felt a little worse. However, Dr. Marwitz assured Wolfram that there was nothing much the matter, and that if I spent six weeks at Ilgesheim, taking the waters and doing exactly what his colleague, Dr. Ebers, told me to do I should return as fresh and blooming as I had arrived a year ago.

We went to Ilgesheim in the middle of June and we stayed at the *Kursaal*, which was the best hotel in the place. Ilgesheim was what Germans call a *Luxusbad*. It had a Casino, large, well-kept gardens, and a number of good hotels. A great many of the summer visitors came from other countries, and in our hotel quite half were English and American. Max and I had a little table to ourselves in the *Speisesaal*, and at first we did not make any friends. The *Kur* took up a good deal of our time, and when we were not at the *Brunnen* or the *Badehaus*, or taking the little walks prescribed by the doctor, we were probably in our own rooms trying to recover from the *Kur*. Then we liked the shops and the market where there was the most lovely fruit that we were not allowed to eat because of the *Kur*. But we could buy it for Wilkins, until she said that she thought she would try the *Kur* too. When that happened, we went to the Bohemian glass shop and bought her a beautiful glass to take with her to the *Brunnen*, but though she admired it immensely, she only drank out of it once. She said the water gave her a headache, and that she had never expected a German *Kur* to suit an English constitution. She was enjoying herself uncommonly though, because some of the English and Americans had brought maids and nurses with them, and she made several friends who understood about duchesses, and presumably bore with her when she talked of them.

Max and I were glad that she was so happy and never at all on our minds, as we liked to be together all day and by ourselves. You cannot imagine what a different boy he was now that Herr Putzer had ceased from troubling him. He began to put on weight, to get some colour into his cheeks, and to recover his spirits. He was naturally a lively, happy boy, with considerable intelligence and a taste for reading. He was interested in outdoor things, too, and we had long rambles in the woods together, looking for rare plants, watching birds and insects, waiting sometimes for sunsets and getting scolded by Wilkins when we got back late. But she could not scold much, because she saw us both getting hungrier and stronger every day, and she admitted that the *Kur* seemed to be doing me good though I wasn't born to it, and she had never expected it to take the place of sea-bathing and whitings for breakfast. Cromer was what she would have recommended for both of us if she had been consulted, but, of course, one could not expect German doctors to know anything about Cromer.

'I know about Cromer,' said Max, 'I know every village and creek on your East Coast. Herr Putzer spent his summer holidays there two years running and made a special study of it.'

'What did Herr Putzer want to do that for?' said Wilkins.

'He had instructions,' he said. 'He had to find out where the farms and granaries were, and the blacksmiths and the wells and springs and the public-houses. Don't English people find out all these things about Germany?'

'English people mind their own business,' said Wilkins. 'As a rule they hardly remember there is such a country as Germany. I suppose it's bein' an island. We seem to keep ourselves to ourselves more than foreigners do.'

What Max said affected me unpleasantly. I thought Wilkins was right when she said that the English on the whole took no heed of Germany. But that was not a matter for self-congratulation if Germany were taking such heed of us as the boy suggested, dangerous, farseeing, methodical heed that a bird of prey would find useful when the day came for it to swoop. But when I went down to dinner a few minutes later the uneasy impression passed, for all was visibly well with the world. The huge room was crowded with people from most of the civilised countries in Europe, dining together in comfort and amity. At one table I saw that Dr. Ebers was the guest of some Americans staying in the hotel. At another some charming Austrian and French people sat together. A patriarchal family of Russians of all sorts and sizes occupied a large table by themselves, and Max and I had our little one close to an elderly Dutch couple, with whom we exchanged greetings as we took our seats. But while we ate our soup, a group of five people, whom we were not expecting and were not over-pleased to see, made their entry into the room and were looked at, as new guests are, with curiosity and appraisement. Max turned rather pale and glanced at me, for one of them was Herr Putzer. He followed his new employers, Baron and Baroness von

Osthofen, and with him were his pupils, Max's second cousins. They all saw me, as they approached our table, and the baron and baroness recognised us in a chilly way. So did Herr Putzer. But they did not speak to us until dinner was over and we were all streaming out of the room. Then the baron and baroness could hardly avoid it, as we found ourselves side by side.

'I heard that you and Max were here,' the baroness said, 'but I did not know that you were at the *Kursaal*. Are you taking the waters and the baths?'

I said we were.

'They fill up one's time completely, I find. I come every year, and when I meet friends here I explain at once that I cannot hope to see anything of them. When I am not drinking or bathing or walking or eating I am lying down.'

I said it was true, and she looked relieved.

'But every day we shall walk out of the room together and exchange a few words,' she said a little more amiably.

I said that would be very pleasant, and got away.

XXXII

I had seen very little of the Osthofens. She was a North German, and as such looked down on the South Germans, although she had married one. She spoke differently. Her enunciation was precise, her voice clear, cold and hard, she clipped no words, she used few diminutives. She had travelled, she knew city life as well as country life, she dressed well, and she went out a great deal in Reichenstadt. Her fair hair was always as correctly done as a barber's wig, her manner was arrogant, and her mouth stretched from ear to ear. She was said to rule her household and her children with a rod of iron, and to manage a difficult husband better than a woman with a gentler nature could have done. His moral reputation stood at zero, but apparently his wife turned a deaf ear to the stories in circulation about him. At any rate they lived together in apparent harmony, and when he raised a public scandal by his brutality to some recruits she took his part. The recruits, she said, were *infame Schweine*, and had to be dealt with severely when they showed signs of insubordination. Her favourite phrase was '*Ordnung muss sein*,' and you soon discovered that she had something Procrustean in her nature that would fit the victim to the system at any cost. I could imagine that she found a kindred spirit in Herr Putzer, although her pride of caste would not allow her to forget for a moment that he was a dependent and a bourgeois. It was perhaps natural that she would regard me with suspicion and dislike, since she accepted Herr Putzer's estimate of me and added to it her fanatical aversion from my nation, an aversion that did not prevent her from imitating our clothes, our houses, and our habits as closely as possible.

There is, however, one respect in which Germans like the Osthofens do not imitate us, and that is in our attitude towards Jews. In England and America you accept people of Jewish blood much as you accept other people: on their merits. If you like them you make friends with them; if you don't like them you avoid them as far as you can. But the Osthofen point of view is quite otherwise. Jews! *Infame Schweine!* You should have seen the whole family of Osthofen with Herr Putzer in attendance ruffle past the Gutheims and the von Gösens one morning when they came into the *Speisesaal* and found me speaking to Eduard and Eugenie, while Papa and Mamma and Emma hovered near us and tried to catch my eye. Well! they caught it. What could I do? We were all staying in the same hotel and were bound to meet several times each day. I could not go on withholding all notice and refusing the olive branch they held so persistently under my very nose. I wrote to Wolfram and explained that it would have been too wearing, and that rather than carry on an active feud with people staying under the same roof I would break my *Kur* and return home. I expected a letter to say I might please myself, but Wolfram took no risks. He telegraphed. The idea of my giving up a *Kur* without doctor's orders, and flying home with Max before we had taken the proper number of baths and glasses of water put him and his parents into a fluster. Such conduct would be *leichtsinnig*.

But I wished Dr. Marwitz had not sent Emma to Ilgesheim, and that the whole family had not decided to spend the summer-freshness there. To be civil to them and to be related to the Osthofens was about as easy as to establish cordial relations with a Babu family in an Indian military station. My own sympathies swayed like a pendulum between the two parties at first, but by the end of a week inclined steadily towards the Jews, for Herr Gutheim had arrived and I had always liked him; and Oscar Strauss came too, with the obvious intention of paying his court to Emma. In fact Eugenie confided to me that all the important clauses of the treaty between her family and the young man were satisfactorily arranged, and that the only thing left for him to do was to ask Emma to have him, and she had signified in a maidenly way that when he did ask she would be willing, and it had been Eugenie's idea to postpone the romantic moment of declaration till now, when, if Oscar chose, he could bring it about in a moonlit garden, and in that way have a charming memory to carry with them through, it was to be hoped, a long, happy married life. By this time I was not surprised by the odd blend of business and sentiment that, as far as I know, is peculiar to Germans, but I continued to be diverted by it. To watch Frau Gutheim and Eugenie conduct Emma's love affair, and see that the young man had his opportunities, was like watching an old-fashioned play, or reading an old-fashioned novel, in which the characters play their part with a simplicity we moderns cannot achieve. I think every one in the hotel knew what was going on, and the principal parties seemed to court publicity rather than to avoid it. They sat together in corners; they strolled together in the hotel gardens. I began to wonder why Herr Strauss hesitated over the word that was to make him the happiest of men till Eugenie told me as a great secret that he was waiting for the betrothal ring. It would arrive shortly from Reichenstadt, and at the same time there would be a moon.

'You will see,' she said, 'one morning he will receive a small sealed packet, and after supper he will suggest to Emma that it is a glorious evening——'

'Suppose it rains?' I suggested.

‘Then he will find some other plan. Oscar is highly original and ingenious.’

‘Did he sing “*Du bist wie eine Blume*,” to Emma?’

‘He did; at our house about six weeks ago. It was very exciting.’

Eugenie and I had both met at the *Brunnen*, and were drinking our morning glass there. It was not seven o’clock yet, and she had evidently thrown her German imitation of a Burberry over her night-gown and a lace cap over hair not dressed yet for public view.

I thought her an odd-looking figure to appear out of doors at all, but there were others to bear her company. Baroness von Osthofen had made a toilet just as hurried and as unbecoming, and I wondered that any of the women liked to be seen at such a disadvantage. I did not get Wilkins out of bed before her time to dress me for these early morning visits, but I would not dress myself like a scarecrow. When I got up I put on whatever I meant to wear for the rest of the morning, and did my hair and wore a hat. Eugenie used to look me up and down and ask me for whom I made myself so smart; and Baroness von Osthofen looked me up and down too, but avoided me if she saw Eugenie within hail.

‘People of that kind are so pushing,’ she said one morning, as if to excuse her usual want of cordiality. ‘The more you show them that you do not desire their acquaintance the more they try to force themselves on you.’

I could not deny it. Eugenie was rather pushing, and she made no secret of her wish to be on visiting terms with the von Osthofens. She said it was for Eduard’s sake, and that a wife who fulfilled her duty could do a great deal to further her husband’s career. She did not explain how the von Osthofens were going to assist Eduard’s upward progress, but I gathered that in general she considered it judicious to know people in their position, and that any disinclination on their part to know her only acted as an incentive. Ambition of a robust kind will not be baulked by little obstacles.

‘It is a very difficult state of mind to understand,’ I said.

‘I see no difficulty in it at all,’ said the baroness in her most disagreeable tone. ‘Persons of the middle class are naturally anxious to associate with those who are well born, and try to do so either by marriage or by friendship.’

‘Some of them do,’ I admitted.

‘All of them,’ insisted the baroness.

‘An English politician once compared a man’s liking for titles to a donkey’s liking for thistles,’ I said.

She looked at me coldly, and threw up her chin in a peculiar way that both fascinated and exasperated me. I had never met any one so naïvely arrogant, and when I was with her I felt tempted to see to what lengths she would go. It was rather like stirring up an alligator with a stick. You do the animal no harm, and if you stand where he cannot hurt you the snap of his jaws is thrilling.

‘The politician was probably a Social Democrat,’ she said.

‘Probably.’

‘And therefore an enemy of the human race.’

‘Does that follow?’

‘Of course it follows.’

‘I don’t think it does in England,’ I said in a dove-like way, and listened for the inevitable sneer.

‘England is a decadent State,’ said the baroness. ‘In its present condition, when it is on the eve of civil war, I can take no interest in it. You cannot expect intelligent Germans to have any sympathy with the internal quarrels that are breaking you to pieces.’

‘But they would like the pieces,’ I suggested.

‘They will have them,’ said the baroness, and drank off her glass as if she were drinking to the day when the British Empire lay in bits ready for the watchful beak and claws of the German eagle.

XXXIII

I should not have wanted to stir up Baron von Osthofen with a long stick in order to hear him snap his jaws. I was afraid of that man. He had a leering eye, a receding chin, tow-coloured hair, and thin bloodless lips. I could imagine him being cruel to recruits, and I had seen him cruel to his horse. To young women he was gallant, offensively so in my opinion. Old women he derided and passed by. He gave people nicknames, usually unpleasant ones connected with some personal infirmity, and he considered civilians dirt under his feet. His politeness to Herr Putzer had a sneer behind it, and his swagger in the public rooms of the hotel and the Casino made him the most detested and notorious man in Ilgesheim. In his wife's presence he always addressed me as his beautiful cousin, probably because it annoyed her, and when she was not there he paid me more attention than I enjoyed. He was one of the very few Germans I had met who professed to admire England; but his admiration was coupled with contempt for her military impotence and envy of her imperial greatness. He told me one day that the Germans looked forward to occupying our country houses when they got into England, and to staying amongst us until we had paid an indemnity calculated to bleed us white. I thought at first that this kind of talk was empty boasting without shape or plan behind it, but he advised me frankly that it was not. We had stood in their way and rejected their friendship, so we were to discover what their enmity meant. Not just yet perhaps, but sooner or later, when it suited them. It was rather horrible to meet Germans in this condition of mind and to remember how little was known or suspected of it at home. I wished I could wake up my country and tell them what birds of prey were getting ready for a swoop on them: but you can't wake people as determinedly asleep to real danger as the English were before the war. Besides, though people like the baron and Herr Putzer made me feel creepy for a moment, I soon put the sense of discomfort from me and hoped their menace would never materialise. At the end of June 1914 my thoughts were not on wars but on those little harmonies and discords of daily life that matter more to most of us than politics. Max was getting stronger every day, and so was I. Life in Ilgesheim was amusing and agreeable. We avoided the Osthofens as much as we could; we were polite to the Gutheim collection but not intimate with them, and for a week or two we saw a good deal of an American family called Lincoln. However, they do not come into my story, and I only mention them because Mr. Van Brunt was a friend of theirs and it was through them that I got to know him.

The rank and fashion of Ilgesheim usually went to the Casino after supper for an hour, sometimes to a concert, sometimes to dance, and sometimes just to sit about in the reception rooms or out of doors, but under cover, at little tables. Max and I did not go there much until we began to feel better, and were tempted to join in the life of the place by the Lincolns, who joined in everything. One evening when we were sitting at one of the little tables together, Sally Lincoln looked up and exclaimed, with a light of pleasure on her face, ‘There’s Cornelius Van Brunt!’ and turning to me she said, with her fascinating little twang, ‘He’s a lovely man.’ I could see that her mother agreed with her, for when Mr. Van Brunt came up to us she welcomed him warmly, and introduced him to Max and me. I did not understand why Sally called him lovely. There was nothing lovely about him. He was as tall as Wolfram, and had shrewd, merry eyes, a sedate manner, and lean, rather plain features, with sense and strength in every line. I liked him the moment I saw him, and so did Max. The Lincolns told me as he made his way to our table that he was the son of a rich man, that he had been educated in the law, and now had some small post in their foreign diplomatic service. They had not expected to see him at Ilgesheim.

‘I’m at Bertholdsruhe now,’ he said, ‘I’ve left Berlin.’

We sat there for a little while and chatted and listened to the military band which was playing in the kiosk in front of us; and we all told Mr. Van Brunt that life at Ilgesheim was very agreeable, and that a considerable number of English and Americans were taking the waters here. He was not going to take them himself he said. Nothing happened that evening that is worth recording, even in a chronicle of small beer, but I remember it well, because I saw Mr. Van Brunt for the first time and felt more akin to him at once than I ever had done or ever could do to a German. We spoke with the same tongue, and I felt pretty sure that we saw some things with the same eyes, and that they were the things that matter. I knew the moment I saw him that he would not be cruel to a recruit or a horse, and that his attitude to women was what women most value in men. His strength was at our service, and his regard for us was founded on respect. I had been more than a year amongst Germans now, and the contrast between their view and the American or English struck me with a pang. I should never get back to it, I reflected, and should live out my life attached to Wolfram, but everlastingly in conflict with the tone of his country folk in all classes, whether I watched the peasant women in the field bearing burdens and doing work no woman should attempt, or whether I encountered the Putzers and the Osthofens of Germany all blown with pride of sex and insufferably gallant, or unconvincingly, enragingly superior. Baron von Osthofen came up to me while these ideas were floating idly and rather wistfully through my mind, and, though no one encouraged him, he sat down at our little table and stared at Mr. Van Brunt as if he resented his presence. Mrs. Lincoln introduced the American to the baron, and pronounced the baron's name more plainly than is usual when people perform introductions. I felt sure from Mr. Van Brunt's glance at him that he had heard it before, but he did not say so. The baron adopted a tone of intimacy towards Max and me that was quite unwarranted, but which it was not easy to check; for he was too clever to give us the chance. He made his assumption by the easy friendliness of his manner, his knowledge of our daily doings, and his novel interest in Wolfram and my life at Hohenroda. I was his beautiful cousin whether he spoke English or German, and he wanted to know whether I was strong enough yet to walk to the top of the Ilgesberg and have luncheon there. As I had proposed this very expedition to the Lincolns and Mr. Van Brunt before the baron joined us, he placed me in a dilemma; but I answered him evasively and I thought they might conclude that I did not want him with us. When at last he took his leave we arranged that we would go to the Ilgesberg next day and make an early start, and let no one in the hotel know where we were going. Mr. Van Brunt did not contribute much to our discussion of plans, but he fell in with them and promised to be ready by nine o'clock.

'If my cousin von Osthofen had gone I should have stayed at home,' said Max unexpectedly.

'So should I, Sonny,' said the American equally unexpectedly.

'You like him not?'

Mr. Van Brunt glanced across the table at me and we understood each other. We neither of us said anything just then, and as it was getting chilly I took Max in a minute or two later. But next day Mrs. Lincoln told me that Mr. Van Brunt had told her that his gorge rose at Germans of the Osthofen type, and that in his opinion if a few of them were wiped off the face of the earth the peoples of the earth would be the better for it. I said that I thought so too, but that I had not discovered how the wiping off was to be done because there were a great many of them, and the whole nation admired them and liked licking their boots. I told her some instances that had come to my ears of outrages on civilians, and how civilians took them for granted, much as serfs in the Middle Ages took for granted their feudal lords' gallows tree and right over them of life and death.

'Some day there will be an awakening,' Mrs. Lincoln said. But I saw no signs of this. In the summer of 1914 the Germans seemed to me a very prosperous, contented people, and if once in a way a von Osthofen ran his sword through a Schmidt or a Müller, that did not matter much to the large majority of Schmidts and Müllers, who pursued their avocations under the strong arm of their rulers, and submitted like sheep to a discipline that they were taught from infancy was necessary to their good.

XXXIV

Max and I had not been to the top of the Ilgesberg yet, although it was the favourite expedition from Ilgesheim, and always recommended by the coachmen when we took a drive. But we wanted to walk through the woods, and we knew that would break into the best part of a day and cause us to miss our baths and some of our glasses of water. To do that would be to treat our *Kur* with levity, and would have given good Dr. Ebers pain; so we waited till he rubbed his hands over us with satisfaction, and said we both did Ilgesheim credit, and that for the rest of our stay we might pursue health easily and pleasantly, taking fewer baths, drinking less water, and relaxing those dietetic rules we found most irksome. Max and I had instantly gone to the market and bought large quantities of wild strawberries and eaten them with cream. We ought to have made ourselves ill, the doctor said when we told him, but we explained that we both felt particularly well, and strong enough to walk up the Ilgesberg and down again.

‘It’s only a hill,’ I said, ‘you can’t call it a mountain.’

‘It is the only mountain we have,’ he argued.

‘There is probably a well-made road to the top.’

‘Of course there is. Otherwise how would you get to the top?’

‘And a restaurant?’

‘An excellent restaurant. When you have walked or even driven to the top of a mountain you require sustenance before you descend again. If you were not sure of getting it you would naturally stay in the valley.’

