

The Mortal Storm

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PRIVATE WORLDS"

**PHYLLIS
BOTTOME**

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Title: The Mortal Storm

Date of first publication: 1938

Author: Phyllis Bottome (1882-1963)

Date first posted: August 5, 2026

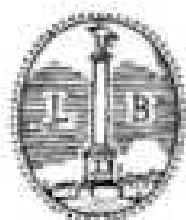
Date last updated: August 5, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260808

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

PHYLLIS BOTTOME

THE
MORTAL
STORM



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
1946

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Published April 1938
Reprinted April 1938 (four times)
Reprinted May 1938 (three times)
Reprinted July 1938
Reprinted August 1938
Reprinted September 1938
Reprinted October 1938
Reprinted November 1938
Reprinted June 1946

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To the memory of
DR. ALFRED ADLER

The Mortal Storm

CHAPTER I

When Freya woke up, she felt as if she were recovering from a long and painful illness, out of the reach for the first time of all disagreeable sensations.

She lay quite still in an ecstasy of relief, wondering a little, what she was recovering from. Ah! she remembered now: she'd finished the last day of her first year's medical examinations!

The cold, terrifying weight of anticipation was over.

The strain of the last few months had been so severe that Freya had had neither time nor strength to think about anything but the relentless advance of her ordeal.

What happened to the rest of her family, or to the world at large, had barely brushed against the fiery absorption of her task.

Calls or claims for affection, from any members of her family, had aggravated Freya like a skin irritation, but now she could afford to think of them all again, as if they had a right to emergencies of their own. Many things had happened in the past year, both to Germany, and to her family. Her father had won the Nobel prize for Medical Research; the boys talked of nothing but Hitler; Olaf had actually become a Brown Shirt and Emil, who always wanted to go one better than Olaf in the same direction, had joined the Storm Troopers. Rudi fortunately was too young to do either; but he had had swastikas sewn on all his clothes. Only their mother had not changed in any way. She sewed on the swastikas and listened sympathetically to the boys' account of their hero; but Freya did not think that Hitler had become their mother's hero, any more than he had become their father's. "I haven't had time to think about him myself!" Freya thought, stretching luxuriously,

till her toes reached the end of the bed, “and after all, what do politics matter?”

Answers that Freya had fought for yesterday in vain, swam tantalizingly back into her empty mind. Surely that chemistry paper could have been better handled? Mightn’t she have thought out more original prescriptions? Couldn’t she have described in clearer words, the actions of certain drugs? Disconnected scraps of knowledge kept sending up their belated signals, like a rush of fast-played tennis balls popping up unexpectedly on the court of her attention, just where she least expected to have to take them.

She didn’t have to go to Bamburger’s lecture to-day, she reminded herself; all the examination students were free for the rest of the week. She didn’t have to leap from her warm home, out into the raw cold, shouting savagely as she passed her mother in the hall, holding out a muffler, that she’d had *quite* enough breakfast, thank you—having swallowed a scalding cup of coffee, and with half a *Brötchen* still sticking in her throat.

She could lie still where she was for hours, remembering that the whole day was free, as well as fine; and that there was a party to-night for Emil’s twenty-first birthday.

A faintly unpleasant thought twitched at Freya’s wandering attention. She hadn’t got a party dress! Her last quarter’s allowance had been spent instead upon a perfectly beautiful new microscope. “My career comes first!” Freya told herself defiantly, while her mind ran hurriedly through her scanty wardrobe. A sport skirt, three pullovers, and a pair of ski-trousers; nothing else whatever; and no sisters to borrow from.

Freya raised herself in bed, and took a furtively anxious glance at the mirror. She looked healthy anyhow, and without spots. She sank back hastily into the bed again, for there was her mother at the door, with a breakfast tray.

Last night Freya had felt too exhausted and sick with belated inspirations, to touch any supper; so that she was pleased to see her mother had thought of an egg.

“It’s all over now.” Freya told her mother, with shining eyes. “Nothing can be helped, or altered any more! It’s like being dead! You may *mind* dying or not; but once you *are* dead, you don’t have to go through the same thing twice, do you?” Her mother put the tray down carefully on Freya’s knees; and then sat on the edge of the bed, smiling at her.

"No—not being dead," her mother agreed. "Besides, I think you'll find that you haven't done so badly after all!"

"You can't possibly tell," Freya told her mother with severity. "You don't *know* what I did with my mind!"

Her mother looked pleasantly unconvinced, almost as if, having rather the same kind of mind as Freya's, she might possibly know what Freya had done with it, in spite of the fact that she hadn't ever had to use her own mind in the same way.

"When I was young," her mother said, with a faint undercurrent of regret in her voice, "careers for women in our class were unthinkable. I was married instead, a year younger than you are now, to Rudolph von Röhn. Is your egg as you like it?"

"Exactly right," Freya contentedly admitted. "Well, there is *this*, Mother; think—if you hadn't been, we couldn't have Olaf—or Emil either! Do you believe in love at first sight?"

Her mother's smile lit her grey eyes, and showed a row of even sugar-white teeth. She looked extraordinarily young when she smiled; but not young in Freya's eyes nor even beautiful; merely completely satisfying.

"I remember quite well," Frau Roth said, "when I saw your father for the first time. He had just fallen off his bicycle into a dust-cart! They had those old-fashioned open ones then—still even then, it was quite a difficult thing to do! I was watering my daffodil boxes on our balcony, and I happened to look over it, at him, and thought how absurd and yet rather *valuable* he looked. He wasn't paying any attention to the dust, even after he'd picked up the bicycle; he just stared up at me, as if he were seeing something quite new, under the microscope for the first time—you know that look he has? I wanted to brush the dust out of his beard—it was black then—I can't remember ever wanting to brush anyone else's beard."

"Yet there was your first husband," Freya reminded her mother accusingly.

She had never quite forgiven her mother that act of premarital infidelity. Widows were, she knew, quite all right in their way, but all the same her father ought *not* to have had to marry one.

"I had the choice between Rudolph von Röhn and Graf Ulrich Maberg, Fritz's father," her mother explained. "It was the only choice I was given; and at the time, I thought that I preferred von Röhn."

"Well, I wouldn't have liked Graf Ulrich for a father," Freya admitted. "I daresay that's the reason the Gräfin can't bear you! I expect he still throws you up at her! How funny life is—I mean our knowing the Mabergs all so well, and Olaf liking Sophie—if he *does* like her!"

"And Fritz's liking you," her mother observed with a twist of her fair straight brows, and rather a teasing smile, "about which there can be no doubt whatever!"

Freya started hastily upon her second *Brötchen*. "Oh, well," she said impatiently, "that needn't interfere with me at all, need it? I am definitely *not* going to marry—if I do at all—for ages and ages. There's my profession! I do think *one* thing, Mother," she added, while the honey spoon dragged its way deeper and deeper under the malicious surface of the honey, "and that is that Father oughtn't to give Emil a motor-bicycle before he gives me one—even if it is his twenty-first birthday! Emil's only a stepchild, and Father knows that I want one *frightfully*—far more than Emil does!"

"There is no thermometer for wants!" her mother murmured. "And if there were do you think your father would use it? Besides, he has never made, and never *will* make—any difference between his own children and my two eldest sons. He doesn't need to either—for thank God, they love him as if he were their father!"

Her mother looked quite red and annoyed as if, Freya thought, it mattered Rudolph von Röhn being their father, since he was safely dead.

"After all," her mother added, calming down a little, as if she too had realized just how dead von Röhn really was, "you didn't do so badly on your last birthday, did you? Look at your lovely bookshelves crammed with the books your father gave you, to start your medical library? Some of his own too! I often wonder if you children realize, quite apart from your love for your father, what a terrific gift his name is! For you specially, since you have chosen his own profession!"

"Ah, but that's just the trouble!" Freya explained. "There he is at the top of the tree, and if I do well, they'll all say: 'What else could you expect from Johann Roth's daughter?' and if I do badly, and who knows that I *haven't* done badly after all,"—Freya's voice shook,—"then they'll be sure to say: 'Think of her father's daughter coming such a crash!' It doesn't matter really how famous he is, for the others, the boys think of nobody but Hitler now; and as for Rudi, who does really belong to Father, I *do* think that now he's twelve years old, you ought to tell him, he can't *possibly* be an engine driver!"

“But if he wants to be,” Frau Roth observed, beginning to smile again, “we shan’t stop him; and we mustn’t even tell him that we shan’t; because he’ll be certain to stop himself! Not that I should mind if he didn’t—I think an engine driver in the family would be a most useful thing to have! By the by, you haven’t forgotten Emil’s party to-night, have you?”

“No,” Freya said, growing red with the same fiery swiftness as her mother’s. “I can’t dress for it though; and it doesn’t matter in the least! I’ve often danced in ski-trousers before and ski-boots—quite comfortably too. Besides, you can’t say my green pullover with the skirt to match isn’t smart—you gave me the silver buckle for it yourself; and there’s only one tear in the skirt; and it’s mended and doesn’t show!”

Her mother’s smile merely deepened. She seemed to enjoy sitting on the edge of the bed, watching Freya eat her breakfast, though she must have had her own hours ago. “You haven’t thought about getting your hair done specially, have you?” she asked cautiously, after a sufficient pause, with her eyes fixed a little anxiously upon Freya’s untidy mop.

“No,” Freya replied, in that warning voice used by grown-up daughters to repel all maternal advice that deals with their personal appearance, “nor my nails manicured, nor my eyebrows plucked! I think it’s pure waste of time and you *know* I do, so you needn’t go on about it!”

Frau Roth did not go on about it, she looked speculatively at the door, and said: “Your father and the two boys have had their breakfast; I gave it to them before I got yours—I left Rudi’s to Johanna—I think I hear her just taking it in.”

Freya smiled at her mother in instant comradeship, for she recognised that her mother was having a struggle.

Should she, or should she not help Rudi off to school? It was such a joy to see that he ate a proper breakfast; to find his muffler; fill his rucksack; see that he had his box of pencils and india rubber; and that his fountain-pen was sufficiently but not over-filled; and if the weather were bad take a last reassuring glance at his feet. About two years ago, however, Frau Roth had begun to steel herself against this pleasant habit. She had not liked Johann’s saying, “Do not make our boy a leaner, for how do we know what there will be to lean against, before long?” but she still had relapses.

“I suppose I mustn’t,” she agreed with Freya wistfully, “but he’s so much younger than the rest of you!”

Freya shook a warning head. "You'd much better *not*," she advised. "Rudi quite likes looking after himself in the mornings. It's only when he's going to bed that he cares about being helped; and that's only so as to take longer about it! He bribes you by being a baby—and you get taken in! Besides, I hardly ever get you to myself, and there's something I particularly want to ask you this morning. Is childbearing as frightful as people say? It's one of the things one ought to know before letting oneself in for falling in love. Besides, when I take my midwifery course, I should be less nervous if I knew beforehand that it wasn't!"

Her mother hesitated before she said finally: "It depends on other things I think, whether it's frightful or not. Olaf and Emil's births *were* hard. I doubt if I had the proper care—the von Röhns had a poor country doctor—and there were other things against me; but when you and Rudi were born, I actually enjoyed it! Your father was with me, or in the next room all the time. It is always a fight—but I knew I'd win; and being used to the utmost of one's capacity is a magnificent feeling. Your father, too, had always wanted children, so that I knew I was giving him his heart's desire; that made me happy; but perhaps most of all what makes the pain of childbirth worth while is that a woman feels like an artist when she produces a child."

Freya nodded. This question of being a woman, had become important to her for the first time.

Perhaps because until now she had not had time to discover that she already was one, or perhaps because, with this passionate aim to succeed as a doctor, that other aim of succeeding as a woman had been crowded out . . .

"There's nothing against being both, is there?" Freya demanded, fixing her mother with anxious eyes. "I mean a doctor *and* a mother at the same time?"

"Your father doesn't think so," her mother replied reassuringly, "in fact he thinks the exact opposite! He believes medicine a singularly suitable profession for a mother, and being a mother quite an asset for a doctor!"

Frau Roth got up after that, perhaps because she saw that Freya didn't want to explore the topic of childbirth any further; and yet, having brought on the conversation herself, hardly knew how to get rid of it.

"Shall I turn on the bath-water for you, as I go downstairs?" her mother diffidently suggested.

"Yes, do!" Freya exclaimed with relief.

Her mother bent over her shyly, as if she feared that Freya might resent her kissing the top of her untidy curls; but far from resenting it, Freya dragged her mother closer, and kissed her, with a strange violence, as if all the pent-up affection she had suppressed for the past twelve months, for her entire family, had now rushed to the surface to find its safest release upon the person of her mother.

CHAPTER II

"Father'll be glad," Freya told herself, as she dashed out of the University in the wake of a swiftly-jerking tram. "Perhaps after all I am a little like him. But I'm not of course really because he's so dreadfully patient!" And Freya ran so fast that she overtook the tram and leapt into it while it was moving, though she might have been fined five marks or have broken her leg; but it was not the kind of day upon which such things happen.

The whole world seemed to move with Freya, the water sparkled and sang in the University fountain, the trees in the English garden filled the air with flying golden leaves; the river had small green and white waves moving in the same direction. Freya could catch glimpses of them through the stripped boughs, until the houses blocked the river from her sight. She tried hard to school herself to stillness, although it seemed to Freya that her mind raced even faster, while she was sitting still, than when she jumped out of the tram, and took the hospital hill in her stride. She caught her father just before he left the Laboratory, taking off his white linen coat, in his private room, so that they were quite alone. For a moment Freya was too breathless to speak, she simply seized her father by his elbows, so that he could get neither in nor out of his coat; saying at last with a gasp of joy, "I've won it! I've won the Stipendiary Grant for Anatomy and Physics! I can go to the Rockefeller Institute after my finals! Only I shan't, I shall stay here with you! But think of it, I've won it!"

The Professor pushed his spectacles back, into his thick jungle of grey hair, and looked down at the two hands that still held him fast; when he raised his eyes to Freya's they were full of tears. He rubbed them away and tried to pretend that he was not wild with joy, but not till he saw that Freya had seen through his pretences. He walked away towards the open window, humming, under his breath, one of Schubert's gayest songs; then he said, turning back to Freya again, as if he had got over the uncontrollable part of his satisfaction: "It seems that they must have thought you worked well! Anatomy is a good subject. I am glad that it interests you. But what I do not quite see is how you came to be told of this Grant a month before the results of the examination should be known? Also such a Grant is usually made in public and I should have expected to be present?"

Freya had recovered her breath by now, and she used it to scold her father, because why did he always catch hold of the most important subjects by their least important points? Why for instance should it matter, when or how she received her Grant? It was the astounding fact of winning it at all, that should have rivetted his whole attention. "It can't matter when," she said impatiently, "but as a matter of fact Professor Bamburger told me this afternoon, after his lecture. I needn't, of course, have gone, but I thought I'd like to, he's always good though he talks through his nose, and I feel sure he ought to have his adenoids taken out! Anyhow, what he said was that I'd won it; and that all his colleagues agreed that I'd won it, for the year's work mostly; but he'd read my papers too, all of them last night, just on purpose; and he said he knew there was only Wasserman, who was in the same class, so he read Wasserman's papers too—and they weren't anything like so good—and he saw the Faculty this morning, and they said that they agreed about the Grant, but why not wait? And Bamburger said that I mustn't repeat this to anyone but you—but there were influences going on, outside the University—Nazi—I suppose he meant, but anyhow they'd be adverse to a girl winning the Grant; and that there was always a lot of jealousy, and your name being so well known, so that if I just had it *now*, before it could be argued about, it would be safer and fairer all round! He said you'd understand why it had to be like this; he was awfully nice about it, but rather grave too; he said that I was to remember always that I'd *really* won it; and that knowledge can't be changed or taken from one!"

"And he is right," her father agreed quietly. "Knowledge cannot be changed, but the use to which it may be put can very easily be changed. Still knowledge is the best thing one can work for, Freya! Violence cannot destroy it; man has no control over it; he may indeed seek to control it by killing other men for what they know, but their knowledge does not die with them; it will proceed unchecked, until there are born others, who can profit by it. I think that Bamburger was right to give you this Grant, though you may find it brings you more pain than profit. The other students will not like you the better for having beaten them; but try to remember that what is unpleasant can be of just as much value as what is pleasant. Even not being liked has a certain virtue about it, if the reason for the dislike does not lie in yourself!" The Professor gave a queer long sigh, and turned away from Freya to hang up his white coat.

"But, Father," Freya said, "do you really think the Nazis will try to stop women having professions, or getting on in them? They're not in power yet anyhow; and mayn't the elections go against them?"

"The Nazis are more likely to go, and to go very successfully, against the elections," her father said a little drily, "and since they believe in force rather than persuasion, and women have less force than men, the Nazi regime must be, to that extent, antifeminine. Physical inferiority is always stressed rather than relieved by a militaristic rule; so that it would not surprise me to find that the half of the human race that produces and trains the other half, will be once more degraded! One must not forget that many women will like it better. For one pets what one degrades; and one has to support what one has enfeebled. Many women who have not tasted the joy and rigour of freedom, prefer to be petted and supported; but not those who have ever worked successfully. For such women the Nazi regime will be very unpleasant indeed. On this account, Freya, unless Bamburger, or the University, *publish* that you have won the Grant, I think it will be wiser for us to say nothing whatever about it. Your mother of course should be told; and if you wish it your two older brothers; but not Rudi, he is too young to be burdened with a secret. Perhaps, my child, it would be as well to refrain from telling even Olaf and Emil, since they both belong to the Nazi Party, and they might feel uneasy at your having a success that seems to violate one of their principles."

"Oh, but Father," Freya cried aghast, "not tell Olaf! I *must* tell Olaf anyhow! and if Olaf, why not Emil! I never heard such nonsense—the boys can keep secrets too!"

"Let it be as *you* choose," her father said, turning to his washbasin; "but not this evening! Give yourself till to-morrow to decide; and remember also, that to-night it is Emil's birthday party. It is for him to be the hero of the occasion. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be content to have done well, and not desire to spread this useful knowledge, beyond your mother and myself."

Freya frowned, she thought her father unusually obstructive.

"You always seem," she said accusingly, "to want Emil to have everything made easy for him. I can't think why! I should have thought, especially as he's turned Nazi, that you would have seen he is made far too much of as it is!"

Her father shook with laughter. "Do not be afraid," he said, "that I wish to decrease your very natural protest against man's predominance! Not at all, if you had not got it, it might even be necessary to provoke it. But hitherto I have not found this a necessity! To-morrow you may astonish both your brothers if you continue to wish it; but remember that they may not desire to

be astonished by your success so much as you desire to astonish them! I have known people, especially brothers and sisters, to react very unfavourably to the triumphs of others. As for Emil, I only remember that he is not the oldest. Olaf had a far finer twenty-first birthday, because the von Röhns insisted upon it. Emil's they have practically overlooked. Also hitherto, Emil has not won a Grant for anatomy, though of course that may still be in store for us. Meanwhile let him enjoy to the full the tremendous credit of being twenty-one! I promise, Freya, that in two years' time, when it happens also to you—should I myself be made cupbearer to young Hitler on the same date—I will keep the dubious honour dark, until you have had time to enjoy the glory of being twenty-one."

Freya smiled reluctantly. She thought about the injustice of the motor-cycle; but it did not seem the best moment for taking up the subject.

"You always forget," she said reprovingly to her father, "to turn off the hot water tap, *before* you begin to soap your hands. There you have made the tap soapy again, as I thought!" Her father looked suitably contrite, while, with one hand held firmly in hers, he groped for a towel.

"You see *my* hand," Freya added, proudly stretching it out over her father's imprisoned one, "it's the same shape as yours exactly!—A true surgeon's hand—my fingers will probably grow longer, although I am nineteen; then it will be more like still! This morning I thought, after Bamburger told me about the Grant: 'Perhaps I *am* like father after all!' But now I know that I am *not* really since I don't feel in the least as you do, about not telling the boys! Still I'll wait till to-morrow if you think I ought to!"

"'Ought'! What an ugly word *that* is!" her father murmured, gently disengaging his hand, to dry it with the other. "'Love and do as you please,' a very wise man once said; but there is a trick about it, as there is about most wise men's sayings, for you must first learn *how* to love so that it *shall* please—both yourself and the object of it! This lesson has very seldom been learned, even by the wisest men, or by the most passionate lovers. Perhaps," her father added, rubbing his nose thoughtfully with the towel and upsetting the spectacles that had by this time returned to its bridge, "perhaps least of all, has this lesson been learned, by the most passionate lovers."

CHAPTER III

Freya went upstairs a little reluctantly to sort out her clothes for the party; for it was all very well to tell her mother that sport clothes would do perfectly, what about Sophie Maberg, she would make short work of such a brittle plea?

What Freya saw when she clicked on the light completely took her breath away. For there, spread out over the bed, was the dress of Freya's dreams—a grey-blue taffeta, with a cloak in the shape of silver wings—silver slippers and silver stockings laid out beside it. For a moment Freya simply stood and stared at this unbelievable vision; and then she turned and, dashing downstairs, pounced upon her mother in the hall.

"I'll get my hair done *now*," Freya cried, hugging her mother breathlessly, "only I haven't got any money to do it with—and my nails and everything!" Her mother made no comment. She merely poured the contents of her purse into her daughter's outstretched hands and watched her fly from the house, carrying her rapture like a lighted torch into the darkness of the Kaulbachstrasse.

When Freya got back, she turned up all the lights in her room, and dressed in a solemn ecstasy. It was a longer dress than she had ever worn, clinging close from breast to hip, and then flaring out suddenly, with the thrust of an opening flower. At last Freya was ready, and turned to the long mirror, to see what the dress had made of her.

She gazed fearfully at what she saw, and the image gazed back at her, with all the unaggressive dignity of youth.

There was a gravity and determination in the firm modelling of the throat and jaw; Freya's hair now bland and shining, the colour of a newly emerged chestnut, followed closely the lines of her small neat head. The wide generous mouth expressed an unsuspecting eager nature, willing to give; but the eyes above the generous lips were those of a fighter, who would not retreat easily, or give from mere good nature. The girl gazing back at her from the long looking-glass possessed a power that Freya had never used. There was a magic in this new Freya that is not found in sexless creatures. The image in the glass was unforgettably a girl, not a human being anxious to be as near like a boy, as possible.

“Perhaps,” Freya murmured to herself in an awed voice, “perhaps then I am not so ugly as Emil thinks, after all?”

Should she go and see what Olaf thought of her now? It would be reassuring, for Olaf would not lie; but he would like to think the best of her.

It was not however the right moment to go to Olaf for criticism, for he was in the very act of earnestly settling a white bow tie. No goddess worth her salt would have drawn Paris’ attention to herself at such a moment.

“Either come in or go out,” Olaf said curtly, for Freya, having suddenly lost her nerve, was standing tongue-tied in the open doorway; then Olaf caught a sudden glimpse of her in the glass; and swung round in astonishment.

“*Mein Gott!*” he muttered, “what under the sun has happened to you?”

“Mother bought it,” Freya said tremblingly. Did Olaf mind there wasn’t any back at all, only those floating silver wings? “Think what she must have spent! She won’t ever buy herself anything new, not even things for the house, because of the beggars, and the problem children! And now this! How frightfully much it must have cost! Women don’t *wear* backs now, you know, Olaf—after all, in bathing one doesn’t!”

“Well, you’ve got to grow up sometime, I suppose,” Olaf said with a queer little sigh. “No—the back’s all right; I’ve seen more on, that looked less decent. But, Freya, remember this—woman’s beauty is like a man’s strength, it hasn’t to be plastered about anyhow or used for personal gain. You’re responsible for what you make of your looks!” This might have sounded harsh had not Olaf’s friendly eyes softened his words into a compliment. The reassurance had taken place—for he had accepted the fact that Freya *had* looks.

“Yes,” Freya admitted, “I quite see that, Olaf, only you’re beautiful too, you know, as well as strong. Haven’t you to be careful about both?”

Olaf reddened, but did not look displeased. “Both you and I,” he said, turning back to his looking-glass, “take after the Trattenbachs and there’s no denying that Austrians, being an older race, have often better features than Germans. Emil is a von Röhn through and through and they’ve always been a plain lot. You don’t look as if you had a drop of Jewish blood in you, thank goodness! Rudi, of course, is the image of your father, but that can’t be helped; and anyhow men’s looks don’t matter to girls in the same way as a girl’s looks matter to a man.

“A man’s sex is expressed by his physical fitness, just as a girl’s is by her beauty. I’m far more pleased with my biceps, for instance, than that I have, like you, a straight nose. For a man not to be fit is a tragedy, just as I suppose for a girl to be downright plain is a tragedy. Well, anyhow, I will say this for us, Freya, my dear, we’ve both escaped our tragedies!”

Freya sighed contentedly; it was all, it was even more than she had dared to expect, from Olaf.

“I suppose I ought to go downstairs and help Mother now?” Freya murmured tentatively.

“Yes, I think that you ought,” Olaf replied firmly. “You might have helped her this morning, instead of dashing off for that lecture of yours; a girl should behave like a girl sometimes, even if she has a profession before her! It was different before your exam—no one expected help from you then—but you might sometimes remember *now* that you are the only daughter in the house.”

Freya had a temptation as sharp as Saint Anthony’s, though of a wholly different kind. She wanted to reveal to Olaf that she had won the Grant for anatomy. This would really startle him, as well as justify her completely for omitting all the things that as a daughter and a sister, for the last twelve months, she had left undone.

Nor need Freya have any anxiety that Olaf would not keep her secret. Not to save his life would Olaf ever give her away, or break his word to her. Nor would it hurt Emil or take from him the evening’s glory; it would hurt nobody; and her father would always believe that Freya had kept her word to him. The words sprang to her lips; but they did not pass them. It would hurt no one, except herself. She would have broken her word to her father.

“Is this bow straight?” Olaf demanded.

“Exactly straight,” Freya murmured wistfully. Olaf, she knew, would never have had such a temptation as she had just, but only just, mastered.

Rudi met her at the foot of the stairs, but recoiled in horror. “Mother! Mother!” he shouted indignantly. “Come and look at Freya—she’s done something to herself! She’s not young any more.” There was distress as well as indignation in Rudi’s voice, for Freya was the only person in his home who still sometimes shared the region of his childhood.

Their mother came out of the dining-room, where she had been giving finishing touches to the supper table, dressed in her old black velvet dress, with a string of pearls round her neck. Her eyes meeting Freya’s had an

expression of guilty triumph, as if a secret conspirator had just brought off his coup, but did not wish too much attention to be drawn to it.

Freya felt no need to ask her mother how she looked.

“Freya’s just the same really,” Frau Roth said soothingly to Rudi. “It’s only that long dress that makes her look so grown-up. You know you never like *me* in anything you haven’t seen me in before!”

“Why should I?” Rudi demanded fiercely. He still felt extremely ruffled, but he suddenly saw his way, to twist his hurt into an advantage. “Anyhow I *must* stay up till the end of the party—now,” he told his mother severely, “or it wouldn’t be fair! It’s no use anyone’s saying that I must go to bed at midnight—even *Father*’ll see that now!” His mother smiled, till not only one dimple showed on one side of her mouth but a second dimple appeared, upon the other. This second dimple Rudi knew settled the matter satisfactorily. His mother only smiled with both dimples when she had surrendered.

Johann Roth, coming in from the hospital, paid no attention to his daughter’s transformation; but Freya would not have had it otherwise, for she did not want to look any different to her father.

Emil came in late, from his first ride on the motorcycle; dressed in a rush, and joined the family’s scratch meal next to the kitchen, with his bow tied crookedly. “What on earth is Freya dressed up like that for?” he demanded curtly. “It’s not *her* party, is it?”

His mother frowned and flushed as if he had hurt her feelings, as well as Freya’s, but Johann Roth leaned forward from his seat at the end of the table, and said with mock reproachfulness:—

“All this fuss about Freya, who looks as a young girl very easily *can*, and always *should*—but I notice no one says, ‘Consider the old bear at the foot of the table, how well *he* has managed to turn himself out for the occasion!’ But not a bun is thrown to him! And yet I tell you, it is not easy to encircle the neck with white walls of starch, and place a tombstone over the breast! Bears prefer to remain a little free and easy; sleeping in peace through such enterprises as the present—well at the back of their cages!”