So we started next morning at nine and took nothing to eat or drink with us. It was a hot, lovely day with just enough stir in the air to refresh us till we got into the forest, and there it was fragrant but rather close and steamy. However we took the ascent very slowly, and found, as I expected, a well-made, winding carriage road all the way. Max marched ahead with Sally Lincoln, who, like him, was interested in butterflies. They had brought their nets with them, and Max had strapped on one of those green tin specimen boxes that seem necessary to a German boy’s happiness when he is on an expedition. I walked behind with Mrs. Lincoln and Mr. Van Brunt, and felt that all was well with my world. At least I felt like that for the first two hours while we ambled lazily uphill, talking of this and that, and at times not talking at all. Mr. Van Brunt reminded me of Dad in some ways. He was a man of few words, and when you thought he was wrapt in a dream he knew what was going on and had his opinion. I remembered Dad’s apparent indifference to Eugenie Gutheim when she stayed with us, and how, after all, he had sized her up. I thought once or twice that Mr. Van Brunt was sizing me up, but I did not mind for I suspected that the verdict was favourable. I wanted it to be favourable, although I had only known him a few hours, for I was absurdly glad to meet a man of my own blood again and my own outlook. Unless you have lived entirely amongst Germans of the military caste for some time you cannot imagine how exhilarating I found it to walk up that forest road with Mr. Van Brunt and view the universe from his eyes. It was like being let out of a garment that cramps your body and consequently clogs your mind. He said that he had no one belonging to him in the army, and he did not sink into the earth as he said it. On the contrary, even in Germany he preferred the civilians. Preferred the civilians! Merchants, doctors, lawyers, professors! And I had spent my German year amongst people who treated the civilians they were forced to know politely but as if they were of an inferior clay. I wished Mr. Van Brunt could meet my father-in-law.

We were about half an hour from the top when we heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs behind us, and looking back I saw Baron von Osthofen on his black mare Rusla. When I saw his face I thought of what an old peasant says of the blackguard in a German play I had read lately. ‘I say, God help us when I meet that man,’ he cries. The baron was in a tearing rage it was plain. He rode so close to the bank that he pushed us right into it as he passed, and as there was a little gutter cut at that edge of the road, Mrs. Lincoln stumbled over it in her hurry to get out of the baron’s way, and was thrown against the bank rather roughly. She did not hurt herself because Mr. Van Brunt and I caught her, but her hat and hair were disarranged, and she was considerably annoyed and discomposed. I never saw a man angrier than the American, and his anger was the quiet kind that I understood best, not easily roused and not easily stilled. He shouted to Sally and Max, so that they, as well as the baron, could hear what he said.

‘Take care!’ he called. ‘Get out of the fellow’s way.’

The next moment the baron had passed them and no harm had been done, but they had been crowded into the bank just as we had been, and there was no need for it since the road was wide. We were all furious, and agreed that his head on a charger was what would appease us: so when we got to the top and he came to meet us, still obviously out of humour but with the formula of welcome on his lips, we hardly answered him.

‘I’ll go in and order lunch,’ said Mr. Van Brunt, and the baron, with a sneer about his mouth and eyes, watched him depart. Then he turned to me.

‘You and Max are my guests,’ he said. ‘Our table is ready. Will you come, my beautiful cousin?’

‘Certainly not,’ said I. ‘This is my party and the three Americans are my guests.’

‘I invited you last night.’

‘I had invited them before you joined us.’

‘You did not say so.’

I looked him straight in the eyes.

‘My party was complete,’ I said. I hate being rude to people, but a man who is both a cockscomb and a bully brings rebuke on himself. My anger against him was still hot, and I did not care how angry he became with me. He certainly had the most unpleasant eyes I have ever seen. They were a watery grey and had a slight squint in them, and when he was annoyed they narrowed and the pupils looked like pin points. I could imagine that his recruits said ‘God help us’ when they saw him coming. But I was not a recruit and he had no claim on me, not even the claim of friendship.

‘You are very plain spoken,’ he said.

‘You have just done your best to ride over me and my friends,’ I reminded him. ‘Bad manners of that kind free the tongue.’

‘You accuse me of bad manners!’ He turned red and began to shout as I had expected he would.

‘Hush!’ I said, for most of the little outdoor tables had people at them. ‘Don’t let all the world hear that I am obliged to reprove you!’

‘Reprove me! You! A woman!’

‘Yes, I felt ashamed of you just now, for unfortunately people know that you are Wolfram’s cousin——’

‘Unfortunately! He is Hohenroda! I am Osthofen. One is as good as the other.’

‘You owe Mrs. Lincoln and her daughter an apology.’

He waved the idea aside with a contemptuous gesture of refusal, and looked at Mr. Van Brunt, who just then issued from the restaurant with a waiter and pointed to a table set for five or six people.

‘Who is he? Where did you pick him up?’

‘He is in the diplomatic service and has a post at Bertholdsruhe,’ I answered, and the manner of my cousin by marriage underwent a change.

‘One never knows with Americans,’ he said, ‘or, for that matter, with Englishmen either.’

‘What doesn’t one know?’

‘Whether they are gentlemen.’

‘Perhaps to judge that one must be a gentleman oneself,’ I suggested, and left him. And we did not ask him to join us at lunch, so you may say that we had his head on a charger more or less. At any rate he ate his lunch by himself at his table set for three, looked as if it was poisoning him, and the moment he had finished sent for Rusla and rode away. We all breathed more freely when we had seen the last of him.

XXXV

For the next week or so Max and I were with the Americans all day long. Then Mrs. Lincoln and Sally left for Switzerland, but Mr. Van Brunt stayed on and attached himself to us. I saw no harm in it. As a rule where I went Max went too. Besides Mr. Van Brunt had an American mind about the relations between men and women, and I had an English one, and neither of us dreamed that the tongues of Ilgesberg would be wagging because we three went for walks and drives together. We were not always by ourselves. Sometimes we met the Gutheim contingent, and one day Eugenie told Mr. Van Brunt about the ring that had not arrived yet, and about the romantic declaration of love that waited on its arrival. One night there was an amateur concert at the Casino, which Oscar Strauss got up and superintended, and ‘by request’ he sang ‘*Du bist wie eine Blume*.’ This time his eyes travelled in the right direction to where Emma sat with her mother and sister, her own eyes modestly cast down. I had not seen much of any of them except Eugenie, but I bore them no grudge and liked them better than the Osthofens. The Osthofens were at the concert too, quite close to us, and so were Herr Putzer and his pupils. Hitherto Herr Putzer and I had both felt that a frosty recognition was all we wanted of each other, but this evening he came up to me in an interval when people were moving about, and asked after the Graf and Gräfin. He sent them his duty, and went on to inform me that he found his present employers highly sympathetic and his pupils pleasingly responsive to his efforts. I said I was glad to hear it, and hoped inwardly that he would go away. But he stayed in front of us, stared hard at Mr. Van Brunt, and finally put his heels together, bowed and introduced himself. Mr. Van Brunt returned his bow gravely, but did not seem to have much to say. Presently Baron von Osthofen joined us, and as usual addressed me in the tone I so much disliked, and had hitherto not been able to stop: a familiar and a sneering tone of gallantry that I had done nothing to encourage.

‘When does Wolfram come, my beautiful cousin?’ he asked.

‘He comes next week,’ I said.

‘It is time,’ said the baron, and Herr Putzer gave a little chuckle of assent. The manner of both men was offensive, and I was so angry that I felt myself turning first crimson then pale. I should have been angry even if the American had not been there, but he sat next to me, heard what the baron said, and, he has told me since, understood his meaning as well as I did. He has also told me since what he thought of both men, but at the time he gave no sign, unless a new touch of chivalrous regard in his voice was a sign when they took themselves off at last, and my friend talked to me again. I was down for a song in the second part of the programme, and I had a great success, which Wilkins, who was there, attributed entirely to my clothes and general appearance.

‘You did look a dream, ma’am, if I may say so,’ she told me afterwards. ‘I’m glad I persuaded you to wear your blue.’

My ‘blue’ was as vivid as cornflower and as thin and crinkly as a poppy leaf. It suited me I know, but I hoped the applause I got was called forth by my song and not by my raiment. I had given them ‘The Herding Song,’ and for an encore I went back to the nursery rhymes that had gone down so well at Eugenie’s *Polterabend*.

‘She sang “Chip, chip,” my little horse;
    Chip, chip again, sor:
How many miles from Dublin town?
    Three score and ten, sor:
Chip, chip, my little horse, chip, chip again, sor,
Can I get there by candle-light?
    Yes, and back again, sor.’

That went well that evening too, but when the concert was over and we all streamed into the open air and the summer night again, I found myself next to my cousin the baroness, and she almost turned her back on me. I could not think why, but when she went on her husband managed to slip into her place, and said to me in an undertone:

‘All the women, including my wife, are ready to tear your eyes out, my most beautiful cousin.’

‘Why?’ I asked, taken aback for I had not noticed it.

‘Because all the men are in love with you. Some of us were before to-night—I for instance and the American; but after to-night——’

In the crowd he managed to get nearer me, and under pretext of protecting me from the crowd he took my arm intending to draw it through his own. But I jerked it away. I disliked him so much that I always disliked shaking hands with him, and I was determined not to take his arm. What he had said was as banal as it was untrue, and not worth answering. Mr. Van Brunt and Max were just in front, and as I freed my arm I hurried on and joined them.

During the week that followed I saw as little as possible of the Osthofens. Max and I were out of the doctor's hands by that time and in the highest spirits. We forswore the Brunnen and the Badehaus and the time-tables and the prohibitive dietetic rules. We did what we liked and ate and drank what we liked, went out and about from morning till night and enjoyed life thoroughly. Max had set his heart on learning to play lawn tennis, and whenever we had an hour Mr. Van Brunt and I practised with him in one of the courts kept up by the Casino. As a rule we had the midday meal in our hotel and supper somewhere else, and on the night before we expected Wolfram we walked to Schloss Selz and had it there.

The Schloss was an old ruin, set high enough above Ilgesheim to have a view, and far enough off to be the objective of a little expedition. When you had eaten too much for dinner and in spite of that partaken of coffee and cake in the afternoon, you walked to Schloss Selz in the hope of arriving there with an appetite for supper and in the comfortable assurance of finding a good one.

'The cooking is better than in our hotel,' Frau Gutheim said when she had explained that she had had trouble with that organ that suffers itself so sadly and easily to be overloaded, and that she was climbing the hill to the Schloss in order to give it tone again. We had overtaken the Gutheim party suddenly on turning a corner, but we did not mean to be tacked on to them, and when I had listened politely to an account of the herring salad and vanilla ice that had probably been the cause of Frau Gutheim's little upset I made my escape and was soon ahead of her. We had chosen a lovely night for our walk: one of those beautiful, still nights towards the end of June when the daylight lingers late in the sky and turns the horizon to an ethereal glowing green; when the air is scented with hay, and when the moon rises in a sky of stars and makes all the beauty of the earth visible again. I wished we could have taken a loaf of bread and a flask of wine into the wilderness and eaten them there in silence: at least my spirit wished it, for the American and Max and I were a happy, harmonious trio, and we liked being by ourselves. But as I have a body as well as a spirit I had to confess that I was hungry when we reached the plateau on which the restaurant was placed and found a table reserved for us and supper ready for serving. Max and I were Mr. Van Brunt's guests that night, and he had left nothing to chance but had come here in the morning and given his orders. We were happy and we were sad, for this little fête was to end a phase of our holiday that we had enjoyed. To-morrow Mr. Van Brunt had to return to Bertholdsruhe, and though we had made various plans for meeting again we should meet under different circumstances. I was very sorry that he had to go without seeing Wolfram, as

I felt sure they would have got on together. They were very unlike each other and yet had something in common, I thought, as I looked at him to-night. He had been more silent than usual, and I wondered whether he had anything on his mind and whether I should ever see him again so easily and intimately.

‘I wish you could have stayed on and met my husband,’ I said.

He made no answer but stared in front of him, and I was astonished by his irresponsiveness. We were sitting at the table by ourselves, for Max had gone across to the Gutheims with some moth he wished to show Eduard von Gösen, who was an ardent collector of moths. As we sat there in full view of every one else on the plateau and brilliantly lighted by the moon, Baron von Osthofen seemed to appear from nowhere as the devil does in *Faust*, and he stood in front of us with an insolent grin on his face, saluted us, and turned away. He did not say a word.

‘I should like to wring that man’s neck,’ said Mr. Van Brunt.

XXXVI

I was surprised next day to receive a warm invitation from Eugenie to go up to the Schloss again that evening and have supper with her there. I would have got out of it if I could, but I had not been very cordial to the von Gösens, and I could see that Eugenie would be hurt if I refused.

‘We were at the Schloss last night,’ I reminded her, for, of course, she had asked Max too. In Germany a boy of fourteen is not as much separated from his elders as in England, and it was taken for granted that Max and I were inseparable. Sugary people called him my little knight. I should say that we were chums. I knew that he would jump at Eugenie’s proposal because he and Eduard had formed an ardent friendship that was founded on the corpses of beetles, moths, and butterflies, but I did not jump myself.

‘There will be moonlight again to-night,’ Eugenie reminded me. ‘The Schloss and the forest are so beautiful by moonlight that one can see them two nights running, unless one is without poetry.’

I could not tell Eugenie that the Gutheim family did not blend well with moonlight and that I liked to take them separately; and as I had no other reason for refusing her I said we would go. Max was delighted, strapped on a green tin of the largest size, and departed with Eduard directly after dinner. He said that the thought of the treasures he was about to add to his collection helped him to bear the separation from Mr. Van Brunt which he had felt very much, and looking at me wistfully he asked what could be done for me to console me for the loss of our American friend. I could not suggest anything at the moment, but he made off with an air of mystery and returned a little later carrying a large paper bag of bonbons, which he had bought with his own money, and presented to me when I was sitting on the verandah of the hotel. The Osthofens and many other people were present, and Eugenie, who sat next to me, asked if it was my birthday. I said it was not, and hoped she would ask no more questions, but her curiosity was like the Elephant Child’s, insatiable.

‘Your wedding day, then,’ she suggested, ‘but no. That must be later.’

‘Much later,’ I said hastily. ‘I hope Wolfram will be here for that.’

‘We are both very sad to-day,’ explained Max in his clear, youthful voice. ‘We have said good-bye to Mr. Van Brunt.’

I saw the Osthofens exchange glances; and the baron was not content with that but looked round as if he expected to find on other faces some response to the offensive jocularity that angered me on his own.

‘We were both devoted to Mr. Van Brunt,’ pursued Max with a sigh. ‘When we leave Ilgesheim we are going to see him at Bertholdsruhe.’

‘*Saperlot!*’ cried the baron, and, leaning over so that he could whisper to me, he said: ‘Perhaps my cousin Hohenroda will have a word to say to that.’

He spoke in an undertone, but I am sure that his wife and others heard him. Certainly Eugenie did, for she looked at the baron as if he had been one of Eduard’s largest insects, and said in her downright, uncivilised way:

‘Karen is English and Mr. Van Brunt is American. They have different ideas from the likes of us.’

The baron twirled his moustaches and looked daggers at Eugenie. He did not enjoy being coupled with a Jewess in that way. Nor did his wife. She put her embroidery down and tried to stare Eugenie into feeling humiliated and uncomfortable. Eugenie, however, told me afterwards that for Eduard’s sake she had tried to make friends with the Osthofens, but they had consistently repulsed her, so she naturally took an opportunity of plucking a crow with them. I did not enjoy the occasion at all and would have fled if I could.

‘We certainly have our own ideas about what is becoming in a young married woman,’ said the baroness in a sour, overbearing voice.

‘The likes of us are very narrow and provincial,’ said Eugenie, and her presumption in again coupling herself with the Osthofens and in charging them with being *kleinstädtisch* or provincial put the husband and wife into a fury. If glances killed we should have been as dead as Eduard’s beetles there and then, but I composed myself as well as I could with bonbons. Max understood as much and as little as was to be expected, and Eugenie had a hide it took more than glances to penetrate. So they went at it hammer and tongs although every one near them could hear what they said. They were very funny and extraordinarily rude. The Osthofens reminded Eugenie that they were travelled people and had been to Switzerland and Italy: therefore they argued they could not be *kleinstädtisch*; but Eugenie retorted that if you travelled the world over in an armour of conceit and arrogance you would return no better than you set out. The answer to this was that people of Jewish birth could not judge of what obtained in a higher sphere than their own; and that as every one knew Oriental blood flowed warmly in the veins even in a temperate climate. Eugenie said she would rather have blood in her veins than vinegar. The baron sniggered, as if he approved of this dig at his wife, and the baroness getting up said that for her part she preferred not to bandy words in public with a lady who was not on her visiting-list. Both the Osthofens then left the verandah, and peace was restored. They were very generally disliked, and I think those people who had heard the passage of arms were on Eugenie's side and mine. But it had been a disturbing quarter of an hour, and as soon as I could I too left the verandah and went up to my own room to unbend my mind over a book. I certainly did miss Mr. Van Brunt, but Eugenie had been perfectly right when she told the Osthofens that Anglo-Saxons could have friendships over which there was no trail of sentiment. When I was twelve I was in love with a little boy I met at a dancing class, and when I was seventeen I was in love with Gerald du Maurier across the footlights; and after that I was in love with no one till I met Wolfram and married him. He was coming either that day or the next and I longed for our reunion eagerly; so that even Mr. Van Brunt's departure became a mild regret in comparison with the great happiness awaiting me. I was as proud, too, of Max's recovery as if I had brought it about myself, and I pictured the pleasure I should see in my husband's eyes when he saw his son. We three were to have three weeks together in Ilgesheim, and I thought it would be the happiest holiday I had ever known. I rather wished the Osthofens had not been in the place, but it would not be necessary to see much of them. Towards the end of our time there was to be a gala and a dance at the Casino, and I wanted to stay for that and to dance with Wolfram again. I had not done so since the dance on Eugenie's *Polterabend*, for we had not gone out during the winter because of Max's illness. Dances had been given in Reichenstadt, and we had been asked to them, but it would have meant putting up for the night in a hotel and we had not felt inclined to leave the boy.

As I was thinking of these things the afternoon post arrived and brought me a letter from Wolfram, telling me that he would come the following day, and I had hardly read it when Eugenie, breathless with excitement, rushed into my room and told me that the same post had brought the long expected ring, and that Emma knew it had come but was being rather tiresome.

'In what way?' I asked, although I could never imagine Emma being anything but tiresome.

'She now says that she has searched her heart carefully, and doubts whether the love for Oscar that she finds there is sufficiently glowing to last through life. She says that some people are doomed to celibacy and that she may be one of them.'

'It doesn't matter much what she says to you as long as she says Yes to Herr Strauss,' I suggested.

But Eugenie, who was in a tiresome mood too, refused to be comforted.

XXXVII

When Eugenie asked me to have supper quietly with Eduard and her at the Schloss, I understood that we were to be a party of four. Eduard and Max were to go forth early with their tin boxes and their green nets; and Eugenie and I were to walk up the hill in the late afternoon and meet them on the top. I knew Wolfram would not mind my doing this, but I knew that he did not wish me to associate more than I could help with the Gutheims. His feeling about Jews was mediæval and his manner to them arrogant in the extreme. I had seen that when I first met him, and he had not changed since. When I told him how much more enlightened we were in England he would remind me that I was not in England now, and that if I wanted to know what he felt about the Semitic question I might read the first act of the *Merchant of Venice*, and mark the scene between Shylock and Antonio. It was no use to tell him that Antonio came off second best in that scene, and that it was the Jew who had dignity and passion. Wolfram would only repeat that he did not like Jews, and if he could would send them bag and baggage back to Palestine. So when I was walking up the hill with Eugenie and she told me that her father and mother were ahead of us and that Emma and Herr Strauss were coming on behind, I felt a little disappointed and annoyed. I was going to be let in for a long intimate evening with the whole party instead of a quiet supper with Eduard and Eugenie only; and possibly for the celebration of a *Verlobung*. There would be champagne and speeches and general hilarity if Emma on her way to the supper-party ceased to be tiresome and accepted Oscar’s ring. And next day I should have to tell Wolfram about it and he, in his way, would be tiresome too and refuse to take any interest in the affair or go to the formal and highly festive speech-making, wine-bibbing orgy which would certainly take place, and to which we should certainly be invited. However, I could not show Eugenie I was annoyed because she was in one of her expansive moods, very friendly to me, excited about the coming event, and bubbling over with reminiscences of her set-to with the Osthofens. We had it all over again as we walked uphill, and I was expected to congratulate Eugenie on the enormous tact that she had shown in not saying things that she might quite well have said. For instance, she might have brought up certain unsavoury scandals in which the baron had played a leading part, and which were probably known to every one in Reichenstadt except his wife.

‘But perhaps they are not true,’ I suggested.

‘You have only to look at him,’ exclaimed Eugenie. ‘Whenever I see that man I say *Pfui* to myself. For Eduard’s sake I would have controlled myself and taken his hand. Besides there is nothing against the baroness except that she is as sour as vinegar and too arrogant to breathe. But after to-day friendly relations have become impossible.’

I knew Eugenie well enough by this time to know that if the Osthofens threw her their handkerchief to-morrow, she would run to pick it up, and that in spite of saying *Pfui* to herself about the baron she would claim acquaintance with him whenever she got the chance. So I was rather glad when she exhausted the subject, and made a few perfunctory remarks about the beauty of the evening and the soothing effect of landscape on the poetical temperament. Perhaps I had become silent and irresponsive. It certainly jarred on me to travel over every step of the sordid battle of the afternoon when the evening was descending on us in surroundings of matchless beauty. The setting sun had set the sky on fire, and the sky threw a warm glow on the trunks of the trees. Sometimes we walked with forest on either side of us, and sometimes we reached a place that commanded a fine view of hill country, of plain and winding river, and of the roofs of Ilgesheim shining golden like the roofs of Zion. In one such place we sat down for a moment, and I could have wished I was alone. But Eugenie, after rattling off several adjectives, such as *wunderschön*, *herrlich*, *reizend*, began to talk of what really interested her, and told me about the ring that Oscar Strauss might at this very moment be placing upon Emma’s finger. There were no diamonds in it because Emma had once said in Oscar’s hearing that she preferred pearls, and that a black pearl was her favourite stone. The delay had been caused by the jeweller, who said it was not easy to find three black pearls that matched exactly and were flawless. The ring had cost——. Eugenie hardly liked to own how much it had cost. I had to listen to all that and to a forecast of Emma’s trousseau, furniture, and wedding festivities, and to an itinerary of their wedding journey, which Emma, when in a contrary mood, had said should take her to Japan. As Eugenie ran on, talking what Wilkins called nineteen to the dozen, I heard footsteps stealthily approaching, and looking round I saw the tip of a pink upstanding plume that decorated Emma’s smartest hat with the interrogatory touch proper to the summer of 1914. I sat still and said nothing. A minute or two later Eugenie and I continued our walk, and when we were nearly at the top of the hill I told her what I had seen. She was agitated to tears, and directly she saw her father and mother told them what had happened, and assured them that Oscar had probably just proposed when I saw the tip of the feather, that the young pair wished for a few blissful moments by themselves in the beautiful spot we were presumably about to vacate, that they had doubtless hidden in the trees and watched us go, and that when Papa and Mamma next beheld their child she would be a happy bride. Herr Gutheim said jocularly that in any case he would order a good supper since we should all want one either in honour of a happy occasion or to support ourselves if things went wrong, and Frau Gutheim said nothing could go wrong, and that if it did she would soon bring Emma to reason. Both the husband and wife made me extremely welcome, and I felt that they wished bygones to be bygones, and that I, as a Christian, ought to accept the olive branch they proffered whenever they had a chance. Emma was the only one of the family I had ever actually disliked, and she was now about to be removed to a home of her own. I was vindictive enough to hope that Oscar Strauss, though small in stature, would be strong in spirit and hold his own with his wife when she went into tantrums.

The supper was ordered, Eduard and Max had joined us, and we had all owned to being colossally hungry when our turtle-doves appeared, and there was such a scene of billing and cooing that I can hardly tell you who kissed whom and who omitted to kiss anybody. I had Emma’s arms round my neck at one moment and Eduard’s Kaiser moustache tickled my hand at another, and every one kissed Max, and I kissed Heir Gutheim: and tears streamed down all the female cheeks except mine, and Frau Gutheim said it was a hard day when a mother saw herself deserted by her remaining child, but that she must resign herself and find happiness in looking on: and Emma said that nothing but the most eloquent persuasion on Oscar’s part would have convinced her that she ought to leave her beloved parents to a lonely old age: and Eugenie took umbrage at this and said that parents whose married daughters were constantly in and out could not be called lonely: and that if Oscar and Emma were as dutiful and attentive as Eduard and Eugenie ——. There was nearly a row again, but luckily some champagne arrived, and we all began to drink healths and wish the betrothed couple and all their relations health and happiness. Moreover, the supper was excellent, and our appetites were not in the least blunted by the romantic agitation of our feelings. We ate, drank, and were merry, and we drank our toasts in lightness of heart, taking health and happiness for granted. The little clouds in our sky were as small as specks in the general fair weather, and now that Max was well I looked forward to a future as golden in its promise as the sunset sky had been. I was dreamily thinking of the morrow and of Wolfram’s arrival when a cry from Max startled me, and turning round I saw my husband standing there and staring at our table. He had come twelve hours sooner than he said he would and he looked disturbed and pale. At first I thought he was vexed to find me with the Gutheims, and possibly he was. But a vexation of that calibre belonged to the life the deed of that day ended for our generation. He brought the news of the Serajevo murders, and it fell on our feast like the writing on the wall.

XXXVIII

Dad has told me since that in England most people heard of the Serajevo murders much as they heard of those other Serbian royal murders years ago. There was a murmur of horror, but the horror was of the kind felt for a deed that cannot affect you and that is too remote to be really grasped. The very name of Serajevo was forgotten in a few days, and every one's attention was concentrated, as we all know, on Ireland and the militant Suffragettes. But in Germany it was very different. At least it was different in my *milieu*, where nearly every man was in the army and knew that these murders would probably bring on the war expected and eagerly desired. Wolfram talked gravely about it, but he took his country's view, that a war was necessary for various reasons, and that it would be a short, victorious one. He explained to me that Germany was in a bad way financially in spite of her commercial prosperity, and that she could not set her house in order unless she reduced her expenses; but that she could not reduce them until she had crushed France and Russia and exacted big indemnities from them. I said this seemed hard on France and Russia, but he could not see it. Like all Germans he was possessed of the idea that the world ought to be Germanised for its good whether it liked it or not, and that Germany did not possess a fair share of the world and must help itself at the sword's point to all it needed. The way he talked made me feel quite creepy, and I asked him if he thought England and America would be drawn in. He said this was unlikely, as England had her hands tied by her internal affairs, and America did not care what happened in Europe. We had this talk as we walked home together from the Gutheims' supper-party that had broken up soon after Wolfram appeared. His news had cast a gloom over it, and I heard Emma whisper to her sister that Graf Wolfram had shown a want of tact in bringing them such tidings on such an occasion. As if Wolfram could have guessed that we sat there to celebrate an occasion! He had only seen Wilkins, who told him where I was and did not even mention that I was with the Gutheims. I expected to be called to account for joining their party, but Wolfram was too happy about Max and too excited about Serajevo to dwell on trifles. Besides he gave me all the credit of Max's recovery, and said he owed his boy's life to me, and that he and Max could never love and cherish me as I deserved. He said this in Max's presence as if he wished the boy to mark it, and I shall always think that the idea of war was heavy on his mind and that he wanted his son to wake to the notion that he and I might be left without him some day. But it was only for a moment that he struck this melancholy note. The time that followed was as gay and happy as I had hoped it would be, and we three were inseparable from morning till night. Wolfram had brought his little car with him, and he taught both Max and me to drive it, for there were broad, well-made roads out of Ilgesheim where it was safe for novices to practise. We were out all day and every day, only coming back to the hotel for supper, and we saw very little of the people we knew there. But we could not altogether avoid the Osthofens, and whenever we were with them our tranquil atmosphere became disturbed. They did not quarrel with you violently one moment and feel affection for you the next like the Gutheims. Their attitude was inexplicably hostile to us all, and especially hostile towards me. Wolfram said bluntly that they were jealous of us, and I suppose he was right. We were happy together and they were not; we had youth, money, and good looks, a high place in the society that hemmed in their world, and an honest name. When you possess all these things you take them for granted, and if you have a grain of humour you do not count them as virtues but as luck. I cannot see now why the sight of us should have acted like poison on the Osthofens so that they could neither leave us alone nor treat us pleasantly. After supper every evening, when most people sat about on the big verandah playing games or otherwise amusing themselves, Wolfram's cousins always came close to us and sometimes proposed a game of bridge. But after accepting their proposal once or twice we decided we would not play again. The baron had not the manners of a gentleman at cards. He lost his temper when the game went against him and invariably accused his partner of doing the wrong thing. He looked over his neighbour's hand when he could (I saw him do it), and he made mistakes in the score unless you watched him carefully. I'm pretty wideawake at cards because Dad has trained me to be ever since I was a child, and I'm used to play quickly as most Germans do. In short, the baron found that his beautiful cousin was a match for him and loved her less than ever in consequence. One night he revoked, and I noticed it and exacted the penalty when the round was over. He denied it, and tried to shovel the tricks together before I could convict him. When I prevented that he went pea-green with fury, and said in a loud voice that it served him right for playing with women and that, as every one knew, women did not play fairly.

'But it was you who revoked,' I pointed out, and every one heard that too.

'It pleases you to say so.'

Well, by that time the cards were gathered together and the baron was shuffling them with annoyed energy. He was smoking, too, and it is astonishing how a man's cigar can be made to express his feelings. Wolfram looked angrier than I had ever seen him, and that is saying a good deal: so I swallowed my own wrath and tried to treat the matter lightly. I did not want the two men to fly at each other's throats, and they seemed to be on the brink of it. I am sure the baroness thought so too, for she tried to cast oil on the water by saying that women, having more sense than men, treated a game as a game and not as a question of life and death. I could not take her point of view, and said so; and while we were arguing Wolfram, in one of his black, silent moods, dealt the cards for the new round. It gave the baron and baroness the rubber, and they were ready to go on to another. But Wolfram refused, and next evening when cards were proposed he refused again. That seemed to infuriate the baron, and he stood there staring at us, his mean, evil face working with offended malice.

'Perhaps you are wise,' he said to Wolfram, and the sneer in his voice could not be overlooked. Wolfram seemed to me to do just what a cock in a poultry-yard does when another cock spars at him. All his feathers fluffed with indignation, and you could see that if his cousin wanted battle he would get it. But I did not want a battle over me between two German officers. I had heard too many stories of what it might mean, and I had heard the story that nearly deprived the baron of his uniform. He had managed to escape public disgrace, but a good many people looked askance at him in spite of his old name and his impenetrable arrogance. Perhaps he had fired a moment too soon: perhaps he had not. The point had been disputed and he had been given the benefit of the doubt. But as I looked at him and saw the chill malevolence of his eyes and the thin cruelty of his lips, I could believe him capable of anything.

'We do not care to sit over cards on these fine summer nights,' I said. 'We are going for a little walk.'

'Take the good the gods provide thee,' he quoted. 'Last week the friend, this week the husband. I have always seen that my beautiful cousin understood the art of life.'

'Osthofen!'

'Hohenroda!'

They were at each other now. Wolfram had risen, and his tone was threatening though low. For we were within hearing of other people, and some of them were eyeing us curiously. But I had risen too, and I managed to get between the two men and to stop further mischief for the time being.

‘Good-night, baron,’ I said. ‘How clever of you to quote Dryden. I’m sorry you are disappointed of your game.’

XXXIX

The gala and the dance in honour of the Grand Duke’s birthday were put off on account of the Serajevo murders, but a small informal dance took place at the Casino two days before we were to go back to Hohenroda. I can see now that we were one and all in a tense, troubled mood, and that the air was heavy and lowering as it is just before a thunderstorm. Outwardly we were rather quiet, but inwardly we were on edge. The Gutheims had a dinner in honour of Emma’s *Verlobung*, but Wolfram and I did not go to it. Wolfram was tiresome as I knew he would be, and said nothing would induce him to sit down and feast with twenty-nine Jews and Jewesses and Eduard von Gösen. Luckily the Grand Duke summoned him about that time, and we went to Bertholdsruhe for two nights and took Max with us. We came back on the day of the dance, but not in the mood for dancing. A great deal more was known at the court of Bertholdsruhe than at the watering-place, and the Grand Duke had told Wolfram that there would be war. Quietly the monstrous organisation was being got ready, so that the final word should set it in motion and send it forth to conquer and destroy. I came back to Ilgesheim with its menace heavy on my soul, for though Wolfram would go with it I could not help thinking of its victims: the unsuspecting, innocent people that were to be crushed because they were in the way of Germany. Wolfram said that there was the alternative, and that if the enemies of Germany gave in quietly and completely there would be a swift German peace and a German millennium.

‘But why should every one give in to Germany?’

‘Because she is strong.’

It was no use to tell him that Might was not Right. He said that in war and politics it was, and that women did not understand such matters and should not meddle with them. I said that if women managed the world the men in it would not be facing each other to-day armed to the teeth, while behind them the children of the race festered in slums and misery. Then we went to the Casino together, I in silver, and he in bluish grey, and we tried to forget everything except the magic of the Strauss waltz and the pleasure of dancing with each other again. It was the old *Blue Danube* that they began as we entered the room, and we both remembered that it had been the *Blue Danube* more than a year ago when we met in the house of Eugenie’s uncle Marcus and, as Germans say, looked deep into each other’s eyes. I had not thought that Baron v. Osthofen would molest me after his behaviour at cards the other night, but the first time that Wolfram and I took breath his cousin came up to us and asked me to have a turn with him.

'No,' I said, 'I dance the *Blue Danube* with Wolfram and with no one else.'

I did not know that I was giving the man mortal offence, but I saw that he looked as wicked as a devil when I refused him.

'You danced it with Mr. Van Brunt last week,' he said, 'but I suppose that the American has a peculiar place in your regard.'

'I did not dance with Mr. Van Brunt or any one else last week,' I said. 'I did not dance once while Wolfram was away.'

'You hear,' said the man addressing Wolfram. 'Your wife is pleased to call me a liar.'

Well, he was a liar; but I would have called him an archbishop if I had understood what his livid lips meant and Wolfram's stately, contemptuous bow.

'Come and dance,' I said to my husband, and we danced together again till the music stopped: danced as lovers do who find the minutes golden and seize them while they pass.

'That was a dance to remember,' I said breathlessly when we finished.

'It was a dance to remember,' said Wolfram, and his eyes had a question in them as they met mine.

'It was a clumsy lie,' I said. 'I walked and drove and talked with my American; but I didn't dance with him. I should have done so if I had felt inclined. Why not?'

'Why not?' repeated Wolfram, and his eyes reassured me.

'Let us go home to-morrow,' I said. 'I should be glad if I need never see that man again.'

'He has molested you?'

I've not said much about it, but as a matter of fact he had: especially before Mr. Van Brunt came and from the beginning established himself as my friend. For a few days the baron had shadowed me and had made love to me in a way I could not misunderstand or entirely stop. That was why his wife had turned to gall and vinegar, and that was why he himself bore me a grudge. I suppose he was not used to rebuffs, and I think he must have been highly inflammable, for lately he had looked like a man whose passions are consuming him, so that even Max noticed it, and said that his cousin v. Osthofen reminded him of the Spartan boy whose vitals were attacked in secret by a fox. To my knowledge I had never met a man of his kind before, and I hope I never may again. But when I hear or read of the German cruelties in Belgium and in the prison camps I always visualise two types well known to me: and one is big and coarsely brutal like my father-in-law; and the other is mean and furtive and licentious like Baron Osthofen.

‘Never mind him,’ I said to my husband, ‘let us go home.’

‘I can’t run away from him,’ said Wolfram, but he would say nothing more, and he would not promise to go home. Looking back I am amazed at myself and at my want of perception and resolve. I blame myself bitterly, and yet I could probably have done nothing. I go over the events of that night till my faculties are dazed, and yet what happened happened, and that hour in which everything hung in balance is irrecoverable. Suppose I had taken alarm? Suppose, when Wolfram persuaded me to go back to the hotel, I had refused to go unless he came with me and stayed. Suppose I had ordered the car and coaxed him into it and driven through the summer night to Hohenroda and arrived there with him safe and sound. Max shakes his head when I say such things to him.

‘It does not sound like my father,’ he says, and I know he is right. Wolfram had a masterful side to him, and every now and then I found myself up against it. When we had finished our dance he said I looked tired and that he would take me home: and I went like a lamb. I was very tired, and I let Wilkins undress me and tuck me up in bed and I fell fast asleep. I didn’t even have bad dreams. I slept till dawn and then was waked by Wolfram coming in, up and dressed, I could not think why.

‘Have you been dancing all night?’ I said sleepily, for I could not see him very well, because the shutters were shut across the open windows and the light was dim.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I’ve not been dancing,’ and he took me in his arms and kissed me, but not so as to frighten me. His voice was tired and grave, though, and I noticed that.

‘Is there war?’ I cried.

‘I bring no news.’

‘But, Wolfram, why have you been up all night?’

‘I have been busy. I had letters to write.’

‘But now you are coming to bed!’

‘Not just yet. Go to sleep again, Karen. Next time you wake——’

His voice did not hold out as firmly as he wished, and that alarmed me.

‘Are you going out?’ I said, holding him as tight as I could. I remember the feel of his sleeve while I write, and of his arm beneath it and I can’t write much more.

‘Throw back the shutter,’ I said, before he answered. ‘I want to see you better. I’ll get up and come with you. Wait for me. I won’t be long.’

‘I can’t wait, Karen. Good-bye.’

‘Yes. Wait,’ I tried to say, but whether he heard I cannot tell you. I know my voice seemed to die in my throat and I put my arm round his neck and told him again that I was frightened and wanted him to stay.

‘I can’t stay,’ he said, ‘but I may not be long.’

He was gone before I could say all that was in my mind, or any of the things that might have persuaded him to stay.

XL

I could not sleep. I could not rest. At six I got up and dressed myself and went downstairs. The hotel was not as lifeless as an English hotel is at that early hour. The landlord and his wife were up and about, the hall porter was in his office, and there was breakfast ready for any one who wanted it. I saw signs of breakfast having been eaten at one table, and a waiter was relaying a second and a third. I thought that people looked at me in an odd way when I appeared, but no one said more than the usual good-morning, and the waiter who always served me asked me if I would have my coffee now. You must remember that I did not know then what had happened after I went to bed the night before, and my thoughts were occupied with the dread of war and the idea that Wolfram might have been summoned suddenly to some service duty of which he could not tell me. Baron von Osthofen came into my mind with disagreeable reminiscence, but not with foreboding. A man like him seemed to matter as little at such a time as a rat would matter in an earthquake. For the Germans at Ilgesheim were either in a panic or a state of exultation according to whether they wanted their Day or feared it, and the more cautious Americans were packing up their traps, and the English were slowly making up their minds that although mine host was friendly and the doctor sympathetic and the peasants picturesque, they had perhaps better cut short their holiday and go home. But the exodus had hardly begun yet. The news in the papers was still scanty and uncertain. It was the little straws that showed the wind and made us all uneasy. For instance, when my waiter brought me my coffee, he made so free as to bid me Good-bye because he was leaving that morning; and when I asked him why he was leaving he said that he had been called up, and that most of the other waiters had been called up too. I asked him what the landlord would do, and he said he would probably shut the hotel.

‘In the midst of summer!’

The man shrugged his shoulders, took my tip, and wished me happiness. I saw that he was greatly disturbed, and he told me that he was the son of a hotelkeeper and had come here to learn his business, and that he had a bride in his native town and was to have been married that autumn and help in the management of his father’s hotel.

‘Perhaps, after all, there will be no war,’ I said.

‘There will be war,’ said he.

‘I think the Herr Graf must have been called to Bertholdsruhe,’ I said. ‘He left very early this morning.’

The man looked at me and did not speak.

‘Did you see him before he left?’ I asked, for there was something in his manner that roused my alarm.

‘I served the Herr Graf as usual. He drank coffee here, but he did not eat.’

‘Did he tell you where he was going?’

The man shook his head, flicked his napkin as waiters do, and tried to get away.