Both Emil and his mother recovered their equanimity after that, and nobody bothered any more about Freya’s appearance.

It was a magnificent evening. The guests arrived on time; the floor was good; the string quartette played with the enthusiasm of amateurs and the

unflagging precision of experts. Everyone knew everyone else well enough, and not too well.

Never had Freya admired her parents so much, or felt so confident that nothing could go wrong.

The older people went away to play bridge directly the dancing began, and only returned long after supper was over, when the dancing had begun to flag.

The Professor, who had escaped to his study earlier in the evening, was dragged down by Emil, to wind up the party with songs.

Johann Roth had a beautiful tenor voice, so rich and rare a voice, that there had even been a question in his youth, whether he ought to throw away so great a gift, for the sake of science. He never had time to practise now, but it was known that he made no fuss about singing for his guests, even after a long day's work. Olaf always played his accompaniments, and his stepfather indulgently schooled himself to his stepson's almost savage precision.

There never were two such men, Freya proudly told herself, as these two. So fine, so balanced, and yet so utterly unlike!

This had been the happiest day of Freya's life, but she had no suspicion that it would remain the happiest.

Had she not won the Grant for anatomy and found out that she was beautiful? These would be mere gateways to more permanent triumphs.

There could be no doubt about the Grant, but Freya glanced at Fritz von Mabergh to make quite sure that her beauty was functioning satisfactorily. Fritz's eyes meeting hers were almost too reassuring. Fritz was in a way her greatest friend, but Freya couldn't admire him as she admired Olaf, or love him as she loved Rudi. Had she been put the question of giving up Emil for the sake of Fritz, she would have sacrificed her friend for her brother. She might cry more if Fritz died, but life would lose half its savour if Freya had lost Emil to quarrel with! No—though on the whole Freya was glad Fritz couldn't take his eyes off her, his open homage made her at the same time feel a little fierce and uncomfortable. "He looks at me as if I were a plate of petits-fours!" she said to herself indignantly. "But I am not to be eaten even if I do look nice in my new taffeta dress! I too have teeth!"

Her father looked as if he were going to stop singing; and Freya sprang to her feet, and crossed the room to the piano. "You mustn't stop," she said

to him severely, “until you’ve sung ‘*Der Tod und das Mädchen*.’ You *know* it is my favourite song!”

The Professor rubbed his eyes in a guilty way, and murmured: “But the ‘*Erlkönig*’—that would help Rudi to keep awake—or better still, since it is Emil’s favourite, why should I not finish with ‘*Die zwei Grenadiere*’?”

Freya pinched his arm. This was a secret signal between them, that betrayed the greatness of Freya’s desire, and at the same time her wish not to have to ask for it again out loud. “Well, well,” her father murmured, “perhaps after all one *might* finish with ‘*Der Tod*’; gay it is not, but it is I think reassuring! And perhaps after so gay an evening as this, one needs to be reassured? But first go and ask your brother Emil if it is *his* wish, as well as yours!”

Rather to Freya’s surprise Emil agreed at once. “Tell the old man to go ahead and sing it,” he demanded cheerfully. “As long as he’ll go on; he can sing what he likes!”

Olaf sat down at the piano again, and their father got up and looked over the hushed room, in his comfortable friendly way, as if he expected them all to share the music with him. Johann Roth never had to ask people to stop talking when he got up to sing.

Freya saw him glance once at her mother, as if to deepen his joy in the music; then Olaf played the exquisite first chords. Johann Roth’s clear, solemn tones rose quietly at first; then the urgency of the girl’s fear crept into his voice. It was a natural, unexaggerated fear, as if something beautiful was trying to evade the end of its brief day. The golden voice deepened with Death’s approach, the steadiness of his answer to the girl’s plea stole softly through the listening room; it seemed to fill unhurriedly, but to the brim, with Schubert’s music.

The fear grew less and less, the maiden must accept Death, but what he could take from her, was her dread of him.

“*Gib deine Hand, du schön und zart Gebild,*” the Professor sang, the depth of his own compassion entering into all their breasts,—

*“Bin Freund und komme nicht zu strafen.
Sei gutes Muts! ich bin nicht wild,
Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen.”*

CHAPTER IV

Freya was not sure that her mother would think it very reasonable for her to have got up at five o'clock instead of six; and not to have waited to give her brothers their coffee, so that they could all four have taken the same train; climbed the same mountain and shared their Sunday ski-sport together; but she had suddenly wanted a different kind of fun.

She wanted, loaded down with her great secret, to go off into the starlit splintering coldness of the winter dawn alone. Brothers, she thought, however dear, however funny, were not strange.

They would lessen the queer, intangible thrill of dark and empty streets, shuddering away like frozen rivers between the misty banks of interminable street lamps.

The tall houses were a solid darkness, and the sky above them looked all the colder and darker, for the trembling white points of the fading stars. The trees glittered past Freya, each one wrapt in icy armour; and under her solitary footsteps the powdery snow rustled like stiff silk.

Freya caught the first train out into country; she met no one on it that she knew, and instead of going to the station for the *Gaudeamus Hütte*, she got out at St. Johann, beneath the Wetterstein. Here and there, through the slowly thinning darkness, a huddle of small houses and the round cupola of a church stitched themselves into the shadowy plain. Far above the village, which lay like a heap of stones at its feet, the great shoulder of the Wetterstein reared itself against darkness.

The snow-hung village slept; not a dog barked; no bird cried; nothing moved except the glimmer of the station lights.

The long white valley shone fitfully under an apricot mist.

Freya left the village behind her, setting out gaily upon a little pathway leading towards the mountain. She loved the taste of the biting, flawless air, and the feel of the long slender skis upon her untired shoulders.

When she had reached the foothills, a curious sound broke the dawn hush, as if a carpet were being beaten.

Rounding a hillock, Freya came out suddenly upon a bare patch of ground lying flat between two foothills.

Eight peasants muffled to the eyes and carrying heavy sticks had posted themselves at intervals in a rough circle. What Freya had heard was the sound of their blows upon the iron ground; but they were not striking at the ground. Something that moved was trying to break out from their circle.

It was just light enough for Freya to see that what they struck at was a terrified hare. The little dark streak of fur rushed from side to side to escape their blows.

The circle drew steadily smaller, the hare leaped backwards and forwards, turning and doubling upon its tracks with wonderful swiftness and skill; but neither its skill nor its speed could save it. There was blood on the snow; with a shriek it bounded back into the centre of the circle. Freya threw down her skis, and ran forward. No one heard or saw her until she had broken the cordon. With a shout, she rushed through between two of the sticks, making a gap that the hare promptly seized.

In an instant it had bounded out, and was safe up the mountainside. But Freya was not safe. Eight angry men crowded about her brandishing their sticks and shouting. Her very fearlessness made them yet more furious.

She stood confronting them, her chin up, her eyes blazing, helplessly in their power.

They would teach her, one of them shouted, to rob the poor of a meal! Another suggested tearing off her clothes and tying her to a tree.

“Let *her* starve with cold, since she starved our children!” he shouted.

Freya had no chance against them, and knowing this, she made no effort to escape. She was conscious suddenly that the new-found glory of her womanhood was a disability.

She was only a girl, a third man shouted with an oath, he’d soon show her what a girl was! Coarse jests made the men’s anger more and more terrifying. But they could not make Freya show her fear, not for all their raised fists, and jeering purple faces!

One man laid his heavy hand on her breast. She wrenched herself free, facing them still, her heart hammering in her throat, but her blazing eyes asked nothing; her firm lips were set.

“Hi!” a voice behind her shouted. “Let the girl go! I’ll fight the lot of you if you touch her! She’ll pay the price of the hare, won’t you, *Fräulein*?”

What more do you want, you'd have sold it anyway?"

The men moved sullenly back from her; the voice they heard was only the voice of another peasant, but it was a voice they knew and respected; it broke the spell of their anger.

The stiffness of Freya's horror left her. She turned to face her deliverer; but he was no Siegfried, only a stout, dumpy-looking young fellow, with a wide mouth, a turned-up nose, and merry ice-blue eyes; nevertheless Freya drew out her purse, and put it into his outstretched hand.

"She's got the price of a good fat hare here!" the boy told the men. "That one of yours was a skinny bitch, I'll be bound, she must have been living on her own fur for a fortnight! You've got the best of the bargain!"

The men took the money, and went off, their sticks over their shoulders, muttering curses.

All the fear in Freya's heart turned to anger. She would have liked to burn the young man with her scorching eyes. How dared he have seen her predicament, and saved her by the mere threat of a strength she could not boast?

Wasn't it almost more humiliating to be saved by a peasant, than outraged by one? Why *couldn't* she have saved herself? Why should she, and the poor swift hare, be attacked by brutes they could not for all their courage, or for all their swiftness, escape from alone?

For a moment the boy said nothing; nor did he meet Freya's angry eyes. He strolled unconcernedly to where her skis lay on the ground, and picking them up, hoisted them over his broad shoulder, with his own.

"I'll carry them for you," he explained, "for a bit of your way, whatever it is, for those men gave you a fright I can see! But you're none the worse for it, *Fräulein*! What made you do such a thing? A hare is meat, like any other animal, and I suppose you eat meat yourself, twice a week at least, by the look of you."

Freya's breath came back to her; and with it a sense of restored composure. She was just as angry, but she felt, somehow or other, less ashamed of her precarious womanhood.

"It was not fair," she answered fiercely, "eight great hulking men with sticks, against one poor little animal! I could not stand it! Have those who are weak no right to live?"

“Not much—against the hungry!” the youth asserted, with a friendly flash of white teeth. “It’s a tough world, *Fräulein*; and you make it tougher if you set out to rob a hungry man of his dinner. It’s true I had a sort of feeling for the hare myself, but more for the men! St. Johann is a poor village.”

Freya turned away from him disdainfully. Did he think of a girl’s honour, she wondered, as lightly as he thought of a stricken hare? Anyhow, he was only a peasant, and it didn’t much matter what he thought.

“I have to thank you,” Freya said coldly, “for saving me from those brutes. I have no money left, but if you will tell me where you live, I will see that you are properly rewarded.”

“I wouldn’t touch your money,” the boy said resolutely. “It was all in the day’s work what I did. I daresay if we’d started fighting I should’ve got the worst of it, though men with a bad conscience never fight well, my father used to tell me. Anyhow, what really saved you was your own six marks. You had the price of the hare, and you’ve paid for it.”

Freya respected this odd youth for not accepting money, she respected him enough to let him see the point of her anger.

“It’s being at the mercy of violence I can’t stand,” she explained in gentler tones. “It takes the joy out of life! Somehow I don’t feel as if one could ever feel safe or happy again! It makes me wish I were dead!”

To Freya’s astonishment the merriment died out of his laughing face.

“*Fräulein*,” he said gravely, “I think that’s wicked of you! What you say is downright nonsense too! We’re all at the mercy of accidents, and we’ve all got to take our chance. Why deny life’s good because someone gets the better of you? Besides, you’ve escaped, the hare’s escaped, and so have I! There’s nothing to be sorry for! We’re free to enjoy ourselves!”

Freya stared at this strange peasant boy, who spoke like an educated man. “Who are you?” she asked him curiously. “You talk—well—you talk *differently* from the men of St. Johann!”

The boy’s grin came back again, and Freya felt her own eyes dance to meet it.

“I’m a peasant right enough,” he explained; “my father bought a farm on the Wetterstein, where the villagers send us their cows in the summer, but it is true that my father was a wise man; he taught us himself, for up on our *Alpe* there is no school and no way of reaching one in the winter. We make

everything ourselves. Father's dead now, and my brother Karl and I run the farm together."

"But you've read," Freya said accusingly. "You've thought, I can tell; things haven't just happened to you, as they do to most peasants, without sense to them!"

The boy still smiled; but there was a curious dignity in his clear eyes. "The winter is long up there," he said, pointing to the peak of the Wetterstein; "we have time to read and think; but we are simple people. My mother has not been down the mountainside for twenty years. We make everything ourselves, we hardly use money, except to buy ourselves tobacco, or a nail or two. We're Communists too, does that frighten you? We kept Russian prisoners to help us during the war. They wrote to us when it was over; and we liked what we heard of it. Besides, we trusted those Russians, they had been our friends. They told us that in Russia nobody need starve and everyone's got to work. That sounded right enough to us, security and no idleness! Here there's no real test of a man's worth—that's why Hitler gets listened to! Rich people are scared of Communists, they won't think out what the world wants. It's tired of its rich people, who make wars and live on others; but we needn't kill them like the Russians did—that I should never want to do, *Fräulein*—any more than you wanted to see that hare killed! Still, by persecuting and killing us, they may make us kill them!"

Freya said stiffly, "I'll take my skis now." She felt very much shocked, for she had never spoken to a Communist before, and knew that Olaf would not like it; but as the boy laid her skis very carefully over her shoulder, looking at her as he did so, with innocent and friendly eyes, she relented and said: "We can go the same way if you like."

The sun caught a distant pine upon the slopes above them. It burned alone, like a lighted candle, till its fellows took fire, one by one.

The snow above the level of the trees shone as if light were under it. A flood of gold poured over the shoulder of the mountain, turning the fields of ice-white purity into the deeper purity of fire.

The golden flood reached their two climbing figures, clothing them from head to foot in flame.

CHAPTER V

This was a queer boy, Freya thought, for he whistled or was silent with equal ease, as if he climbed alone; and yet her shaken heart was conscious of his unspoken comradeship.

When Freya told him her name, he said it over slowly under his breath, as if she had given him something important. "I am Hans Breitner," he told her, after a pause. "My friend, Seppel Neuner of the Gaudeamus *Hütte*, whom you may know, will tell you anything you wish to know about our family. We have lived on this land, in St. Johann, or on the Wetterstein, for hundreds of years. They call us always in the village, 'the Breitners of the Wetterstein'; as if the mountain belonged to us—or we to the mountain! Have you crampons, *Fräulein*?—you should put them on now. The hillside is steep, and in amongst these trees the way is slippery."

Freya felt more at home with Hans after the little ceremony of putting on their crampons had taken place.

His eyes, when they met hers, had a strange innocence, direct and unquestioning, like an animal's. The spirit behind them was washed clean of pity or speculation.

Nothing in Hans reminded Freya of her escape from the men of St. Johann.

He moved steadily on, a yard or two above her, showing her how easiest to pierce through the crowding pines.

Freya could see nothing but the red-gold stems, stretching in endless corridors ahead, and behind them.

Suddenly Hans paused. "Now we are at the wood's edge," he told her; and as if Hans had thrown open a door, the stems grew brighter, and parted into a space of golden snow. Beyond the shining upward slope, the peak itself stood bare before them.

Warmed and exhilarated by the sunny air, they put on their skis, and began a zigzag track up the steep ascent; each in turn leading, to break down the soft weight of the new snow. They moved onwards and upwards in an effortless rhythm, beyond the need of speech. Both had skied from childhood, so that it was an unconscious exercise; while they climbed they

never hastened or altered their steady, even pace. Blue crystals shifted and streamed away in the wake of their ski tracks; the empty snow fields sparkled in an unbroken expanse.

There was no sound but the faint hiss and crush of the close-packed snow, shifting under their weight. The cloudless bowl of the sky burned a deep gentian. In the hushed, empty world, where nothing moved but themselves, their bodies grew more consciously alive.

Freya felt each steady beat of her heart; the drawing and holding of her breath took on a strange significance; nor was she merely conscious of herself. She began to be equally aware of Hans, his little physical habits sinking into her mind, held the same importance as her own.

Beside Olaf or Emil, Hans would have looked slouched and heavy; he had not their trained compact lightness; but he was without tension. Olaf, for all his suppleness and the dignity of his proud carriage, was tense with his consciousness of himself. Olaf felt responsible for the impression he made upon others. Hans, pursuing his way with vigorous certainty, felt no responsibility beyond losing it. Hans had dealt with emergencies all his life, and took for granted that when they arose, he could deal with them well enough; but the element of style that controlled and haunted Olaf's actions had never dawned upon Hans. Even the slightest failure was an indignity to Olaf; but to Hans failure had no more moral significance than success.

Freya flushed when she found herself comparing Olaf with Hans; for it was the first time that she could remember ever comparing Olaf with any other man.

Hans' clothes were worn and patched in places; but they were made of good stuff. His bare hands were as clean as Freya's own; though they were chiselled deep with wood-cutting and heavy manual tasks.

When Freya said at last, "Hans, I'm hungry—let's stop here and eat!" it already seemed superfluous to ask him to eat with her. She was unaware of it, but a new thing had taken place in her, she would never feel condescension again.

Hans trod the snow round them, into firmness, and loosening his *Loden* cloak from the straps of his rucksack, spread it for Freya to sit on. He dug himself a hole at her feet as if he were accustomed to snow as a cushion. He drew out of his rucksack black bread and goat's cheese, although when he saw that Freya had plenty for two, he shared her finer fare without protest.

When they had satisfied their first eager hunger, Freya said to Hans, a little uncertainly, "I've been thinking what you said about the hare, and the children. I hadn't thought of it like that you know, I just couldn't bear to see it defeated! Can you understand what I mean—that tiny creature alone against such cruel odds? All those brutal men, creeping nearer and nearer with their sticks? And to know that an animal so harmless—so swift—and so alive, was going to have the life beaten out of it. Oh, it *was* cruel, Hans!"

Hans looked up at Freya with clear, reflective eyes. "And yet for a child to be hungry," he observed, "is as cruel as for a hare to be killed to feed it—at least fathers think so!"

"They might have shot the hare, and not tortured it!" Freya pleaded.

Hans laughed. "Ah, but it is expensive to be so merciful," he explained; "peasants cannot buy guns."

"You speak only of the hare," Freya added in a low voice, "not of their brutality to me! If you had not come—they might have ruined my life!"

Hans moved uncomfortably in his snow hollow. "I think that they would not have done you much harm," he told her. "Rough they were—and more rough they might have been. An accident is always hard to bear, and it is worse when one human being sets out deliberately to hurt another. But ruin your life! No, they could not have done that, for it was not within their power! You are a person whom, I think, no one could ruin!"

Freya frowned, she could not quite accept this spiritual compliment at its full value. The insult to her womanhood remained.

"It is not only girls who suffer from violence," Hans went on gently. "Anyone may get broken, by someone who has power over him. All men employed by others have to bend themselves, and accept another man's will; but we need not cry because we are not all Samsons!"

"I am not crying," said Freya rather crossly. Hans said no more, but he helped Freya bury the scraps of their lunch, and put away the neat little tins they had been packed in.

Freya watched with amusement his bowed flaxen head, and fair clenched brows; he was wrestling with his thoughts as if they were enemies.

"It is what I wanted to explain to you," he said at last, "for I saw you were frightened when I said I was a Communist. In Russia there is a terrible punishment for a man who interferes with a woman. We do not believe in any inequality of value between human beings. People call Communists

‘Reds’ as if they were by nature violent; but that is not our ideal—our ideal is only to attack selfishness. It is Nazis who suppress knowledge; degrade women; persecute Jews; and drag their people back into the Middle Ages! But in our modern world there is no need to fight and bully, for machines can supply more and more riches, enough for all. None need suffer or be deprived of a good life; except by the will of other men, who have unfair advantages. Do you not see that if we learn how to divide and prosper in our own countries we shall soon learn how, by the same method, to divide and prosper all over the world?”

“But,” Freya objected, “Communists are not necessary at all; and they *have* persecuted other classes, and still persecute each other! *You* may not, but you do not live under their regime! Nor are yours the only high aims! Olaf and Emil, my brothers, have very high ideals! They too, believe in brotherhood. You do not understand that the Nazis wish to purify and strengthen our whole nation. Their morality is a stern and high morality, my brothers would sacrifice their life for it. This too, is a religion!”

“It is a religion,” Hans agreed, “but it is a cruel one! Communists do not say: ‘This man has a drop of Jew blood in him—torture—outrage—kill him!’”

Freya stared at Hans as if something ugly and incredible had reached her. It stole out of the sunny day like a dark shadow, to rest upon them both. “A Jew,” she repeated slowly, “but, Hans, my father is a Jew! Not by religion, but by race—my grandfather and grandmother were Jews, and before them for many centuries, Roths were Jews, but Germans too—always Germans! Hitler (whom my brothers love) could not wish to persecute *good* German Jews? Only wicked, corrupt Jews, usurers who suck the lifeblood out of simple people. Such men he might well punish. But Jews like my father cannot have anything to fear, that would be impossible! When you think what he has done for the whole world! Why, my brothers, Olaf and Emil, love my father as if they were his sons!”

“*Fräulein*,” Hans said in a grave voice, with all the sunshine gone from his young face, “where whips and swastikas lead the way it is a fool who does not know what to expect! I can believe that your brothers and many more, seek to obey their *Führer* for fine and noble reasons, but they will not be allowed to practise their wise and noble aims, if they conflict with the ignoble and cruel aims of the State! Such men will be as eyewash to reassure a public that might become too hostile if all Nazis showed cruelty and baseness. Believe me or not—to vote for this Herr Hitler, with his great voice that shakes the heart, is to bring darkness and horror into the world.

He is no German but a man who gave up his own country from personal pique! He fought with us because he had to fight, and would not fight for Austria; but was he even a great fighter? He rose no higher than a corporal, he won no honours! He disobeyed our laws, and tasted prison for his disobedience—is it for this we make him our lawgiver?”

Now that Freya saw Hans without laughter, she was surprised by the strength of his young face. She sat quite still and silent, feeling as if from the great noon hush of the mountains some reassurance might reach her to overcome the fear she felt lie cold at her heart.

Hans had not convinced her; but he had shaken her confidence.

How could one believe in cruelty or danger in this warm and golden world? Her father's face rose up before her, his wise benevolent eyes, his great brow behind which so much creative knowledge lurked, ready to be used for the good of all mankind. She thought of their ordered, peaceful home.

The Roths were not rich, but they had always had enough to use reasonably for the benefit of themselves and others. She thought with a sudden queer intensity of God. Their mother was a Catholic, a liberal Catholic; their father an agnostic, who practised a religion he did not preach.

“I suppose there *is* a God,” Freya said half to herself and half to Hans, “and if there is He must have made us all? His very son was a Jew! Have we not all the same senses, the same joys, the same terrors? Can we change our skins or our blood? What other *can* we be, than what we are born?”

“We cannot be any other,” Hans agreed gently, “and since we are all brothers we must work together for the good of all.”

A flurry of snow spat towards them from the ridge.

Hans rose to his feet; drawing the skis from his shoes, he gave them a final touch of wax.

At their feet the virgin snow streamed smoothly towards St. Johann, dipping into distances as blue as the sky. Range after range of golden mountains zigzagged their gorgeous way into the North Tirol.

“When we get down,” Hans reminded Freya, “I'll show you the way to the *Gaudeamus Hütte*. You'll find it easy enough, for half Munich will be on the slopes.

“This run has no great difficulties, *Fräulein*. It steepens in the middle; I should advise you to break a little; but there is a two-thousand-foot drop,

before we reach the trees. I will slow up and shout as I near them; and if you follow me through, you will not find it too difficult.”

They looked at each other and smiled, tasting, in an instant’s comradeship, the joy of what lay before them.

Hans crouched; swung his ski-sticks; and with a hoarse cry of exultation, plunged into the blue air.

Freya took time for a long breath before she followed him. All her fears fell away from her; she felt instead wildly happy, as if the heart of the world were beating through her breast, filled with the same light and joy as her own.

The flurry of snow on the ridge died down. She leaned out of the sun-shot veil of mist, into a divine clarity of golden air.

Freya did not know when she had moved. She only knew that the spirit of speed had caught her, and tossed her forward into flying space.

She felt the sudden strain of the icy air upon her eyeballs. She was conscious of her eyes; but of everything else about herself, Freya was unconscious. She might have been the wind that ran with her down the mountainside, so blown free felt her heart, so unpossessed and clear her thrilled and empty mind.

There seemed a hundred regions in the featureless expanse of snow she swept through; whole landscapes rose and vanished, full of checks from invisible hillocks or sharp falls over panic-stricken steepnesses; but in between were long stretches of pure flight, as smooth and steady as a gull’s path through the air, above the unequal seas.

Freya’s ski-sticks trailed softly at her side, the blades of her skis cut clean through the light fine texture, churning up sapphires and diamonds as they passed over the snow. Rocked in a dream, without visible images, Freya felt beyond good and evil.

Time had lost its old significance, and become a shining cloak, hiding the spirit of speed. Far away, down the mountainside, Freya caught sudden glimpses of Hans, his head bobbing like a black cherry; but though she saw him, she did not feel that she was following him.

It was the mountain that she followed, and the fierce wind that bore her company.

At last the trees rushed up to meet her, like an attacking army. Freya steadied her pace, checking the lilting smoothness of her flight.

Hans shouted, to guide her last uneven scramble; and with a sudden drop of the heart Freya knew that the run was over.

The day became faintly overcast. They had to plod for miles along a flat rough road.

As soon as they sighted the path, leading to the *Gaudeamus Hütte*, Hans turned as if he were in a hurry to leave her. Freya held out her hand. "You'll come to see me in Munich soon, won't you," she demanded.

Hans hesitated, the hot colour rose to his forehead, his eyes shone, but slowly the light died out of them, and he said cautiously: "I shall be in Munich again next week it is true, for I start work with my uncle, who is a master builder. My brother Karl will spare me till the cows are sent up again. But will you really want to see me—there—in Munich? For the little service I did you at St. Johann you have already repaid me many times over. I am not only a peasant but a Communist, how could your family receive me?"

Freya laid a quick impulsive hand upon his arm. "No, no," she said, "I am not trying to repay you! For such things there is no repayment. But are we not friends? We Roths are free people, we ask no man what he believes; all creeds are the same to us! You will be very welcome."

Hans glanced away from her to hide the gladness in his eyes. "Then I will surely come," he murmured.

CHAPTER VI

While Freya struggled up the path to the *Hütte*, she met Emil flying down the slope beside it.

“Hullo—where’ve you been?” shouted her brother as he shot past her. Freya’s answer, carrying for miles in the clear air, reached Olaf. Still it wouldn’t have mattered its reaching Olaf, if the Mabergs hadn’t been with him; it was their shocked annoyance that roused Olaf to the sinister side of Freya’s prolonged absence.

Olaf followed Freya up the run, and reached her before she came to the *Hütte*. “If you hadn’t turned up in an hour’s time,” he said in a tone of grave reproof, “we’d have had to go and look for you—not a pleasant business, with dark coming on! Ski-ing off alone like that, isn’t sporting—it gives other people too much trouble.” Freya instantly apologized. She hadn’t, she explained, meant to be absent so long. She had simply gone to St. Johann by herself in order to have the extra walk and time alone. All she had wanted was the silence.

Freya could say things like this to Olaf, even though he was her brother, and could count on his understanding. He nodded his beautiful fair head now, but she saw that he was not wholly satisfied. He had only accepted the silence.

“You left home,” he objected, “at five o’clock—and St. Johann is only two hours’ walk from here, over the foothills. It is now four o’clock. Surely you must have spent most of the time ski-ing?”

“Not by myself,” Freya explained; briefly, without emphasis, she told Olaf the episode of the hare. This too, he might have swallowed, had not the Mabergs strolled up in time to catch the end of it. “You and this boy went off together then—after the hare had escaped and the men had calmed down,” Fritz asked with ominous lightness. “If he lived on the farther side of the Wetterstein, he went a good deal out of his way, in order to ski with you on the St. Johann slopes? You must have made quite a conquest of your peasant boy!”

Freya’s eyes still rested on Olaf’s face. “People find those woods so difficult they don’t often go up there,” Freya explained, “but Hans knows them, and he offered to show me the way. It was too good a chance to miss

—two thousand feet of untouched snow—and Olaf, it *was* perfect! I longed for you to have been there!”

“*He* must have thought it perfect too—” teased Fritz Maberg. “What did you and your young peasant find to talk about, for six solid hours?”