‘Do you know where he has gone?’ I said, but I felt half ashamed of asking, and perhaps my voice came faintly. At any rate the waiter gave me no answer, but made off to another table, and I strolled out of doors and into the marketplace, wondering, as people do, why I ever lay late abed and missed the freshness of the morning and the busy sights of the early morning hours. For the market was something to see that day in late July, its stalls loaded with farm and garden produce, its peasants and citizens chaffering noisily with each other, the patient, mild-eyed oxen bringing in their loaded carts or taking them empty away, and the ancient gabled houses that surrounded the place seeming to wake to a fresh day, and throw back shutters or open windows in welcome of it. At the north end of the market there was a thirteenth-century house with a sharply gabled roof, and little windows as high as they could go in the roof, and a fine old carved stone doorway. To the right of it were some arcades, and between the arcades and the gabled house two tall old church towers rose, and the gabled red brick roofs of other houses built on slightly higher ground hundreds of years ago. I was standing at the south end of the market with some apricots and plums I had just bought from a stall close by, when from the narrow street leading out of the market to the churches a procession came that hushed and awed the crowd as death must in the midst of life. For some of the men walking slowly into sight carried a bier and other men walked beside it reverently. I could not see much else at first. The figure on the bier was covered, and if it had not been for the woman who had sold me the fruit I should have let it pass me. But she knew me well by this time, and set up a wail that curdled my blood.

‘What is it?’ I cried, going up to her, but by this time the bier was half way across the market and near enough for me to see that it was not a peasant lying on it, but an officer covered with an officer's long bluish-grey cloak.

'Go home, go home, Frau Gräfin,' the woman screamed. 'There has been an *Unglück*. God grant it is the other.'

'What is it?' I said again.

'A duel it is. This morning we met them driving out to the flat field near the butcher's tower. The Herr Doktor was in the carriage with the Herr Baron, but the Herr Graf——'

Now the bier had reached us and I fell upon my knees beside it, lifting my hand as I did so to make them stop. The lookers-on were far away from me, and I was alone with Wolfram, whose hand lay uncovered so that I could take it in mine, while I turned back his cloak from his face. He looked as I had often seen him look in sleep, for his eyes were closed; but at his heart there was a little blood, and I sickened as I saw it. Otherwise life seemed to be suspended in me, and I could neither think nor sorrow yet. His hand was cold already, as cold as stone. I rose to my feet, and finding strength and voice enough to speak, I asked if everything possible had been done.

'There was nothing that could be done,' the doctor told me. 'The bullet went straight through the heart.'

The crowd began to press round us now, in spite of the police who were engaged in driving it away, and the men carrying the body moved on by their orders. I walked beside it, still too numb and stupid to feel anything except a weight at my heart that shut me in with Wolfram. I saw nothing but his still figure beneath his cloak, and I heard nothing but his voice bidding me good-bye. I wished I was with him, but he had gone, leaving me alone. As we reached the hotel I saw a little crowd of people in front of it, and amongst them Max. He ran forward and took my hand in his and fondled it; but at first he did not speak. It was when we got upstairs to the room I had left a little while ago that we both broke down. I will not try to describe that hour or the desolation of spirit that descended on us.

'We were going to be so happy together,' murmured Max. 'We three. Our happiness was just beginning.'

'Why did it happen? What happened? Do you know?' I asked the boy, but he could tell me nothing. So we sat there together hour after hour, and all the morning I felt peculiarly wide awake. I issued orders, sent telegrams, and saw the numerous officials who had duties to carry out in connection with the affair. Then without a moment’s warning some string within me gave way, and as Wilkins, all blubbering and unhinged, hung over me and tried to make me eat, everything suddenly went black and I knew no more. It happened when I came back from the room in some public building close by, where Wolfram lay. I had seen him again, for a moment they had left me alone with him, and for the last time I had kissed his lips. I thought when I bade him good-bye that I would be brave and strong as I had known him to be; but against my will my strength failed. I can only tell you by hearsay what happened for some time to come, just as I can only tell you by hearsay what had happened the night before to bring about the duel.

XLI

Baron von Osthofen had been drunk when he accosted Wolfram and me in the ball-room at the Casino. I had hardly known it, for men who drink had never come my way. I imagined them noisy, splendid and reeling like Sir Charles Wyndham, whom I had seen and adored as David Garrick when I was a child. But the baron was one of those dangerous drinking men who turn wicked in their cups, wicked and quarrelsome. His eyes had been half closed, and his glance from beneath the puffy lids had been leering and malevolent. He hated Wolfram, and he was furious with me, and the war fever that was rising every hour made a medium in which his evil passions flourished. His world was with him when he said insulting things of French and English women at the buffet where he stood drinking still more: so that he felt himself applauded and encouraged. I suppose there must have been Americans and English in the room, for they had not all left yet, but I picture the baron standing with his countryfolk and addressing them, while they purred in agreement and turned their broad backs on the foreigners about to be hurled forth in ignominy from the Fatherland. I cannot give you his exact words, but probably any one could who has heard Orientals quarrelling together. The man had a lewd imagination and a spiteful tongue, and he was flown with wine. I do not even know whether he descended from the general to the particular and named me. Anyhow something he said seemed to Wolfram insufferable, and he bade his cousin hold his tongue. I daresay my husband's manner was not conciliatory. He had been made angry enough already when we were dancing together, and whoever described the scene to my father-in-law said that it happened in a moment, and that the two men were evidently enraged with each other before Wolfram spoke. What he said sounded like the last explosion in a quarrel, and not like the beginning of one. And the baron answered by flinging his full glass of wine into Wolfram's face, so that it streamed over his uniform, while the glass crashed upon the floor. After that there was only one thing that my husband could do. He would have been dishonoured if he had hesitated, and he did not hesitate for a moment. He made his cousin one of his scornful stately bows, and turned from him, looking, they said, very dignified, in spite of the sopping red wine. I still have the coat he was wearing, and the stains of wine are there, dry and discoloured now. So Wolfram was murdered and I was made a widow, because he had a vicious, drunken cousin who picked a quarrel with him, and that is still the code of honour in Germany. But the baron had no honour, drunk or sober, and my father-in-law knew it.

‘He has fought six duels,’ he told me, ‘and twice he has killed, and once, when he killed little Graf Elster, they said what they say now. But it is a difficult thing to prove.’

He had pulled his trigger too soon, it seems, not clumsily soon so that he could be convicted, but just the edge of a moment soon, while Wolfram waited honestly, and fell as he lifted his hand to fire. Perhaps if war had not broken out there would have been a scandal and an inquiry, but two days after Wolfram died the order came to mobilise, and the baron, who had gone straight back to Reichenstadt, was sent to Luxembourg, and was with the army that left its cruel and dishonoured mark on Belgium; so that an innocent German like Max, when he comes to man’s estate, shall find his race accursed and his blood refused in brotherhood by the nations who looked on.

But as long as I was at Hohenroda the truth was hidden from me, and the only news I had of the war was of German victories. English letters and papers did not reach me, and though I wrote to Dad I received no replies. I had sent him a telegram when Wolfram died, and it was not till later that I knew why he had not come to me. He had been away from home at the time, and though he actually started for Germany directly he got back he could not get through. Wilkins had had the sense to write to him when I fell ill and tell him that I was going back to Hohenroda. Otherwise he would hardly have known what had become of me, or whether I was dead or alive. The Hohenrodas had advised Wilkins to return to England at the outbreak of war, while return was possible, but she had refused to go.

‘I thought it well over,’ she said to me, ‘and I reckoned you’d be glad to see an English face and hear an English tongue when you came to your senses again. If I’d been a man I’d have cleared out double quick. You hear of them shooting men. But they’re not going to shoot women, I suppose, though the little guttersnipes do throw stones at me whenever I take a walk. I suppose you know, m’m, that we’re at war with Germany, and that I have to report myself to the police every day in consequence. Such a fuss about nothing; and I can’t say much for their manners either. But what can you expect?’

I could not tell Wilkins what I expected. I was sitting up for the first time and had seen a German paper in which there was a jubilant account of the English retreat from Mons. German airmen had dropped bombs on Paris. The French Government had fled to Bordeaux. Everywhere German arms were triumphant, and Germany would soon be ‘*über Alles*.’ I put the paper down and thought of the Englishmen fighting against odds. The very idea was new and strange; the idea of Englishmen fighting on French soil. Our little army at grips with the big German one! I did not know then that the Kaiser had called it contemptible, and that his insult would be cried from the housetops and turned into an honour by the heroism of the men at whom he hurled it. I knew nothing that day except that Wolfram was dead and that I was widowed, that the September sun was shining, and that the world had gone to war. At Hohenroda it was very peaceful at first, for the Graf had been appointed commandant of a prisoners' camp and was away all day, and the Gräfin had her household to attend to as well as various schemes in connection with war work and war charities. I think, too, they were glad not to see much of me, partly because I was English, and partly because, they argued, if their son had never married me he might never have been killed in a duel. The baron had spoken offensively of English women, and Wolfram had resented it; but if he had not married one he need not have interfered. I was perhaps not to blame——

'Perhaps!' I cried, astonished by my mother-in-law's tone. She was paying her daily perfunctory visit, and had brought me the paper and some flowers.

'I was not in Ilgesheim,' she said stiffly, 'I could only listen to what was told me.'

'It might have been wiser not to listen,' I suggested. 'A watering-place like that is full of gossip.'

'I do not gossip. Your own friend, Frau von Gösen, told me what had gone on. She said you were constantly about with an American to an extent our stricter ideas consider free, and that the baron, who was madly in love with you——'

'The baron madly in love with me! What nonsense!'

'Frau von Gösen assured me that the baron was in love with you and furiously jealous of the American.'

'Then why didn't he kill the American? Why should he pick up a quarrel with Wolfram?'

'Every one tells me he was drunk at the time and not responsible for what he said or did.'

'He is a criminal and ought to have been punished.'

'He has just received the Order of the Red Eagle,' said the Gräfin with a sigh. 'He is alive and well, and distinguishing himself, while my Wolfram

——’

‘How has he distinguished himself?’

‘In Belgium. He was at Liége, at Dinant, at Visé, and at Louvain, when our brave men had to burn it. Have you read that the heart of the All-Highest bled for Louvain? Such noble words touch and inspire us all.’

‘I wish I could see some English papers,’ I said unguardedly. My mother-in-law looked horrified and offended.

‘What can you, the widow of a German officer, want with English papers?’ she asked. ‘They are not like ours. They tell lies.’

‘How do you know?’

‘They accuse us of infamies. They call us barbarians. Such lowness! Such impudence! War is War.’

I looked out of my window and said nothing, but I thought to myself that I would have given a king’s ransom for the August numbers of *The Times*.

XLII

For weeks and weeks after Wolfram died I knew little or nothing of what was going on in the world. I was broken in spirit and in health for the time, and when I got up I spent the late September days sitting in my own room or in some sunny corner of the garden. If it had not been for Max and Wilkins I should have been forlorn, but they never failed me; and though she was in the hands of our bitter enemies and saw no papers that she could read, Wilkins kept a brave heart about the war.

‘Such goings on,’ she would say when she came back from her visit to the police station. ‘Flags flyin’ and bands playin’. They’ve got Brussels. What’s Brussels. They say they’ll have Paris soon, and that Paris is only eight hours from London. Eight hours! I don’t think! And our navy about. But you can’t explain to these people anything about a navy. Most of ’em have never set eyes on the sea; and it does make a difference, I’m sure, m’m, even if it’s only Scarborough in August. The duchess preferred Whitby for the young ladies as being more select, but I’m partial to Scarborough myself, and two of my sister’s boys are in the merchant service. I’d give something to know where they are now. In it, I’ll be bound.’

While Wilkins chattered I sat by the open window, and I idly watched her come to and from the adjoining room with her preparations for my midday meal. She looked hot and tired, and I wondered why. That showed I was getting better. As they say of babies, I was beginning to take notice. She had brought in one of those tiers of earthenware dishes in which you can carry about a succession of courses, and was giving me some soup from the top one.

‘Isn’t that heavy, Wilkins?’ I said, looking at the stack of dishes.

‘It might be heavier,’ she said evasively.

‘Who brings it up here?’

‘Never mind who brings it so long as it comes,’ she said, talking just as she did when I was ten, and she told me not to ask questions if I wanted no stories told.

But next day I met her in the corridor staggering under the weight of it; for she was a little woman and the kitchens at Hohenroda were a Sabbath day’s journey from my rooms, and not on a level road either, but up twisty stairs and round awkward corners.

‘This is absurd, Wilkins,’ I said. ‘The house is full of hefty men and women who could carry that for you. Why doesn’t Rosa do it?’ Rosa was a peasant woman as strong as an ox, whose business it was to clean the rooms in our wing, and generally fetch and carry for us.

‘I couldn’t think of it, m’m,’ said Wilkins in her most standoffish tone, which however had no effect on me.

‘By the way, what has become of Rosa?’ I asked. ‘I’ve not seen her for a long time.’

‘She is still in the castle, m’m.’

‘Doesn’t she clean our rooms now?’

‘I believe not. Your soup is ready and none too hot. If you will attend to your dinner, m’m——’

I was being told to mind my own business. I understood that right enough, but there was a limit to what I could bear, even from Wilkins. I turned on her.

‘You’re cleaning the rooms yourself,’ I cried.

‘I hope I’m giving satisfaction. If there is anything not quite right——’

I took her by both shoulders and looked into her eyes. She got very red and turned her eyes away, but her standoffishness, which never was a trustworthy weapon in her hands, broke down. Then I saw that her eyes were full of tears, and that behind her armour of banter and indifference there was something I had not been allowed to know.

‘Why doesn’t Rosa clean our rooms now, Wilkins?’ I asked.

‘Me and her had words. We fell out.’

‘What about?’

She hesitated.

‘I hardly like to tell you. You’d hardly believe it.’

‘I believe you.’

‘You may. I’d swear to it on the Bible.’

‘What was it?’

‘I caught her outside with those dishes. She had the top lid off and was spitting into the soup; as true as I stand here.’

‘It’s a common trick in this country when they don’t like you,’ Wilkins continued, as I did not speak. ‘English swine they call us; and I’d rather be an English swine than a German human being, from what I’ve seen and heard since there’s been a war on. That Heinrich who cleaned the boots here was back wounded the other day, and bragging about what him and his mates did in a French castle; in the ladies’ bedrooms. Baboons would be more decent I should say.’

‘But could you understand him, Wilkins?’

‘I understand a bit now. Besides they don’t only tell you with their tongues. Their coarseness has always disgusted me, and now they’re worse than ever. I walked out of the room with all of them calling English swine after me. One gets quite used to it; and they daren’t do more than shout. They’re scared to death of the Graf and Gräfin. Besides they know I won’t stand any nonsense. I’m glad the soup happened to be scalding hot that day.’

I naturally asked why, and was told that it had been promptly and effectively thrown into Rosa’s face, and that she had retired squealing loudly; that she had gone blubbering to her mistress with a lying story about the Englishwoman; that there had been an inquiry, and that the Graf and Gräfin had both believed Wilkins, and read the Riot Act to their assembled household, explaining that the Gräfin Wolfram was now a German and must be treated as such, and that Wilkins was living under their protection until a suitable opportunity arose for her return to England.

‘Then you are doing Rosa’s work as well as your own?’ I asked. ‘I’m not doing more than is good for me,’ said Wilkins, trying to be disagreeable and standoffish again; but I put my arms round her and kissed her, as she says I did when I was a child and had been more *contrary* than usual. She had been nursing me night and day ever since Wolfram died, had been alone with her anxiety, alone among hostile savages, and with more manual work on her hands than she had ever done before. She looked thin and ill. But we sat together and talked of England, and that comforted us both. For though we were without knowledge, we were full of faith, and never doubted for a moment that England would win.

I had loved Wolfram dearly, but I cannot say that my year of married life had taught me to love his country-people, and now that he had gone my whole heart was set on England, and I longed to see my father again, and the streets and lights of London, and the Londoners going to war. It was unimaginable, but I spent my days trying to imagine it. The German papers I saw were full of sneers about Kitchener’s army, and the easy prey such soft, incompetent civilians would be to ‘our invincible greys.’ The Graf said that England would never raise a citizen army at all, and that we should fight as we had always fought before, with our money bags but not with our men. He came back from the camp every day with stories of the English, French and Russian prisoners, and of the trouble the English gave him with their requirements and want of discipline. I asked him if I could see the camp, but he put me off roughly, and said he had too much to do there to take visitors with him.

‘He’s ashamed,’ said Wilkins. ‘That’s what he is. Ashamed you should know.’

‘Know what?’

‘The way they’re treated. Mamsell, she tells me things, and they make my blood run cold. I don’t let her see it. I put on my most woolly-lamb expression and I say, “Oh, indeed?” because I want to find out all I can against the time I go back home. But you wouldn’t believe. No one would believe, and I lie awake nights raging, and I’m helpless. Our men are starved, m’m, they’re bullied, they’re knocked silly with the butt end of rifles, they’re alive with lice, they’re dying like flies.’

I suppose I turned pale, for she stopped suddenly.

‘I dunno whether to laugh or to cry over one story,’ she went on. ‘What do you think the little German boys do of a Sunday afternoon? Take their bows and arrows, they do, and shoot at the prisoners, at those who have the strength left to be walking up and down. Some boys from our village told Mamsell about it.’

‘I wonder what Pastor Mink is about?’ I said.

XLIII

I found out what Pastor Mink was about on the following Sunday, when I went to church for the first time since Wolfram died. I am not fond of the Lutheran service at any time, and I had never liked or trusted the Minks. I mean I had not trusted in their goodness, although they talked of the heavenly powers and appealed to them oftener and more intimately than such as I do at home. The husband and wife both had smooth, hypocritical faces and a fawning manner, mixed, in his case, with a flavour of male condescension so common and so exasperating in Germans of the meaner kind; and beneath their smoothness and their obsequiousness I had always known that there were qualities neither smooth nor humble. It needed little insight to discover this, and yet the Hohenrodas had not found it out. With the old people and with Wolfram the Minks passed for a model pastoral pair, meek, beautiful, and holy; and the Graf and Gräfin were both so obtuse that even now the pastor's ravings did not open their eyes. When he began to preach that morning he read, as his text, one of those passages from the Old Testament in which the Israelites on going to war are exhorted to slay their enemies, sparing neither women nor children. He compared the passage he had chosen with others of a similar kind. He gloated over massacre, he waded, screaming with maniacal enjoyment, in blood. He described the process of hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord. He compared the King of the Belgians with Sihon, the King of the Amorites. 'And we took all his cities at that time and utterly destroyed the men and the women and the little ones, of every city we left none to remain.'

'Slay, burn,' he screeched, beating the air with his clenched fist, and finished by declaiming the Hymn of Hate, which had just appeared in *Jugend*, but which I had not heard yet. 'England! England!' he finished, thrusting a skinny, denunciatory hand at me, and then sank upon his knees—to pray, heaven save the mark, to his German god.

At home, I know, you have laughed at the Hymn of Hate. It ran like a joke through the Empire, waking you ever so little to the German state of mind, but only exciting a mild wonder that a nation calling itself grown-up could be so silly and hysterical. I have found, on the whole, that English people preferred not to speak of it. It offended their sense of decency just as the gibberings of an ape or a lunatic might do. But I was alone, bereaved, and, I suppose, not as strong as usual. I felt myself being cursed and pilloried. I saw hostile faces everywhere, and the thought of being by myself and at the mercy of people knowing no mercy turned me dizzy for a moment. I have always thought that the slow journey to the guillotine through that sea of angry, malevolent faces, must have been worse than death itself; and now I know that I was right, and that the horror and loneliness of sitting amongst enemies as cruel as a pack of wolves sears your soul as no bodily hurt can. I shrank within myself. I felt the chill air of death, and I should have broken down, I fear, had it not been for Max. He put his warm hand upon my cold one, and gave it a little squeeze of encouragement and affection.

‘I thought you were going to faint,’ he said later.

I was in my own sitting-room, and he had come there to see me. There was a strong tie between us, and though his sympathies were honestly and naturally German, he never let that affect his friendliness to me. He was too immature to understand the full wretchedness of my position; but he remembered that his father had loved me, and committed me to his care, and his manner had a note of tender protection in it that was both touching and amusing in one so young.

I asked my father-in-law that evening whether I could return to England if I wished, but I found that it would not be easy, and also that he considered it inadvisable.

‘You are my son’s widow. You are living under the protection of his parents, and that is the proper place for you to live while you are so young,’ he said.

‘You bear our name,’ the Gräfin reminded me. ‘By marriage you are a German and a Hohenroda. Would you go over to our enemies?’

I would have gone that moment, if I could, on the wings of the wind; for I loved their enemies and longed to be amongst them again. But I could not say so.

‘At any rate, I will not go to church again,’ I said. ‘I may be a German by marriage, but marriage isn’t everything.’

The Gräfin’s eyes were fixed on me in disapproval and surprise.

‘It should be everything,’ she said.

‘I’m English,’ I said obstinately, and the Graf cleared his throat in a way he intended to be terrifying, and glared at me.

‘If you said that outside these walls you might be torn in pieces,’ he thundered. ‘Take care.’

I thought he was exaggerating and trying to be disagreeable, for I knew next to nothing of what had happened in the world since Wolfram's death, nearly three months ago. The Pastor's sermon and the Hymn of Hate had entered like iron into my soul that morning, but even then I did not realise that I was listening to the voice of the nation, and not merely to the fanatic frenzy of a crazy shepherd and a crazy poet. However, I was not well enough yet to go outside the Hohenroda walls, and the next object-lesson I received in the state of the German temper was when Max arrived from school one day with his coat torn and his face bruised and bleeding. He had been set upon in the playground by a mob of boys, and battered savagely because his father had married an Englishwoman.

'They wanted me to spit upon your name, and I refused,' he said.

'I wonder why Germans are so fond of spitting?' I said to Wilkins, who was attending to Max's wounds and listening to his story.

'Dirty!' she said to me when Max was gone. 'Dirty eaters. Dirty fighters. I wish we were at home, m'm. I suppose there's no way of getting there?'

I told her what the Graf had said about our being torn to pieces if we called ourselves English, and she told me stories that came to her, through the little Mamsell, of the prisoners' camp and of the treatment of prisoners on their way to it. At first I found them difficult to believe, but one afternoon Frau Mink, who was an active member of the Red Cross, paid us a visit and recounted her own deeds and adventures at Reichenstadt railway station the day before. She was one of the ladies in charge of a refreshment stall for wounded soldiers there, and she described the arrival of the trains from the front, the terrible sufferings of the unhappy men in them, and the Christian joy with which she and other devoted German women ministered to their needs. But, gradually working herself into a frenzy, she went on to describe the scandalous conduct of two Jewesses whom she believed to be friends of mine and whom, if she had had her way, she would have hounded out of the station with whips.

'With whips!' she hissed. 'Such women I would whip.'

'What did they do?' I asked, recognising that she spoke of Eugenie von Gösen and Emma, who was now Frau Oscar Strauss. I had found letters of condolence from both sisters in the correspondence put aside for me when I was ill; and also intimations of Emma's formal betrothal and of her quiet, hurried wedding.

‘There were Englishmen in the cattle trucks attached to the train,’ said Frau Mink in a tone of concentrated hate.

‘Wounded and suffering too,’ I suggested.

‘Let them suffer. Let them die. War is War, and they made it. Our Red Cross is not for them.’

‘I thought it was for every one alike.’

‘Not at all. We Germans hate our enemies. We are furious and terrible in war as our God commands. I watched the Jewesses fill the plates with bread and the cups with coffee. I bided my time. I saw the English wretches stretch out their hands and I heard them beg for food and drink. All night and day they had travelled in filth I would not permit my swine to wallow in. They were caked with blood and mud. They were pinched with hunger, mad with thirst——’

‘Thank God my friends were there to help them,’ I cried; but the woman laughed, a smooth, sneering, noiseless laugh, as hateful as her mouth.

‘I was in command,’ she said, pointing to her own breast. ‘I knocked the cups and plates from their hands and spilt the coffee on the floor before the men’s eyes. I ordered the Jewesses out of the station. They will be reprimanded and their badges will be taken away.’

‘You disgrace the badge you wear,’ I said plainly, for the Red Cross was on her arm, and my eyes had been fixed on it as she told her shameful story.

XLIV

The autumn and the winter dragged. I became well in body, but more depressed in spirit than I had ever thought to be. No English papers reached me, and in all that time I only heard twice from Dad. The letters that came through were short and colourless, just letting me know that he was well and going to America again early in the spring. I knew nothing of the war but what the *Reichenstädter Zeitung* told me, and as long as I was in Germany I never heard of the battle of the Marne. Victory was on every one’s lips and in the flags they waved and the joy bells they rang, but I thought that sorrow and uncertainty were in their hearts. Not that their hearts were in the least degree softened. The Graf was as savage against his enemies as if he had been a captain in Israel, with orders from his heavenly Lord to slay and spare not; and though the Gräfin was not such a hyæna as Frau Mink, she accepted the tone prevalent around her and did not try to check it.

I was not allowed to go near the prisoners’ camp, of which I heard stories on all sides; stories of riots and insubordination, of illness, of deaths that made me wish I could visit my countrymen there and find out the truth. But it was as impossible to get inside as it would have been to get into a prison at home without a permit. I did not find fault with that, but I felt helpless and most uneasy. They were so near, those Englishmen who had fought for their country, and I longed to talk to them, to see English faces again and hear the English tongue; perhaps be able to give them little things they wanted, and to assure myself that they were properly fed and clothed. We had plenty to eat at Hohenroda, but there was a great deal of talk before long of a coming famine and of the English blockade that would bring it about. I asked my father-in-law what the rations were at the camp, but he would not tell me. In fact, that was the way with everybody I met. A conspiracy of silence shut me out of everything concerning the war except the victories and the atrocities committed by enemy soldiers and civilians on the humane German troops. I was as much in the dark about what had actually happened as most of the Germans were themselves; only when they actually boasted of infamies they had committed or heard of, I seemed to shift my judgment of them, and begin to understand that the greater part of the nation was demented and depraved for the time being, and was saying as Satan did, Evil be thou my good. When the *Lusitania* went down Max had a holiday; a general holiday given at all the schools in Germany in honour of the occasion. Just consider a moment to what depths a people must have fallen to teach their young the celebration of murder: the wholesale murder of men, women, and children on the high seas. A little later Max brought home the medal struck in commemoration and gave it to his grandmother. He did not show it to me because he knew that I was eating my heart out over my father, who should have been returning from New York about the time the great liner was lost, and from whom I did not hear. Besides, I had spoken my mind to Max about the dishonour brought upon his country's name by such a deed; for my mind's eye saw the drowning women and children, and I was revolted by the unctuous excuses made by the German Press. Even Eugenie, when I met her, had a qualm, and said it was *gruselig*, and she hoped my father had not been on board; but Pastor Mink rang his church bells and told his flock that if only he had been younger he would have danced before his altar as David did before the Ark, and that whoever wasted pity upon the victims and could not give himself up to honest delight was no true German. He said much the same to me when we met in the village one May morning.

'My father may have been on board,' I told him.

'That is *allerdings* unfortunate; but, inasmuch as your father was an enemy, you must rejoice that he may be amongst the slain.'

I turned my back on him; and Max told me on the following Sunday that he preached a more bloodthirsty sermon than ever, and that his text was from the 137th Psalm—Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

In Britain you are not so much inclined to shudder at this spirit as to laugh at it. You collect the fiercest and silliest of the Hunnish ravings in a volume and sell them on bookstalls to make you a holiday. I cannot laugh with you even now because of what my eyes saw and my ears heard one day in Reichenstadt. You who sit safe in your own country view these gibberings as something wholly contemptible and impotent. You know that even if the English have begun to hate, they hate with a difference. They are going to remember, if they can they are going to punish, but as a nation they are not going to run amok like savages themselves.

I had driven Wolfram's car into Reichenstadt to do some shopping for my mother-in-law and to fetch Max from school. She was evidently uneasy at the idea of my going alone, but she wanted her commissions done and was not quite well enough to accompany me. I did not dream of any danger to myself because Wilkins had told me that the village children made faces at her and threw stones, but that grown-up men and women only screamed abusive names when she passed by, and that, she said, did not hurt. I thought it would hurt a little, but I hoped the noise of the car would prevent me hearing, and when I got to the main street of Reichenstadt and the best shops, I expected people to behave. I think they probably would have behaved if I had been a less conspicuous figure. But too much and too little was known about me for my comfort. I was English; I was a widow, and my German husband had been killed by his cousin in a duel. They blamed me, I believe; imagined love affairs where there had been none, and looked at me askance. Eugenie von Gösen, with the air of one bravely speaking to a pariah, shook hands with me in a grocer's shop, and in a clear, loud voice, asked after the Graf and Gräfin. I asked after Eduard, and she told me that he was in France and in good health. She hoped he would soon have leave, and that she would see him again.

'When we get Calais, the war will soon be over,' she said.

'When you do,' I thought.

'We shall get it shortly, and dictate a peace from London.'

I said 'Indeed.' I was always saying 'Indeed' to Germans in those days.

'Oscar Strauss is in Brussels,' continued Eugenie. 'He is wounded and in a hospital. He has two brothers who are prisoners in England.'

'I hope they are both as comfortable as possible,' I said. 'Shall I write and tell Dad about them? Perhaps he would be allowed to send them things.'

There was an odd, half-shamefaced gleam in Eugenie's eyes, and an unusual touch of hesitation in her manner.

'They both write that they are well treated and have all they want,' she said. 'It should be so. Prisoners, I say, are no longer enemies.'

After that we naturally talked about Frau Mink and the abominations committed by her and her fellow-Christians on the sick and wounded. I cannot repeat most of the things Eugenie told me because they are not fit for print, and because you would not believe them. There is a meanness and a dirtiness of brutality to which the very apes hardly descend; and when they are told of Red Cross women in a country claiming to be civilised, your mind dazzles and refuses. Unless you happen to have been in a German city, as I was in the spring of 1915, when a large batch of British prisoners was being escorted through the streets.

As Eugenie and I stood together on the pavement near my car, we heard a smothered, terrifying sound, indistinct at first, but then becoming louder. A sound of marching feet, a chorus of shrill, angry voices, a reiterated cry. Eugenie had turned as white as a sheet and was clutching my arm.

‘Get in,’ she muttered. ‘Get in. Get away.’

She could hardly speak. The words died in her throat, and I wondered why she was so afraid.

‘What are they saying?’ I asked, holding up my hand as one does when one wants to listen and another person interrupts. But she gave me a shove towards my car.

‘It is the English prisoners,’ she said. ‘They are crying, *Zum Tode, zum Tode*. To death with them.’

XLV

Eugenie vanished. I suppose she fled into the shop from which she had just issued, and I for one cannot blame her. She knew her country-people as I did not until that hour was past, and I had seen men and women of all classes and all ages in a state of bestial fury, that felt no check and feared no punishment. For these exhibitions were permitted and encouraged or they could not have taken place. The story has come down to us from immemorial times of prisoners conducted at the conqueror's heels in a triumphal progress; but I cannot remember one in which the mob was allowed to attack these prisoners with every form of outrage and insult. That dishonour seems to have been reserved for the Huns of the twentieth century, and to my dying day I shall be haunted by the picture of it.

I did not feel afraid for myself. I forgot myself, and so would you have done if you had heard that roar and seen that obscene mob approaching. In the centre marched ragged, blood-stained, starving Englishmen. Englishmen, I say, because the word comes to one's lips. But some wore the kilt and carried themselves proudly; some were from overseas, and the one I spoke to had an Irish tongue. I know now, but I did not know then, that wounded and unwounded had travelled here in cattle trucks where they had neither food nor water, nor even the opportunity to relieve nature. Through long days and nights they had lain in filth and darkness, unfed and unattended, spat at, beaten, deluged with dirty water for the amusement of the Cologne crowd. By the time they got to Reichenstadt many who might have recovered had died, others were raving in delirium and beyond all help. Those who could stand were kicked and sabred into some sort of order, and accompanied by an escort who used their bayonets to prick them on, but not to protect them, they started on their long march from the station to the prison camp on the other side of the town. You would have thought that men so starved and shamefully abused would have lost all spirit. But my countrymen had not. They held up their heads, marched with a swing when they could, and looked at their tormentors with set lips and steady eyes. I could see, as they came past, that there were men of all ranks present, officers, N.C.O.'s and privates, whole men and lame ones, men sick and shivering with fever, and men weak with starvation but otherwise whole. There were people of all classes amongst the crowd, too, and women with the badge of the Red Cross. I saw an officer, wearing the Kaiser's uniform, snatch an eye-glass from an English officer's eye and grind it beneath his heel, screaming some word of coarse abuse at the Englishman as he did so.

The screaming went on the whole time, and the women joined in it and the children. I saw weak men who could hardly stand prodded with bayonets, and I saw others beaten with the sticks they had carried to help themselves along. Then I saw a small vixenish German woman, who might have been Frau Mink, run up to a man hobbling along painfully on crutches and kick them one after the other from under his arms. He fell right in front of my car, and I jumped out and tried to help him to get up, while the woman belaboured us both with one of the crutches, and other people surrounded us yelling something about swine.

‘Cowards! Brutes!’ I cried, and for a moment I stood there defending my fallen man, and in such a blaze of fury that they stepped back and stared. They looked horrible, those people, with their hot, distorted faces, coarse features and shapeless figures. The very children were in a wicked mood and given up to persecution.

‘Englishwoman! Englishwoman!’ they began to scream, and closed dangerously around us.

‘Run away, darlint, the beggars will kill ye, and ye’re too pretty to be kilt,’ whispered my man, and actually winked at me with a merry blue eye, as he lay on the ground. So I knew that he was an Irishman.

Then there was a moment of indescribable confusion, when everything that happened seemed to happen at once and reach a climax. The prisoners continued their march past, and some of them, catching sight of me, kissed their hands and started singing Tipperary. The crowd was now in the stone-throwing stage, and one stone caught my cheek as I stood there. They were roaring with enjoyment too, and more numerous than ever. A sergeant, seeing my Irishman prone on the ground, came up to him, and with my assistance pulled him to his feet; and to my intense relief and amazement I suddenly saw Mr. Van Brunt. He came out of a hotel next to the shop I had been in with Eugenie, and he came towards me. He acted before he spoke too. One crutch was out of the woman’s hand before she knew what was going to happen, the other was picked up and put under the Irishman’s arm again, several people pressing on us were shoved back so suddenly, that there was a little space between the mob and me, I found myself in my car, and Mr. Van Brunt having started the engine was in the driver’s seat and smoothly going on, while the men and women within reach yelled ‘Lusitania’ and ‘Amerikaner’ after him, and snapped their fingers at him in a derisive way I have only seen in Germany. Also they threw stones at us, and an elderly man with a paunch and a long Tirpitz beard struck at me with his stick and brought it heavily on my shoulder. I am ashamed to say I screamed with pain. It took me by surprise or I don’t think I would have done, for the people near enough to hear literally danced with delight and rocked themselves to and fro with laughter; while the Englishmen who saw it made a start forward as if they would defend me, and were thrust back by their guards who seemed sometimes to use their bayonets and sometimes the butt ends of their rifles. It was all over in a moment, and the howling, roaring, crazy crowd was behind us, and we were on a quiet high road with the hot May sunshine streaming into the car and throwing its warmth and glory over us. But I broke down and wept bitterly because I had seen my countrymen given up to the wolves, and could not help them. I saw their tortured faces, the hunted look in their deep-set eyes, their blood-stained bandages, their ragged, mud-caked clothes, their sticks and crutches. Would they find relief and comfort when they reached the camp; would they be fed and washed and tended there? All the tales that had reached me filled me with unbearable misgivings.

We were half-way towards Hohenroda before Mr. Van Brunt stopped the car, and until then he had not turned his head my way once. I had hardly thought of him, I was so overwrought and miserable; but now he got down and spoke to me. When we met last Wolfram was alive and the world was not at war. Now, I had been a widow for ten months, and I still wore deep mourning. He had never written to me since we parted, but I thought he must have heard of what had happened. Wolfram was a well-known man at Bertholdsruhe, and his duel with Baron von Osthofen just before war broke out had been one of the violent events that seem to happen on the eve of war, when men are straining at the leash and readier than usual to spring at each other.

‘What about your shoulder?’ he asked.

‘I don’t think any bones are broken.’

‘It’s hurting you?’

‘It’s nothing.’

‘I wish I could have smashed the old satyr’s head. But if we had stayed another minute they would have lynched us.’

I shuddered at the thought of it, and I suppose I looked pretty sick and gone to pieces.

‘You ought to go back to England,’ he said.

XLVI

We stayed there by the roadside, and he told me things about the war that I had not known; things that did not get into the German papers because they would have depressed the German people. It thrilled me to hear about Kitchener’s Army and its growing strength and size. England was awake, he said, and it was the cruelties in Belgium, in the prisoners’ camps, and on the high seas that had waked her. We agreed that these deeds would live from generation to generation, and that the name of Germany would be accursed and dishonoured as the name of sixteenth-century Spain is in the Netherlands to this day. Then I said what every one in England was saying at that time.

‘Why is America silent? Why is she not standing by our side?’

He answered as a diplomatist could, discreetly, and with some explanation of difficulties; but I got the impression that he was heart and soul with us, and that most of his countrymen were too. Then he told me that he was in Reichenstadt on purpose to make inquiries about the prisoners’ camp, and that every possible obstacle was being put in his way.

‘My father-in-law is commandant,’ I told him; and he said he knew it, but had not succeeded in seeing him yet.

‘Come in now,’ I suggested, for he was going to drive me home. I could not have driven myself. My shoulder had become extremely painful, so much so that I suppose I began to look uncomfortable, for he noticed it and said he would go on at once.

It was late afternoon when we reached Hohenroda, and the Graf and Gräfin were on the verandah; for in South Germany you get hot summer days at the end of May. Mr. Van Brunt and I walked straight out there, and I daresay startled them; for he was a stranger and obviously not a German; and I looked as white as a sheet, had a clot of blood on my cheek, my hat battered by some one in the crowd who had clutched at it, my hair wildly untidy, and my arm and shoulder stiff with pain so that I could not move them. I presented the American to my in-laws and my in-laws to the American. They stared at him, and they stared at me; and their stares were expressive. Where had I picked him up? Why did I bring him here? Was he not the American about whom Ilgesheim had gossiped, not without reason? Had there been an accident? Or one of those regrettable but inevitable encounters between patriots and alien enemies, when the patriots, being many, and the enemies few, the enemy got the worst of it?

‘What has happened?’ said the Gräfin, and Mr. Van Brunt spoke for me, for now that I had reached home I was at the end of my tether, and had sunk upon a chair feeling too exhausted to speak.

‘There was a concerted attack by the mob on English prisoners,’ he said curtly. ‘One of the brutes saw Gräfin Wolfram go to the assistance of a wounded man, and when she was in her car again and I had my back turned, he hit at her with his stick. Luckily he just missed her head.’

‘We live in a great hour, but terrible things take place,’ said the Gräfin, shaking her head solemnly from side to side.

‘My daughter-in-law will not go to Reichenstadt again with my approval,’ said the Graf, scowling impartially at us all. ‘What was she doing there, and how is it that the escort allowed her to approach a prisoner? Such a thing is against all discipline.’

‘One of your Red Cross harpies had kicked his crutches away, and was beating him with one as he lay on the ground,’ I said, rousing myself. ‘Is that against discipline too?’

The Graf shrugged his shoulders and looked incredulous.

‘The people are in an excited state,’ said the Gräfin.

I got up and went indoors. I knew that Mr. Van Brunt wished to talk to the Graf, and I wanted to find Wilkins and put myself in her hands. When she was very sorry indeed for me she called me her lamb and forgot to be standoffish, and my shoulder was hurting so much that I wanted to be tended and petted. Yet what was my hurt, and why should I have every comfort and luxury my bruised body needed, while those Englishmen I had seen to-day ——

‘Do you think they have hot baths at the camp?’ I asked anxiously.

‘They’ve lice,’ said Wilkins. ‘Lice and mouldy bread and tainted meat, I’m told. Good enough for the English swine they say.’

Her voice trembled with indignation, as it always did when she talked about the prisoners’ camp and the stories she heard about it; stories the Germans were apparently not ashamed to tell.

I sat near the open windows of my sitting-room and looked out at the view Wolfram and I had often looked at together, and though I grieved that he was dead and I without him, I thought that he had been saved from seeing his wife beaten and cursed by his countrymen and his nation infamous in war. My shoulder was so swollen and painful that I had not put on a frock again, but sat there in a pale pink wrap that was quite presentable, but not of the usual raven black that I wore more to please the Hohenrodas than myself. I had seen in the glass that I looked white and ill, but I had refused to go straight to bed as Wilkins wished. In fact, if I had been able to get my arm into a sleeve or had possessed a black elegance of the kind I now wore, I should probably have gone downstairs again to see Mr. Van Brunt. I was just thinking so when the door opened, and he came in accompanied by Max. I was rather surprised that they had been allowed to come up here, but he said at once that Max and he had met outside and that he had proposed it.