“One doesn’t talk while one skis!” Freya snapped back irritably, but she turned her eyes at last, and looked at Fritz. When you know a person particularly well, you cannot escape their ruffled feelings. Fritz’s were instantly communicated to Freya, and did not make her own less ruffled.

She glanced hastily away from him, towards Sophie. Sophie looked non-committal. She would willingly have helped Freya if she had been sure that Olaf wanted it. She knew that had she been in Freya’s place she wouldn’t have needed help. There were no switches and shiftings of fact or temper that Sophie could not have accomplished single-handed and without fear of discovery. She smiled now—her brilliantly lacquered lips feeling a little stiff under their barrier of scarlet paint—and laid a deprecating hand on Freya’s sleeve. She wondered if Olaf realized how enchanting she looked—balanced on the slippery icy path, as lightly as a bird on a twig—in her black, neat-fitting ski-trousers; her pullover as brilliant as a peacock’s tail; her azure eyes, her fluffy hair the colour of a duckling, all pointed really at Olaf’s reserved but tender heart. How could he go on being preoccupied by a mere sister? And if he wasn’t preoccupied with Freya, that would help her to get out of her ridiculous scrape. Sophie pleasantly wondered what the peasant boy was like, although she felt pretty sure that Freya had had no real fun with him. “One seldom skis with a single companion for six hours without *some* subject for conversation turning up!” Fritz Maberg dropped, turning away from Freya, to pick up his ski-sticks lying on the snow, with ostentatious indifference.

Freya’s imagination went off its guard; she was so accustomed to telling Olaf everything, and cared so deeply for his good opinion that she burst out impulsively: “We talked, if you want to know, of politics, Olaf—all the time of politics!” How safe it sounded from Freya’s point of view! There had been nothing inconsiderate or personal in her conversation with Hans Breitner, and Olaf would believe this now, but a curious whiff of fear ran through her consciousness. Was politics after all, so safe a subject for Hans? Hadn’t she better, if the subject was to be thrashed out—conceal Hans’ politics?

Of course it couldn’t really matter what anyone thought or said upon a purely impersonal subject. Still just at present there was such a red-rag-and-

bull feeling about Communists that Olaf and Emil might be put off Hans before they met him if she revealed that he was a Communist.

"They're cross," Sophie murmured, slipping an affectionate arm in Freya's, "because we all missed you, *Liebling*—it's a terrible compliment really!" She had decided suddenly to throw in her lot with Freya's, because there hardly seemed any other chance of drawing Olaf's attention to herself. Instantly Sophie saw that she had acted rightly, for Olaf looked at her with marked approval; he wanted his sister to be defended, after all.

"We had *Bretzeln*," Sophie ran on, "and beer and marrons glacés—I brought the marrons glacés! Too bad I couldn't keep any for you, *Schatz*; but you know what marrons glacés are—quite apart from Emil being a pig, they leaped into my mouth without any action on my part whatever! Olaf, of course, never knows if he's eating manna from Heaven, or last week's pumpernickel. *Was für ein Mensch!* All my best pastries and cream mayonnaise would be wasted on him!" Slowly Olaf began to smile. Sophie's soft, ridiculous jokes were, Freya thought a little enviously, the only thing that could make Olaf smile. Olaf, who never yielded to any pressure, sometimes relaxed surprisingly under Sophie's uncanny velvet paws. He was relaxing now; and had begun to feel that after all there was nothing particularly serious in his sister's escapade. It was a great relief for him to feel this, for he loved his little sister almost as much as she loved him; her absence had caused him real uneasiness and there was, he had felt sure, something or other that had gone deep, in that experience of the hare.

Darkness began to drink up the last cold light upon the mountainside.

The *Hütte* filled quickly. The *Stube* soon grew misty with cigarette smoke and the steam from melting snow.

The fire blazed unseen, like a vital creature caged in a living shell.

Each party of skiers drew their own table as near to the stove as they could get, eating and drinking according to the contents of their pockets; smoking vigorously and laughing loudly at the mildest joke. They were a friendly, healthy, happy group of human beings undivided in their mirth, because whatever their birth or education might be, their tastes at the moment were precisely the same. By and by, as soon as their hunger was satisfied, before sleep caught their tired and glowing bodies, they would have music. Under a high carved crucifix hung a guitar fastened by cherry-coloured ribbons. Seppel Neuner, the son of the house, would soon have it on his knee; even now while he slowly finished his last mouthful of milk soup, he was conning over the exact words of the *Lieder* he knew would

shortly be demanded of him. His head was full of coarse, kind, religious little songs—the words based on the simple lore of animals and saints both acting as the peasants themselves would have acted—exposed to the same risks, or sharing the same needs.

Joseph, Mary and the Babe, were the Neuners themselves dressed in their Sunday clothes; and the Neuners, even in their least respectable moments, were always accessible to the deepest religious emotions.

A prayer could start as a joke, and a joke end as a prayer, and neither God nor man be the worse for it as far as any Bavarian peasant was concerned.

Seppel Neuner having finished his milk soup, leaned back, with his black curls against the wooden panelling and his roving eyes summed up the attractions of his father's guests. They were fortunate to-night, he thought—Fräulein Sophie, for instance, so soft, and curving, thin too, but with nothing scraggy about her—merely the lightness of a mountain flower—what fine pink cheeks she had—what fun those red lips were—the colour of wet raspberries; and how he would have liked to stroke the silken fineness of her silvery-gold hair! Still if you wanted a girl with a heart, Seppel decided, a staunch girl that would stand by you like a man, and be a woman while she did it, you couldn't do better than Fräulein Freya Roth, with her dark lashes that weren't stuck apart, but fell softly against her pale, clear cheeks, covering grey eyes, that had, when she looked at you, such a steady gaze! Those finely chiselled, close-shut lips weren't painted: Seppel could swear to that, and what colour she had never came out of a pot. To-night she seemed less gay than usual. Her eyes were cast down. He was used to seeing her sitting up, very straight and eager, doing her share of the talking; but to-night she leaned back a little, and seemed out of the stream of things. He didn't believe she cared any too much about that insolent Fritz von Maberg.

Fritz suddenly leaned forward from the von Röhn table, and called across the room to Seppel.

"Hi—Seppel, what do you know about the Breitners who live on the other side of the Wetterstein?"

Seppel came out of his fantasies to answer; but he didn't come very far out, because he was a peasant, and peasants living with only a mountain between them are still neighbours. Nor should one, Seppel reminded himself, tell a *Herren* anything whatever about a neighbour, since *Herren* were like butterflies between thunderstorms, soon blotted out—whereas the chances were that your neighbour always remained your neighbour.

“There is such a family,” he went so far as to admit. “A mother and two sons. Old Breitner died four years ago; and the widow and the sons keep on the farm.” Seppel raised an arm, and drawing the guitar down from the wall, threw the ribbons behind his neck, and began to tune up. He had said all he intended to say about the Breitners.

Freya gave a sigh of relief—for a moment she thought the danger over—instead of only just begun. “And what are these young men’s politics?” Fritz demanded in his lazy, high-pitched drawl. He tilted his chair so far back that it pivoted on one leg. A nice way to treat his father’s well-made chair, Seppel Neuner thought; but why did Fräulein Roth look alarmed? It was not her chair! What had she to do with the Breitners, and if she had anything to do with either of them, which one was it, Karl or his own friend Hans? And what was it that she had had to do with him? She wasn’t the sort of *Fräulein* to play a light game with a man—peasant or equal! What was the matter with everybody in the room? A curious hush had come over it. All the little groups had stopped talking. The peasants looked like animals who taste in the air a hint of doom. The students listened with equal attention, but less fear. They knew what talk could do, or what it couldn’t. Besides, although every one felt anxious as to what might happen after the elections—nothing had as yet happened. The foreign tourists, of course, knew nothing; but they too, were aware of the tension; and they stopped talking to listen, although they had no idea what they were listening for.

There were, Freya told herself hurriedly, no dread penalties for free speech, but there were anticipations of penalties; and there were—Freya felt it with a sudden pang—dread intentions. She felt sure of it, because Olaf and Emil’s faces closed themselves up. When this had happened in their nursery days it meant that they wanted to exploit a boys’ secret, by themselves.

Well, that was what they meant to do now! They had a secret, and they weren’t going to share it with Freya. She was only a girl.

Old Neuner, who sat on a grandfather’s chair, half hidden by the stove, but which commanded a view of the room, and the kitchen behind it, spoke with decisive stress.

“Peasants,” he said, addressing Fritz Maberg, “have no politics, *mein Herr*. They keep cows.”

“If they want to keep their cows—they’d better have the right politics, Herr Neuner!” Fritz answered with veiled insolence; and then Emil chipped in, bent on entrapping Freya:

“Well—since you talked all day long with this Herr Breitner, you’re the right person to tell us what his politics are, aren’t you, Freya?”

Freya guessed that Fritz must have repeated her weak defence to Emil, and with a brother’s perspicacity, Emil had realized her blunder. Emil enjoyed making Freya’s blunders public—it appeased the jealousy he always felt, at Olaf’s deep affection for her. She was only a half-sister, Emil resentfully felt—Olaf should have loved Emil, his whole brother—best.

“Yes,” Olaf said without animosity, but with a quiet insistence, much more alarming to Freya than animosity.

“What were the young fellow’s politics, Freya?”

Olaf intended to scold Emil well for drawing attention to his sister in public, but since the attention had been drawn, her best way out of it was to speak the truth; and Olaf thought that he was helping her to speak it.

The eyes of the whole room were fixed upon Freya; her cheeks burned and her mouth felt strangely dry; but it was not for herself that she felt frightened. “We talked,” she said a little hesitatingly, “about politics in general, Olaf—all the different parties in the German Reich and we talked of Russia, too—and of the Communists. And of our Nazis—what these new ideas mean; and—and I explained to Hans how good you all think Herr Hitler is—and what he will do—if the elections go in his favour—for our country.”

“Good!” interjected Emil contemptuously. “Why that’s a word you might use for a washerwoman! Hitler is great! He’s—well, he’s Hitler—and all the world will know what that means soon! *Heil Hitler!*”

As he spoke—solemnly—as if all were pulled by the same invisible string, ten young men and half a dozen girls sprang to their feet, and stood as if God were present—in a silence that was the more impressive from the astonishment with which the tourists and most of the peasants greeted it.

With straightened backs, and lifted heads they shouted like one voice: “*Heil Hitler!*” drank their beer to its dregs, and sat down again, proud and flushed, to what remained of their sausages.

Freya did not stand. She felt a curious sense of stiffening and hostility, as if something was taking place within her, that would forever prevent her bowing to that name.

Slowly ordinary conversation and laughter once more filled the hut. Fritz Maberg waited until there was no one else listening to them, then he leaned

forward and touched Freya's wrist with his finger. "Why was it that you needed to explain to young Breitner, Freya, how good Hitler is?" he demanded. "Is he then—your young peasant—a Communist?"

The truth was out at last, and Freya wondered why so simple a word should sound so terrible. What was it Hans had said: that Communism was only another name for sharing? Olaf's dark blue eyes had gone almost black, he waited tense and speechless for her answer.

"Why does it matter so terribly?" Freya asked, drawing her wrist away from Fritz' touch. "After all—what is a Communist?"

"A rogue and an atheist, a man who takes God from the hearts of the people; money out of their pocket; honour from women; and innocence from children!" Olaf said sternly. "Never again let me hear you ask, Freya—what is a Communist!"

Even from Olaf, Freya could not stand so overwhelming a condemnation. "Surely that's nonsense!" she exclaimed, "and it's not the way Father likes us to talk—it's without reality! I've just been spending the day with a Communist, and he was the exact opposite of what you say. Even those brutes from St. Johann respected Hans. He is as good and decent as any of us, although he is a peasant. I dare say lots of Communists are wicked—and lots of Nazis too! But one can't speak of the Ten Commandments as if they sprouted out of one's own politics, and the seven deadly sins out of other people's. To hear you talk one might be back in the Middle Ages, with Catholics torturing Protestants—and Protestants, when they got the chance, doing the same back! Look at the English—whom you and Emil are always praising. They think what they like—and say what they like—are they any the worse for it?"

"The English have been brought up differently from us," Olaf said sternly, "and I in no way wish to see a good German get too like them. They have a certain carelessness that is most regrettable! No doubt it comes from their island security. Since they are, however, a strong and resolute people—in some way resembling ourselves—and since they must by now realize that their island is no longer safe—they will no doubt in time learn from us the virtues they are lacking in, at present. Discipline is what they most need; and discipline is what we must acquire ourselves—more than we already have—in order to train others. I am sorry to say, Freya, that to-day you have behaved in a way that is the very reverse of discipline. This has already had bad consequences and might—as presumably you know—have led to worse! You should never have put yourself into so false a position. A

position in which you had to be saved by a low-class youth with criminal politics! I take your word for it that he acted correctly; but he might not have done so; and though he certainly did you a service, I hope that having expressed your gratitude properly, you made it plain that you can have no more to do with him!”

Olaf spoke in so low a voice that no one beyond their own table could overhear what he said; but Freya could scarcely believe her ears, for never before had Olaf scolded her in public—his rare words of reproof had always been a private thing—bringing them closer together rather than further apart. Now a gulf opened between them, and with every word he uttered the gulf grew wider and wider. Freya’s first instinct was to cry out in her pain: “Olaf! Olaf! don’t go away from me!” But Emil’s eyes were on her, as well as Olaf’s. Emil no longer looked at her unkindly, for he was extremely sorry for her, as well as a little remorseful, at his part in her downfall. Still she knew that he would feel a little triumph too, that Olaf should at last be forced to realize and punish in public, the waywardness of his spoilt darling.

Freya’s pride came to her assistance, she made no answer to Olaf, but turned her face away from the table, so that none of them should see how deep this hurt had gone.

She closed her soft lips close against each other, and by an agonizing effort kept her tears from falling. Her swimming eyes met Seppel Neuner’s expressionless shining black ones; instantly there flashed into his the tenderness he would have felt for an injured lamb. His fingers settled on the strings of his guitar; he flung back his head and began to sing in a high, clear baritone: “*Spinn! Spinn! meine liebe Tochter!*” rollicking through each question and answer, until no word or thought could resist the gay and wicked rhythm of the song. Politics were instantly forgotten. The spell of music—the laughter of primitive people—laid hold of the hut.

They would sing now till sleep took them, and Hans and his politics would lie quiet and innocuous, under the waves of song.

CHAPTER VII

Every morning Freya ran downstairs to meet the postman; her heart beating hard with dread; her mind on fire with panic plans. At all costs she must evade the emergency of a visit from Hans; and every morning there was no letter, and her heart sank back slowly and serenely into an empty peace.

In the terrifying open streets Freya never met the heavy slouching figure she was afraid to meet. Hans was a dream—a ghost—a threat escaped.

Freya would not have to fight her brothers for him, nor explain him to her parents. She was safe. Hans did not want to see her again.

As the slow short days passed, filled to the brim with work and familiar occupations, Freya grew conscious of something haunting and unfamiliar; there was a new presence in her imagination—a coloured thread that wound its way through the pattern of her life, knitting itself into everything she did, revealing itself behind everything she thought. When she first woke, this presence faced her, and at night, until she slept, she was no longer alone.

Politics, she told herself, must be the root of her trouble. She had never taken them seriously enough before. Her mind at stretch upon medical subjects had refused to turn aside out of its groove.

She had accepted, as the majority of medical students had accepted, the social democratic state.

They felt themselves powerless members of this new and rather stagnant republic, full of splendid privileges and no traditions, run by uneager and anxious men, who had never been trained to authority but had been brought up instead to obey the sharp short orders of their betters.

The young looked for a lead out of the black cul-de-sac of poverty, defeat and unemployment, that daunted their futures and ate up their strength. But they got no such lead.

A few of the more alert and aggressive turned Communist. Nobody liked them; startling in their doctrines, dishevelled in their appearance, they made few friends. Their fellow students jeered at their strange doctrines and the authorities weighted the dice against them. They were looked on as moral and social riff-raff.

Another and larger body of students threw in their lot with the Nazis. This group was not looked down on by its contemporaries, and was actively supported by the authorities; its escapades were overlooked; duels by its members were leniently dealt with though against the law; even physical attacks upon their opponents in the streets were treated as playful sallies of the high-spirited—"reds" and "Jews" were fair game. But should a member of the Communist group dare to infringe the slightest rule, he was instantly penalized by the heaviest form of sentence; and on the most flimsy of excuses expelled from the university.

When Freya complained to her friends of this rank injustice she was told, "Ah! but you see Communists are so dangerous! The Nazis are good Germans! It is a pity that they are often so rough! But think how horrible it would be to be overrun by Communists! The Nazis are strong—they will save us from such a catastrophe—it is better to support them in order to be on the safe side!"

But Freya's doubts remained and grew stronger, such defenders seemed worse to her than any dangers they could save her from.

When Freya tried to discuss the subject with her father, he seemed unwilling to attack it seriously, but merely murmured in the mild, unsatisfactory way of older people: "Do not let us grow excited over such matters! Every hen thinks she has laid the best egg! Can we not all believe as we choose? But the choice of others—what is that to us? Let them alone—Nazis and Communists. How do we know that they are not two ways of avoiding the same thing? And this thing that they are so anxious to avoid—perhaps it is common sense? I notice that those who have common sense get on in the world whatever they call themselves! Nor do they waste their time miscalling others. I have seen good men and women belonging to both parties. And yet before such parties were heard of—I also knew good men and women!"

The weather itself, Freya thought, was against her. In Munich winter is always grim, but Freya could not remember a winter more piercingly cold and bedraggled than this one. A mountain wind carrying the icy venom of snow peaks prowled through the withered streets. Every other house had a board with "To Let" or "To be Sold" on it; and whatever she looked at was grey and clenched with frost.

Pipes burst, water froze in bedrooms; hot food grew cold on its way from plate to mouth; old people's bones and young people's tempers became

brittle and snapped short. Work was a burden and thought itself dulled down into pointless dreams.

All day long mournful futureless beggars knocked ravenously at the doors of the well-to-do and would not be denied. They wanted food; they wanted clothes; they wanted work; they wanted life. Their brother man had little enough to spare for them, and their father God—that good German God of battles—had turned his face away from his obedient, defeated people.

“No,” Freya thought to herself, “Nazis cannot be right—for they would do again what we have done before, turn the state into an arsenal and prepare a whole nation for Death! We cannot worship such a state—for we are young—we want to live!” And she thought with a shudder of Olaf and Emil in their Nazi uniforms.

Such fears threw her more ardently than ever into her work at the hospital. There they fought death—not life—and were happy fighting it. There, too, she could feel her father safe in his great fame. She loved to go to his lectures and share the thrill of his packed audiences. His words lived; they were so simple that they reached the stupidest student in the room, and so vital that the most brilliant and sophisticated could not duck beneath their simplicity.

The hospital was a long walk from the university. Wrapped in her *Loden* cloak, Freya battled her way against the ferocious cold, wondering not for the first time, where Hans was, and if he too would have understood and appreciated her father’s lectures.

She was late, and afraid that she would not be able to get inside the hall. The lecture-room was usually so crowded that students plastered themselves against the wall and sat on the steps of the platform; but to-day when Freya pushed back the door, she found the hall half empty.

Had the university clock gone wrong? Had she misread the number of the hall on the entrance board? No—it was her father’s lecture-room, for there he was as usual crouched over his desk, his long grey beard more wispy than ever, his small keen eyes ablaze as usual with the light of his thought. The half-empty hall was slowly warming with his words. His occasional sly wit shook the students into laughter. The steady chain of his reasoning bound them inflexibly to his meaning. . . . It was all right, Freya told herself reassuringly, the emptiness—the odd silences—could only be the cold. Had not she—his own daughter—thought twice before facing the icy funnel of the Leopoldstrasse instead of going home?

There was no alteration in her father's vitality of thought, it was as swift and sure as usual, and as usual it reached its goal; but when his voice gathering force for its last succinct summing-up, dropped, silence hung over the room with the weight of frost.

Freya gazed round her in blank amazement. No applause? No questions? But the students always asked questions, the difficulty was to stop their flow; and where was the accustomed violent outbreak of prolonged applause?

The students crowded together like a flock of sheep; none of them stopped at Johann Roth's desk for a final word or greeting—they pushed and jostled each other on their way to the door as if they were escaping from a fire.

Freya found herself alone in the lecture-room with her father.

His twinkling eyes met her anxious ones with a smiling reassurance. "There is something perhaps," he suggested, "that specially interests them this afternoon! I have not looked at the papers to-day—an international football match may be in progress, or perhaps it is so near Christmas that they want to get to the market before it closes. Curious though, I admit—Ebert—Bardt—Wölfinger—Rosenheim—my chief students—never before have they failed to stay and discuss a lecture. To bolt a lecture down without questions is like eating meat without biting it. But we must not be disturbed! It is an interesting subject—the first stages of a germ attack—but perhaps I went too fast for them. Or was not clear enough? I may have over-filled their plate! Your mother says that if I made a pudding I should put all the contents of the kitchen into it, and then ask for more. There is nothing so difficult to understand as congested thought. No doubt that is it. I was unclear and they are over-fed!"

Johann Roth looked round triumphantly for his spectacles, and after some searching Freya found them pushed backwards into his hair. "The lecture was quite clear, Father," Freya said, when she had disentangled the spectacles. A look of disappointment crossed her father's face, as if he had hoped that his lecture had been at fault.

"Well, well," Johann Roth said vaguely, "a full subject is like heavy traffic, there are a hundred ways of *not* getting through it safely, and only one right way. It is upon this one right way that a good mind should clench—but not even a good mind clenches always! Come, let us escape from our analogy and go home! Analogies are misleading, after all—and we can be thankful that a bad lecture is not as disastrous as a motor car accident."

“But it was a *good* lecture!” Freya persisted. “It was as always, Father—and they were *not* as always!”

Her father shrugged on his coat, and dragged at his muffler, as if he wanted to leave the empty hall behind them as quickly as possible. “If one student is interested, a lecturer has nothing to regret,” he said cheerfully, “for a single mind can carry seed. What is it that the neglected English poet, Coventry Patmore says? ‘The truth is great and shall prevail, When none care whether it prevail or not.’ I am fond of the English poets. They feel deeply and express themselves simply. They are not ornate like the French, or verbose as we Germans are—except of course our old friend Heine! I see that in the new anthologies the Nazis have decided that Heine did not write the ‘*Lorelei*’! Our poor race, I take it, is to have no ornaments! Einstein’s discovery was a blunder and Jesus Christ was a Prussian *Offizier*! But relativity, the ‘*Lorelei*’ and the gospels, these things have an awkward way of remaining what they are—Nazis or no Nazis!”

The big doors of the university swung to, behind them. When they were outside them, opposite the fountain, Freya remembered that the porter had not been there to hold them open for her father, and to exchange their long accustomed good-night greeting. It was a little thing, but it fell as coldly on her heart, as the few strangled drops of water fell from the university fountain, into its frozen basin.

The cold of the street felt like a plunge into an ice-cold bath. The houses wore a pallid look, as if they were drained of light and colour. Trams shrieked and jarred their way over the frozen rails, while motors on chains shuffled and jostled each other on the ice-bound roads, with unaccustomed diffidence.

In the Odeonplatz the heavy models of Florentine statues looked more disreputably comfortless than ever.

As they turned down a little alley between high walls, leading from the Leopoldstrasse to the Kaulbach, they came face to face with an old acquaintance. The Professor paused with outstretched hand. His smile died slowly on his lips—for the General, gazing over their heads, passed them without a greeting.

“Father! Father!” Freya cried aghast, “that was General von Stürmer, the Mabergs’ cousin! He must have seen us! He looked right at us! What is happening to-day? What does everything mean? Are we lepers?”

“Probably nothing!” the Professor said, increasing his pace. “It may be the good General was concentrating upon an important train of thought, and

so did not notice us. At such a moment I myself have been guilty of just such *gaffes*. Or the cold may have dazed him. Such things must not be taken seriously unless we are sure that they are seriously meant. We will ring him up when we get in, and if he says he did not see us—all will be well! And if not—we shall know soon enough what reason he had for cutting his old friends. Most points of offence are childish things. Easy to put right with a little goodwill upon one side or the other. And no doubt after a good cup of your mother's coffee, we shall believe—as I think it is very possible to think—that the rest were accidents!" Freya clung to her father in silence. She was not satisfied, she could not believe that these accumulated slights were accidents.

The sky was dark with unshed snow too cold to fall; everything beneath it wore the same bloodless pallor. The stripped trees were the colour of the stone walls they leaned against. Freya could hardly believe they held the life of the spring in them.

On the steps of their house stood Olaf, slim and rigid in his brown uniform. Freya's heart sprang to meet him. For no apparent reason, there are scenes that etch themselves forever upon the mind. It is as if they were stamped by an invisible hand with an indestructible seal. The sight of Olaf looking down at them from the steps remained with Freya until she died. . . . He looked so young, so beautiful and so kind.

His grave eyes smiled, as with a mock salute, he flung open the door for them. "*Wie geht's, Vater?*" he demanded.

"*Ganz gut, Sohn!*" Johann Roth answered in his slow deep voice.

"If," Freya thought with passionate eagerness, "if they're both all right together—then everything must be all right!"

Olaf followed them into the hall, his neat shoulders flung back. The colour had not been frozen from his fair young cheeks, and his blue eyes had the hard bright sparkle of a frost flower.

On the hall table lay a letter addressed to Freya in a round, childish handwriting.

Her father's and Olaf's eyes, fixed themselves curiously upon her. She knew that the letter was from Hans; but she did not know that she was trembling, until she felt their eyes upon her.

With a muttered excuse, Freya picked up the letter and ran upstairs to her room, locking the door behind her; although she well knew that no one would seek to follow her.

“Dear Fräulein Freya,” she read.

“I have wanted very much to see you, and I have turned it over often in my mind. I remember very well what you said, but it is difficult for me to believe that it would not be too hard for you to be my friend. If I were only a peasant it would still be hard; but to be both a peasant and a Communist—even for your brave heart—this would be too difficult to face! I am not a hare, that you need run between the sticks to save me! And this time it would be your friends and not strangers, who would be angry with you. That is always worse, I think. I shall understand that we must not meet again, and not resent it.

Nothing could happen that would make me think without pleasure of our meeting upon the Wetterstein.

HANS BREITNER.”

Her eyes followed every word, but she read the letter with her heart. When she had finished reading it for the second time, she put it in a drawer where there was a bag of lavender, that smelt sweet. Without tidying her roughly blown brown curls, she raced downstairs to her father’s study.

Her parents were alone together, and it occurred to Freya afterwards that they looked like people who were discussing a subject of extreme importance; but at the moment Freya’s own urgency was too great for her unconscious observation to take effect. She looked quickly from one to the other, wondering which of them would be the more vulnerable to her purpose. Both respected justice, but perhaps her father would be the easier to convince as to where justice lay.

“Daddy,” she said in a challenging voice, “that letter in the hall was from my friend, Hans Breitner—the peasant boy who helped me when I interfered about the hare—you remember that Sunday at St. Johann?”

Both her parents seemed to remember this episode. Her mother said, as if she were completing a picture already familiar, but not yet quite filled out: “The peasant boy—who is also a Communist?”

“Yes,” Freya admitted, tossing back her curls, and taking a position upon the hearthrug that dominated—or that she hoped dominated—her attentive parents. “This is what he says—that it might be difficult for me to be his friend—and that you wouldn’t want to meet him. He says he will not resent it but it is *I* who would resent it—if you will not have him here! Why should

I not have my friends in my own home—and why should I not see him again? What does it matter what he thinks? Is not thought free?”

Her eyes left her father’s face and fixed themselves upon her mother. It was her mother that Freya most feared—her mother who was the aristocrat—who had such perfect manners—who did not wholly belong to her father and to herself. It was terrible to have to explain Hans to either of them, because parents always cared too much—but her father was terrible only because he cared too much for Freya—her mother was terrible because she cared for things that neither Freya nor her father cared for. How could Freya explain the deadly wound to her pride if she were forced to tell Hans that she would not see him again because her family was less enlightened and magnanimous than Hans himself? They would think it was Hans that she cared for and she could never tell them that what she cared for most was to keep her pride in them.

“This young man,” her father said with obtuse benevolence, “did you a great service, I know, a service, however, that I think any decent young man would be proud to do for a courageous girl. Such actions are their own reward. I think your acquaintance could easily stop there unless you wished it otherwise. You would find that the untrained mind of a peasant lad was poor company, and I think he might have reason to resent a withdrawal from friendship more than the fact of no friendship taking place. Perhaps this is what he already feels—from what you say, he sounds a most sensible young fellow. What do you feel about it, Amélie?” he asked, turning towards his wife.

“He would have fought eight angry men for me!” Freya flashed out, “and though he was young they all respected him so much that for his sake they gave up their anger!”

“I think he must be a very fine young man,” her mother said quietly, “and I should be proud to meet him if your father agrees. Shall we not invite him to supper one evening, Johann? This would give us an opportunity of thanking him and unless Freya wished otherwise, this would be the end of the matter.”

“But Amélie—your boys—” her father said anxiously, he pulled himself up short, as if what he left unsaid was already in both their minds.

“If I can stand their being Nazis,” Freya exclaimed angrily “why can’t they stand my having a Communist friend?”

“They have already a good deal to stand,” her father said, still looking at her mother. “Do not let us forget how much!”

To Freya it seemed that her father was making mysterious and futile objections in order to harrow her feelings. “Mother, is it fair?” she demanded, “are the boys always to do what they like, and have what they wish, and I—simply because I am a girl have no such rights—no such freedom?”

“It would not be fair,” her mother agreed. “Dearest,” she added, her eyes fixed entreatingly upon her husband’s face, “let us be fair to the last!”

Freya had never heard her mother use the word “Dearest” to her father before, and it startled her very much. It startled her still more when her father said in a husky voice quite unlike his own: “Amélie, remember—they are your sons!”

“They are also *his*,” her mother said in a voice upon which ice seemed suddenly to have fallen. “That, too, I remember! At least let there be one roof in this land under which a woman has the same rights as a man, and knows herself to be equally valued. If my boys do not already know this—let them learn it now—and if I cannot trust them to be fair to their sister, let me know that upon this point they are not trustworthy!”

“For what they believe in, and are, surely you can trust them?” Johann Roth said with urgent gentleness; “but, my dear, there are not many of us who can be trusted with what we do *not* believe in and are *not*!”

Amélie Roth did not answer this statement directly. She stood looking at her husband in silence. Freya noticed her mother’s beauty for the first time, and saw also for the first time the power that a beautiful woman’s silence can have upon a man who loves her.

Amélie Roth’s youth looked out of her face. She was a tall woman with long, slender limbs; her eyes were a clear grey without a fleck of hazel; her sweet strong lips were like Freya’s, but her mouth was stronger and sweeter than her daughter’s, with what the years had taught her.

It was from her mother that Freya had inherited her clean-cut Greek brow, and the long fine line of her chin and throat: but the spirit within Freya was a fiercer and more active spirit. Amélie Roth never seemed to take up much room, nor to emphasize her presence in any way; even now, the pressure that she used upon her husband was a passive, not an aggressive pressure. Johann Roth felt the intensity of his wife’s feeling enter into him, only because he loved her.

“Freya,” he said, after a long pause, “your mother and I wish you to have freedom in your choice of friends. This young friend of yours may come

here, and it is true that you have the right to see him under your own roof. But this right—well, my child, I confess to you frankly that if you had not wished very much to see your friend again—that for all our sakes I should have asked you to waive it! There are moments when to be in the right is an unnecessary misfortune. Amélie, shall we not immediately put this intention of Freya's, and our acceptance of it, before her brothers? Perhaps if we could talk out this subject frankly and freely together, it would do something to take away its bitterness?"

"That is what I wish," Amélie Roth agreed with quiet firmness, turning towards the door. She did not look at Freya as she passed her, and Freya had an uncomfortable feeling that though her mother had fought for her, and won her battle for her, she was not thinking of her—she was thinking of Olaf and Emil.

CHAPTER VIII

Rudi, trimming a Christmas tree for the first time, was in a pleased and excited frame of mind; even Freya had been told not to help him, except by carrying out his instructions.

He was twelve years old, and while still thinking of the Christmas tree as a mere souvenir of his childhood, some of its old thrill remained; and there was added to it the keener joy of a grave responsibility.

Rudi was trimming the tree not only for his family, and the servants, but for his mother's poor children. They were children of the unemployed, whose parents could afford them nothing; and all their Christmas joy depended upon him.

It was always a tall tree, and their own choice, for year by year the Roth children went to the Maberg estate to choose and cut a tree for themselves.

This year it seemed to Rudi taller and grander than ever, with firmer and straighter boughs.

Rudi stood precariously perched on the top of a step-ladder, with a large basket over his arm, full of ornaments and silvery snow.

At the foot of the tree he had already arranged a small landscape for the Oberammergau Krippe. The Inn at Bethlehem was a bark cavern designed by himself, with a tiny electric lamp behind a silver star. The animals strayed in a lifelike way over the mossy slopes of a green mound; fir trees sheltered the shepherds, made from the smaller branches of his tree; the kings on camels wound gaily up a perilous cardboard path.

In the middle of the cavern lay the haloed Babe in a bark cradle, with His kneeling mother bending over him. Oxen and asses were His guard; and a tiny electric bulb was hidden in moss before the crib. Rudi, looking down on his work with satisfaction, thought that they had never had a better Bethlehem.

Olaf was playing Beethoven at the piano—a terrific body of beautiful sound broke over the room—it might have been the Heavenly host acclaiming its King.

Emil was studying English, a language he hated, almost snowed under by coloured papers, cardboard and ribbons—safe for the moment from teasing.

Rudi's father had come in so quietly that Rudi did not know he was there, until he had to get down to look for some more silver bells.

Then he saw his father, sitting as usual in a deep, shabby armchair, but not smoking his usual pipe. His head too was bowed, as if it was too much trouble to hold it up.

It always made things easier and less anxious in Rudi's ardent mind to know that his father was near him. He did not want his father's advice or help, nor would he have got it in any direct way had he asked for it. His father expected his children to be independent of advice and gave his help more in the nature of a stimulating word or glance than by showing any willingness to share a child's responsibility, but the mere fact of his father's presence gave Rudi an impression of being stronger himself. He no longer felt the need to impress the fact of his age and acquirements upon his brothers. His father would, he knew, always treat him as ageless, and exact the same attitude from them.

It was true that sometimes Rudi envied his father his ability to express the wealth of his mind; for Rudi, feeling his brain swell up and expand with the jungle-swift productiveness of youth, was shackled by being inarticulate. Nevertheless, his envy made no barrier between them, since Rudi was aware of his father's respect for him, and knew that he fully realized a young brain is as good as an old one, though like a new shoe, it pinches its wearer a little, until it has been worn long enough to find expansion.

Rudi heard the door click softly, and saw his mother come into the room; instantly pain entered with her.

Rudi was her youngest child, born late in her maturity out of a great love, so that it was perhaps not surprising that he felt himself almost too seriously a part of her. Freya was too old for him to play with, his brothers older still, and there was no other child in his world, so that his mother, turning herself swiftly into a playfellow to meet his need, was, in his mind, the youngest and the nearest of them all.

She was so near that her pain instantly pricked the bubble of his joy. She paused a moment, looking round her as she always did on entering their family living-room, not to interrupt or disturb, but always to second and reinforce the life that was already there; very cautiously she moved the reading-lamp to a better position for Emil's eyes, then passing the Bechstein,

laid a light hand on Olaf's swinging shoulder, swaying for a moment, as if she were passing into the music with him.

She shot an admiring glance at Rudi, and the Christmas tree, before she settled herself by her little sewing-table and drew out an unfinished frock to work on, for one of her poor children.

These were all usual activities, but the consciousness of pain was not usual.

Rudi gazed at her anxiously from the top of his step-ladder. Had she one of her headaches? She was not sewing peacefully, her thread caught in knots and broke, she used short, jerky movements quite unnatural to her.

Freya came bounding in from the kitchen with a dish of chocolates.

She might very well have tied ribbon round glass animals, and packets of sweets, and handed them up to Rudi; instead of putting the chocolates out of his reach on the distant sideboard and pouncing down at her father's knees, by the stove.

Freya was usually helpful to Rudi, though he never swallowed any advice or interference from her, so that he felt distinctly hurt by her ignoring his marvellous scheme of decoration for the tree. She might at least have noticed that behind the star was a real light.

Nobody moved or spoke, until Olaf had finished the Moonlight Sonata. The last storm of notes died slowly down, and left the room curiously lifeless. The figures of his family might have been waxwork, Rudi thought. No one stirred, and the only sounds were the faint vent of flames in the china stove, or the occasional snap of a branch springing out of his fingers. His mother had stopped sewing.

Johann Roth gravely lifted his heavy head and spoke at last. "Olaf, my son," he said slowly, "your music gives us all great pleasure. You have not had much time to practise lately, yet your tone remains firm, and there is great sympathy and tenderness in your playing. Technique—practice—training—these are all very important parts of any art—no scientist dare underrate them, nevertheless there is a final gift—a gift that lies in the artist himself.

"A work of art is only a work of art when it is created by the spirit of the person himself. You believe this, I know? To a musician, his music is as organic as the heart within his breast. We do well not to underestimate the creative part of us—we do well to trust to it rather than to any other part."

Johann Roth paused, Olaf turned round on his music-stool and faced his stepfather as if he already knew that the Professor's words were but the preface to an opposition of their wills; and as if he were arming himself to withstand both the wisdom and the underlying tenderness, of his father's voice.

Emil glanced up quickly from his English grammar. "Awfully bad people," he announced trenchantly, "are awfully good musicians! Look at Wagner! and the other way round! Only Bach was both—and you aren't going to have more than one Bach, are you? If you're going to trust to people's playing the way they really are, you won't have a leg to stand on, Father."

"Bad—good," said his stepfather a little impatiently; "these blacks and whites have never interested me. Why should we limit ourselves in this manner? There is something beyond good and evil—an intrinsic quality which is the creative mind—and when we reach it we find it safer to deal with than all men's categories. Olaf, I hope that you have the creative mind, and will allow yourself to act from it? We are living in a time, when out of defeat and poverty of heart, man clings to slogans, and sinks his powers into the exhaustion of obedience. He lets his creative mind sleep, since he finds it too much trouble to awaken it. I ask something bigger of you both, than this—and more energetic!

"You are Nazis! You a Brown Shirt—your brother Emil a Storm Trooper! You know that your mother and I have never by word or deed, objected to this symbolism on your part. We accept it, and what it stands for, without criticism.

"You and Emil have found something that your youth can serve. Serve it well then—with our blessing; but beyond this service there is still something more to give, and something that as thinkers, we have a right to demand of you both—this something is tolerance for the opinions of others. Can you not give us this also?"

Olaf was silent. Rudi, turning on his step-ladder to look better at him, was frightened at the strange, set look he saw upon his eldest brother's face. It was a stiffened look, as if someone had dragged a rigid mask over his youthful features. Emil's face too, wore the same patterned expression, as if they had both been turned out of the same mould, and yet they had no physical likeness to each other.

"Father," Olaf said after a long pause, "there are moments in a man's life—as in a country's—when I do not think thought should come first.

Moments when instinct is safer to trust to—instinct following the lead of instant obedience! At such times the heart acts quicker—and more justly than the mind. To think of tolerance at these moments, would be a disgrace. What is it that you are asking us to tolerate? That must be the real point at issue.”

“I am asking you to tolerate a thought entirely different from your own—and an instinct different from your own as well, since I am quite unable to differentiate between thought and instinct.”

A curious sternness had crept into Johann Roth’s voice, his bushy eyebrows met above his shining eyes, and Rudi thought his father looked like a wise old goat peering out from a deep cave.

“These instincts,” Johann Roth went on, “that you divorce from reason, and imagine to be safer, are on the contrary indivisible from thought, and never safe without it. It is the *aim* of a man that makes his character, and let him beware that he is not deceived into thinking his aim other than it is—for whatever his aim is he will follow it with all the powers that he has!

“There is no such thing as character apart from aim. What is this instinct you try to separate from reason? In an animal instinct is the sum of his traditions, forced by emergency to flash into appropriate action. All young animals are fearless until their mother has taught them where danger lies. Their future actions are conditioned by their thoughts upon these dangers. A man’s superiority over an animal—in so far as he is superior—lies in the creative way in which he adjusts himself to each emergency. To follow orders, to accept any prompting blindly from within or from without, is to ignore and to injure this deeper power. Beware, Olaf and Emil, how you blind your creative power, for all man’s progress depends upon it!

“If your mother and I have taught you anything, it has been that each individual has a right to pursue the path he chooses, providing that his actions are not destructive to the same freedom of choice in others. Intolerance is a direct interference with the right of another. No emergency excuses you from exercising tolerance.”

“It is exactly in times of emergency that I dispute that right,” Olaf said firmly. “Emil and I have accepted the rule of our leader. Where he leads, we follow—what he commands we obey. Our freedom lies in our choice of him. We have made this choice and it satisfies us! We are intolerant—and we must be intolerant—of anything or anyone who opposes our leader’s orders.”

A silence fell upon the room. Rudi slowly descended from his ladder, depositing his basket within reach of the shepherds.

This was his business, he felt, as well as Olaf's and Emil's.

He, too, might be called upon to make a choice. Hitherto like his sister, Freya, Rudi had not taken politics seriously. He attended a school kept by a modern-minded teacher, free and creative in his handling of his trust, nor would the Headmaster countenance in his teachers any teaching that showed a political bias.

Still Rudi vaguely knew that there were boys with Nazi parents who adored Hitler; and other boys whose parents were not Nazi, and who feared him.

Rudi sat down soberly upon his cushioned green mound, shifting a lamb or a king every now and then, to give himself countenance, for though none of his family would dispute his right to join in their discussion, the idea of being as grown-up as he might have to be, if he took an active part in it, was slightly unnerving to him.

His mother was the next to speak, she had put away her sewing, and was leaning forward, with the pain Rudi had felt in her heart, now visible in her eyes. In spite of the pain, she spoke in a low, clear voice, very resolutely. "Olaf and Emil," she began, "I cannot speak with the wisdom of your father. I wish that I could, but speak I must—since what I feel—may be important to you. We have been a happy family, in spite of the fact that we are divided by different strains of blood and race. I want you to ask yourselves this: 'Have these differences ever hurt you; until now?' My husband's parents were Jews; until a year ago did you ever suffer from this fact? I do not think that you did! I have felt in your hearts only respect and deep affection for the man I love, and I have felt in my husband's heart only respect and affection for my two older sons. You are my sons. Are Adolf Hitler and his theories more to you than your mother's peace of mind, and the happiness of our family life together? I do not ask you to give up Hitler. What I am asking you is exactly the opposite—it is not to give us up—*for* Hitler. You will say I exaggerate, but I beg of you to ask yourselves this question as if it were *now* the actual truth—before the time comes when it *will* be true! Your father and I do not like tests. We would have put no such questions to you, had not an accident forced us to choose between doing a wrong to one member of our family, or losing our harmony as a home by an open division. My sons, must it come to such a division between us?"

“Well, let’s hear exactly what the test is,” Emil asked brusquely. “We’ve told you our point of view, and we know yours, but as far as I can see, we needn’t do anything about this famous difference of ours, unless you’ve got something concrete up your sleeve? If you have, hadn’t we better know first what it is—and do our deciding about divisions and household peace afterwards?”

Olaf nodded agreement; and then Rudi saw him turn his eyes on Freya—as if he knew already that she was part of this test they were talking about—and Freya, who sat like a frozen bird, clenched and still against her father’s knee, now roused herself to look at Olaf. It was a terribly sad look, Rudi thought, a hard lump rising in his own throat, as if they were saying a long good-bye to each other.

Freya slipped her hand up over her father’s, and grasped it to give herself courage. She spoke before Olaf had had time to think out his answer to their mother.

“You know what Mother means,” she said in a low, urgent voice. “I suppose you must have guessed it—in the *Hütte*—when I didn’t rise to give the Hitler salute? That was when I knew! I knew suddenly—when you all got up—that I couldn’t—and that I *never* could! I don’t believe in Hitler! I don’t know if I’m a Communist or not—but I have a friend who is; and I do believe that to share and share alike working together for the good of the whole people—is better than being a Nazi, with some people keeping a lot of private property in a country where others are nearly starving!

“I believe that to accept all men as brothers is better than simply accepting all Germans as brothers!

“I don’t believe in militarism at all, but I could imagine fighting for universal brotherhood, rather than for Germany, although I love my country better than any other. I believe Hitler means war and nothing else but war, and that National Socialism is cruel in itself—and against thought. It leads back into the past—and not on into the future. It’s not just—the way they treat Communists in our university—quite differently from Nazis! And it’s not just—it’s not even decent to persecute Jews! If Father is a Jew, then I am a Jewess. How could I be a Nazi—even if I wanted to be one?”

“What is being a Jew?” Rudi suddenly demanded. He felt his heart beating hard; and it became more and more difficult to keep down the lump in his throat. He closed his sturdy fists as if he wanted to fight an enemy. He felt as if someone had thrown dirt at his father. Could it be Germany that

was throwing this dirt? Was his own country turning into his father's enemy?

He watched Johann Roth's heavy head turn slowly in his direction, till he faced the child of his old age.

His father fixed upon him a look of bottomless trust and fellowship.

"My boy," he said in his low deep tones, "to be a Jew is to belong to an old harmless race that has lived in every country in the world; and that has enriched every country it has lived in.

"It is to be strong with a strength that has outlived persecutions. It is to be wise against ignorance, honest against piracy, harmless against evil, industrious against idleness, kind against cruelty! It is to belong to a race that has given Europe its religion; its moral law; and much of its science—perhaps even more of its genius—in art, literature and music.

"This is to be a Jew; and you know *now* what is required of you! You have no country but the world; and you inherit nothing but wisdom and brotherhood. I do not say that there are no bad Jews—usurers; cowards; corrupt and unjust persons—but such people are also to be found among Christians. I only say to you this is to be a *good* Jew. Every Jew has this aim brought before him in his youth. He refuses it at his peril; and at his peril he accepts it."

Freya sprang to her feet, her face on fire, her grey eyes sparkling.

"I know now what I am!" she cried. "It is enough for me to be a Jewess! But listen to this—Olaf and Emil—the Communists are my friends, and you—you Nazis—is it too much for you that I am a Jewess? Are you then my enemies?"

Amélie Roth spoke again in her cool, level voice. "You are my daughter," she said. "That should be enough for your brothers." After she spoke, she looked at each of her sons in turn, a piercing and yet loving look; first at Olaf, then at Emil, and last at Rudi. When Rudi met that look in his mother's eyes he stumbled across the room to her, and threw himself against her breast, for he felt suddenly that he was young and that something terrible was happening.

"You are all my sons," his mother said in a voice Rudi had never heard from her lips before; it seemed to ring out through the room like a clear silver bell. "Now choose!"

"But this test!" Emil demanded angrily. "Tell us then—what is it? It isn't that Freya nicknames herself a Jewess! We know she isn't one really—only our step-grandparents were Jews, whatever she likes to call herself! Anyhow, we have no choice in the matter. She can shout it out on the housetops and make us all feel damned uncomfortable—but you can hardly call that *our* choice, can you? It's true the *Führer* seems to have rather a maggot in his head about Jews, but after all, he's human, and we've all got maggots in our heads about something or other, haven't we? Naturally Olaf and I don't particularly like this one, but we're his men—we believe in a new Germany—and we believe that he alone can get it for us—and *with* us! So obey him we must—and in everything—isn't that so, Olaf? We don't need to *want* to persecute Jews, and it isn't likely that we should! But there *are* bad ones, as you've said yourself, Father, and we must trust to Hitler, to use the discipline he thinks any of us need! Isn't that so, Olaf?"

"It is so," Olaf agreed gravely. "What is this test, Mother?"

"Freya's Communist friend is the test," his mother said more quietly, but Rudi felt the desperation and the longing under her quietness, and pressed himself closer against her breast. "Will you agree to accept him, under our roof, in a friendly spirit, as she has accepted Fritz Maberg and your other Nazi friends? If you will, we are still one family and none of our differences need matter. If you will not—we must be divided indeed—for two of our members will have become—unjust."

Johann Roth said in his low, deep voice: "Think well, my sons!"

Freya subsided once more at his feet, but this time she covered her face with her hands, as if she was shutting out her brothers' thoughts.

Rudi withdrew himself from his mother's encircling arm, braced his shoulders and turned to face his brothers. He longed to show them that he was as much a man as they were, and wished that he might have had a uniform with a swastika badge to help him; but what his father had said, stirred in him like flame. It was better to have no badge and to be a Jew like his father. Emil hunched up his shoulders and strolled about the room whistling like a bedraggled bird, trying to keep its spirits up in the rain. Olaf silenced him with a glance.

"I am afraid," he said quietly, "that we cannot accept a Communist, Mother—not even as an acquaintance. I do not see why, since we are your sons and live under your roof, we should prevent your receiving whom you will as a visitor, however much we may regret your choice both for your sake and for Freya's. I need not say how much we shall regret it for our own,

but we must refuse to see or speak to the fellow ourselves. I hope—if we explain fully the difficulties of our position to our party chief, and our fellow Nazis—that they will permit us to remain at home. More than this cannot be asked of us, and even this I cannot promise you. We simply do not see eye to eye with you in this matter. That we love and respect you, you already know; but we are younger than you are—we have stirring in our hearts the vision of our country, once more magnificent and all-powerful—once more leading Europe and the world! To build up this Germany we are ready to make any sacrifice. We must become sufficiently powerful to force the allied governments to break up the treaty of Versailles. This is our first step, and in our eyes the only honourable and serviceable one for any young German. We must destroy the power of the Jew—in spite of the value Father claims for him—since Jews have always been an international and provocative power detrimental to the expansion of our Nordic race.

“We must strengthen ourselves for our purpose by overturning all the less active influences of life. We must accept only the thought that builds us up towards our one purpose. As for Communists, they attack the very elements of our faith, and will be remorselessly exterminated! I beg you both to remember this before you allow Freya to involve herself in such a disastrous acquaintance!

“I am not sorry we have had this open talk together. It is surely better for us all to know where we stand. It can only be tragic if it breaks up our happy relations among ourselves. But why should it do this—why on earth should it?”

“It’s all such rubbish!” Emil shouted aloud. “We *needn’t* be asked questions! We *needn’t* be tested! We’ll leave you alone—if you’ll leave us alone! You’re not Communist yourselves—why behave as such?”

“Ah, my sons,” Johann Roth said with deep sadness, “you think that to break up the Jewish race in Germany—to exterminate your fellow men, who are also Communists, and merely differ from you in political—as the Jew differs from you in religious—thought, is compatible with half your family being Jews and freethinkers? It is true we can be silent in each other’s company—we who have talked half the night through as free men and equals—we can eat together, we can sleep under the same roof—but is this family life as we have hitherto known it? I tell you people cannot love behind locked doors!”

“Freya!” Emil cried accusingly, “all this trouble is your fault! You’re a little beast! Why do you force this wretched peasant boy you’ve only seen

once upon us. Mother—Father—it's so silly! Why don't you force her to give him up? We'd get on all right then as we've always done! A girl in the family always makes trouble!"

"Emil," said his mother sharply, "this is the first time I have heard womanhood insulted by one of my sons! Is this a part of your new faith? You wish to degrade the mothers of the future? Take care then, of the future—for it is the future itself that you will find you have degraded!"

"Hush! hush!" Johann Roth interceded. "His blood is up, Amélie, he could not have meant such a folly! He has always had a kind and generous heart—this Emil of ours! But it acts a little wildly sometimes—sooner too, than his head! They should act together, my son—your heart and your head—then you would easily see that it is not kind to scold your only sister for having been born a sister. Freya has made no trouble. The trouble is already made. Sooner or later an incident of this kind was bound to crop up. It is for us to meet it with great consideration for each other. To do otherwise is to tear at an open wound. I think, Emil, that you already regret that you spoke so harshly to your sister. A girl in our family is three times precious to us all, because we have three sons who are also precious!"

Emil said in a choked voice: "I'm sorry, Father. I oughtn't to have—you've been—I——" and suddenly flinging back his head, as if to shake the tears from his eyes, he dashed out of the room.

Rudi had never seen either of his brothers cry before; and the sight terrified him. Emil, a grown-up man—in tears—his world rocked under him. He looked from his mother to his father and then rushing across the room, flung himself into his father's arms. "I don't want my Christmas tree!" he cried out, shaking with sobs. "I don't want my presents—or anything any more—if poor Olaf and Emil have to be Christians—and only the rest of us are Jews!"

CHAPTER IX

The moment Freya saw Hans standing in the hall, twisting his sheep-skin cap between his hands, and smiling all over his round, ruddy face, she knew that she had been right. This was a friend worth fighting for.

It was Christmas Eve, and a whole holiday. After dinner they were going to the Zoo; Olaf and Emil had gone out for the day, so that there was very little left to be anxious about; still it had been on Freya's mind—ever since she knew that Hans would come—this fear of what her parents would think of Hans.

That was the worst of liking your parents—you minded what they thought of your friends more than what your friends thought of them; and if you didn't like your parents you still minded—for then you minded what your friends thought of your parents rather than what they thought of your friends. It was always difficult for Freya to guess what her mother, for instance, thought of strangers, for Amélie Roth was always kind, and never more or less than kind; but with her father Freya instantly knew.

If people didn't mean what they said, or meant it unintelligently without due consideration, the Professor would either stun them by the sharpness of his reproof, or else sink into a pool of silence so deep that nothing more could be done with him. His silences were not necessarily sullen or adverse, they were merely a form of retreat such as a wily old trout takes when his favourite pool is invaded, and he slips into a hollow beneath a stone, darkening into a shadow. Still, whatever the Professor himself felt, the visitor would be disconcerted by so complete a conversational disappearance. To Freya's intense relief, directly the Professor had been introduced to Hans, he flashed into the conversation with zest. Here was a boy who had never had a mechanical education! He could read, but not quickly or easily, so that the contents of the few books he knew, the Professor soon discerned, had really become a part of his mind. Hans did not know very much, but if he had been put on a desert island he could have made use of every particle of knowledge he possessed.

He had never forgotten anything that he had once learned, nor did he ever confuse one thing with another. Hans, feeling himself understood, was instantly at home with the Professor. Freya's mother he admired too much not to be frightened of her. She was in his eyes, the image of ideal

womanhood—a Freya who had been through the mill of life, and come out shiningly intact. He gazed at her serene and beautiful face with awe, and hardly heard the words she said to him, though he knew that their meaning was altogether kind. About Rudi, there was no difficulty on either side.

Rudi fell in love with Hans at first sight. Here was a man whose chief human interests appeared to be ski-jumping and the care of animals; while to Hans a boy of twelve years old *was* a young animal; and could be treated as such. Freya's family so far as he had yet seen it, was perfectly satisfactory to Hans; but the dining-room was a little startling.

Hans had never in his life before seen a table covered with so many sparkling things. What was all the glass and silver for? Why was there so fine and spotless a white cloth, when food might be spilled on it? and at each one's place a small white cloth also to spread over the knee? Surely this was superfluous!

By never being in a hurry and by watching what the others did with their enormous quantity of eating utensils, before starting off himself, Hans made no serious mistakes, perhaps because he found himself in an atmosphere where no unconscious errors were considered serious.

The dinner itself was wonderful. First a rich meat soup, enough in itself (Hans privately thought) for an entire meal; followed by roast ducklings; potatoes dressed up like cakes and a delicious vegetable he had never before tasted. The *Torte* and fruit that followed were hair-raisingly fine. Hans longed to be able to tell his mother what the *Torte* contained—chocolate, walnuts, cream—these his palate safely registered before it lost count. Coffee followed, unbelievably strong, but alas! in cups so small that after one sip, Hans saw to the bottom!

It was all much grander than Hans had expected, but at the same time much easier; he had known, the moment he saw Freya in the hall, that however great the strain, the ordeal was going to be worth it. Her eyes had been full of an appeal that his heart had leapt to meet.