‘But I cannot stay,’ Max said anxiously to me. ‘I have not begun my school work yet.’

So the boy ran off, leaving Mr. Van Brunt and me by ourselves, and me a ten months’ widow in pale pink, and the afternoon sun shining into a very attractive room with big bowls of lilac and lilies-of-the-valley to scent it. Perhaps we were together for five minutes. At any rate he had time to say that if I wished to go to England, he would do his best to help me, and that he expected to be off and on in Reichenstadt during the summer. He told me where he always stayed there, and that in Bertholdsruhe letters and telegrams should go to the American embassy; and he reminded me that anything that I sent by post or telegraph went through German hands.

‘I’m safe enough up here,’ I said. ‘I need not go to Reichenstadt again.’

He hesitated a little: looked at me as if he felt anxious about me, and would have liked to have called me his lamb; and said finally:

‘May I come and see you sometimes?’

‘Why not?’ I said lightly.

He had just saved my life, and even if he had not, the sight of him refreshed and heartened me. I loved the sound of my own tongue as he spoke it with the slight educated American inflection that seemed to give everything he said point and humour; I felt at home with him, and I appreciated the grave chivalry of his manner, which was as far removed from the gallantry of a Baron Osthofen as the bravery and courtesy of a Lord Roberts is removed from the brutalities of a Stengel or a Bissing. Yet my tone was not over-cordial, and my response to his proposal did not reflect my real feelings, because I knew that the Hohenrodas would probably object to entertaining him, and I was in their house and not in my own. But he looked so disappointed and so surprised, that I had to explain myself.

‘I’m not my own mistress here,’ I began.

‘Is that it?’ he said, understanding at once, and I nodded; and before he spoke again both the Hohenrodas came into the room; and I was in pale pink; and Mr. Van Brunt, who had bid them good-bye and gone out at the front door, sat there with me. Moreover he did not look in the least concerned or embarrassed. He got up when he saw the Gräfin, offered her his chair, took another himself and said that, as my shoulder was so painful, he thought I ought to see a doctor, and that if they pleased he would call on ours when he got back to Reichenstadt and shoot him along.

XLVII

I laughed at his phrase, and my in-laws looked at me stonily.

‘We came up here to inquire after your shoulder, Karen,’ said the Gräfin. ‘If it is necessary to have the doctor——’

She was a stupid woman, but she had some personal dignity and breeding; and she would not have put her foot into it as her husband did the next moment. He turned his bullet head towards the American and said in a parade voice meant to frighten and impress:

‘How did you find your way up here, Mr. Van Brunt?’

‘Your grandson showed me,’ said the American. He did not get up to go at once, although the Graf’s tone must have informed him clearly enough that he was not wanted. He stayed on for a minute or two, talking pleasantly to the Gräfin, and then at his own time took leave, departing with flying colours, a man of the world and a gentleman. I wondered what he thought of the highly-born boor in whose castle I was henceforth a prisoner. For directly he was out of hearing the Graf laid down the law for me. I was never again to show myself in Reichenstadt until the war was over, and if I wanted a long walk or drive I must take it in the opposite direction.

‘An Englishwoman who assists a prisoner of war risks her life,’ he lectured; ‘not only at the hands of the crowd but officially. If any officer had seen you——’

‘The officers were busy,’ I said. ‘Some were in the crowd helping to throw mud and stones; and some were using their sticks and the butts of their revolvers.’

‘To defend their prisoners,’ said the Gräfin reprovingly.

‘Not at all. To prod them on. The Englishmen were wounded and weak and starving, you see——’

I don’t know whether it was pity or anger that choked me. It may well have been both. The Gräfin looked at her husband as if to ask him whether I was telling the truth; and the Graf made a gobbling sound in his throat and muttered something about swine.

‘Will they be looked after when they get to the camp that you command?’ I said, and I dare say I spoke fiercely. ‘Will they have doctors and food and baths as German prisoners in England have?’

‘How do you know anything about German prisoners in England? You are not there.’

‘I know my country.’

‘*Papperlapap*,’ he said, which means nonsense and is rude.

‘I hear stories of what happens on the German trains and in the camps,’ I continued.

‘Who tells them?’

‘Frau Mink, Frau von Gösen, Wilkins, who hears them told without shame downstairs. Yet they are stories of such incredible cruelty, meanness and dirtiness—yes, dirtiness—that if my own eyes had not seen to-day and my own ears heard——’

‘War is War,’ said the Graf.

‘War is no excuse for such stories as I am told,’ I said heatedly. ‘If they are true they stamp you for the most brutal and uncivilised race in Europe.’

‘Peace, woman,’ shouted the Graf, lumbering to his feet, and shaking his fist at me.

‘Take me to your camp. Show me the prisoners I saw to-day, clothed and clean, decently housed, and fed——’

‘Take care!’ shouted the Graf, shouting me down. ‘There is a limit to what I will endure, and you have reached it.’ He went on for quite a long time after that, going back to past history and telling me that, in spite of my money, he had been violently opposed to my marriage with his son, because he had the lowest opinion of Englishwomen; and that he had never approved of me; and that if Wolfram had married a German he might now be alive and defending his Fatherland against bandits leagued together to destroy it. His bellowing voice seemed to get farther and farther away, and what he said began to be all sound and fury. I shut my eyes——

‘Here’s the doctor, my lamb,’ said Wilkins, and there was I in bed with her bending over me, and Dr. Marwitz asking in his gruff, friendly voice what I had been doing now. I was so vexed with myself. I, to stand up for my countrymen! I, to help them and fight for them! And I’d fainted at the sound of a noisy voice, and lay in bed, with my faithful maid coddling me and a domineering doctor calling his countryfolk a pack of swine when he saw my shoulder, and ordering me to stay in bed till he saw it again. I suppose I was feverish and wandering for a day or two, for there was a pink silk eiderdown that worried me day and night. I wanted it to cover the Irishman with the crutches, and tried to send it to him, and could not make Wilkins understand. When I told her what I wanted she shook her head.

‘They’ve got the fever at the camp now,’ she said. ‘They’re dying like flies. The Germans won’t go inside.’

I didn’t understand what she meant, and I was still too weak and feverish to ask many questions. But when I got well the Gräfin told me that there had been an epidemic in the camp, and that the Graf had been anxious lest it should spread to the town, and when I got back to England I heard that what happened at Wittenberg had happened at Reichenstadt, and I had to tell English people that no one I met in Germany seemed to care or feel in the least ashamed. They were everlastingly celebrating victories, and I have not told you yet what a hullaballoo there was just before Christmas over the bombardment of the Yorkshire coast, and the massacre of the innocents in Scarborough, Whitby, and the Hartlepools. They did not call it a massacre of the innocents; they said the invincible German fleet had attacked English fortified towns and destroyed the fortifications.

‘Glorious news,’ said the Graf, who brought it back with him.

‘But Scarborough and Whitby are not fortified,’ I said. ‘They are open towns. I know them both well.’

‘They are fortified,’ said the Graf. ‘The official telegram says so.’

‘Our official telegrams do not lie,’ said the Gräfin.

But you can imagine what Wilkins said when she heard of it, and of what went on belowstairs. Scarborough and Whitby fortified towns! Didn’t she know every inch of them?

‘It shows how ignorant they are,’ she remarked. ‘I wonder if they killed any one?’

They didn’t tell us that in the German papers, but they had a great deal to say about the cowardice and incompetence of the British navy, that was always in hiding when the Germans came out. Even when they spoke of the battle of the Falkland Islands, they gave the credit of it to the Japanese. How I longed for an English paper day by day, and how difficult it was not to lose heart. I could not believe, as Wilkins did, easily and cheerfully, that everything a German said was a lie.

‘People as will say Scarborough and Whitby are fortified, will say anything,’ she maintained, and I certainly found when I met Mr. Van Brunt that I had not been told the truth about any event of the war. I had not even heard of the battle of the Marne.

Towards the end of June my shoulder had healed, and I was able to drive a car again. I went as near as I dared to the prisoners’ camp once or twice, but I could only see the guns trained on it, sentries mounting guard, and men in various uniforms walking about. I could not get any information of what was happening there except through Wilkins, and she got hers from sources I was not inclined to trust. I wished I could see Mr. Van Brunt again, but I did not know how to manage it. I could not ask him to Hohenroda or go to see him at Reichenstadt. The summer dragged on, bringing with it crowded memories of a year ago when Wolfram had been alive and the world at peace. On the anniversary of his death I went with his parents and Max to his grave, but I wished I could have gone alone. I felt myself an unwelcome and suspected member of their household now, and their genuine grief for their son did not soften their hearts towards me. On the contrary, they regarded me as responsible for his death because it had come about through a quarrel over Englishwomen.

XLVIII

I had been more than two years in Germany; for I had arrived at Hohenroda early in August, and it was a late August morning when I kept an old promise to Wilkins and set out to show her the caves Max had shown me long ago. I had not seen Mr. Van Brunt again, but I wanted so much to see him that I had written to tell him of our expedition, and suggested that if he had time he might meet us at a point in the road close to the caves. Ever since we had met in Reichenstadt the idea of getting back to England had taken life in my mind and become stronger than any other wish I had. If you have never been an exile amongst enemies you cannot understand how homesick I was, and how I was pursued by the sights and sounds and ways of England—my England. My affection for Max had not lessened, but I was no longer ready to stay at Hohenroda for his sake, and I knew I could not take him with me. His grandparents were his guardians, he was well and happy now although he was still overworked at times: and he would some day be Graf v. Hohenroda. I could picture the affectionate friendship that would exist between us throughout life, and how in happier times he would visit me in England and I should go to him at Hohenroda. But I knew that I, as an Englishwoman, could never make my home amongst Germans again, and I was on fire to get away. I tell you all this so that you should understand why I wrote to Mr. Van Brunt and asked him to meet me near the caves. I knew he would help me if he could, and that he would be cool and wideawake about it. He often reminded me of Dad, but he never said Shucks! or used any of the picturesque but startling expressions we expect of our cousins. He laughed when I told him so, and said I might as well expect an Oxford don to talk like a bargee.

Wilkins, Fritz, and I set out early after breakfast, and we carried our lunch with us: plenty of it in case we should have four to feed instead of three. It was a blazing hot day, but we walked slowly, and mostly in the shade. I could have taken her by road in the car, but we both liked the idea of the long walk through the forest first and then across the wild, broken heather country that I had only seen in its late autumn dress. The tremendous heat rather doubled us up at the end of the morning, for it was more than anything we ever felt at home, and I understood why the Graf and Gräfin had told me that Germans got up at five for such a walk, and were not so silly as to be in the midst of it at midday. However, we trudged along silently, and Fritz had his tongue out, but I will say for ourselves that we did not puff and blow and grumble as I have heard Germans do when the heat afflicted them. I used to dread sitting with my in-laws this weather, because the Gräfin would heave a long sigh every minute or so and moan, '*Ach! diese Hitze*,' and the Graf would drink glass after glass of a foaming beer with gurgling noises in his throat that ought not to have got on my nerves but somehow did. I liked getting right away from the house for once with no Germans near us to spy and listen; and I think Wilkins enjoyed it too, for while we were in the forest she looked quite cheerful and talked about the duchess. She was sure the duchess would be doing more for the sick and wounded soldiers than the Gräfin did, she said. And when we got to the high road that passed by the caves there was Mr. Van Brunt in his big travelling car; and he had brought lunch too, and two bottles of champagne. It was a picnic.

It was so burning hot that we decided we would carry our food and wine just inside the big cave and have it there in the cool and the twilight. The idea of dripping icy stalactites was delicious, and I said I would break the tip of one off and put it in my glass. We were in good spirits when we met because we were glad to see each other, and glad to be out of the burning sun and able to eat and drink when we were hungry and thirsty. Occasionally the sorrow and terror of the time would be put behind one in this way for a while, and I think such interludes help to keep us sane; so that even when I see a crowd at a theatre door I cannot condemn them, but believe that if you could look into their hearts you would find that each one had its load of anxiety or weariness and had come there for an hour of escape.

We stayed quite near the wide door of the main cave because we wanted to be in the light, and as it was past our usual lunch time we set to at once, unpacking Mr. Van Brunt's hamper and our own packages. He had brought enough and more than enough for us all, because he said I had told him that I was going to walk, and he knew I could not carry much. He had thought of things like chocolates and peaches, too, while we had only brought what the little Mamsell gave us—solid chunks of grey bread and butter with slices an inch thick of liver sausage in between—the whole wrapped in that rough, thick grey paper Germans use. Wilkins chose to sit a little apart from us, and I was in the midst of telling her not to be silly and refuse the glass of champagne Mr. Van Brunt was holding out to her when Fritz, who had been sniffing round the floor of the cave a little further in began to bark loudly. Fritz had become so much my dog that I knew his language, and understood that he had found something or some one he did not like, and was giving me warning. I guessed at other visitors farther down the cave and called him to me. He understood English, but at any rate Come here is much the same in both languages.

‘Come here, Fritz,’ I commanded.

‘I’ll fetch him,’ said Mr. Van Brunt, getting up; but as he rose to his feet Fritz sidled back to us still protesting violently; while in the dimmer light behind him we were amazed to see two men supporting each other and stumbling slowly and very feebly towards us.

‘What’s this?’ said Mr. Van Brunt.

I had been feeling so lazy and bodily content that I had not thought to stir from my comfortable corner till I must, but I was on my feet in a moment and going with Mr. Van Brunt to meet the two men. Wilkins was on her feet, too, and close behind us. As they came nearer we saw them more clearly, and I hope you will never see any one in such a plight, because you can never forget it. To this day I sometimes meet those men in that cave in a dream. Their clothes were uncleanly rags, their cheeks were sunken, their eyes wolfish with hunger, their bodies weak and thin. They looked terror-stricken, too, and stupefied. One of them had his arm in a rough sling, and the other wore a dirty, blood-stained bandage round his head. Their boots were in such a state that their bare toes protruded, and when they spoke, their voices were hoarse and low.

‘We heard English,’ said one.

‘I’m English,’ I said. ‘Who are you?’

‘We’ve been in the camp ever since Mons,’ said one; ‘we got away in the dark.’

‘How long have you been here?’ asked Mr. Van Brunt.

‘Give us food,’ begged the other man, ‘we are starving.’

They shrank back into the twilight from which they had come, and we found them huddled on the ground when we went back to them with food and wine. I had brought an electric torch with me, and by the light of it we fed them. I think they would have died there of exhaustion if we had not found them, and yet they had not been long in the cave. I had heard stories of the mismanagement and brutalities of the camp for nearly a year, but nothing I heard or subsequently read made such an impression as the sight of these two men did: dirty, ragged, cowed, and nearly dead of hunger. Mr. Van Brunt raised his hand suddenly to get hold of the bottle of wine near him, and I saw one of them start back as if he expected to be struck. He was the stronger and the saner of the two. The other seemed ill and apathetic even after he had eaten; but his mate treated him with affection and respect, and I soon gathered that there was a difference of quality between the two, and that the rougher man had a big, generous spirit. He could have got farther by this time but he would not go on alone, and some one in the camp had told him of these caves but warned him they would not make a safe hiding-place for long because at any moment visitors might appear in them.

XLIX

They were both privates we found, and you could tell by his speech that one was a man of some education. But the other who was younger did most of the talking.

‘They set one o’ their big dogs on my mate the other night and he got bitten in the arm,’ he said, when I asked some question about their wounds. ‘Wounds! There wasn’t much wounds on us when we got rounded up. Two hale and hearty chaps we was when we left Blighty August come a year; and now look at us. I want to get ’ome, I do, and show myself and tell ’em what these devils are like. Do you know what I see with my own eyes as we come on through France?’

The champagne had lit him for the time, food had given him strength, and he told us what he had seen. As his regiment went forward and were almost at grips with the enemy, some French women and children foolishly ran out from their homes to welcome them, and the Germans seeing this turned their machine guns on the women and children and shot them down.

‘Put up their arms like this they did and gave a screech and fell,’ said the boy; for he was only a boy. ‘Might happen in Kent where I come from if we let ’em land.’

You could tell that he was naturally a cheerful, friendly boy, not easily stirred to anger or to hate. Even now the memory of those murdered women and children and the sight of his friend’s sufferings seemed to move him more than what he had undergone himself.

‘What about your head?’ said Mr. Van Brunt. ‘Who did that?’

‘Butt end of a rifle,’ he answered, and added as if in explanation, ‘Yer see, I don’t understand their lingo.’

We tried to make out what their plan of escape was, and where they proposed to cross the frontier, and we found that they had thought out these details with the help of some one in the camp who knew the neighbourhood. They were going to hide by day and move on by night, living on what they could find in the fields and swimming the river when they came to it. They had no money and no food, and the rags they stood up in were khaki. They were doomed to failure, I thought, and so I am sure did Mr. Van Brunt, though he did not say so. But he gave them money, and we left them every scrap of food we had. As we got up the man who had hardly spoken got up too to bid us good-bye, and the light fell more clearly on his emaciated face and tragic eyes. Wilkins had hardly spoken all this time, but now she plucked at my sleeve and whispered in my ear——

‘Tell ’em to wait down there in the dark,’ she said, pointing to the depths of the cave. ‘I’ll come back and bring ’em some clothes and food.’

‘We’ll both come,’ I whispered, ‘but don’t say anything to Mr. Van Brunt.’ He had gone ahead to start his car in which he had offered to take us home.

‘Certainly not, m’m, and I should not think of your coming,’ said Wilkins, and then we both spoke to our countrymen, and told them to go far down into the depths of the cave and wait there for us until after dark, and I left them my electric torch.

I had not got into Mr. Van Brunt’s car, but was standing beside it while Wilkins put in the empty hamper and arranged a light summer rug for me when another car came rapidly towards us, and slowing down a little as it reached the caves passed us by. In it sat the Baroness von Osthofen, her two boys and Herr Putzer. I had not seen the baroness since the duel between her husband and mine, and she stared at me now without recognition. Eugenie had told me that she applauded her husband’s deed, because Wolfram had proved himself an enemy of his country by marrying an Englishwoman and defending the English. Apparently the All-Highest took this view too, for the baron had been rapidly promoted, and was now a general and governor of one of the larger Belgian towns. Since then I have often heard his name spoken in connection with the deportations, with levies on the starving population and with the execution of women and young girls. You could easily imagine him saying what Count Harrach said when Edith Cavell was murdered. ‘I wish we had two or three of these old Englishwomen to shoot!’

Herr Putzer did not follow the lead of the baroness and refuse me recognition, but his greeting was unpleasantly derisive. He glared at me, he glared at Mr. Van Brunt, and he took off his hat with a sweep of his arm and sneered at us. Mr. Van Brunt’s eyes followed the receding car expressively but he said nothing; and when we started I talked to him, as far as you can talk to any one driving a car, about my return to England. For I had left Wilkins in the back of the car by herself and taken my own seat in front. It was a heavenly summer afternoon, and our return journey took us through the Hohenroda valley. The air was sweet with hay, for the second crop had just been cut and added its fragrance to the scent of the forest that covered the hills on either side of us. The scene was one of peace and beauty, but that only made my spirit heavier, for though my eyes saw the glory of the world my mind was weighed down by its wickedness and the anguish of its victims. I spoke of my homesickness, but I spoke half-heartedly, for I could think of nothing but those men we had just left, their slender chances of escape, and the savage punishment that would be visited on their weak suffering bodies if they were caught. The boy who had talked to us had a sensitive, rather girlish mouth and honest eyes. He wasn't married he told us, but he had a sweetheart and a mother waiting at home for him. They had sent him parcels of food when they could, but they were very poor now and unskilful packers. Sometimes a package would arrive with its contents lost or spoiled; but his mate, whose people were better off, had always shared his parcels with him.

'So you have made up your mind to get back to England,' said Mr. Van Brunt to me.

'I want to; but how can I?'

He hardly answered, but seemed to be thinking hard; and I hoped he was planning my way of escape; but he did not make any suggestions that afternoon, and a few minutes later we were within sight of Hohenroda.

'When can we see each other again?' he asked.

'It isn't easy,' I said. 'I can't ask you to Hohenroda because my in-laws object to my having English and American friends.'