It was Freya who had been the most afraid; and Hans had guessed in a flash, the cause of her fear. He was a man, and his manhood was an unspoilt thing, in possession of all its faculties. Freya's eyes had asked him what this spirit of manhood might mean to a girl who already liked him; and his answer had been to give her instantly the whole of his kindness.

Women, he believed, should always have kindness from men, not a mean protective kindness, used to guard her for a man's private pleasure, but

a kindness that would meet her in every emergency, without expectation of reward.

Hans had found with his animals that a cow, a mare, or a bitch, needed this extra friendliness for their well-being. One must not do their duties for them, or pet them into scrim-shanking, but a man must show to all female creatures, a responsiveness and respect that he would grudge to another male. Did not women too—of the right sort—have something deeper and more gentle than they gave to each other, to give to men?

He felt it in Freya's smiling eyes across the table, and in the voice of her mother, though Amélie Roth only asked him about his own mother.

Directly the meal was over, Freya and Hans, accompanied by Rudi, started off to the *Tiergarten*. It was a brilliant day, still and full of light.

All the shops were gay with Christmas; even the ironmongers had wreaths of holly and mistletoe among their pots and pans; grocers and confectioners seethed and glittered with sparkling foods and drinks. Butchers cheered whole carcasses of pigs and hares by decorative evergreens; small bunches of holly and mistletoe were archly fastened to ear and tail alike. Every shop had its Christmas tree, or evergreen wreath tied with scarlet ribbon.

Wherever the eye glanced, it met a Madonna and Child, in wood, or paint, or plaster; and where the Christ Child and His mother might well have been considered out of place, sugar lambs and other emblems of the Nativity acted as substitutes.

Snow had fallen the night before, and the roofs and trees sparkled as if a rain of diamonds had descended upon them, out of Heaven.

Freya did not feel that she was walking upon solid earth, a different and lighter substance floated beneath her feet.

The noisy, lurching, cheerful tram that bore down upon them to carry them through the suburbs to the *Tiergarten*, might have been a chariot of fire.

No Christmas streets had ever looked so gay before. They all three clung together on the outside platform of the tram, partly for cheapness, and partly because they loved the dancing air, and their precarious balancing.

Freya hadn't really wanted Rudi to come with them, but now looking down at his shining, happy face, and watching the affection and pride with which he clung to Hans, she felt a deep thrill of satisfaction.

These two creatures that she loved did well to love each other. But did she love Hans? It was as if a cold hand suddenly touched her glowing heart. *Love* Hans? Why, to love him would be absurd—impossible—tragic! He was her friend—but not her lover. This wild gaiety in the air was surely only Christmas? It must not—it could not—be serious!

Freya thrust such a thought from her, but it was not easy to keep it out of her mind. Why did she feel, when Hans laughed into her eyes, that there was no corner of her heart she wished to hide from him?

What was the meaning of this passionate desire to share to the utmost with him every sparkling moment as it slipped irrevocably past them? The very core of her being ran out and became part of the bright substance of the day surely not only because Hans had called it out?

No! No! she repeated reassuringly to herself—this was only the festive atmosphere. Rudi too, felt it, and shared it with them. They all three melted into gales of laughter, as they helped to pull or push stout fellow-passengers on or off the crowded tram. Peasants of all ages and sizes were returning from the Christmas *Markt*, laden down with immense packages; stores; Christmas trees; fatted geese; bundles of evergreen and holly. Every one was exchanging jokes of the finest flavour with the conductor, or saving children and babies from untimely plunges, with screams of laughter.

Only, why did Freya's eyes and hands meet those of Hans, so involuntarily and constantly, why did she feel this steadily increasing bond between their hearts?

The drive was over, before it had begun. Arm in arm, they all three surged into the *Tiergarten*, and danced along its snow-covered paths.

Hans had never seen a wild animal before, except little harmless neighbours like hares and martens; or distant chamois leaping from rock to rock.

Freya and Rudi had to explain everything to him. He didn't know a dromedary when he saw it, and thought its second hump must be an accident or a disease. As if it happened on purpose to please them, a baby dromedary, looking like an untidy rug flung over a towel-horse, had been born a few days earlier.

The baby dromedary—rather unsteady on its feet, and puzzled in its infant mind (if race and blood mean anything at all) to find instead of the hot sand and sun it had a right to expect, a precariously nipping air and a snow carpet—absorbed their attention. His mother stood beside him, looking less

raspingly supercilious than most camels, and peered enquiringly into their faces, to see if what their paperbags held, could be good for one so young.

Hans laughed till he cried over the monkey-house, and could hardly be induced to part from the bears.

Freya had brought with her, besides crusts and sugar, six good oranges; and though Hans couldn't help feeling shocked at wasting such rare food upon animals sufficiently fed on humbler provender provided by the authorities, he had to admit that it was worth a good deal to see the neat rapture, with which the bears clawed open the oranges, and consumed the contents, without losing a drop of juice.

Hans loved the slender, dappled deer, so tame that they took salt and sugar off his hand with their long pink tongues; and he was thrilled by strange birds of tropical brilliance, consenting to peck delicately at breadcrumbs only a yard or two from his feet, so that he could see their jewel-coloured feathers were as real as hair.

"Now!" Freya exclaimed, as the last crumb vanished, and the snow began to glimmer in the falling dusk. "There is still something more to see—the best of all!"

She and Rudi exchanged a significant glance, for they had kept this treat a secret till the last.

"More strange animals?" Hans demanded. "Could there be more—in all the world?" His mind seethed with lions and tigers, and was half-dazed by the soft heated atmosphere of the big hippo's house where all the water creatures lived.

He wanted more time to take in this flood of new impressions; not more animals.

"Yes—but this isn't *only* animals!" Rudi said reassuringly, leading the way between the trees. "In a clearing in this wood there is something better than animals!"

"I see the first star," Hans exclaimed, as the dark beneath the trees deepened. "Let us stop for a moment and wish a wish, but what we wish we must not tell each other for a year and a day or it will not come true." They stood quite still to wish their secret wishes. The sound of voices and laughter had drawn off into the distance; beneath the trees loaded with wreaths of fallen snow, there was no sound, nor was there any other light except the star.

“How large and low it is!” Hans murmured, “and not where I should expect to see a star either—can it *be* a real one at all?”

“Now I’ve wished *my* wish!” said Rudi hurriedly. “Have you wished yours, Freya?”

Freya said quite crossly: “I don’t *know* what I wish!” But why didn’t she know—for surely her heart’s desire was set upon her work—to be sure of being a doctor—that was her heart’s desire; and she had forgotten to wish it!

“I have wished mine,” said Hans tranquilly. “I wished it before I saw the star—but I still wish it—so it cannot make any difference.”

“It is *the* star,” Rudi explained. “The one I copied for my Christmas tree! It has to be hung low enough to be seen, but even though it isn’t exactly a *sky* star, I’m sure it’s lucky enough to wish by!”

The trees parted. In front of them in a small clearing, stood a thatched barn, with an open door.

Inside the barn, the floor was covered with moss and real grass. A fire burned in front of a crib that held the life-sized figure of a child. The Madonna in a blue cloak knelt above it. Live sheep cropped the grass, close to figures of kneeling shepherds; mildeyed oxen munched their hay without astonishment, looking down upon the Babe; a real camel swung its proud, silly head above bedizened kings.

“*Moment!*” a polite attendant muttered to the camel, presenting it with a bundle of hay.

“But they are alive!” Hans whispered, shivering with awe, “it *is* real?” He fell upon his knees before the crib, and Freya knelt quickly by his side.

“Not *quite* real!” Rudi whispered, bending over Hans.

He was not sure that Hans heard what he said, for he was looking at Freya, with eyes full of a strange compelling light.

“Freya,” Hans murmured in a low shaking voice. “Freya, it is always like this!”

Freya said nothing. A strange feeling rose in her breast; like a great wave it washed away a barrier that had always stood between her heart and human love.

This love, between man and woman, had seemed to Freya like a wall in front of a hidden garden. She had often longed to enter the garden but the

walls stood higher than she dared to climb; and now suddenly there were no walls. Nothing held her back from the garden.

The old words of Mary rang through two thousand years, into her listening heart: “Lord be it unto me according to thy word!”

“Joseph is there too,” Hans pointed out excitedly. “Look, he is pushing back the shepherds and the kings! They come too quick! He would like to be alone a little with Mary and the Child!” Slowly they rose to their feet.

The attendant withdrew; the camel bent over the hay; the fire burned on, before the semblance of the Mother and Child.

“You *did* think it real—just for a moment, didn’t you?” Rudi demanded eagerly.

Hans gave a curious little sound, half-way between a laugh and a groan; and stumbled out into the cold darkness.

“Yes,” he muttered aloud, but as if he were speaking to himself rather than to Rudi. “Yes—just for a moment I thought it was real!”

CHAPTER X

It was dark by the time they reached the Kaulbachstrasse but not so dark that they failed to see three tall figures under the street lamp in front of the Roths' house.

These three figures stood below the steps very straight and stiff, as if they were guarding the door.

All three were in Nazi uniform.

"Why," exclaimed Rudi, "there's Olaf, Emil and Fritz! All in a row! What are they up to?"

Freya stopped short. They had been rollicking arm in arm down the Kaulbachstrasse, and although she stood still, Freya did not withdraw her arm from Hans'.

"Let us say good-bye here," she said to Hans. "It's no use your meeting my brothers—they're Nazis!"

Hans stared at her with bewildered eyes. "But—they're your brothers," he said in a puzzled voice. "I don't mind their being Nazis! Why should I—let me see you as far as your door."

"No! don't come any farther! They *do* mind," Freya explained. "It's part of the whole silly thing. Don't come farther! I'd rather you didn't."

"But," Hans said slowly, "I was going to take you home. I must not change my plans because those are your brothers, or because they are Nazis!"

Freya had a cold feeling at the pit of her stomach. Surely her brothers couldn't behave like the wild students she'd heard of, who chased and beat suspected Communists and Jews, in unfrequented streets?

She forced herself to say proudly: "They'd hardly be rude to one of my friends!" but in her secret heart, she doubted if there were any grounds for her pride.

"Oh, come on!" Rudi said, in an excited grown-up voice; a male instinct within him scented a row; and like a young dog he wanted to see the old

ones set to. Here was his new hero about to meet his life-long heroes, and perhaps who knows, to get the better of them!

Rudi suspected Freya's anxiety as an obstacle to the coming fight. Women always tried to stop things, it was in their nature—it would be terrible if Hans turned tail and fled just because Freya wanted him safe! But to his private astonishment, Freya made no further protest. She walked on slowly, but resolutely between them, arm in arm, until they reached the steps.

The three young officers stood stock-still, staring at them. All three had that blank, shut look on their faces, as if the human and individual in their natures had been blotted out.

Freya spoke before she reached them. "Olaf," she said with a note of appeal in her voice, "this is my friend Hans—the one I told you about—who helped me when I saved the hare from the men of St. Johann."

Olaf's expression did not change, he might have been a stone figure from the cathedral; but Fritz Maberg spoke before either of her brothers:

"Freya," he said, "your friend is a Communist. He must not come here. Leave him to us. You and Rudi go indoors."

Rudi, clinging uncertainly to his new hero, saw with horror that Freya had released her hold upon Hans' arm, but she did not go indoors.

"Good-bye, Hans," she said, holding out her hand to him, "I will write to you. This is my father's house, and I have his consent to invite you here. My brothers perhaps do not know this! Please go now. Good night!"

Olaf's voice rang out, like the sudden crack of a whip: "Freya! Rudi!" he called out, "go inside—go at once!"

Rudi, with an anguished glance at his new friend, felt the pull of the years irresistible. This was after all his eldest brother's command. He was inside the door, and heard it shut behind him before he had made up his mind not to obey Olaf. He expected to find Freya with him; when he found himself alone, fear seized him, and his newly-aroused manhood crumbled under it; he rushed upstairs, calling out loudly: "Mother! Mother! Come down and save Hans!"

Freya had not moved, she stood half-way between Hans and her brothers, watching Hans. He looked past her, with incredulous, friendly eyes, towards the three young men. A fight seemed so strange an end to Christmas Eve; but he knew now, that there was going to be a fight. He had

no quarrel with these men. They had done him no wrong and he had actually served their sister. His heart beat heavily with a sullen pain, against such rank injustice, after so much joy.

“What is wrong?” Hans demanded in a low, hoarse voice. “*Meine Herren, was ist los?*”

“Come one step farther and I’ll knock you down,” Fritz Maberg said sternly.

Freya swept round on him, her grey eyes blazing with contempt.

“What an answer!” she exclaimed. “That you have no manners shames you alone! But that you must use force because you have no wits, that is a tribute to your party! Now I know why you are Nazis—*Dummköpfe!*”

At her taunt Emil rushed forward, and struck wildly at Hans, but Freya moved so quickly to intercept him, that his blow fell full on his sister.

Hans swung forward, his fist caught Emil under the chin and dropped him, stunned, into the gutter.

Freya felt herself half-lifted, half-pushed up the stairs, and into the house, but blinded and sick with the force of Emil’s blow, she dragged open the door that had been banged behind her, and would have gone down the steps again, but she felt herself pushed aside gently, while someone from within ran past her.

“Olaf! Emil! Fritz!” she heard her mother’s voice sternly calling.

To Hans it seemed as if an angel with a flaming sword broke up the evil, struggling mass into which he had found himself suddenly wedged. He was bruised and breathless, baffled and enraged, but in spite of his three adversaries, he could have still given a good account of himself, had they not stopped fighting.

“Mother, you should not interfere with us!” Olaf said angrily; “this is not the place or time for women! We are punishing an insult to our home.”

“You are yourself the insult!” Amélie Roth answered in a voice so cold with anger that it quieted them all. “Where women have no time or place there is no time or place for men—only for wild beasts! Three to one—and in uniform! What do you represent—gangsters? Let this young man go! I apologize to him for the behaviour of my sons! Good night, Hans!”

Hans, looking into her clear eyes, saw pity and anger burning together in a single flame. “I am sorry,” he muttered, “this had to happen—I am sorry! I

thank you. I meant no offence!”

“You have committed no offence,” Amélie Roth said quietly. “Good night.”

He turned, and was swallowed up in the darkness, before he remembered that to Freya, who had been struck for him, he had given no farewell. It did not matter, he told himself with passionate pride, she had been struck for him, and this blow accepted for his sake, bound them together for ever.

When his footsteps had died away down the long street, Amélie Roth turned once more to the three young men.

“You need stand here no longer,” she told them with quiet scorn, “for there seems no other single enemy in sight. Emil, since I see your nose is bleeding, you had better go in and attend to it. Fritz Maberg, I think I shall not invite you to our Christmas supper to-night. It would be out of place. Olaf, I should be grateful if you would spare me a few minutes of your time.”

Fritz saluted, with what he hoped was crushing dignity, and marched off in the opposite direction from Hans.

Emil, whose nose was bleeding profusely, hastily retreated into the bathroom.

Olaf followed his mother into the house.

“Which of you was it who struck your sister?” Amélie Roth demanded in dry tones.

“I’m all right!” Freya hastily announced. “No one struck me. I rushed in!”

“I am glad that you admit the truth,” Olaf said sternly, “for there need have been no fight, except for your foolish words and worse behaviour. Mother, you have spoken to me to-night as if I were a child! You have wounded my manhood, and for a matter of which you know nothing. Emil and I acted so as to protect you and my stepfather. I would have liked to spare your feelings, although you have not spared ours, but it is not safe to keep these matters from you any longer since you will not trust us! If you persist in allowing Communists in this house—you risk our stepfather’s career. His hospital will be taken from him!”

“Let us come in here,” Frau Roth said, opening the door of the living-room, “and Freya also. Up till now there have been no secrets in this house, but I do not wish Rudi or the servants to hear what you are saying. It is too

discreditable! Rudi, go upstairs and help your brother Emil—be content to know that no great harm has been done to your sister or to your new friend—that is all that concerns you!”

Frau Roth opened the door of the living-room. There was no one inside, but the Christmas tree had just been lit; it was alive with candles, shining and glittering in the dark.

Olaf could not bear to look at the Christmas tree for the feeling of all his childhood weakened the inflexible purpose in his heart; he turned and faced his mother, with his back to the shining tree.

Freya sank, shaken and trembling, into the nearest chair. Frau Roth stood by the table covered with Christmas presents not yet opened. “Now,” she said, “what do you mean by this danger to your father? From whom does it come? What is it? And how can your hurting and insulting your sister’s guest, assist us, as a family, to avoid it?”

Olaf’s dignity shivered within him. His mother’s soul was too like his own. A traitor rose in his heart, a feeling separate from his purpose, that was on the side of her courage and her anger.

“I will tell you,” he said slowly and dispassionately, after a long pause, “all that I can, Mother! But that you have already judged me before you knew the facts, makes it hard for me to speak to you. This is no play-acting—no children’s game that we are living through—it is the change of a crushed but valiant people, into a great and crushing power—such a power as they have never yet wielded—a power that is going to transform the world! To learn to wield this power, we must transform ourselves! Many things that were once allowed us—things that were even admirable in themselves—must now be suppressed and forbidden, in order to perfect our new strength.

“It is true that this house is our stepfather’s—he has a right to invite his guests, and while we are under his roof we should not object. But suppose that we happen to know that if one of these guests is a Communist, the party will mark our stepfather down as a suspect? His name discloses his Jewish stigma. Must we add another stigma to our household? If we ourselves can answer for you, that this house is favourable and loyal to the Nazi regime—and after the elections there will be no other power than Hitler’s—we may yet save our father! We have always loved him, but more than this we cannot do for him. And Freya, who is his child as well as yours, is preventing our trying to save him. She must give up this young man, Mother. Or Father will take the consequences! I don’t say anything about the

danger to herself—but it exists. Freya wants to be a doctor. Well—we Nazis do not believe in men’s professions for women—there will be, if no women doctors, at least far fewer, under our regime—what Freya is risking now is her own future, as well as my father’s!”

Amélie Roth sat down, and stared straight before her, with blank, unseeing eyes.

“Her future too—” she said in a low voice.

“But Father—” Freya cried out. “Olaf, they couldn’t do *Father* any harm! Surely you forget—all Europe knows him! All humanity owes him a debt! Such men as Father are beyond politics!”

“There is nothing above the State—nor is anyone of importance unless he is a servant of the State,” Olaf said incisively. “It is unfortunate, but we cannot deny that our stepfather has the Jewish stigma. It stands against our leader’s faith in the Nordic race. The kind of power the Jewish race has produced is inimical to ours—and there must be no other power than ours!”

“If your leader were dying of tuberculosis, would he refuse to be cured by my husband’s discovery, or find it inimical to the human race?” his mother asked with weary irony. “Olaf—I think not! What power can safely rest in such a tyranny? Have you accepted unquestionably this obedience to evil—with your whole heart? I have always respected my sons. I find it hard to understand!”

“Hitler’s power is not evil,” Olaf said firmly, “it will be the salvation of our German race!”

“Perhaps no power is in itself evil,” his mother agreed with a weary sigh, “but all power, Olaf, can be used evilly! To destroy the best gifts of life—wisdom, science, human relationships, the security of free souls—can you not see that nothing is worth such destruction? Can you divide a goal from the methods you use to reach it? Think of this evening—that young man you struck at is not only your sister’s friend and a guest of ours, he is in himself the very kind of young man you have always liked and respected. He has put us all under an obligation by the help he gave your sister—and you fall upon him like a wild cat, and then tell me it is to save your father’s and Freya’s careers! Besides, your father has not been asked to make his choice. You have decided to choose for him. How do you know that he would be willing to give up the rights of an invited guest even to save his career? You are young to make such a decision for him!”

“But, Mother,” Olaf urged, “you still will not—or cannot—understand! Surely Father’s career *is* worth more to the world, and to his country, than the chance call of a Communist peasant boy on Freya? You say that I gave you no choice—in a sense that is true—but I am a Nazi! I have information that you know nothing about. . . . Can you not trust me? You say that you respect me—is not respect founded upon trust?”

“My son, I have up till now trusted you,” Amélie Roth said with unrelenting firmness, “but what I have trusted you for has been to make up your mind for yourself, not to make up mine for me! Nor for your father! This ‘Trust Hitler! Trust von Papen! Trust Hindenburg!’—it is always the same cry in our poor country! You remember what came of ‘Trust the Kaiser!’ and it will come again—for we are on the same road, and it will lead to the same place! We must live to see another and more terrible debacle—perhaps involving the world! For we have no right whatever to trust others for what we should decide for ourselves. The faith that is in us—and our actions from it—should be our own affair. Only infants and the insane should trust others, and they should do so only because they have not learned to be reliable!

“It is true that you may have information that we are not allowed. If you cannot share it with us, it is unfortunate, both for you, and for us; but it would be worse than unfortunate, it would be impertinent for you to try to act in our place. This we must continue to do for ourselves—and face the consequences! While you are under our roof you cannot choose our guests, or strike others—whom we have chosen—from the doorstep. I will consult with my husband about this new danger in our choice of friends, and when he has decided what line to take I shall expect you to act upon it, or to leave this house!”

Freya could not bear to look at their faces—they were so sharpened by pain—and so alike.

“Mother,” she said desperately, “you have said that it is for us to choose our acts and our faith! Well, I’ve chosen mine! I won’t ask Hans to this house again. If one of my own family can turn on him and beat him—if Father might lose his hospital, should Hans be known to visit here—why then, it’s only sensible to keep him away! I give in about that, Olaf—and I give you my word that Hans shall never come here again. But Hans is my business. I know you like him, Mother—and I know Father likes him—that is all I wanted! He’s my friend, and I’ll be responsible for the rest. I’ll meet him where and when I like—but never here. Only, Olaf—Olaf, stay with us! Everything’s horrible—but, Mother, Olaf can’t help it—I believe he hates it

really more than any of us *can* hate it. It's only that he thinks—to do what he hates is right!”

For a moment, Freya saw Olaf's face soften—the old tenderness flashed into his eyes, his lips trembled and then set into a hard, straight line.

“It is horrible indeed,” he said quietly, “for you and Mother not to respect our aims, and not to be able, when the time comes, to share the glory of their fulfilment. It is worse than horrible, for it is dangerous. And in this danger that you are bringing upon yourselves, and upon Father, we may not be able to be of service to you!

“It is, however, something Freya, that you consent not to meet this fellow under our roof—and I can only hope that for your own sake you will extend your common sense a little further, and give up seeing him at all!”

The door opened softly and Rudi put an anxious head round it.

“Mother, Olaf”—he reminded them—“the children have arrived! Emil's nose has stopped bleeding, and Father's just coming in! Isn't it time to start the Christmas tree?”

CHAPTER XI

Freya admitted to herself that it wasn't very nice of her to creep away into the woods beneath the *Alpe* where the Mabergs were holding their first picnic of the year.

Olaf and Sophie had already slipped away together; an importunate long-winded peasant was grappling successfully with Fritz. This gave Freya her chance. She stole away without warning or excuse. She wanted to catch—in the net of her spread senses—every thread of whispering sound, and every flicker of the laughing light—not to keep them for herself, but to share them with Hans, since not to share them with him was to lose their full significance. To leave Hans just now had been like splitting something open the terms of whose very existence depended on its remaining shut. To give up the four whole holidays, out of which Hans could at least have managed two and the evenings of the other two, was practically a form of suicide; nobody, unless they were in love themselves, could understand what such a parting meant, and if you didn't want them to understand, naturally you couldn't explain. How awful, if Freya had refused to go with Olaf, to think of her mother saying to herself: "Ah—it's that boy Hans then, after all!"

How more awful to have had Olaf point out to her the risk everybody was running all round—but surely, and as long as old Hindenburg held out against Hitler, they were still safe?

It was just the kind of weather for Schloss Maberg and so perfect a day that Freya felt she could almost forgive her family for persuading her to come. The sun poured through the larches, not yet green, but with their feathery plumage stirring within its sheath. The trees hid Freya from sight. From a niche of rock above a stream, she could look through the little wood, to where the kingcups poured down the south slope in a golden flood—almost to the castle walls.

Wherever the snow had melted from the grey winter grass, little waxen pink crocuses stood up, and trembled to feel themselves alive. They were like frail children, Freya thought, not able to stand alone, but forcibly pulled to their feet by their strong old nurse, the sun.

The larches clinging to the steep hillside, moved in the wind like a flock of birds, wheeling against the piercing azure of the sky.

The river glittered and flickered in the valley, two thousand feet below.

The noon bell, from a toy village hidden in a fold of the hills, swung its deep voice up into the air. The penetrated silence closed itself slowly round Freya again, like a shell. Sometimes, with a little trail of sound, a bee boomed past her, on one of his industrious predatory errands; or a startled bird coming upon Freya's seated figure at a height he hadn't supposed human beings would break out, gave a surprised flap, changing his course in mid-air, to a still safer level.

Schloss Maberg rose, white and glistening, on its eyelid of level ground; but looking down at it through the straight larch stems, Freya felt no longer oppressed with its stiff old strength, its ninety-nine rooms, and air of tough finality. The Schloss didn't oppress her, because she knew now that she was seeing it for the last time.

She hadn't known till now, that this was what her visit meant. The certainty deepened and deepened in her, with every breath of the keen, sweet air. She wouldn't see Schloss Maberg ever again—and she didn't care—and that was why she could enjoy it now. She might have had to see it every spring, and watch the kingcups spread their golden sea against its walls, the larches preen their feathery plumage for the plunge they never took. She too might have been tethered to that hillside, always feeling her wings, and always knowing that she could never fly away.

Had this been what her mother wished her to make this visit for—to set against the sharp, broken feeling of being apart from Hans—the value of her old security?

It was conceivable, Freya admitted to herself, that if there had been no Hans, she might have accepted the stout and sober shelter of the Schloss. All through history—like the honey-laden bees—the Schloss had been useful as well as predatory.

It hadn't climbed up out of the valley, only to rob and pounce on the unwary, but also to shelter and protect the long-stretched ribbon of the valley beneath, studded with its toy villages.

Freya was willing to admit to herself the incalculable and courageous turn the feudal system had done the human race; unfortunately, like the ice and snow of a hard winter, the feudal system had lasted a good deal too long; and was now retarding growth. Still the hardest winter could not hold back the spring forever! Nor need she feel herself imprisoned by it. The farm on the Wetterstein was free.

Freya had longed to spend her holiday there with Hans' people; but Hans had said: "Wait a little! Till the snows melt and the flowers are out! When the *Alpen* are alive again, and everything is out of doors—you'll see it will be fine! And I want you to see it first only when it *is* fine!"

Freya could understand Hans being a little afraid of her meeting his people. He loved his mother; his eldest brother Karl, and the younger half-witted one, Michel, who was such an angel with all the animals; but Hans knew that they were not like Freya's family.

There was his cousin Anna, for instance, who wasn't educated at all, but who lived with them, and helped his mother, because she had a hare-lip and probably wouldn't marry; and had also—rather unfortunately perhaps—produced a little boy, whose father had been one of their herdsman.

They all loved little Franz, who was only six, and nobody minded the herdsman having gone away, leaving no address behind him.

There wasn't an easy-chair in the house; you ate every day the same food; and if people talked it was always to say the same things, though there was the radio to listen to in the evenings.

For himself, Hans had explained, the farm on the Wetterstein was what he had always been used to, but he didn't know whether Freya might not find the life hard, especially in winter.

Freya twisted round on her rock, so that she could look straight down into the courtyard of Schloss Maberg.

It wasn't as different as all that, she told herself a little defensively. The interests and activities of a Schloss and a farm were very much alike. On a farm you did whatever there was to do, and in the Schloss you simply arranged what was to be done for you. You possessed cows—you did not milk them. You kept pigeons, but somebody else cleaned the pigeon-house. You owned *Wiesen* and *Wälder*, but somebody else tilled the fields and cut your timber. Still, Freya reminded herself, there were even at Schloss Maberg activities enough.

All winter long, Freya would have seen to it that the pigeons didn't freeze and were well fed enough to enjoy their exquisite antics on the terracotta roofs.

Every morning, when Freya awoke, she would have watched them preening and bowing, retreating and advancing over their snow-covered ballroom, carrying on their immemorial, pink-clawed coquetties, in the face of any and every human change. In the autumn, Freya would have

superintended the wood-cutting, and the building up of the high patterned wall of winter logs. She and Fritz would have prompted each other, in their perpetual care of cattle, fields, fodder, markets, timber and drainage; with sport intervening at the right seasons. Even Freya's special knowledge, though she wouldn't have been able to use it as a profession, wouldn't have been allowed to grow rusty for want of use. There were no doctors nearer than the distant valley villages, almost inaccessible in winter.

The Maberg peasants were seldom ill, but there were always accidents and childbirth; old age and death.

Freya would have had children too—fortunate, happy children, with secure futures—not children whose lives, from the start, would be suppressed and attacked because their mother had Jewish blood in her veins and their father was a Communist.

It wasn't even as if Freya didn't care for Fritz. She did care for him very much indeed. He was her childhood's friend; and the first man who had shown her the powers and attraction of her womanhood. She hadn't liked it when she ran away from him just now. It gave her a guilty feeling, leaving Fritz in the lurch, but she had felt that she *had* to do it. She must be alone with Hans—to prepare, with his image free in her heart—the harvesting of the golden day.

Freya couldn't spare any more time, or any more attention for Fritz; but she hadn't liked to think of his disappointed face when the boring old peasant relaxed his grip, and Fritz, turning with eagerness to seek her company, would find that she had fled.

Fritz wasn't like Olaf, polished and fine, obedient to gallant dreams; but he was nice-looking, in a large healthy way, tall and springy, with clear eyes and ruddy cheeks; and the sort of kindness and courage that goes with a good deal of animal spirits and no imagination.

If he was unkind, he didn't mean to be, and if he was kind, Freya rather cruelly reflected, his kindness was as accidental as its opposite.

Even when he meant to be kind, he never took the trouble to find out first the sort of kindness that the person he intended to benefit, happened to want.

Any woman who married Fritz would have to live her own life—just as his mother, the Gräfin, had lived hers; not with, but simply in the near neighborhood of, her husband.

Graf von Maberg had been a general in the Bavarian army; but not one of those who brought off one of the splendid German victories that had

meant nothing. He was stout and good-natured, with small twinkling eyes like a rogue elephant's. The Graf was full of jokes, war experiences and the kind of clumsy tact that enables big, blustering people to get their own way without forcing them to see what other people have to pay for it.

Fritz was nicer than his father, better-looking than the Graf had ever been, and not nearly so blustering. Still, when he was fifty, he would, Freya thought, have managed to deceive himself and others a good many times.

Nor would Freya ever be able to take Fritz with the agreeable lightness evinced for her husband by the Graf's Hungarian wife. The Gräfin von Maberg was profoundly, almost ideally selfish; but on a scale so small, that the vigour of her set desires seldom interfered with those of her husband.

From morning till night, the Gräfin did exactly, and only, what she chose; and as she always chose the same things and had them done for her—or did them herself—at the same time, and in the same way, they were always calculable; and seldom obstructive to the Graf.

There was a story that one evening, when the Schloss had been discovered on fire, the Gräfin had gone to bed as usual, and merely asked, when she was called at her accustomed hour next morning, if the fire had been put out? She would not, however, be an interfering mother-in-law; all she would expect of her son's wife would be to have her children in the furthest wing, and to keep them quiet.

Suddenly she heard the crushings and crashings of some creature in the woods below her, and Fritz' voice boomed out, calling her name, and yodelling for her—though he might have the sense to realize that if Freya had wanted to be with him, she wouldn't have run away without telling him where she could be found.

CHAPTER XII

Shouting and panting, Fritz burst out of the wood, and caught sight of Freya on her rock. He was so full of gratification at his success that he entirely overlooked Freya's having run away from him.

There was no need for her to make any excuses. He had found her, whether she liked it or not.

"Ha ha!" he cried, "there you are! I've had a tremendous hunt, but finally I remembered that you particularly liked sitting alone on the rock over the waterfall. I've got tremendous news for you!" he added, as he sank complacently at her feet. "Olaf and Sophie are engaged to be married! Isn't it splendid?"

Freya felt every sight and sound pass into complete blankness. She might have been a blown bubble in an empty world. Fritz himself—the Schloss beneath them—the inner ecstasy of her dream of Hans—all these things bled themselves white and lost their existence for Freya, because of the deprivation she felt take slow possession of her heart.

It was not only that if Olaf married Sophie, Freya would lose him; she took that for granted in any marriage. The ideal trust and love that had bound them together was unsharable, any primal claim must break it up. Still there were girls who would have given Olaf the same gifts that Freya had given him, and received from him equal gifts, and Freya could have had a share and a pride in such love. But she knew that Sophie could not trust or be trusted, for such a bond can only exist when upon both sides there is something to rely on.

Freya knew that there was nothing in Sophie to rely on but the sliding scale of her vanity. Along this—now up—now down—her passion for Olaf would shift—rising or falling as it was puffed up by praise, or let down by his disillusionment.

Olaf would get no real love from such a wife, instead his own real love would find itself torn and scratched to shreds by Sophie's small, relentless fingers. In their disharmony neither would have heart or thought to spare for any third person.

In a sense Freya had been prepared for this marriage, but she had always had a hope that Olaf's very slowness in declaring his love, voiced a doubt of its object. While he wasn't actually bound—he was free; and into this freedom a new love might dawn, and blot out his captive tenderness for Sophie.

Freya herself might have helped him to blot it out, but since she had known Hans, she had ceased to keep in touch with Olaf. She blamed herself bitterly now, for having been a surly, sluggish companion, full of restraints and irritabilities. She had opened wide the gap for Sophie's insidious presence.

With veiled eyes, and set lips, Freya gazed past Fritz, down into the long valley that led through the mountains to Tirol. "I am to blame!" Freya's bruised heart cried. "What is Hans to me now? He is new! He cannot hold the past! With Olaf everything that I have had, and loved, is gone! Those distant mountains are beautiful—but they are not *my* mountains! I never climbed their slopes—or raced down them—knowing each flaw and obstacle, and how to take it, or how to avoid it! How can I bear this strange life without Olaf?" She felt like someone stripped suddenly naked and exposed to a biting, friendless air.

Fritz laid a large, possessive hand upon her knee. "Look here, Freya," he stammered, "why don't we—? Why not us? You know what I mean! We've always had the idea—haven't we? Let's be engaged too!"

It was strange and cold to face a new world—but to be invited back into the tunnel out of which you came—was this more tempting? Only for a moment Freya thought with yearning of the old security, then she moved away from Fritz' hand, as if his touch had scorched her. "Oh no! No!" she cried vehemently, "never!—that is unthinkable any more!" Seeing the pain and astonishment in his eyes, her heart misgave her for her cruelty. "Don't be so sorry, Fritz!" she pleaded. "It isn't only that I couldn't! But you wouldn't like it if I could! It's all right—Olaf and Sophie—all right, I mean, from your family's point of view. He's a von Röhn—but I'm only a Jewess! Such people are scarecrows now—but they'll become worse—they'll become the crows themselves—creatures only to be scared—if Hitler comes to power! You are better free from such a family! I have my work. I am content. It is true that you have been my best friend. I suppose we can go on being friends—though even that may stop—lately there have been people who have cut us! But I shan't ever forget what you and Schloss Maberg have been in my life. Just before you came, I was looking at the castle. I was seeing how beautiful—how strong it is—and I was remembering that all

through history it had helped the poor; and how all the little villages in the valley below had looked to the Schloss—in storm or trouble—flood or avalanche—and never turned to it in vain. I was thinking that was what you would always stand for—and I was glad, but I knew—oh, Fritz, I knew that I should never be a part of it—I couldn't be!"

"But why couldn't you?" Fritz demanded, drawing his heavy, flaxen eyebrows together, and staring up at her, half puzzled and half angry. "It's nonsense about the race question! I mean nonsense for us Mabergs—the wife I take won't be menaced. I promise you that! Besides, you're only a fourth part Jew—and no one will question it after we're married—with Olaf von Röhn as your half-brother—and your mother a Trattenbach! you'll be safe as houses! Put that idea away from you, Freya—and my mother and father will make no objections. They know too well that we owe Maberg itself to your Grandfather Roth! They aren't even strongly Nazi—they would, between ourselves, far rather have had Schleicher than that plebeian Austrian, for head of the state—they're merely quite willing to accept any ruling idea in a sensible spirit. What is best for Germany will be best for them—and it *is* best for all of us! The mere fact that Hitler is a man of the people keeps the people quiet!"

"And you do not see that is an unworthy trick," Freya exclaimed angrily, "to keep the people quiet! Why should they be kept quiet? They *are* the people—their voice should be heard! What is Germany—but her people? It is for each person to decide what they think best for themselves, and for their country. For myself I know that marriage with you is *not* best—since I do not love you—not in that way, Fritz!"

"Girls don't understand love to start with—not the good ones," Fritz explained impatiently, "but I could easily make you. I have only not tried because there was no particular hurry—but as I see it now, it would be best to get married before the new regime is started. Besides, lately I've felt in a hurry! I want you, Freya!" Again his hands were on her, they reached up this time to her waist and gripped her, as a careless boy might snatch at a bird. Freya dragged herself away, rigid with anger.

"Leave me alone!" she said fiercely. "Why is it to be always what *you* want? I have told you, I *don't* want you! When I say I do—and I never shall—that would be the time to begin to take me for granted! Not before!"

"But why don't you want me?" Fritz demanded incredulously, letting his hands drop, but regarding her with eyes in which self-pity fought with anger. "It's from my point of view unhealthy and quite ridiculous not to! What can

you have against me? I'm Olaf's best friend! I'm a Maberg! and your first lover! Haven't I always preferred you to other girls? Is it that you have heard tales against me in Munich? I may have had little adventures with common town girls—to keep myself going—but I'm no Don Juan—and I swear to you, Freya, that there's no serious love affair against me! Don't you believe me?"

"What difference does it make," Freya said impatiently, "whether I believe you or not—since I don't care for you? For your own sake I should think you might keep away from common girls! And if I *did* take you seriously, I should infinitely prefer your having had real, rather than unreal love affairs. What is there to make light of in love? It is painful! And also a great joy—but it has to be both great *and* painful to be lasting. I see it in my parents—they love each other deeply—and for always—and with confidence. But I am sure they have had pain from it—and I am sure that neither of them loved either each other, or anyone else—lightly. When you love lightly, it is yourself that you love!"

"That may be so for women," Fritz admitted tolerantly, "indeed it sounds just the idea a girl fit to be a wife should hold. Men are totally different—they can feel both sorts of love—one after the other—or even both at once, though I myself believe that after marriage there should be no occasion for such outbreaks. Your parents can't be argued from—they're exceptional people—it was the oddest thing in the world your mother marrying out of her class, but of course, your father is a famous man. But, Freya, although I am willing to admit to you that I have had a few little affairs, I want you to understand that I am also capable of profound attachment. I have always meant to marry you, for instance, ever since I was twelve years old—perhaps earlier! Whenever I think of marriage—of a home and children—it is you—and only you—that I see! And now that you've grown so pretty, I have thought of those things oftener and I have wanted you more!"

Freya smiled. How childish Fritz was, she thought, with his ignorant certainties about himself, with his sly activities off the line of his code, and his unsteady centre of desire.

Hans was not like that—whatever lay before him he looked at with the same eyes. He dealt patiently with facts as they came. If you trusted Hans, he could not fail you, because he would always be in readiness for trust.

Freya's slow smile deceived the watchful, predatory Fritz—he snatched a sudden kiss from her before she knew what he was doing. Freya had forgotten that she was playing with a hunter—she had supposed that she was

a human being at the heart of a serious crisis—taking counsel with another human being.

She pushed Fritz so savagely from her that he nearly fell over into the stream. “It’s hard to forgive you when you do such things!” she cried, shivering with physical rage. “How can you want a kiss I don’t want to give you!”

“You smiled!” Fritz exclaimed ruefully.

“Yes, I smiled!” Freya answered bitterly; “and must a smile mean that I want to be kissed? What a grave universe you expect me to live in! Am I never to smile again, because you want to make a joke of love? Leave me alone! I, at any rate, am in earnest! And remember, whatever *you* want, I don’t want *you*—and never shall!”

She saw with relief, by Fritz’ crestfallen face, and by his reseating himself farther away from her with dignified resentment, that his vanity had been deeply wounded.

It was her only defence, so that Freya could not regret having used it, though she was sorry for Fritz, since hurt vanity is one of the cruellest of mortal wounds.

“I don’t believe you couldn’t learn to love me,” Fritz said doggedly, “not unless you care for someone else! Any girl—loved as I love you—wouldn’t refuse a man, without having another one she loved better up her sleeve! I’m not repulsive to look at, am I? I know I’m not to other women! You used to say you liked dancing with me!”

“I like dancing with anyone who knows how to dance, and how to behave themselves while dancing,” Freya said incisively, “and I can quite believe other girls fall for you. Girls don’t lose their hearts to men in bunches though! I am separate in my feelings, and such as they are, I am quite sure about them. You ask me if I am not in love with someone else? I think you have a right to ask such a question—and so I must tell you that I think I am!”

“*Mein Gott!*” Fritz cried in real anguish; “another man—Freya, not that infernal Communist peasant we started to thrash last Christmas?—I thought that was the last of him! You can’t mean such a thing seriously! Why, your own people, however mad, would never put up with such a *gaffe*! And Olaf and Sophie—what a blow against their happiness! I say nothing of myself. But think how I have always respected you!”

"I have just seen how you respect me!" Freya said ironically. "I did not find it very impressive. At least your infernal Communist peasant doesn't play such pranks. As for my people, they would always give me freedom of choice, and always respect my choice when I had chosen. I have not yet made it—I am not betrothed to Hans—I may never be. I have merely told you that I think I am in love with him. For his feelings I have as yet no right to speak. As for Olaf and Sophie nothing I can do can really hurt either of them. They can refuse to know my husband—if they dislike him or his politics and they can also refuse to know me—as you pointed out, I am only half-sister to Olaf. Now let us not talk about such things, any more, for they are finished between us; and this is my last visit to Maberg, which I shall always love. I was thinking, when you came up through the trees, that I would carry it with me always wherever I went—the larches swinging away from the hillside—the castle shining through their tall, stiff stems—and all the valley laughing in this golden air! And I shall always see the kingcups crowding down the slopes to the castle walls, the little pink crocuses, with their frail cups veined with light—and, dear Fritz, I shall always remember the fun we have had together, over so many years! Let us forget that we have quarrelled now, and only remember what a happy—and rather nice little boy and girl we shall have to think about—when we are old!"

"Your last visit?" Fritz stammered, his eyes full of sudden tears, and for the first time, Freya saw an unashamed reality spring from his heart. Her own heart beat in instant sympathy, and she realized how hard it is for a woman to refuse any man's love. She and Fritz had had something together after all—some lovely, unconscious thing had belonged to them in common. Now it was dying and could never rise again—it must go—with the glow of noon—the burning blue of the March sky, and all their playful hours—these would pass, and the bond between them must also pass. Freya held her breath for a moment, out of respect for their childhood's passing—then she put her hand in Fritz' and gave him a strong, quick pressure.

"It was beautiful," she said, "thank you—thank you, dear Fritz—for all that we have had together! Let us be grateful to each other always. Whatever comes, we have this safe. No one can take it from us—not even we ourselves."

Fritz stared at her, and Freya watched the reality die out of his eyes, till they darkened with reproach and self-love.

"I shall never forgive you!" he said angrily; "and it is all your fault! You are refusing the best I had to offer! And you are refusing me for a low, mountain peasant—beneath you even to think about! It is degrading to us

both—and to all who have ever loved you! It makes me ashamed *for* you—and *of* you!”

“Then you should be glad I have refused you!” Freya exclaimed with equal anger. “For a woman you are ashamed of you could hardly wish for a wife. As for those who really love me—you have no right to answer for them. They will answer for themselves. And if they all condemn me, still it does not matter—for I have done nothing to be ashamed of! I have a respect for the man I love, and therefore I respect myself.”

“God damn you both!” Fritz shouted at her in a sudden explosion of rage, and dashed headlong down the hillside into the shelter of the wood.

Freya looked after him for a long time, till the anger in her heart died slowly down. Her mind sank away from him altogether, and set into the lasting pain of Olaf’s engagement. It was Olaf’s marriage—not her refusal of Fritz—that would break up her life.

CHAPTER XIII

The Gräfin laid her knitting down on her lap. She was knitting a baby's vest, with very soft fleecy wool; and she always used particularly smooth and easy needles. Looking at the opening door, she shuddered slightly.

As it was such an exceptionally warm spring day, the Gräfin was sitting in the big hall of the Schloss, by an open log fire. Still, she thought, Freya need not have flung the door so wide open, when she came in. "A ramshackle child," thought the Gräfin. "All that is wanted of any woman is to have nice quiet ways. I am glad that my Sophie—whatever else she may be guilty of—and fortunately one never knows nowadays what the young do—was brought up to come in and out of a room as quietly as a cat. I shouldn't wonder if this noisy young creature makes Fritz a bad wife! But perhaps she will not marry him at all—although he is so sure that she will. Fritz is like his father, who always takes for granted that what he wants will happen, without taking any of the proper steps to bring it about. It would appear that such men are difficult to get on with—but this is not so—it is men who take steps to get what they want who begin to be dangerous and—when they take the right steps—though this seldom happens—they become very dangerous!" Freya crossed the hall in a few impetuous strides. The little Gräfin, who disliked all swift and sudden movements, looked up at her, and blinked.

Her lips curved pleasantly, but her eyes, although they had blinked, never changed their expression. They resembled those of a cat that has made up its mind in what direction it is going, and will certainly, somehow or other, get there.

"Ah, my dear," the Gräfin said, "a nice day, is it not—a slight draught from the door—but that is almost pleasant—good of you to shut it though! Where are the others?"

Freya sank down on a stool in front of the Gräfin. She had never understood the Gräfin, although Freya supposed her to be extraordinarily gentle and good; and this was the opinion of all the Gräfin's acquaintances. Even her servants adored the Gräfin, though they stood in some awe of her. Never did she raise her voice to them, nor did she exact strict attention as to where food went after it had once left the table—what happened behind doors—or even what took place through open windows. Should family

complications occur, the Gräfin never scolded, but she always sent troublesome servants serenely away. No one ever had a harsh word from the Gräfin. Her servants did what she told them, and she always made her wishes kindly and pleasantly distinct, or else the servants immediately departed, treated to the last with the utmost consideration.

The famous Dowager Empress of China never suggested suicide to offensive members of her state more engagingly than the Gräfin Maberg gave notice to her servants; she conferred upon the act of dismissal the charm of a welcome, but she had never been known—however heartfelt the repentance—to take a notice back.

“I think Olaf and Sophie are fishing,” Freya said hesitatingly; “they went to the lake after lunch—and I—I took a walk by myself!” She faltered, and a tell-tale colour flooded her face. The Gräfin carefully observed Freya’s confusion, although she proceeded to help the stupidly transparent girl out of it.

“A very pleasant, sensible thing to do,” she said cordially. “I often take my walks by myself. Indeed, I prefer them alone. One does not lose one’s breath while walking uphill, as one does when conversation is demanded of one. Besides, people with long legs walk too fast for me; and in my family all the legs (except those of Sophie, who dislikes exercise) *are* too long. You, my dear, walk very fast indeed, I fear I should find it most difficult to keep up with you!”

Freya frowned; a peculiarity in talking with the Gräfin was, that whenever you began to talk seriously or intended to do so, the Gräfin, while retaining a seriousness of tone, reduced the subject itself to triviality.

Freya wanted to talk seriously. She had known the Gräfin superficially all her life; loved her with uncritical enthusiasm, and believed her to be a fount of secret wisdom.

She took a minute—thinking how she could start afresh, and tap this secret fount of wisdom—and while Freya thought, she looked about her at the familiar things she never expected to see again.

The house was very still. A bar of late sunshine stretched low, across the hall; the rest of it was in shadow; but Freya’s memories, as well as her eyes, pierced the shadowy vagueness; she knew what everything was and where it stood.

The Mabergs had very few precious things; they had collected and left behind them through the centuries glass cases full of plaster fish; stuffed

birds, heads of chamois, dotted about unevenly; suits of rusty armour, and many family portraits inexpensively painted by mediocre artists.

Here and there, the light caught a dash of scarlet from the painted tasselled hat of a cardinal; or gleamed upon a favourite weapon hung low upon the wall.

There had always been cardinals and warriors in the Maberg family, but all that was left of them were the red hats in the portraits, and the disused weapons on the walls. No Maberg had ever done anything very significant either with the hats or the weapons.

Until Freya spoke again, the Gräfin, who was never idle, picked up her knitting and placidly went on with it.

“Fritz came after me,” Freya forced herself at last to say haltingly against the silence, “he—he found me, though I hadn’t meant him to!”

“He has always liked you very much,” the Gräfin observed pleasantly, “and he will not like you less, that you have grown prettier lately, and are not particularly fond of him. It is always strange to me how few young girls grasp the fact that nothing ever attracts a man so much, as a pretty girl thinking of someone else!”

Freya flushed again, this time more deeply.

“How do you know I’m thinking of someone else?” she demanded, fixing the Gräfin with her clear grey eyes, behind which nothing had ever been successfully hidden.

“I did not know it,” assured the Gräfin tranquilly, “until you yourself told me just now. I merely suspected it, because one is usually prepared to fall in love with a tolerable young man, who has a passion for one, unless one is already in love with another tolerable young man, whom one does not believe to be indifferent. One must at least *suppose* a bird to be in the bush before one drops the bird in the hand! Such forethought is but natural in the least intelligent young person and I always expect natural things to take place.

“I admit that I am occasionally disappointed, because some young girls and young men prefer to be unnatural—they think it is less trouble—which it is not—or else more interesting—though if it is interesting at all, it is so only to themselves. A marriage that comes off, for instance, must be more interesting—even to the participants—than a marriage that does not—*nicht wahr?* Fritz is, of course, very natural—so, thank God, is Sophie—though

she is quieter about it. I am glad that she and Olaf have at last made up their minds, I shall look upon their marriage as a good match for both of them!"

"But," stammered Freya, "what makes you think they *are* engaged? Fritz has only just told me—it happened at the picnic—and you weren't there! I don't believe anyone else knows!"

"I am never at picnics," the Gräfin said with a faint but perceptible shudder. "The ground was not meant to be sat upon in its raw state, I feel sure, and I prefer my food without either caterpillars or draughts! Still, picnics have their uses for the young and I had expected that with all that space about him, Olaf would probably bring matters to a head. Nor would it surprise me very much, my dear, should you tell me that Fritz had proposed to you—and that you had refused him—since had you accepted him, you would scarcely have come indoors by yourself to talk to me. The young rarely seek the old, unless things do *not* come off. Nor is it altogether surprising that old people have learned to put two and two together, since these matters come up fairly often, with similar results, in any lifetime. Your mother, it is true, seldom makes observations upon the conduct of those about her, and if you will allow me to say so, I think it is a pity, since without these little exertions in spiritual accountancy one does not arrive at who has stolen the spoons."

Freya would have liked to assert that people did *not* steal spoons from her mother, but this she knew was not precisely true, what was true (though this did not occur to her until too late), was that the question of stolen spoons did not rank as highly in her mother's mind—as other questions that never ranked at all—in a mind so small and meticulous as the Gräfin's.

"Well, anyhow, you happen to be right," Freya rather grudgingly admitted. "I *did* refuse Fritz; and the other two *are* engaged! I'm terribly sorry I had to refuse Fritz, Gräfin, but I don't exactly love him—only in the way I love you *all*, and always shall! But I awfully *like* Fritz—and perhaps it hasn't been very fair—not to be sure sooner that I couldn't! and to come here so often! Anyhow, I think I oughtn't to come here any more—or not for an awfully long time—till we're old, and it's all different!" Freya's voice shook. It is not easy for a young and ardent person to give up a home where she has run free since childhood.

Freya loved even the heads of the chamois, and their unblinking brown glass eyes. Once she had hidden—very uncomfortably for hours—in one of the suits of armour in the hall, and she had been forbidden more than once to play with the weapons, or to take them down from the walls.

Although sometimes the endless empty rooms, the wide stone staircases and galleries with queer sounds and unexplained footsteps had oppressed and frightened her, nevertheless all the magic of the past—the dreams and lives of long ago—were as enchanting to her thrilled mind as the dancing motes in the last long beam of sunlight across the darkening hall.

The Castle was so close to the mountain that it was almost a part of it, and once beyond the door, nothing stood between Freya and the animals and sports she loved. “Perhaps,” she thought to herself “it must feel like this to be banished—that is what is happening to me now—though it’s happening because *I* wish it, not because *they* do—but I am losing a country. I don’t know where I’m going, nor what my new country will do with me. But this I know, that I have chosen to leave this—and that I would choose to leave it again.”

“Ah,” the Gräfin murmured in her sweet, vague voice, “well, it is hard, my dear, for a young man to be refused. Very hard for our poor Fritz—who can scarcely have expected it. No doubt you have made up your mind. You are very young, and have had no experience of life whatever, but that of course is only a reason the more for you to feel quite sure that you know your own feelings, and that whatever they tell you to do must be right! I may say, however, that for quite different reasons, no doubt, I happen to agree with you. You are the *garçon* type; and probably should *not* marry at all. In this wonderful new modern world, there are plenty of openings for young girls like yourself, who prefer to lead uncertain lives—doing things that men generally do rather better than they do. Or else in order to show off their superiority, such girls do *really* do their work better than the men themselves—nor should that always be very difficult; but what men cannot do at all—produce and rear children—these girls, though it is their *métier*—flatly refuse! Still I do not agree with the Nazis—who would limit women to their homes—for I have always found that people only do well what they wish to do, and if I were a man I should prefer a wife who enjoyed such a function, and all that it implies, to one who was yearning to add up figures in a bank or to set a broken leg. Therefore I should make it as easy as possible for such girls to do these things, and as difficult as possible for them to marry me! Fritz, unfortunately, is of a different opinion!”

“But Gräfin,” Freya urged, “I don’t see why girls shouldn’t do both—life is quicker than it used to be—and there is more time! But what I want to know is, do you think Fritz will be so *terribly* unhappy?—for *long*? I know he is now! He rushed off into the woods by himself, looking so heartbroken. Do you think I could go home before he comes back? It will be so hard for

him to see Olaf and Sophie so happy. And harder still for him to see me—when I have made him so unhappy. I dare say I should have made him a bad wife, but he isn't thinking of that now—he's thinking that he wants me—and that I don't want him!"

The Gräfin blinked again. She disliked emotions almost as much as she disliked making fresh plans. She had already told the cook how many people to expect for dinner, and the coachmen to use the horses in the fields since they would not be wanted for the house. Nevertheless there was something in what this aggravating child, on the verge of tears, had said. Fritz, on his return, would be in the condition of a bear with a sore head; and he would wish to communicate this condition to all those about him. By removing the source of his provocation the Gräfin could evade any additional soreness. She made up her mind to change her plans, and sighed, with annoyance; she was the more annoyed when Freya—mistaking her sigh for sympathy—seized her hand and kissed it. "Badly bred," the Gräfin thought, gently withdrawing her hand to pick up a dropped stitch, "rowdy and affectionate—what an escape! The mother's face and head—the father's blood! Why let a man propose if you intend to refuse him? Such a *bêtise*! I dare say this poor little idiot is capable of not knowing when a man is in love with her or not! Or that if he is—it makes no difference whatever—whether she marries him or any other lover—since at the end of a year or two, all will be exactly the same—and the less emotion there is meanwhile, the better! That romantic Trattenbach mother is to blame! But why should I make *her* ignorant child—wiser? It is the best possible thing for Fritz that Freya *has* refused him. She has a certain amount of money, it is true, but there is that silly stigma attaching to her name, and even without it, she is a wilful and excitable young thing. She will never make a decent match, I feel sure, and will always be a difficulty—but she will not—*Gott sei Dank*—be a difficulty of *mine*!"