'We might meet in Reichenstadt.'

'I'm forbidden to go there since I was attacked the other day.'

'How did you get away to-day?'

'I just went. When they hear that I met you there will be a fuss.'

'How will they hear?'

'I shall tell them. I'm not afraid of them, but I wish I was in England.'

He fell to brooding again, so I asked him if he had thought of any plan yet that would set me free to travel across the German frontier.

'I've thought of one,' he said sombrely.

'Is it practicable?'

'Quite; if you consented to it.'

'I would consent to pretty much anything that took me—us, I mean, to England.'

He slowed down the car and turned his eyes on me with such wells of pleasure and surprise in them that I was taken aback.

‘Us,’ he murmured, ‘you would——’

‘Wilkins and me,’ I explained, ‘I can’t desert Wilkins.’

He seemed to be interested in his speedometer, and I waited a little before I spoke again.

‘But what is your plan?’ I said. ‘What do you want me to do? Dress up as a boy or a peasant? Or hide in a hay-cart like the refugees in the *Scarlet Pimpernel*. I’m afraid I’ve not courage enough for that kind of escape. I shan’t sleep to-night for thinking of those two men in the cave. When I leave Germany I mean to leave in broad daylight with my passport in order and my trunks in the luggage van. Can’t you get me a passport?’

He shook his head doubtfully, and for a moment we stood there together unwilling to separate, unable to stay together. I dreaded going into that unfriendly house from his strong friendly presence; but there was nothing else to be done.

L

I had to appear at supper, and I found the atmosphere lowering and stormy. The Gräfin had the pursed-up mouth that denoted anxiety. Max looked like a melancholy Eschenau and hardly spoke, and the Graf was in a state of concentrated fury. He shovelled food into his mouth as if he were stoking a furnace, swore at the trembling old butler, and more or less turned his back on me. While we were at table a telephone message came that he had to attend to, and when he returned to the room his wife looked at him inquiringly.

‘Not yet,’ he said, ‘but it is only a matter of time, and when it happens ——’

‘Two prisoners have escaped from the camp,’ said the Gräfin turning to me, and as I had prepared myself to hear this I hope that I kept a tolerably composed countenance.

‘Which way have they gone?’ I said, and my in-laws both stared at me with the pity and contempt English stupidity rouses in the highly-trained German mind.

‘Which way would you expect?’ said the Graf. ‘To the nearest point on the frontier, of course. We shall catch them to-morrow. They cannot get across. The bridges are guarded. The river is swift.’

‘What will happen to them?’

‘What they deserve. Severe punishment if they come quietly, death if they resist.’

I daresay I gave a little shiver. I tried to imagine myself or any one dear to me in the clutches of that old man, and then I wondered what he would do to any one who helped his victims to escape.

‘Fools!’ he went on muttering to himself, ‘they have no food, no money, no clothes, and any one who helps them will be shot.’

‘Do you mean to say that if a man took pity on them——’

‘Man, woman, or child—I should have no mercy in such a case.’

‘Have you power, then, over people’s lives?’

‘I should act with others who have power. We should be agreed.’

‘Nevertheless,’ said Max, ‘it is considered a noble action to help a prisoner to escape.’

His grandfather fell upon him, reminding him that the prisoners in question belonged to the accursed and degenerate race that in its envy had planned the destruction of Germany, and that any one who helped them out of captivity did so at his peril and had no patriotism. By the time the meal was over and I could get back to my own room I felt more creepy-crawly than I had ever expected to feel, and while I waited for Wilkins I imagined myself led out in front of a firing squad while my father-in-law looked grimly on.

‘They’re all in a hurly-burly about the escaped prisoners downstairs,’ said Wilkins directly she came in. ‘The search parties have been out all the afternoon but they’ve not tried the caves, because they’re the wrong side of Reichenstadt. I can’t see as our two men have a dog’s chance.’

‘I’m going to give them one,’ I said.

Wilkins wanted to know how, and when I told her she said it could not be done, and that at any rate I was not to do it, but that a more obstinate child than me, begging my pardon, she had never known, and that whether she was wanted or not she was coming with me. I said that nothing would induce me to take her with me, and that she really must remember that I was not a child now, whatever I had been when she first made my acquaintance many years ago.

‘I’ve a will of my own too, m’m,’ she replied, ‘as you’ll find. Where you go to-night, I go too. I promised your father I’d keep an eye on you——’

‘But it’s dangerous, Wilkins.’

‘Yes, m’m. So I should think.’

‘If we were caught we should be put against a wall and shot.’

‘I shouldn’t be surprised.’

That was all I could get Wilkins to say. She did not approve of what I wanted to do, but if I did it she was coming with me. I believe her strong sense of propriety acted as a motive as well as her regard and affection for me. She could not let me run about the country at night by myself even if she risked her life by coming with me. Perhaps neither of us believed in the risk as we should have done a little later, after the execution of Edith Cavell. At any rate we did not dwell on it, but made our preparations carefully; and one of them was to entice Fritz into my room soon after the household was in bed and to leave him there happy for the night amongst my sofa cushions. There was no other dog in the house, and the one in the stables knew me well and did not bark when I went near. We were both loaded when we stole out of the house, for we took the men clothes as well as food. I took them two of the civilian suits Wolfram had worn on our wedding journey. Does this seem wrong to you and heartless? If so, I have not made you see what I saw as I unpacked the clothes; the faces of the two English boys for whom I carried them; their hunted, terror-stricken eyes and their rags. I had no doubts and no compunctions. If Wolfram had been alive and at the front I would have done the same.

Wilkins had foraged in Mamsell’s larder, of which she knew the ins and outs, and had brought back a basket of food chosen judiciously, she assured me, so as not to be greatly missed. I filled a flask with brandy, sacred to the Graf when he had the little troubles that come upon people after they have overeaten themselves once too often; and, feeling quite unrepentant, we stole mousey quiet out of a side door used by the servants and close to the stables where I kept my car. I knew it was ready, because I had told the old man who cleaned it for me that I should use it that morning, and then after all had decided to walk to the caves through the forest. I hoped no one would hear us start, but we had to risk that, and once away I thought I could invent a rigmarole about wanting a spin by moonlight. For it was bright moonlight, and when we got into the main road I looked up at Hohenroda, and saw it like a castle in a fairy tale, all its turrets and windows in blue light, the forest closing round it on three sides, and in front the precipitous rock on which the gardens had been made with difficulty, and that dropped sheer beyond them to the road.

‘I’ll go ahead, m’m,’ said Wilkins when we got to the cave, ‘and as I go I’ll call out. They may have undressed.’

I didn’t feel much like laughing, but Wilkins made me laugh because she went forward in a most cautious way, throwing her light to either side of her and at intervals saying in her genteel voice: ‘Are you there?’ or, ‘Where are you?’ or only, ‘How very dark and cold it is, m’m. Take care of that stone. I nearly tripped over it,’ for I had followed her. She spoke very clearly and with her voice raised as you do when you speak to give warning, and when we had got a long way in she suddenly turned to me and said:

‘The very idea of your wanting to come by yourself. Most improper it would have been, I’m sure.’

At the same moment two figures stirred quite close to us, and we found ourselves almost touching the men we sought. They were heavy with sleep, and in their sleep they were afraid. Afraid of blows and kicks, putting up their arms to guard their heads. You could see what treatment they expected, these two decent Englishmen, and when you have seen you can't forget. At least Wilkins and I can't. We shall never be able to talk of 'our German friends,' because we should begin to think of the prisoners in the streets of Reichenstadt and those two battered, bullied wretches in the cave that night, and the words would stick in our throats.

We fed them again, and then we told them to be quick and change into the clothes we had brought while we waited for them in the car. I took them to within twenty miles of the frontier, and told them the little I knew about the river there and their chances of getting across. They said they were strong swimmers, but I described an inn just outside a little town, and an old boat I had once seen lying on the shore there and wanted to use. Wolfram had said it was probably out of repair and I had not insisted, so I could not say whether it was water-tight or even whether there were oars near it. Whether they rowed or swam across they would probably be seen and shot at from the bridge. I knew I was only giving them a dog's chance.

LI

The glory of the moonlight had gone from Hohenroda when we went back, and as I took the car beneath the ancient gateway the old castle faced me grey and threatening but still asleep. Not a dog barked, not a voice called to us as we crept upstairs in that chill early dawn, and when we reached my rooms we found Fritz still amongst my cushions, and a rosy light just beginning to glow in the eastern sky. Wilkins made a cup of tea, and then we both went to bed, knowing that we had committed a capital crime, and that we should be lucky if we escaped detection. The night before, in the exaltation of our spirits the risk to ourselves had not weighed a straw. We were sustained by the flood of pity and righteous wrath the sufferings of our countrymen had unlocked in us. But now that we had done the deed its heinousness weighed on us like lead, so that we both dreamed when we slept and cried out in our dreams. I waked myself calling to Wolfram for help, and found Wilkins up and dressed beside my bed. She looked drawn and white, and had black rims under her eyes.

'I'd give something to be in the Seven Sisters' Road this morning,' she said; 'I dreamed I was there in my brother's front shop, and some of those Germans came goose-stepping along the way you see them and then I woke ——'

'We are both new to crime,' I said, sitting up in bed wide awake and anxious. 'I keep going over everything we did and wondering whether we can be found out. I should hate to be shot in cold blood.'

'Do you think they really would?'

'Baron von Osthofen is having women executed in Belgium for less than this, women and quite young boys and girls. Mr. Van Brunt told me about him.'

'Have a hot cup of tea, my lamb,' says the sensible Wilkins, and brings me one; for what was the use of dwelling on Osthofen and his infamies since we could not stop them, and were in the same degree guilty as his victims. It would have sapped our strength and courage which we might still want.

'Anyhow we had no choice,' we both agreed. 'We would do it again.'

I decided, as I dressed, that I would overhaul my car before breakfast and make sure no traces of our passengers had been left inside; and I found when I went to the stables that the old coachman was engaged in cleaning it, and grumbling to himself because he had to do so now that the chauffeur was at the front. I made some excuse about looking for a little bag, which upset him still further, because he had to cease work in order to assure me that he was not a thief and would restore a little bag if he found it, and that he was not used to *Herrschaften* who promenaded the countryside by night when all decent folk, and especially young ladies, were in bed. He had heard me start, he said, and had asked his wife if such things were allowed; but he had not heard me come back. When Wolfram was alive this old man had been obsequiously polite to me, but lately he had been disobliging and uncivil. He and his wife were favourites with the Minks, and probably imbibed their ideas about the treatment of English people unfortunate enough to be in Germany. I could not find anything of a suspicious nature in the car and went back to breakfast rather relieved. I was prepared to confess to a moonlight ride, and did not think that in itself could be used against me; but I did not mention it as I sat at table. I hardly spoke at all, because the Graf was in his blackest mood, and his wife always took colour from him, while Max drank his coffee in five minutes and hurried off to school with his rolls in his hands. He drove Wilkins into Reichenstadt every day, where she had to present herself to the police, and she came back on one of the Hohenroda carts that took two hours to do the trip. I always thought that my father-in-law, with his influence and great name, might have arranged for a weekly visit, or even to be guarantee for her; but he never moved a finger to save us this daily indignity; for the German police make any traffic with them an offence and an indignity. They always kept Wilkins standing as long as they could, and when they did attend to her they were often grossly rude. However, I believe she annoyed them by her imperturbability and the twinkle in her eye. One of them made a point of saying '*Gott strafe England*' to her as a daily greeting, and she had not moved a muscle, she told me, except to recite the facts she was there to recite and answer the questions she was bound to answer. We had never taken their bad manners very seriously or expected to be at their mercy except in a formal way.

The Graf went off to the camp every morning after breakfast, and this morning he had not gone long when the old butler appeared in the Gräfin's sitting-room and said that Herr Putzer was there and desired to speak to her at once on urgent business. I was with her because I was helping her with the accounts of one of her charitable funds, and though I had no wish to see Herr Putzer, I did not go away because he was announced. I was sitting at a writing-table in one corner of the room when he came in, and perhaps he did not see me. At any rate he looked straight past me, went up to the Gräfin in a state of indescribable agitation, and deposited at her feet something ragged and dirty that he carried on a stick, and that I knew at once to be the khaki coat of one of my runaway Tommies.

‘I thought to be in time to see the Herr Graf,’ he panted. ‘I will, however, ’phone to him——’

The Gräfin had drawn back from the unsavoury object on the floor, and was looking at the tutor as if she thought he had taken leave of his senses.

‘Good-day, Herr Putzer,’ she said formally. ‘You have perhaps walked too far in the sun and overheated yourself.’

His appearance bore out her suggestion, for he looked ashen with excitement and fatigue, while his clammy hair seemed to be pasted in thin strands on his head and temples, and beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks like tears.

‘You do not understand,’ he screamed, shaking a denunciatory stock at the khaki rags; ‘they have been helped. Some one has given them clothes into which they have changed, and food and wine. Whoever has done this thing——’

He wheeled round and took a step towards me.

‘Whoever it is!’ he screamed in a still higher voice, and shook his clenched fist so near my face that I had to push back my chair to avoid it.

‘Herr Putzer, I must ask you to control yourself,’ said the Gräfin indignantly. ‘I still do not understand of what you are talking.’

‘I am talking of the English swine who have deserted from the camp. I am talking of the cave in which they hid themselves, of the clothes they left there, of the food and wine with which they were strengthened and refreshed.’

‘The caves!’ echoed the Gräfin. ‘But the caves are not between us and the frontier. They are in the other direction.’

‘The swine hid there.’

‘How do you know?’

Herr Putzer made a gesture of despair at the Gräfin’s stupidity.

‘Have I not told you? Have I not shown you? They changed their clothes there and left those behind.’

He pointed again to the little heap between them, and the Gräfin looked at it again, her ponderous mind refusing to move as quickly as he wished.

‘But how should they come by clothes in a cave?’ she said, and he shrugged his shoulders and lifted his eyes to heaven.

‘Some traitor assisted them,’ he said, ‘the punishment, as you know, is death.’

I had not spoken yet, and I did not speak now. A silence followed that was terrifying because, while it lasted, I seemed to see the mists clear from my mother-in-law’s brain, and the truth reach her understanding suddenly and with horror.

‘What were you doing in the cave?’ she said severely to Herr Putzer when she found her tongue. ‘How came you to think of going there?’

I had risen to my feet now, and I stood beside the Gräfin when Herr Putzer pointed at me.

‘She threw me down,’ he croaked. ‘She offended my dignity. Now she shall pay—she shall pay—to the uttermost. She was outside the caves yesterday with her lover——’

I took a step towards him and he started back, but as he did so he plucked some small object from his coat and shook it triumphantly in our faces; and my mother-in-law and I both recognised it for a letter-case that Wolfram had used and that had his monogram and coronet outside. One of those silly Tommies must have found it in a pocket and thrown it away, thinking perhaps that it might convict him. It was certainly sufficient to convict me.

LII

You know how spontaneously your body will act in the moment of danger, and how it saves itself without any conscious direction on your part. I suppose there must be some parallel operation of the mind, for as Herr Putzer's voice rose to a scream of insult and denunciation, I remembered that the electric bell was out of order and that this little circumstance in my favour might give me time. In a moment I had whisked out of the room, locked the door, and with the key in my pocket, rushed to the Graf's office and asked for Mr. Van Brunt's hotel on the telephone. The longest moments of my life were those during which the hotel porter sent for Mr. Van Brunt, and it was just all I could do to sit there with my hands folded waiting for the call. But I forced myself to stand the strain because I knew that Wilkins and I were rats in a trap, and that we had not a chance of getting across the frontier by ourselves. I had no passports, for I had not been out of Germany since my marriage, and we could not expect to pass any one of the guarded bridges without them. There would be a hue and cry after us in a short time, and we should have to hide by day and travel by night until we got to some part of the country where we were not proscribed. But what should we look like after a day or two of such a life and what should we live on by the way; and how should we open our mouths without betrayal, and how should we find our way? Sitting there in the Graf's office at Hohenroda I stared at a large map of the German Empire and saw that I was a mighty long way from the Dutch frontier and close to Switzerland. I had known that before, but not as I knew it now with those hundreds of miles between me and safety on the one side and the rapids of the Rhine on the other. I determined that if Mr. Van Brunt told me to stay where I was and trust to luck I would do it. I almost hoped he would. Escape seemed impossible, and I thought of my poor Tommies, and wondered what had happened to them. Then the bell rang, and I heard Mr. Van Brunt's voice at the other end of the receiver. He listened to what I had to say, and then he told me what I had feared to hear. The two Englishmen had been caught about two miles farther on than I had taken them and one had been shot dead, but the other had been brought back alive to the camp and was to be tried by court-martial. Then he said:

'At Tiefenstein in half an hour.'

'I am to be there?'

'Without fail; and bring your papers with you.'

'I have no papers.'

‘Yes, you have. A marriage certificate—anything. Anyhow be there, and hurry up.’

I knew he could not say much in case he was overheard in the hotel, but I felt sure that somehow or other he was going to help me. I suppose I was asking a great deal of him, but he had not hesitated a moment. I had not expected him to. You would as soon expect the stars to fall from the sky as Cornelius Van Brunt to desert a friend in a difficulty, and as for saying that I ought to have thought of his official career, I call that far-fetched. My life was threatened, and life is sweet. Besides there was Wilkins to consider as well.

‘I shall have Wilkins with me,’ I said.

‘Of course. Hurry up. Good-bye,’ said he.

That was just like Mr. Van Brunt too. Wilkins made things more difficult, but it never even entered his head that she could be left behind. She was a plain, elderly woman of the working class, and the American was, I believe, as ready to save her as he was to save me; while with the Germans, her age and her withered looks made her an object of contempt, and they would have shot her without mercy as they did many an old ugly Belgian woman who had done less to offend them than she.

It took me about ten minutes to run to my own room, put on a hat and coat, gather together a little jewellery, the money I had by me, my marriage certificate and another document, both of which I found in Wolfram’s writing-table. I had no time to think: no time for tears or memories. The one clear driving idea in my mind was that I must be at Tiefenstein in half an hour, and that I must scurry like the wind to do it. I could not take things for Wilkins because I did not know what she most valued, and I thought that I could buy her all she needed if we came safely through. I left a word for Max on Wolfram’s writing-table, and the sight of a strong pair of nippers there put an idea into my head that might have come there before if my head had been as calm and level as I could have wished. I had to pass the Graf’s office on my way out, so I went in again and snipped the telephone wire. Then I hurried on to the stables and got into my car. The old coachman was about, so I called him to me, gave him the key of the Gräfin’s room, and instructed him to carry it to the butler at once. He stared at it unwillingly and asked what key it was.

‘Never mind what key it is,’ I said. ‘Give it to Reuter and tell him to take it to the Frau Gräfin’s room.’

Then I started, not a moment too soon, for as the car began to move Rosa, the girl who had spat into my soup, came tearing across the stable-yard screaming ‘Halt! Halt!’ and the old coachman took up the cry and screamed ‘Halt! Halt!’ too. But, as you may imagine, I didn’t halt, and when I think of the speed at which I took that car down the steep Hohenroda hill to the main road, I know how frightened I must have been, and I remember how my heart beat. I guessed that Herr Putzer must have raised such a clamour inside the room that some one heard him, and that he had sent Rosa to the stables to stop my departure if she could. I have always believed that he was the author of a long paragraph in the *Reichenstädter Zeitung* which was posted to me anonymously at a later date. It gave no names, but every one in the town and the neighbourhood must have known for whom the narrative was intended. It described a virtuous and aristocratic family who had been sorely afflicted by the marriage of the son and heir with an English adventuress who united in her person all the most shameless characteristics of her degraded race. It became lachrymose over the son’s early death in a duel which the behaviour of his wife forced upon him, and it marvelled at the Christian magnanimity of the son’s parents, who, in spite of the misery she had brought upon their noble house, gave her shelter and protection. But how did this debased woman reward her benefactors? Need it be said? With ingratitude and treachery. Perfidious daughter of Albion! The curses of every honest German were to be for ever on her head! Instead of humbly trying to expiate the sins of her married life, and in sackcloth and ashes working for her dead husband’s country, she actually assisted the escape of two English soldiers who had run away from the comfort of a German camp, in revolt, no doubt, against its decent order and discipline, thereby rendering herself liable to the death penalty. The paragraph went on to describe the discovery made in the cave by a learned townsman, who preferred to be unnamed, and my violent behaviour when confronted with him. It could not make up its mind whether my conduct proved that I had criminal antecedents or only that criminal impulses are natural to every one born of the decadent robber nation, and it became so dull and ponderous as it argued this out that I ceased to be amused and never read to the end. But did it represent Herr Putzer’s genuine point of view? Or did he know deep down that every sentiment was false and every fact twisted to his purpose? I cannot decide.