Aloud the Gräfin said gently: "Certainly, my dear child. What you suggest is very considerate. We will leave our poor Fritz to get over his growing pains, without extra pangs! You shall go home at once—I think I hear Olaf's and Sophie's voices coming in from the stables. And since the men are probably about to have their supper, and have already finished their day's work—Olaf can drive you to the station. There is a train at six o'clock that will get you to Munich at half-past nine; and Olaf can telephone to your mother after your departure, so that she may expect you back to-night. Do not feel unhappy! To have received a good offer of marriage, whether you have accepted it or not, should be a satisfaction to any sensible girl—in fact, in some ways, if you have refused it, it should be an even greater satisfaction

—since you have no consequences to face from your decision! You will also be surprised to see how quickly our poor Fritz recovers. An unhappy love affair in a young man's career is a mere flea-bite. There are thousands of pretty girls who want a good home—for one that does not. Of course, it will annoy Fritz not to have succeeded in getting his own way, but have you yet found any permanent harm come from such an annoyance? In that case we should all be dead—a week or less after birth. As to your never seeing Schloss Maberg again, you will—unless the Nazis decide to choose our visiting lists for us—come as often as you like—once our poor Fritz has discovered another suitable or even unsuitable—fancy. Ah, my dear children,” the Gräfin cried, once more laying down her knitting, to welcome Olaf and Sophie—“your happiness is written in your faces, and your joy is already in my heart!”

The Gräfin drew Sophie's head towards her breast, with a caressing gesture, and smiled a really pleased and approving smile at Olaf, over her child's head. Without seeming to do so, she also glanced at the big clock in the hall, and saw that she just had time to dismiss them all comfortably before her husband and two cronies came in for bridge.

The Gräfin was moved, but she need not be moved for very long. She even noticed how extraordinarily becoming joy was to a fair girl in early youth. Sophie was scarcely pretty—only just passable—according to her mother's rather severe standard of good looks, but at this crisis in her life Sophie looked as fresh and radiant as a newly-opened lily, surprised to feel the sun. Life blew upon her with so beneficent a breath, that Sophie's amazement was a wholly joyous one. She had, for the moment, all that she wanted, and this, since it was also what the Gräfin wanted, greatly touched her mother. Tears rose to the Gräfin's eyes, and her small features quivered slightly, as a rabbit's quiver, when a particularly succulent lettuce leaf comes within its reach.

It added to the Gräfin's pleasure that for a moment those strangely handsome von Röhn—and Roth—children looked quite plain. They were staring hard at each other—not at all relieved or proud, as they should have been, at such an excellent connection having been achieved for their family—but as if they had lost something precious that they would never find again.

CHAPTER XIV

The big lumbering carriage-horse looked like a cart-horse between the shafts of the high dog-cart; there was very little light, and the roads pitted with holes and heavy with mud needed all of Olaf's wits for driving. He accepted the few unsteady words of congratulation that Freya wrenched out of herself, with gloomy rigidity. Neither were thinking of what they said; only of the parting that had already taken place between them.

Once more under the station lights they looked into each other's eyes with searching tenderness only to find—to their young, intolerant spirits—that the gulf between them was impassable.

The train, into which Olaf hastily helped to wedge Freya, was filled to the brim with late skiers from the glaciers, and the first hikers of the spring, swaying and clinging together down the long corridor, poising insecurely on their feet, or sitting on each other's knees and laps, laughing and lurching.

The train moved off with a long whining jerk—Freya caught a last glimpse of Olaf standing rigid and white-faced under the station lamp, his hand raised in stiff salute. "He is not real any more," Freya thought bitterly, "he has become a gesture!" Then the dark swallowed him; and Freya felt more alone than she had ever felt in her life before. The friendly sport crowd round her did nothing to shake this stubborn sense of isolation, indeed their presence heightened it; for soon they broke into the "*Horst Wessel*" song. They did not sing as those who love music sing, their minds were set sternly upon the purpose of the song, their ears were inattentive to all but the volume of sound they were producing. It was the cry of a pack, rather than a song.

Freya kept her lips shut. She had not been able to get a seat, and hung from a steel strap, with a man, and another girl.

She became aware that they resented the separate action of her silence; and soon their resentment spread to the rest of the carriage; Freya's near neighbours stared at her threateningly, like dogs turning over in their minds a hostile scent.

"That's no foreigner," she heard the man say to the girl in an undertone. "I know her face—it's a Jewess—that young Roth from the—*Spital*! No wonder she doesn't sing our birth song!"

Nothing worse, however, than being nearly jostled off her feet happened, but the noise increased as if the element of hostility caused by Freya's silence, provoked a larger volume of sound. The carriage was filled with blue mist from innumerable cigarettes, through this cloud the young weather-beaten faces stood out with a threatening significance. As the little stations flickered up out of the darkness and the train jerked to a standstill, the carriage grew emptier, other girls found seats, but Freya found none. Their fellowship was shut against her like a wall. Something within Freya felt weakened by their hostile solidarity, outwardly she resisted it and kept her eyes clear of anxiety or appeal, her figure firm and erect. "He who cannot stand firm against hate has no integrity," her father had once said to her. Freya reminded herself of these words, and thought: "He told me because he foresaw that I should have to stand against hate!"

If only, Freya thought, there had been a reason for this hate. Or if she could have shared it. But it was difficult to stand firm against the open frank young faces of fellow sportsmen. They too, loved the vigorous air and the high regions of the mountains; they had been taught the same toughness and endurance that Freya had learned; and were braced by the same courage.

What did the words of the "*Horst Wessel*" signify, and why should it break up the spirit of fellowship?

The train jolted its slow way through the bare shadowy fields and leafless woods, into the outskirts of the city. The open spaces grew over-built and narrowed down. The soft darkness was interrupted by the speckled lights of little suburban houses; and all the while, the journey took on for Freya more and more the quality of a nightmare. The fear in her heart deepened—she felt as the trapped hare must have felt at St. Johann when the men closed in about her with their sticks.

The entrance to the west station was like the grey shell of a tomb. A harsh white light flooded the terminus. Hardly waiting for the train to stop, the army of youth broke out of it like a gathered wave. Skis and ski-sticks carried like lances above the hatless blond heads of men and girls; rucksacks on their backs; their coloured shirts open at the throat, the sport army swept serenely on its way, as automatic and compact as a regiment of infantry.

A Storm Trooper broke through their ranks, hurrying down the platform to scan the emptying carriages, and Freya saw—to her astonishment—that it was Emil.

He stopped at her carriage door, calling her name. The current of the crowd changed round her. They made way politely for Freya to join this

soldier friend. Freya had instantly assumed an identity—she knew a Storm Trooper. There was no difficulty in seeing her now, or in recognizing that she was a fellow human being. The man who had nearly succeeded in pushing her off the strap she was hanging on, now handed her out her suitcase with a friendly smile.

“Emil,” Freya demanded breathlessly, “why did you come to meet me? Did Olaf tell you?”

Emil did not answer her immediately. He looked anxious and preoccupied. As they entered the main hall of the station he leant over her and said in an undertone: “Talk of indifferent things until we are clear!” He raised his voice to add: “It’s all right! Olaf rang me up, and told me to expect you by this train—so as I was on my way home from barracks, I thought I would pick you up.”

Freya waited; nor did she ask why she had to wait, for suddenly she knew.

This crowd about them had a new sense. It was not safe to speak of anything but trivialities. Personal life had been shaken open; and they were surrounded by alert and hostile ears. They waited till the crowd melted away, on foot, or by bus and tram; then Emil drew Freya into a quiet side street, unlit except for an occasional street lamp, and practically empty. Emil spoke at last in a low voice, leaning towards her: “No one’s hurt or ill or anything,” he began reassuringly, “but rather a horrible thing has happened, that’s why I came, to tell you before you got home. Last night the Brown Shirts came—two men I didn’t know—they knocked at the door at about two or three o’clock in the morning. They were armed with whips and bayonets. It was the night control. They have to go about like that, you know. They were perfectly courteous to the old man. They only wanted to search the house for weapons or subversive literature. And I was there—so it was quite all right! Freya, you needn’t stop and stiffen up like a shot rabbit! Nothing awful happened. The old man’s quite all right. He behaved splendidly—took them into his study and made them sit down and smoke, while he hunted round for his papers—talking to them all the time in his jolly, friendly way. Mother brought in some beer, and it all passed off beautifully. Only—well, Mother didn’t want to spoil your holiday and Olaf’s, so we didn’t ring you up to tell you. Besides, one has to be careful what one says on a phone. It’s all right I tell you, Freya! It’s *quite* all right!” Freya could not go on walking. She stopped dead under a street lamp. Her heart felt like a bird trying to beat its way out of a strange room. Whips and

bayonets! Her father—the greatest scientific name in Munich— —! What were the Brown Shirts looking for? Who was their enemy?

The light on Emil's face showed her the concern he was trying to hide. "But what does it *mean*, Emil?" she stammered. "What do they think Father has *done*?"

Emil seized her arm, and drew her back into the friendly darkness. "Well—that's just it!" he explained nervously. "I dare say it doesn't mean an awful lot! It may not mean anything! Anyhow, they were perfectly satisfied for the moment. Father had no papers they disliked, only some foreign scientific journals, and a book or two that they said might have to be burned later on—so they took them away—just to be on the safe side, but there was nothing they really minded. Father told them that he was quite prepared to fit into the Nazi regime and serve it to the best of his power. He has nothing against the Hitler government, and believes in accepting Public Authority in a law-abiding spirit. He told them he was not interested in Communism—that's always something, because of course, people believe Father—they see that he means things. But then he went on to say—and I couldn't stop him—that he had always worked for life and peace."

"And why should you stop him?" Freya demanded. "Are life and peace wrong things to work for?"

Her heart beat more strongly now, and the blood ran faster in her veins; but she was glad that they had reached the friendly shelter of the English gardens. The ringing sound of footsteps on the stone pavement, and the way Emil lowered his voice for every passer-by, disconcerted her. She found that she wanted to get out of reach of the tasteless, sinister light of the white arc-lamps, although she had never noticed them before, into the mild, unhindered darkness of the trees. Emil ignored her question. They walked on for a minute or two in silence. When they reached the low parapet of a bridge across the central stream, Emil stopped, and leaning over it, looked down into the dark, swift-flowing water. "Look here!" he said urgently. "It's all awfully serious, Freya—too serious for us to quarrel about. Listen, and think it out for yourself! One of the Brown Shirts said: 'What's this about your daughter—running about with a Communist? She's been seen at cafés—and in the streets—and in cinemas with him—always the same one, that Hans Breitner—the bricklayer. You say, and your stepsons, who are both good Nazis, declare that you are no Communist. But if you don't hold with them, why not stop this girl of yours from mixing herself up in things she's no concern with? Why not keep her at home—like any other good German girl in the kitchen?' Father said: 'Is it forbidden to be friends with people, all

of whose views you do not share?" The Brown Shirt answered: "It is forbidden to consort with Communists—or if you do—you take the risk!"

"I told the captain afterwards, that this fellow was a mere acquaintance of yours and never came under our roof, but unfortunately Father overheard me, and said: 'I have not forbidden it. Your sister may invite any of her friends here—unless indeed, it is against the law—a law we must obey. And that, of course, I should have to explain to her.' The Brown Shirts didn't like this, because naturally, a good Nazi-minded citizen does not need a law when he once understands the *Führer's* wishes—they *are* law. They reminded Father that he was a Jew, and that since the *Führer* came into power, all state officials must be pure Nordic, and they explained that if he didn't resign from his hospital appointment, he would be made to, but that in view of his services to science and to Germany, he might go on working in the lab. and would receive his full retiring pension. Only he must continue to live in Germany, of course, and put his discoveries at the service of the Reich.

"I believe, Freya, they will do all they can to protect us—partly because of Olaf and me—and partly, too, because they quite see that Father might be useful to them. If only you'll help us by not putting their backs up! Oh, Freya, why can't you be sensible and join us? Give up Hans! Think what it means *not* to! Think of Father! Mother has been quite different since this has happened. You'll see, when you get home. She looks—queer and old! And she doesn't smile any more! I can't bear to look at her. Early this morning, I went by car to see the von Röhns—I wanted to find out if they'd stand by us—after all, they're my uncles and aunts. I thought perhaps they might. We've never asked a favour of them before. I know Mother hates them. Still—I was frightened for Father—I didn't ask leave, I just went!"

"Those horrible von Röhns?" Freya cried aghast. "Oh, Emil, how could you? Why, they loathe us all!"

"Yes," Emil agreed gloomily, "I know, but whether they loathe us or not—their brother was my father and Olaf's—they've got to think of that! We *are* von Röhns—a disgrace to *us* is a disgrace to them! I told them so. They said they'd help Olaf and me, at any time—and take us in, if we wanted a roof—but never would they help Father or Mother or their children—not if they were begging their bread, or threatened with the axe! They spoke hideously of Mother—and I swore I'd never go near them again! Oh, Freya, it's all so horrible—I mean, it all *will* be so horrible—if we don't stick together, and work for the regime!"

Freya could not see Emil's face, but she could see that his whole strong young body drooped despairingly against the parapet, and she heard the break in his voice. "Emil," she cried, throwing her arms round him, "Emil, you *do* belong to us!"

"I belong to *her*," he stammered between his sobs, "and oh, Freya, I love our old man! It's more than just with my blood and my bones! *He's understood me!* Whenever I've got into scrapes he's always made me feel I *could* get out of them. He isn't my father! I know all that; but he's my *friend!* And if we're not careful, he'll get sent into a camp. I oughtn't to tell you, because even Mother doesn't know that—nor the old man himself. But they told Olaf and me they *might* have to do it—if we can't *prove* he won't have anything to do with Social Democrats or Communists!"

"But he *is* a Social Democrat!" Freya cried in dismay, "and he's always been one. You see, Emil, that's what he's *like*. How can you stop being what you're *like*?"

"He can't—but he might hold his tongue about it!" Emil groaned; "dear old chap, he hasn't any fear. He was full of jokes last night, and made them all laugh. But they have to do their duty. They told me, when I saw them alone, that you'd got to keep away from Hans—or Father'd have to take the consequences!"

"Father!" Freya said with bitter anger. "Why Father? I alone am answerable—for what concerns me alone!"

"Ah—*not* alone!" Emil reminded her, "girls are not alone. They are answerable to their family, and the family is held responsible for them!" They were both silent—Emil because he dared not add another word, and Freya because she was too angry to speak.

The stream below the bridge ran fast, but with little sound. They knew its every curve and eddy, for Sunday after Sunday all through their childhood, they had come to feed the ducks from its banks. The bare willows threaded themselves closer into the dusk; beyond them lay a still black pool picked out by a distant gleam of light.

Freya felt the darkness settling down upon her heart, with the weight of water.

She had thought at Maberg, that she was facing the greatest crisis of her life, but now she looked back upon it as a trivial affair. Whether she married Fritz or not—only she and Fritz would be the worse or the better for it—no one else's life or security was at stake.

Now she stood on the verge of a gulf into which, if she plunged, she might draw her whole family after her; and if she did not take this plunge, she must repudiate the current of her being, for Freya knew now that Hans was menaced, that the whole current of her being set towards him.

"If I give Hans up," she said at last, in quiet, even tones, "Emil—he will have had nothing—not even love!"

"Well, what is this love?" Emil demanded harshly. "A man and a girl in each other's arms? A sleep comrade! A partner, if you like—to share children and meals with. Why one man or one girl rather than another? Far bigger and higher things than our little tastes and wishes are at stake now. Can you not wait for someone else's arms?"

Freya said half to Emil, and half to the dark water, where close against the reeds the sleeping ducks had folded themselves into a deeper darkness: "It is easy—until you feel it—to belittle love! If what you say were all of it! But it is his heart and not his arms that I am held by! I cannot throw away his heart! Listen, Emil, suppose Hans were to be killed—and in this madness we are living through perhaps he will be killed for a nothing, for the mere wish to share money and work, and to obey the people, rather than this Austrian—my heart will go down into the grave with Hans and if he lives, it is out of his heart that I shall build up my life. You cannot desert love, or get rid of it! For it is part of your breath—your blood—and your tears! Is it my fault if wicked men persecute and injure my family because of me? You say that a girl cannot act alone. That is another of the Nazi lies. Girls, like men, live and die alone; they bear children alone; and it is alone that their hearts are broken. No one can rob us of our loneliness! If Father had thought I ought to give up Hans for our home, I know he would not have said to the Brown Shirts that I was free to ask Hans under his roof. He made his choice then—and showed me what mine should be. I cannot try to save him behind his back!"

"I don't believe you're sane!" Emil said roughly. "You risk our old man's being tortured—for that's what the camps amount to! We've got to have a *solid* country behind us to face the world with. We must accept our *Führer's* laws wholeheartedly. I don't altogether approve of torture, I admit, but what am I? Only a boy without power or knowledge—my value lies in my complete obedience. My country claims this unquestioning service, and I must put it before any man. But, Freya, after all, I am a human being. That is my tragedy! I have a heart—I love Father and Mother! I don't want to see our home broken up. I'd give up any girl in the world to keep things going!"

"You would let a girl, who loved and trusted you, be killed—without the strength of your love to support her?" Freya asked incredulously, "but, Emil, I do not think you would—not for all the world! Let us go home now. We'll keep all these things to ourselves, you and I. One thing I can promise you: whatever I do, won't be done lightly. Nor without thinking what harm it may do Father. I'll not see Hans till I can find a safe way. One can always find a way if one wants to, I think. Isn't that what courage is for? But if there is no such way—why, Emil, we can but die—that must be better, surely, than giving in!"

Emil drew her hand through his arm again. "Freya," he said in a low voice, "I've often quarrelled with you—sometimes I've hated you! I didn't think it fair that Olaf, who's my whole brother, should love you—his half-sister—better than me. But now that everything is so dangerous, there's something I want you to know, I've always—even when I hated you most—admired you!"

Freya listened in silence, her mind and heart felt too oppressed for pleasure, but it occurred to her that one day, when she was old, she might be glad to know *why* Emil had always tried to hurt her—and that behind these pin-pricks had been no hatred—but a wound.

"Another thing," he pleaded anxiously, suiting his steps to hers, "I've envied your father, too. Mother hasn't ever said anything nice to me about mine, and I think she would have said it, you know, Freya, if there'd been anything nice to say. Olaf thinks he was a hero, but I never have; and this morning I heard for the first time—from the von Röhns—that he wasn't killed on the battlefield, as we always thought—he died of an illness at home. I've always wanted what you've had—after all, you are the old man's flesh and blood child—and I'm *not*. Freya, even though he's a Jew—I wish I *were* his child!"

"That's the nicest thing you've ever said," Freya whispered back, pressing his arm against her side. "If there was anything to forgive you for—well, I'd forgive you for that! But there isn't. I see all those things didn't matter as much as we thought they did, when we were safe. But you needn't feel badly about Olaf, he doesn't love me any more now—I hadn't meant to tell you, because although I can't think of it so much just now as I'd expected to—his *not* loving me must matter always. It can't be helped. In a sense Olaf is too good to be true—do you know what I mean?—he can't give way in any direction—he's so sure he's right. And you see, that makes him sure I'm wrong. It doesn't matter to you that I'm wrong—I mean, you can still like me—but Olaf can't!"

“If he wants people to be perfect he’d better not marry Sophie,” Emil said with conviction. “She cheats over her bridge scores; and she’s got no real pluck!”

“He won’t find it out,” Freya explained. “She’s much cleverer than I am about getting away with her faults—they don’t stick out of her, like mine do out of me—besides, in a sense, she *will* do what he wants or what she makes him think he wants. I’ve disagreed with Olaf too much, you see—I’ve refused Fritz!”

Emil sighed a prolonged and gloomy sigh. “Just our luck,” he muttered, “that you won’t marry Fritz. *Mein Gott*, what a solution that would have been!”

They turned out of the gardens into the road that led into the Kaulbachstrasse, and stood for a moment at the door of their house.

The night was not cold, and there was a scent of spring in the air; the moon, as thin as a leaf, rose ice-white and visionary above the chimney-pots.

The lights within the room gleamed through the heavy curtains with a happy, human glow.

When they opened the door, Rudi rushed out upon them, his eyes sparkling with glee.

“Freya! Freya!” he cried, “have you heard? Soldiers came here last night—Brown Shirts—actually in my room! I was in bed. With whips and bayonets! Mother was there too, so it was all right! Think what you’ve missed! They made jokes with me, and were ever so nice.”

Freya saw her mother standing behind Rudi at the foot of the stairs. For a brief moment she didn’t recognize her as her mother.

It was absurd, of course, because Amélie Roth looked nearly the same as usual. Only when a face has always been curved and soft—and sets suddenly into straight lines, and hardens—the whole expression is changed.

Freya saw, in her mother’s eyes, such a strange and hungry love—a light so fierce and so unlike her usual composed benevolence—that running forward into her arms, a pang of fear shot through her. Why was her mother’s love for her suddenly so fierce and so sad?

CHAPTER XV

Freya felt her mother's arms close about her, as if she could never let her go, but almost immediately Frau Roth's grip relaxed, and she spoke with her usual tranquillity. "Have you had your dinner, my dear?" she asked. "I have kept some hot for you in the kitchen, or if you prefer a glass of milk in your room—there is plenty for you!"

"Yes—yes," Freya agreed impatiently. "Milk, I mean—not anything to eat—where's Father?"

"In his study reading his third-year men's theses," Frau Roth told her, "but I think that he would like to see you," she added, answering the question in Freya's eyes.

Instantly Freya shot past her mother, up the stairs. She felt she could not get quickly enough to her father's room; she wanted to tear the door down with her hands. Freya did not pause to knock, but flinging it wide open, dashed upon the quiet figure seated at his desk, in panic wildness.

She flung her arms about him, laying her head against his breast. What Emil had said to her was true. She was his flesh and blood child; his hands were like her own hands to her; the blood that raced through her heart and brain was his blood; the eyes that looked at her now with love and wisdom, had created her out of that love and wisdom. If they took her father from her, she would lose the roots of her being.

"Daddy! Daddy!" she cried over and over again, and then fiercely: "What *can* they do to you? What *will* they do? Can't it be stopped?"

Her father pushed her gently into a low chair by his side, and shoving his spectacles up into his thick mane of grey—where he so often lost them—he said: "One question at a time, my child, even for a sage—that is enough! What can they do to me? Not a great deal for you see, what I care for most is already done. It is beyond the power of any dictator to kill a scientific truth. Dictators die, and the laws of that reckless being, man, change with his growth but knowledge once set loose into this world of ours, goes on for ever.

"It has been my great privilege to set loose a little knowledge; not a great deal, but a little, and if they should choose to prevent my old mind from

functioning further, then what I have already done must suffice for me—I shall know that those who come after me will discover more! The Jews—and that is the race to which I am proud to belong—have never believed very deeply in human immortality. They believe—and I with them—that the Immortality of God is of greater value than the immortality of man. Now, since the word ‘God’ means to me—and to all other scientists and artists—the spirit of Truth—to believe in *that* Immortality, and to have worked for it, is sufficient. Therefore the answer to your question ‘What can the Nazis do to me?’ is ‘Not very much!’ I cannot say ‘Nothing!’ for they might destroy my family happiness—this would be bad; and there is one worse thing they might do. It has sometimes occurred to me, my daughter, that you have in you the makings of a scientist—they might discourage you, my child, into impatience—that would be the worst thing they could do to me. For I should like to think that when I am dead, you would go on studying the difficult laws of the body, and connecting them—as I have tried to do—with the more difficult, because less accessible laws of the human mind; and without patience you cannot do any valuable creative work.”

“But why should you die?” Freya cried aghast, seizing his hand between her own. “You are not old!”

“I am sixty-five,” said her father quietly; “twenty years older than your mother and sixty-five is a reasonable age to die. I should have nothing to complain of, if I left this world now; but I have no wish to leave it. I am merely trying to help you to see that the worst that could happen to me, is an affair of no very great importance—either to myself—or to the country I have tried to serve. To die at my age is nobody’s tragedy.”

“Don’t say that!” Freya cried angrily. “Don’t talk about such a horrible thing! It would break all our hearts; and what is worse than to talk of dying is that you speak as if it were possible the Nazis could *wish* to kill you? Why ever should they? You have done so much to make Germany proud, how can her rulers desire to destroy you?”

“I do not say that they wish it,” her father said after a pause, “nor even that they wish to injure me; but it is well for us all now to remember that the Germans are a proud people, whose pride has always been in military success. War has brought them forward in this world, more than once. It has achieved great things for them and they have not yet discovered that war today is behind the times—an activity no longer necessary, no longer human—and therefore no longer useful to man. In 1914 when the Germans once more launched their great might—in spite of their ingenuity and a heroism beyond belief—they were defeated, and this defeat was lost upon them, they

did not learn from it, partly because of the cruel folly of their victorious enemies, and partly because, drunk with their own valour, and the victories that they had achieved, they could not accept the stupendous shock of defeat; nor understand that their goal itself was the cause of their failure. So they begin again, with bitterer passion to achieve the same mistaken goal—war power—war victory! A disappointed, clever man, with a fair tongue, and a heart burning with thwarted personal ambition, has lit their hearts—how can I tell you where he will lead them? He does not know himself where he will lead them! We Jews are but the easy scapegoat that Germany could first fasten her mistake upon, and then destroy—but her mistake itself, she cannot destroy—until the Germans themselves seek a change of heart; and how can this be when they trust no man as a brother; nor are themselves to be trusted?”

“But surely, Father, you have done nothing to annoy the Nazis,” Freya exclaimed passionately, “you have made Germany still more famous! One would think all Germany would be, if not grateful, at least anxious for you to go on with what profits every German, as well as every Jew!”

“Well, they have not done much against me so far,” her father explained tolerantly. “It is true they have curtailed my public work, but that limits *them* rather than *me*. I can no longer advise the government, as I have done in the past, in the erection and administration of state hospitals, nor in planning hygienic improvements for great cities. Also I cannot train any more students through the university—that batch of theirs upon the table are my last examinations—but I may work in the hospital laboratory, and such work is not limited by our rulers and to me personally it is far more congenial than any public work. So you will see that not much has happened to your old father after all! Probably a great deal more has happened to you at Schloss Maberg—for it is always to the young that what is of the first importance happens.”

Freya opened her lips to speak, but shut them again. She was not sure how much she wanted to tell her father. To tell him nothing would be simple, for he would ask no questions; but to tell him a little (and no young person likes to tell a parent much) was not so safe—since from the merest trifle, her father could deduce all that there was—and sometimes even more than Freya had known that there was. The room was very silent; the curtains drawn; the fire burning low in the big porcelain stove. It felt safer than any place in the world, so safe, that presently meeting her father’s eyes, Freya burst out: “I don’t think I shall ever go to Schloss Maberg again! Father, would you mind if I joined the Communists?”

“Hum!” her father growled into his beard. “Mind! And what has minding to do with such high matters? I have told you before, I am not interested in politics. You children have every right to call yourselves—and call others—any name you please! I will not call myself a name! I watch what people do, and if their activities seem to me useful to mankind, I should be glad to associate myself with them—as activities. For instance, when you ask: ‘Should I mind if you were a Communist?’ before answering this question I immediately ask myself—what have these people done for mankind? They began by killing their intelligentsia, for that in most countries is what the hated bourgeois *is*. Do you think such an action good for mankind? They also killed off all their aristocracy—was that a wise step—since to all intents and purposes their aristocracy—quite the worst in the world—was already dead? Both these activities roused the deep ill-will and panic fear of all capitalistic countries. That is a good deal for a revolution to have to live down. Lenin had an integrating ideal that we can all respect, and that I think will outlast all the other manifestations of modernity because it was founded on an unrecognized law. He made work universally shared for the good of all, obligatory—that seems to me a great creative act—if by ‘universally shared’ you mean reasonably shared; and by the ‘good of all’ you mean the good of all mankind—not solely that of your own country.