LIII

I knew that I must meet Wilkins if she had left Reichenstadt at the usual time, but when I got to the road branching off to Tiefenstein she had not appeared, and I was obliged to wait for her. Every moment seemed like an hour, and I sat there in the blazing sunshine, my mind furiously at work imagining disaster. I felt naked to mine enemies, perched there in view of any one and every one who passed and stared at me.

There was traffic on the main road at this hour, traffic chiefly of peasants returning from market, some on foot, some in carts drawn by oxen and some few on bicycles. There were townspeople too, and they knew me by sight and looked at me with no friendly eye. The man who came to Hohenroda every week to wind up the clocks and see that they were in order, scowled at me as he whizzed by, and a shoemaker none of us employed because he made bad shoes called out '*Gott strafe England*' and spat at my car. I hope he relieved his feelings. I am sure he did not guess how I was quaking, and probably cursed me for one of the idle rich as well as for an alien enemy. The heat was intense, the sky a hard, cloudless blue, and the road inches deep in a fine white dust that everything moving along it blew up in a gritty trail, choking the air. All around me the sun shone in glory on the depths and coolness of the forest, but where I waited there was not the shade of a hedge or of a single tree. I could not go on because two roads from Reichenstadt converged here and Wilkins might come by either. I could only wait and watch and upbraid myself for minding an overdose of sun and a little anxiety and suspense in a world loaded to breaking point with pain and misery. Unfortunately the most moral reflections and commendable sentiments will not save you from sunstroke, and I was beginning to feel quite sick and ill when my attention was diverted by the arrival of Eugenie v. Gösen and her sister Emma in an open carriage with their husbands, who were presumably home on leave. To my surprise they stopped to speak to me. The last time I had seen Eugenie was when the English prisoners were being pursued and attacked by the mob, and she had fled for safety inside a shop. She did not refer to this occasion, but explained that they were out for a day's expedition, and that they were going to Tiefenstein. I was sorry to hear it, but could not say so. If only Wilkins would come we might easily pass them by.

'Who are you waiting for, and why have you chosen the hottest part of the road?' she asked.

I said I was waiting for Wilkins.

‘We passed her a little way back,’ piped Emma. ‘She will be here before long; but she also looked as if the sun was too much for her.’

‘I think I’ll go and meet her,’ I said, and jumped down to start my engine, but as I did so I turned dizzy for a moment, and had to steady myself by holding on to the car. It was nothing, but Eugenie noticed it.

‘You are overcome by the heat,’ she said. ‘You are not fit to drive a car. Where are you going?’

‘I am quite well,’ I said, as soon as I could speak. ‘I am going to meet Wilkins.’

‘But that is unnecessary since she is already on a cart. I implore you to go straight home, Karen, and lie down in a dark room. You are as white as a sheet, and look as if the sun had touched you. Why should you kill yourself in order to meet Wilkins? Where are you going with her?’

I did feel dazed by that time, and unable to look far ahead or think very clearly; and I knew we should have to pass them, so I just told the truth and said we were going to Tiefenstein. It was a mistake, because it was an unlikely thing for us to do and roused their suspicion and curiosity.

‘But why should you and Wilkins be going to Tiefenstein?’ said Eugenie, in her most inquisitorial tone.

‘Why not?’

‘One does not as a rule go on expeditions with one’s servant.’

I might have told some silly lie, and said it was Wilkins’ birthday or any other anniversary, but it did not occur to me.

‘We shall probably pass you,’ I said getting into my seat. ‘Good-bye, Eugenie.’

‘*Auf Wiedersehen*,’ said she in an admonitory way. ‘But how tiresome of you to take Wilkins. Wait, Karen! I have an idea. We will send Wilkins back in this carriage—the horse is very old and slow—and you shall take us to Tiefenstein in your car—and we will have lunch there together. With our two field-greys you will be quite safe although you look so English, and speak German with such a shocking bad accent. Get out, Emma—the carriage can go back and explain to Wilkins.’

I could not stop to argue or be polite. I could not stop at all. I knew Eugenie and her persistence and the ‘enormous tact’ with which she would thrust a plan of her own on its victims. Emma had opened the door and had her foot on the step of the carriage and remained so, staring open-mouthed after me as I slid past, calling out that I could not disappoint Wilkins. I was glad I had met them, because I knew by which road they had come, and sure enough half a mile on I saw Wilkins, sitting forlorn and dusty on the Hohenroda cart while the man in charge of it trudged along by its side. I drew up and stopped them.

‘Get into the car, Wilkins,’ I said. ‘Be quick!’

She looked at me doubtfully.

‘I’ve got a headache,’ she complained. ‘If you don’t want me, m’m, I’d just as well go home and lie down.’

‘Get in,’ I said, and I suppose my voice or my manner alarmed her. She bundled out of that cart and into the car as quickly as I could wish, and I turned round and went ahead again. Wilkins was sitting beside me, and I told her what had happened since the morning. What with her sleepless night, her journey to and fro in the blazing sun and her bad headache, she was in a depressed mood and inclined to find fault.

‘Did you say you’d brought none of my things with you, m’m?’

‘I didn’t, Wilkins. I’m very sorry, but I thought it was more sensible to bring jewellery in case we are held up in Switzerland.’

‘If we ever get there. I don’t hold with carrying jewellery about. You remember that poor lady they enticed to a villa and robbed and murdered and put the corpse in a trunk and a railway porter noticed it——’

‘Oh, don’t, Wilkins,’ I said, for I was off colour myself. However, my thoughts were that very moment snatched from tragedy to comedy because we whizzed past the carriage in which Eugenie sat with her sister and their field-greys, and I saw by their faces and their frosty want of recognition that they were mortally offended. I was sorry to have hurt their feelings, but I knew that before the day was out they would be glad not to have spent it in my company and would forgive me for having fled from them.

‘Not even my night things and my hair-brushes,’ grumbled Wilkins.

‘I’ll buy you new.’

‘Thank you, m’m, but I’m attached to my possessions. Mrs. Gilfoy gave me my hair-brushes one Christmas, and the duchess gave me my photographic album that has portraits of all my family in it. The album belonged to her Grace’s mother and has her ladyship’s signature inside, which I may have shown you——’

‘Do you understand that we are running for our lives, Wilkins?’

‘I understood it in the night when I had that bad dream. In the day-time I can hardly believe it. What good would our lives be to any one?’

This was such an eminently Wilkinsish way of looking at the situation that it seemed useless to reply, and I paid the whole of my attention to getting the top-speed out of the car on a long, level bit of road. Then we came to a zigzag, steeply uphill, with dangerous corners, and for some time I did not speak. Wilkins broke the silence first, and I knew by her voice that her mood had changed.

‘Did you wait long for me at that corner, m’m?’ she said.

‘About twenty minutes.’

‘Enough to give any one sunstroke, and all through that Herr Putzer not minding his own business. What will we do if Mr. Van Brunt isn’t here? Go on by ourselves?’

‘I don’t know what we should do. Don’t let us think of it.’

‘He’ll be there,’ said Wilkins.

LIV

He was there. We came upon him suddenly at a bend in the road about a mile from Tiefenstein, and to-day his chauffeur was driving the car. He has told me since that he got a considerable shock when he saw me, and wondered whether I should hold out. However, he did not waste words, but listened to what I said about Eugenie and her party coming on behind us.

‘If I leave my empty car here,’ I pointed out, ‘they will be so inquisitive about it.’

He hardly let me finish. I never saw a man less flurried, but he acted mighty quick, and I thought he looked concerned. I thought so, but I could not be sure. He went up to his chauffeur and gave an order, and then he took my seat and began to drive my car. We passed through Tiefenstein, a tiny, picturesque village with a ruined castle on a height and an inn in the valley where you could get a good dinner, and followed by his car we went on for another two miles.

‘This will do,’ he said, and stopped and helped me down. By this time I was so dazed and dizzy that I could not have driven much farther. We all three got into his car, and he told his chauffeur to drive as quickly as possible. We were still twenty miles from the nearest bridge over the Rhine, and though I felt ill and dazed my mind worked clearly enough to know that there was no time to lose. We might be pursued or we might be prevented from escape. Quite easily prevented. A message to the bridges or the railway stations would do it, and there are many ways of sending messages nowadays. How had they found my two runaways, for whose sake I was in my present quandary?

‘If they opened their mouths they would betray themselves,’ said Mr. Van Brunt.

The car sped swiftly and smoothly on through lovely forest country, the sun baked the uttermost scent out of the fir-trees so that the hot, pure air was heavy with their fragrance, the villages were sleepily alive, and the children of Germany ran beside us in troops and begged for pence when we slowed down. I began to get back my lifelong sense of security and well-being. It seemed incredible that I, Karen, should be fleeing for my life, and that the life of my dear, highly respectable Wilkins should be forfeit too; so that if we did not escape we should both be pushed into prisons, go through some mockery of a trial, probably behind closed doors, and finally be executed in a prison yard. It seemed impossible one moment and inevitable the next. I went up and down between the extremes of terror and blank unbelief.

‘Do they execute women?’ I said aloud.

‘They are not going to execute you,’ said Mr. Van Brunt. ‘Have some lunch.’ He took some packages out of the pockets of his car, and we all ate and drank as we went along. But Wilkins and I did not eat much. We both felt flat and sunsick and up-all-nightish. I should have thought it was very exciting to race to the frontier for your life, but the excitement was not of a kind we could enjoy or recall with any pride. I wondered how Mr. Van Brunt proposed to get us across the bridge, but when I asked him he put me off, and said he was trusting to the inspiration of the moment. He was in a silent mood himself and hardly spoke as we traversed the last few miles. He had asked me what papers I had brought, and I had given him my marriage certificate and another setting forth Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda’s appointment to be Rittmeister in the Reichenstadt Dragoons. He said I had been very sensible to bring that, and, as it turned out, he was right.

But when we reached the bridge we had a sickening disappointment. It was closely guarded, and the noncommissioned officer in command at the moment said he could let Mr. Van Brunt through because he had his passport, but he could not do the same for Wilkins or for me. I think he discovered we were English. Certainly he was as truculent as he could be, and I thought anxious to pick a quarrel. But Mr. Van Brunt managed him very quietly and skilfully. We got away, and there was nothing for it now but to take the car to another bridge some way up the river and to hope for better luck there.

I had once been to this other bridge with Wolfram, and we had approached it in that most lovely hour of summer when ‘the moon is up and yet it is not night.’ We had come through the forest all day and arrived suddenly beside the river, foaming in glacier green rapids over giant rocks and then scurrying still in haste towards the little town that lies like a sack in the Rhine. We had crossed the bridge into Switzerland because there is a good hotel on that bank and not on the German side, and we had spent a night there, returning next day by a different road.

It was the hottest hour of the hottest day in the year when we stopped to show the guard our papers that afternoon, and as we waited in the dust and the pitiless glare I looked longingly down the darkness of that covered bridge across the river and at the icy torrent dashing underneath it. The anxiety of the moment was so intense that it was paralysing. I listened and was thankful I did not have to speak, and I hoped that I did not show my suspense in my manner or my face. Wilkins sat bolt upright, the image of correct indifference. She looked grey and ill to my eyes, but she behaved admirably.

Mr. Van Brunt showed his own passport, which the officer on guard examined and returned to him. Then he looked at us.

‘And these ladies?’ he said politely.

‘This lady is the widow of Graf Wolfram von Hohenroda,’ said Mr. Van Brunt, ‘Rittmeister in the Reichenstadt Dragoons.’

He presented my marriage certificate and the other paper, and the young officer perused both slowly; oh! so slowly that I longed to shake him. But I perceived that he was impressed. He read. He re-read. He compared. He looked hard at me. And the minutes dragged.

‘I once saw the Frau Gräfin in Reichenstadt,’ he said, putting his heels together and making me a low bow. ‘I remember her well.’

I returned his bow.

‘You would take coffee at the hotel. On this side there is nothing.’

‘Nothing!’ I repeated mechanically.

‘The other lady?’

‘My maid!’

He bowed again.

‘She also has no passport?’

‘I have never troubled to get them since we did not mean to travel. Last year I came here with my husband and he did not bring any——’

I had found my voice and my composure. The man who had our lives in his hand was a boy, not much older than Max, fair-haired, blue-eyed, amiable, and plainly my admirer.

‘In war-time it is well to travel with passports,’ he said, seeming rather troubled and undecided; and then suddenly making up his mind, he returned our papers and signed to the chauffeur to go on.

‘Are we safe now?’ I said to Mr. Van Brunt.

‘The Swiss must let us through,’ he reminded me, and I held my breath again.

The Swiss were rather more difficult than the Germans had been. They argued and grumbled for a long time; but Mr. Van Brunt was so good-humoured, and at the same time so determined to have his way that in the end they sulkily consented to let us pass. He had got out of the car here to talk to them, and just as they concluded their discussion I noticed that he was watching the other end of the bridge. He showed neither hurry nor concern, but I knew something was happening there, and I wondered whether this end of the bridge was Swiss or German soil. I did not turn round to look because I might have been recognised.

‘Quick!’ he said to me when he had wrung consent out of the Swiss guards, for we were at the very end of the bridge, and it was quicker for Wilkins and me to tumble out of the car and walk into Switzerland than to wait for the chauffeur to get a move on. As we stood in a group waiting for the car to come up to us we saw that there was a pother at the other end of the bridge, and men in uniform gesticulating and a man in civilian clothes running excitedly towards us. Mr. Van Brunt took out a field-glass and looked through it.

‘Herr Putzer!’ he said. ‘Just half a minute too late!’

LV

Poor Herr Putzer! He was not a dignified object as he advanced towards our end of the bridge, his face distorted by rage and his clenched fists threatening us. He shouted things too, unrepeatable insult and invective, that we heard as he got near. Presumably the stolid Swiss sentries heard too, but though they stared at us they took no notice.

‘Get in!’ said Mr. Van Brunt, and opened the door of the car for us while Herr Putzer shouted to the Swiss that we were criminals escaping from justice and must be stopped. That was the last I saw of him, for the car began to move, and took us out of hearing as we settled ourselves again.

‘Are we safe?’ I said, for I could hardly believe it.

‘Safe and sound,’ said Mr. Van Brunt.

Wilkins and I were not quite sound, as it turned out, but we were extraordinarily happy and light-hearted. You must have known your life forfeit and had it given back to understand what we felt like all through that afternoon. The sun had touched us both, and our heads ached miserably, but at first that did not seem to matter. We were safe and free and out of Germany. But we did not get as far as Mr. Van Brunt meant to get that night. He discovered before long that he had two suffering females on his hands, and, without consulting us, he altered his plans, which had been to get on to Lucerne. We spent three days at a small hotel that took summer guests, and Wilkins was so ill most of the time that she had not the strength to grumble at the things I was able to borrow for her, and which were not what she had been accustomed to. On the third day I was well enough to get up and dress, and I went down into the garden, where I found Mr. Van Brunt.

‘I’ve written to your father,’ he said when we had walked to the end of the garden and found a quiet seat in the shade. ‘I said that you would wait at Lucerne till he came.’

‘Are you going back?’ I asked uneasily.

‘I have another three days. Then I must.’

‘Will there be trouble because you helped us? What will happen?’

He said he did not think much would happen, but I knew he was not telling me his real thoughts.

‘I suppose you have imperilled your career for my sake,’ I said gloomily; but he only laughed. He did not make love to me that day in the garden, and indeed I hardly know now when I began to see that he loved me. Sometimes I think I might have guessed it one night at Ilgesheim when he turned silent and Baron von Osthofen appeared like the devil in *Faust* and stared at us. Sometimes I know I saw it in a flash one morning at Lucerne when we were looking across the lake together at the everlasting snows, and seeing in each other’s eyes the delight that filled our souls. But it was not till the hour of his departure that he told me in plain English what I did not want to hear: that he hoped I should some day be his wife. He said he would wait as long as I pleased if I would give him hope. I told him it was impossible, and I asked him what his plan for my escape from Germany had been, the plan he had spoken of on the day when he drove me back to Hohenroda from the cave.

‘Just that,’ he answered, ‘if you would have married me I could have taken you back to England.’

Two years and more it is since we stood together beside the lake of Lucerne and I told him I could never marry again. It is three years and more since Wolfram died. The war is still raging, America is with us, and Cornelius Van Brunt is at his Embassy in London. He did get into trouble through helping me, and all his chief could do was to let him go quietly and quickly. But the story got abroad, and, as you may imagine, no one thought the worse of him for it.

‘You are not treating the man fairly,’ Dad said to me this morning. ‘You ought to make up your mind one way or the other and stick to it.’

I looked up at Dad indignant and amazed. Never in his life had he interfered with my intimate personal affairs, or suggested that I was not conducting them admirably.

‘You keep him hanging round you.’

‘We are great friends, and if he chooses to come in and out——’

‘You are furious if another woman looks at him.’

Imagine Dad, of all men, noticing a little thing like that. For I knew what he meant. It happened after lunch at the Ritz, yesterday, when Mrs. Florida got hold of him as we were having coffee in the lounge, and snatched him for the afternoon. He did not want to, but Mrs. Florida is some sort of cousin and gives herself possessive airs that I consider rather ill-bred and absurd.

‘He saved your life,’ continued Dad. ‘You would never have got away by yourselves, and the Huns would have shot you as they shot Edith Cavell.’

They would. I knew it. In fact my mother-in-law had said as much in a letter that had come to me from her *viâ* America, soon after my flight. It was quite a nice letter. She said that for her son’s sake she was glad I had escaped because what I had done was a crime against the Fatherland, and her husband could not have reconciled it with his conscience to show me any favour on account of our relationship. She, however, would have suffered terribly if I had been caught and executed, and she could never forgive Herr Putzer for trying to bring this about. He had behaved like the plebeian he was when he found himself locked into the room, and his language when he was let out and found the telephone cut was such that she fled from him. The Graf had been seriously upset by the whole affair because he had incurred blame with his superiors, and was even suspected of having connived at my escape. So far from having done this, he had sent Herr Putzer and three soldiers in his own car to go in pursuit of me, and, as I knew, they had only missed me by a minute. It must have been the will of God, pursued the Gräfin; and ended with an affectionate message from Max. She did not mention Mr. Van Brunt.

‘You don’t marry a man because he saves your life,’ I argued; but Dad said nothing more. He had expressed his opinion and left me to digest it. That was always his annoying way.

‘You mustn’t come here any more,’ I said to Mr. Van Brunt when he looked in, as he often did, on his way from his work at his Embassy.

‘I shall not be coming much in future,’ said he.

That was so unlike the answer I expected and so startling that I’ve no doubt I showed my surprise. For two years he had lived near us, been in and out as Dad said, been at my service, become a corner-stone of life to me.

‘I’ve joined up,’ he explained. ‘I leave in a week’s time.’

‘In a week.’

‘A great deal can happen in a week, Karen.’

‘Can it?’

So it happened, as Dad and he wished; and he left to train in France, while I went on with my own work in London. But to-morrow I expect him home on leave.

‘The duchess has married again,’ says Wilkins, fluttering a penny illustrated paper in high excitement. ‘At her age! A Captain Archibald, and in future she will be known as Mrs. Archibald. What a come down!’

‘I suppose she doesn’t mind,’ I said.

‘But it was an English title, m’m,’ says Wilkins. ‘No one need mind giving up one of those foreign ones. I heard from Hohenroda to-day—from the little Mamsell——’

I had heard from Hohenroda too, but I could not tell Wilkins much about the letter. It was disagreeably formal, acknowledging the news of my second marriage, but not approving of it. I was looking at it and feeling rather depressed when the door opened and Cornelius walked in, a day sooner than he was expected. He was in good spirits and splendid health and his khaki suits him. I showed him the Hohenroda letter, and when he had read it he put it in the fire.

‘We have a whole week, Karen,’ he said.

‘We have as long as we both live,’ said I.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Karen* by Cecily Sidgwick]