“Brotherhood and Peace are the Soviet’s declared aims but, my child, we historians cannot forget that Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were the declared aims of the French Revolution. Should you say that France has acted out these aims in every direction? Will Russia, two hundred years from now, have achieved complete security for her aims—Peace and Brotherhood? Possibly she will, but not unless—unlike France—she forms each law—each action—each step forward on her path—*from* this spirit of brotherhood and peace! Aims and actions are like flesh and blood, neither is alive without the other. Are police spies an incentive to brotherhood? Do executions spell peace? Can we punish our brothers without open trials? Is peace to be procured from a propaganda that hides our own faults and reveals those of others? Before you become a Communist ask yourself, my dear, what more will you do for the world, as a declared Communist, than you are doing already as a medical student at the university? In my opinion, by declaring your Communism you would soon cease to be such a student, for the Nazis do not like women students, only by working very well, and not handicapping yourself any further than your share in my race unfortunately already handicaps you, will you achieve the activity for which you have trained yourself hitherto, with no small amount of effort and

success! What greater usefulness do you expect to gain by asserting that you belong to the Communists?"

Freya hung her head—that was the worst of her father—if you asked him a question at all, he usually answered it by asking half a dozen other questions which you were not particularly anxious to see brought up. "You do *like* Communists better than Nazis, don't you?" she demanded defensively.

"My affections have not been stirred to any depth of passion by either of these parties," her father said drily, taking up the thesis he had been reading when Freya burst upon him. "If these black and white monsters did not exist, I should expect the world to find instead—a grey cat—neither black, nor white—to breed from. To such a cat, I would promise my unequivocal support."

Freya knew that their talk was at an end; and yet she had not told her father anything. All the urgencies of her racked mind had curiously slackened and died down; but she was not yet wholly at peace. She stood in front of her father, looking down at his strong, thought-chiselled face. Supposing that after all, he was safe from the Nazis; there was still Hans! Her father was wise—he was quiet and tolerant—he was not a Communist—he could not be tortured or killed without a great public outcry. Hans was only a peasant boy, whom no one knew. He could be destroyed very easily.

"Father," Freya began anxiously, watching him search for his spectacles everywhere, but where he had pushed them; he looked up at her, and the gleam in his eye reassured her. When he laughed with her it always made her feel as if he were the same age as herself, and had no advantages over her. "Father, it is all very well for you to laugh!" she said, half relieved and half resentful, "but you know that this is a very serious matter!—and Olaf is engaged to Sophie—and I have refused Fritz—and Emil says if I am still friends with Hans, it will break up our home!"

Freya poured out this list of tragedies without drawing breath, she was startled to find that she had after all told her father everything, and that she felt relieved, rather than distressed, by his knowledge.

She resettled herself beside him, for he had immediately given up his hunt for his spectacles, and pushed his scholar's thesis to one side. "It is true," he admitted, with a twist of his heavy humorous lips, "I was not as busy as all that—only too busy to go on talking about politics! Now these things you tell me are really serious! Really of very great interest indeed! You see, I told you that you would find at Schloss Maberg something more

important than a visit from the Nazis! We will begin at the beginning—‘Olaf is to marry Sophie!’ You do not like this, of course? You say to yourself, ‘My perfect Olaf to marry this inferior young woman—I have lost him forever!’ And there is indeed some cause for your fear, for I have never known a marriage that was not the end of some earlier tie. A blossom must break the sheath it has been sheltered by. It is true also, that Sophie has not the great qualities such a hero as Olaf deserves—but although I admit he deserves them, does he, I ask myself, desire them? I have never known a perfect hero who wished to marry a perfect heroine! They must exist but not, I think, upon this planet. The king-type—like Cophetua—stoops to the Beggar Maid. They like stooping—the Beggar Maid likes looking up. She perceives, and Sophie I feel sure perceives with her, that there is something to be gained from this upward glance! Rest assured, *Liebling*, that Olaf will remain more perfect than ever, and that Sophie will never improve at all! She has a healthy little body and a silly little mind—Olaf will greatly enjoy both; and their children—I think too, that they will have several remarkably fine children—should be neither too good nor too bad, too wise or not foolish enough, and as for you, you will love them very much—and not lose Olaf at all—not the real Olaf! Your dreams of him—these must go, and for a time it will seem to you both that the real Olaf has gone with them—but that is not so, and one day you will find even more of Olaf than you knew existed. For he *is* a hero—although I hope,—*not* a perfect one!”

“You will never understand Olaf!” Freya said coldly, for to Freya it was still necessary to think Olaf perfect, even though she had lost him. She could not, she told herself, have felt so broken-hearted had she lost anything short of perfection; but she was bound to admit that a faint spark of hope stirred beneath her coldness, since her father’s words, perhaps after all she had not wholly lost Olaf.

“I *have* lost him,” she repeated, “because he cannot forgive me for what I have done!”

“Well—what have you done?” her father demanded, rolling up his eyebrows until they became invisible. “So far I have heard only of one action on your part—you have refused Fritz Maberg—well, had you accepted him, you would have lost *me*! It is not that I dislike Fritz Maberg, but I know that I should have disliked *you* as Fritz Maberg’s wife. You would have been an extremely troublesome one! So you see, that you were obliged to lose one member of your family from the moment that that inconsiderate young man proposed to you!”

"You keep pretending things don't matter!" Freya told him severely, "because you always want to laugh at everything! It is most unfair! I minded refusing Fritz—quite apart from hurting Olaf—very much indeed!"

"Of course you did," her father perversely agreed. "What you would have liked is what every nice young girl wishes—to keep all her lovers at her feet forever! Giving up a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush, was never a feminine proclivity!"

"Now you are being nasty about women!" Freya said crossly, "and you know Mother never allows you to be that! And you haven't said anything a bit helpful either—there's still Hans!"

The gleam in her father's eyes died out, he looked at her gravely enough now, and though Freya felt less cross, her heart sank.

"I was coming to that," her father said gently, "but I was not in a hurry to get there, for about Hans I have nothing at all helpful to say. It is a sorrow to me, for it can but be a sorrow to you. Freya, if you could accept it as a sorrow, and close this beginning of love in your heart, I would dare to counsel you to do it, for I fear that out of it a greater sorrow will be born. But if you cannot—if it is already too serious—and too vital a part of your being to cast out—why then remember that love is what you are yourself—it is not less nor greater than the stature of your soul! Use this love then—generously, my daughter, and with wisdom—and without haste!"

"But Emil said," Freya stammered, "I mean—how can I tell how much I love Hans? Emil said that I should risk your safety and break up our home—unless I gave up Hans?"

"Emil had no right to say such a thing!" her father said more sternly than he usually spoke. "Romeo and Juliet broke up their homes. They broke them up by ill-considered rashness. The same kind of rashness, that their foolish parents used in trying to break their wills. You have no such parents, Freya, and I ask you never to do such a thing as those wild children did—be patient with your love! That is all, Freya, that we as parents have a right to ask of you—or you a right to answer. As for our home, it would not be worth holding together, if it accepted the sacrifice of a daughter's love. Ask yourself how much I should enjoy a safety bought at such a price! Have I ever prized safety for myself or for my children? I have prized courage. For with courage a human being is safe enough. And without it—he is never for one instant safe!"

Freya bowed her head. A curious feeling swept over her—a feeling that was like reluctance. Her father's words had set her free to go to Hans; and

she knew that she was going; but for the first time the mad longing to go to Hans, and the ecstasy of being with him, dimmed down in her heart as a fire dims, in the light of the sun.

CHAPTER XVI

They sat alone together in their corner of the little *Stube*, their hands locked, their eyes sparkling with unconsidered joy. All anxious thoughts were shut away from Freya by the four square walls of their love. Nothing could happen; nothing had happened. She was with Hans.

They had just finished a wonderful supper, *Frankfurter* and beer, paid for by Hans with pride from his first full wages. His apprenticeship was over. From this week on he was a skilled builder and bricklayer. He did not tell Freya that these were also his last week's wages. How could he bear to take the security from her happy eyes? He would have to tell her, but not yet, that his uncle had received orders to dismiss him. He must go back to-night, to the sparse, heavily-taxed frugality of the farm on the Wetterstein. There would hardly be enough food for them all, through the long snowbound spring, until the peasants from the valley sent the cows up to their *Alpen*; and would they be allowed to send up their cattle to a stronghold of disaffected peasants?

They might still send them, for Karl had never openly joined the party—only Hans' name was on the list; and peasants shut their mouths, and keep their hearts still closer shut; so that unless the lists were known to the Nazis, all might yet be well. Meanwhile, in spite of all shadowy portents, Hans too was wildly happy. He had eaten and drunk enough, a rare treat, for he was frugal and saved all he could, to help his family; and beside him was his girl. Such a girl—so wise—so kind—so gay! And with such a curious haunting beauty; unlike the mere stalwart freshness of peasant girls. Freya had such quick graceful movements, like a wild deer; and her colour came and went under her clear skin, not painted hard on the outside of her cheeks by wind and weather. Her voice, too, was sweet as music, so that the words Freya used ran on in his heart like a song.

His mind was full of happy images. He saw their life together as it might be, if their luck held. A little house in fields near enough to the city for their work, but away from the streets, and looking towards the mountains. He would not grudge Freya all that she had learned, she too should work, but when she had children (and they would have beautiful children exactly like Freya), then Hans would specially protect and work for her, making double money, until she was strong again. Their mutual earnings would ensure that

their children could be well looked after, while they worked, and what joy to return to them every evening! What holidays they would take together in the summer on the Wetterstein! Christmas too, up there in the snow—with all the mountainside for a playground and every animal in the *Stall* for a playfellow!

His body glowed, and his mind felt richer than any king's. How he worshipped this strange and yet so familiar creature by his side, whose lips he had so often kissed but never enough, whose body pressed against his own was the gateway to unlimited desire!

To-night was the first time Hans had dared to meet Freya for over a week. Fortunately they had discovered a post-office in a hollow under a silver birch that stood in an unfrequented part of the English gardens. Only Freya and the squirrels knew of this hole, so carefully hidden away under dead leaves. Whenever Hans or Freya came to it, if there were any passers-by within sight, they innocently sprinkled breadcrumbs in front of a birdhouse placed opportunely opposite the silver birch, until the intruder disappeared. There was only one place where they could meet safely now, at the "Three Red Crabs," kept by Hans' friends, Julius and Martha Bauer.

The little inn on the outskirts of Munich was a Communist meeting-place. If a stranger dropped in, all kept their mouths shut, until he had departed.

There was an inner room that the party could enter by themselves, and even a secret door in the kitchen chimney, that led to a tunnel underneath the garden.

Hans had not told Freya of the secret door, because he did not want her to think that there would ever be any need to hide; but it made him feel safer whenever he looked at her, to know that it was there.

No precaution was too great to take for her safety, one by one he had given up all the earlier chances and places of meeting, in the street, or any public place; but not even these sacrifices were now enough. To-night—though Freya had no idea of it—must be their last meeting in Munich. From now on, if they met at all, it must be on the mountainside, and their news of each other must be cut down to infrequent messages through trusted friends.

Before Hans stretched long years of exile; strange work in a strange land, with a strange tongue in his ears; for if he could not get work in Austria or Czechland—and it was becoming more and more difficult—he must go farther into Soviet Russia. The little house set in the fields must wait for a long time.

Hans did not see himself as helpless in a foreign land, for he was a strong intelligent workman, nor could he do only one thing. Upon a farm or with land, he could do anything; and now that he was also a builder, he could make houses as well. No, he was fortunate, for he would only be lonely, and as he looked into Freya's eyes he laughed for joy, for no man can envisage loneliness while he is with the comrade of his dreams.

The double doors swung open precipitately and a man came in, who had been running and was breathless. He stood for a moment with his back to the *Stube*, hanging his rucksack on a familiar peg, then he turned and faced the room, noting in a swift secretive flash, all its inhabitants. Into the warm, smoke-filled room there had entered with him, the clear sharp breath of the mountain air.

"Why, it's Seppel!" Freya cried in astonishment. "It is Seppel Neuner from the Gaudeamus *Hütte*!"

"Speak lower, Freya!" Hans murmured urgently. "We never speak names out loud here, for we have a saying, 'The walls of a *Stube* are made of glass.'" Nevertheless Hans smiled broadly in greeting, for perhaps known only to themselves, Hans and Seppel were each other's greatest friend, and had been so from their earliest childhood. But when Seppel's eyes rested on Hans, and then passed significantly on to Freya, the smile left Hans' good-natured happy face, and he suddenly looked old.

Seppel moved quickly to their table and asked Freya's leave to sit with them. Seppel was rich; he wore footless Salzburger stockings of white ribbed wool, with double socks of a softer wool to protect his feet; his leather breeches—worn dark but unpatched—were laced close to his big sunburnt knees; his broad leather belt was fastened round his neat waist by a wrought-silver buckle, hundreds of years old; and his open shirt was of fine spotless linen. He said "*Grüss Gott!*" several times over before sitting down.

Julius Bauer brought him a foaming golden beer and stood beside the table, with his hand on it, to share the news that all of them expected, and none of them had asked for.

Seppel took a deep draught before he spoke, then he turned to face the room and said in a low resonant voice: "*Kameraden etwas ist geschehen!*"

The peasants moved closer to the table but not so near as to inconvenience or intrude upon Freya and Hans, only so that all could hear what Seppel said easily, without his having to raise his voice.

There were half a dozen men in the *Stube*, besides Bauer and themselves, and all were party members.

“The Reichstag is on fire!” Seppel said slowly. Nothing lived in his expressionless face except his burning black eyes. “It is on fire—*Meine Herren*—and it is not being put out! It burns, alas, not from one place—but from many! It is said that the fire-engines arrived without proper attachments for their hose, and that the water supply gave out. Berlin is a capital city, and its Fire Saving Department is the best in Germany—perhaps in the world. A half-witted Dutch boy is said to have caused this fire. No guard saw him enter the Reichstag, though the Reichstag is well guarded. The fire burns as if it had been scientifically lit; but science is not understood by idiot boys! Our party was holding a meeting at the usual centre; they broke up at the news, and found themselves pursued and arrested. It is not considered in our favour that the Reichstag was our one security. Nor will it be considered that a man would sooner kill his mother than burn a place where a little freedom still stood between him and the Nazis! *Kameraden*—it is Justice that is burning; and we must see to it, that this fire is kept alive within our hearts, forever!”

There was a long silence; each man looked uncertainly at his neighbour, and thought of his home; and of how these words menaced it.

What must they do? They—whose names were listed—whose lives might be forfeit—who had a faith and could be asked to die for it—or killed even without a test of their fidelity! These peasants understood their helplessness; a mortal sickness was in their hearts, and rose to their eyes.

Julius Bauer, who was the oldest man in the room by twenty years, spoke first.

“There is no mistake?” he asked in a dry, colourless tone. “Would such news not be on the wireless? How have you heard of it?”

“That too, they control,” Seppel answered bitterly. “Peter the flyer, brought me the message from Berlin. He had watched the Reichstag burning! Thalmann is already taken. The arrests have begun.”

“They will find the lists then?” Hans asked anxiously.

“They may have found them,” Seppel admitted, “but not from Thalmann! By a surprise they can have discovered what none of our leaders would betray! Well, brothers, we knew it might be so! We gave our names!”

He rose slowly to his feet. None of them moved quickly. The weight of this knowledge slowed their bodies, as well as their minds.

Seppel looked from Hans to Freya with a curious, deep kindness. "*Fräulein*," he said, "should go to her home at once. And you, Hans, will return with me. I have got two seats on a friend's lorry—it will take us by dawn—in reach of the Wetterstein. There will be no great hurry once we are on the mountain. Soon you should go over the frontier, I think, but *Fräulein* could come to our hut for a day before you go—" he paused, while all the peasants listened . . . as if for the moment their own heavy problems were less vital to them than the pure flame of this young love that had shot up so brilliantly before their friendly eyes and was so soon to be put out.

"This is not good-bye!" Hans cried cheerfully, his hand on Freya's shoulder. "We will be careful for a time—that is all! We must go our separate ways, for a week or two perhaps. While we think things over and make our plans. Those lists in Berlin may not touch us. And they may not be discovered by the Nazis, after all. Seppel here, is well thought of, and need not be suspected, since he is the son of a well-known innkeeper, who was once mayor of St. Johann and the whole *Thal*. He will give you news of me, Freya, and help you like a brother! Now we must all be off!"

Freya looked from one to the other of the men before her; she was the only girl in the room. Frau Bauer stood behind the bar. She, too, had been listening to Seppel, but she had not come forward to hear better. If a stranger should enter, and see her indifferent and unconcerned, he would not guess that anything important had been said. Freya, looking from the group of anxious men across the room to Frau Bauer, felt the older woman's calmness enter into her. It gave a steadiness to the flame of her sudden purpose.

"I am not going home," she said firmly to Hans, "my home is with you!"

"No! No! that is impossible!" Hans said quickly, "you must not come with me! It would mark you to be seen with any of us. Such things are foolishness! Stay here quietly in Munich. Go on with your work. I will always live for our future, and I will send news through Seppel or the Bauers—whatever happens!"

"It is Saturday and I am free," Freya said firmly. "I, too, can go in this lorry and up the mountains to the *Hütte* for Sunday. Can I not, Seppel? I will not add to his danger, but I will not be parted from Hans—not while there is still this little time to be together!"

There was another long and heavy silence.

The men withdrew at last, picked up their rucksacks, and paid their reckonings.

"I have a right to my choice!" Freya persisted.

Hans looked down at the ground, saying nothing.

Seppel spoke at last. "The lorry passes in five minutes—we must be there by then, Hans—we can take the *Fräulein*! Frau Bauer can carry a message to her parents. Write it yourself, *Fräulein*, so that they may know your handwriting, and be at peace. But do not mention names or places."

Julius Bauer pushed the wine card towards her, and Hans with a muttered protest, but a heart on fire with love and pride, handed Freya a pencil.

She wrote to her mother: "I am spending the week-end with friends and will be home Monday—Love, Freya." Julius, without a word, took it from her and slipped it into a greasy pocket-book. "Better go straight to your homes, boys!" he said, turning away from her to the men, "some by the back door, and some by the front! Not too many together, but not secretly! Walk as if you owned the six foot of ground the Nazis would like to see you all under! Good-bye, *Fräulein*! Good-bye, Hans!" His huge bony hand crushed Freya's for a moment, and then rested upon Hans. Frau Bauer beckoned them to follow her behind the bar and into the kitchen. She shut the door carefully behind her.

"Now quickly!" she said, and going to the big open hearth, she brushed aside the ashes, and pressing heavily with her foot on the floor beneath, drew two boards slowly apart, revealing a black hole under their feet.

"I will go down first," Hans said to Freya. "This flashlamp will make light enough for you to follow."

In a moment Hans had disappeared, and Freya let herself down cautiously on to the iron rung of a ladder. The boards above, slid back, and they heard Frau Bauer shovelling the ashes over their heads.

"Do not speak aloud," Hans whispered urgently, "and move slowly! Bend double when you get to the bottom. Seppel has gone by the front door—he will meet us at the turn of the road."

Beneath Freya the tiny light bobbed and glimmered; the iron rungs she slipped down, one by one, seemed interminable. There was air enough to breathe, though it had a heavy, earthy smell. When Freya reached the ground, she found that by clinging to Hans with one hand, she could just shuffle along bent double, between the tunnel walls. The surface of the ground was uneven; after a few moments they began to climb. The space contracted, until they could only progress on their hands and knees. At last

they came up against a blank wall. Hans held up his flashlamp and searched it steadily; passing his hands over all the bricks in turn, until he satisfied himself that one was of a slightly different texture to the others—yielding to pressure—the brick uncovered a spring; and a section of what had seemed solid wall swung open; in front of them was the live night air.

Hans switched off the lamp. “Now there is nothing but the dark!” he whispered. “I am used to walking in it. Keep hold of my hand—the road is near. There will be light enough soon!”

There seemed nothing but his hand between Freya and dissolution. The ground was a trap for her feet, the trees she slipped between, dragged at her like spiteful enemies. Sometimes beneath their feet a twig snapped with the report of a pistol. There was no sound but their breathing; but Freya thought anyone could have heard that miles away.

A faint glow broke up the curtain of the night. Freya saw that they were near the edge of a little wood, only a few trees and a broad ditch separated them from the open road.

Hans stopped, withdrew his hand from Freya’s, let himself down into the ditch and held out his arms. “I am just as happy,” Freya thought, slipping into them, “as if I were safe and we were doing this for fun!”

The road was empty. Hans held her close, and kissed her as if he were leaving his life behind him on her lips.

Two huge headlights sent their long shafts down the road, as if feeling for them.

Hans signalled to the lorry with his flashlamp, it heaved over them like a toppling wave, jerking itself to a noisy standstill.

Seppel’s head peered out from its covered back. Hans lifted Freya towards him, and sprang in after her. The lorry moved on as if it had never paused.

Freya had not even seen who sat in front to drive it. Once more she was in the dark, pressed close between huge sacks, out of which came a stuffy sour smell of flour, almost choking them. Freya slowly grew used to the heavy dusty smell, she felt Hans draw her gently against his breast; his heart beat close to her ears, very strongly and slowly; but soon whether it was his heart, or the heave and throb of the lorry engine, or the waves of a troubled sea—Freya could not have told—for she had fallen fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

Freya gazed at the retreating lorry with a desire to punish something, or someone, for the extreme inconvenience of her sensations. She felt dishevelled, and pinched by the dawn wind. No one was to blame for it but herself and yet if you have a lover surely he should manage better than to stand beside you in your extremity, looking like a half-frozen bird, ruffling out its feathers and without a word of commiseration or self-reproach?

Hans' flaxen hair, dusted white, stood up in fantastic clumps all over his head; his face was smeared and streaked with flour, his eyelashes thickened and white as an Albino's.

Worse than what Hans looked like to *her*, was what Freya knew that she must look like to *him*; and yet he had the insane tactlessness to exclaim—blinking at her between the stiff floured rows of his eyelashes—“If you only knew what you looked like!”

Freya turned her back on him, and stared resentfully at the Wetterstein, towering above them, grim and unspectacular as a prison door.

On the other side of the road, a sodden haystack was afloat upon a flooded field; short uneasy trees stood knee-deep in the water, shivering a little, as the dawn wind drew a claw over its steely surface.

Hans stood stock-still with his hands in his pockets, as if he were waiting for something.

He did not seem able to carry off the situation of having absconded with a willing girl, pursued by enemies.

It was as if he expected to be reassured, when he should himself have been reassuring.

Freya swallowed nervously, she couldn't very well say to Hans: “If you'll admire me, I can still be brave; but if you aren't going to admire me, I shan't even want to be!” After a moment or two of blank discomfort she ceased to desire to impress Hans; and longed instead for her warm little room at home—so clean and bright—blankets of the thickest wool—curtains of daffodil yellow—a soft pillow to burrow in—hot coffee on the table downstairs sending up its tempting aroma—bath-water turned on—her mother within call! How terrible, she began to think, for her poor mother if

she were to see Freya standing alone in this wild dull dawn, with six thousand feet between her and shelter! Alone with Hans! Slowly and very unwillingly Freya began to smile, for it wasn't any use trying to turn Hans into a dragon; nor would her mother be the least uneasy at the thought of him; on the contrary she would have been considerably more uneasy had she envisaged Freya without him.

"We shall get warm climbing!" Hans murmured timidly, as if he guessed, even with her back turned, that Freya had begun to yield to the promptings of common sense.

He turned towards his old accomplice, the Wetterstein, with unruffled composure; for Hans was accustomed to the dead hour of the dawn, and in spite of his lumpish appearance, unconcerned by discomfort.

Freya followed him, although her heart still bristled with resentful feelings. She was cramped and felt sick. Flour tickled her nose, and inflamed her eyes. "I'm not at all sure," she told herself, "that I won't go home—as soon as I lose sight of Hans among the trees—I could easily slip back into the road and walk to St. Johann and take the train back! Besides, he'll be safer without me. I was mad to come with him."

The trees soon swallowed them both; the wood was not only without colour, it was nearly without light. Pine stems reared up round them, hostile and motionless as a frieze of lifted spears. A thin white mist clung to the trees and seemed to move with them. They had entered a ghost world, without life or sound.

Hans strode some way ahead, as if he realized that Freya did not desire his company. The path through the wood turned and twisted, lifting itself gradually towards the foot of the mountain. Soon the clarity of the air began to free Freya from the choking flour, and her heart began to lift with a new courage. She heard the faint tinkle of a little invisible stream whispering to itself; and when she reached it she poured the ice-cold water over her face and hands, till every nerve in her tingled and felt refreshed. It would have been easy to turn back now, but all desire to turn back, had mysteriously vanished.

Birds began to call to each other, short sleepy warning notes. A squirrel stirred in a tree above her, ran over a dozen pine tops with fantastic leaps, and shook down a pine-cone at her feet with a pleasant crash, as if he wanted to make Freya look up at him, and see what a fine fellow he was. He paused for a moment on a broad bough, looking down at her with bright eyes, and chattering fiercely, half threatening her, and half inviting the

flattery of her attention. “Hullo there!” he seemed to be saying, “you’re made too big, but I don’t know that that matters, since you can’t climb! You’re alive and I’m alive—call it a day!” He was a bright golden red, and when he unfurled his long tail, hurling himself, in his patterned rushes from branch to branch, he looked almost winged.

While Freya watched him, he unwound the tight brush of his tail, and swung off again. His little lively paws were as sure and swift on the swaying branches, as a great pianist’s fingers on the keys of a piano.

Freya would have liked to draw Hans’ attention to the squirrel. The wall of her crossness had grown as thin as the dark. Hans was not far ahead of her, she could hear him kicking pine-cones off the narrow path, but could one end so terrible a thing as a desire to desert a lover, by drawing his attention to the antics of a squirrel?

The little stream broke out close beside her, from the sheltering trees, noisy and clear, close to a waterfall.

Kingcups curled their gold into hard knobbly buds, stretching against their green sheaths; their stems wading in and out of the stream; their shiny green leaves fluttering the water into little waves. The mosses on the path grew a faint green, and the black pine stems suddenly turned pink.

Through the thinning trees Freya caught a glimpse of the high meadows.

Birds stopped their short sleepy calls, and began tuning up into long busy breakfast raptures. Clear and liquid, splashed the note of a blackbird, as if he had found a way of catching the shining drops from the brambles and flinging them into the air.

Jays shrieked suddenly; starlings kept up an indefinite gossiping chatter; woodpeckers began their interminable cautious tapping, and wood-pigeons cooed and clucked, and crashed their heavy wings against undergrowth, as if determined to break up the security that they were seeking. A ray of sunshine sprang across the path, and caught a baby rabbit in the very act of blotting itself into a dead leaf; but Freya’s terrific approach was too much for its newly-acquired knowledge—with a scattering rush it made off through the trees—the white stump of its tail shining as it ran. “Hans! Hans!” Freya called, “I almost caught a baby rabbit!”

Hans stopped at once, at the sound of her voice; and when Freya came up with him, he looked quite different.

The white flour on his hair was rather becoming now, and he too, had cleaned his face and hands in the stream.

They were so near the edge of the trees that they could watch the light race down the mountainside in a great golden wave.

The snow peaks of the Wetterstein stood higher than the sun. They hung, ice-white and solitary, in a blue clarity of air; but the snow had already melted from their lower slopes, into a dazzling green.

All down the mountainside, the stream ran, gayer than a child, with kingcups splintering the hillside in a broad golden crack. "Oh, Hans! Hans!" Freya cried, seizing his arm with grateful compunction—for it seemed to her as if she owed it to Hans, that for one splendid instant the snow peaks and the kingcups filled the world—"Oh, Hans—how could I have known it would be like this?"

Hans looked at Freya with eyes so full of joy, that Freya felt her own sparkling to meet them. "Why did you come?" he whispered, knowing well the answer.

The sun, that had at first spread only a thin golden veil across the mountain, grew slowly deeper and more powerful, until it reached their bodies, and warmed the very cockles of their hearts.

"Frau Bauer slipped something into my rucksack last night," Hans said. "I didn't have time to ask what it was—but let's look—it might be food!"

They found a sun-warmed stone, surrounded by kingcups, close to the stream, and Hans, opening the rucksack, discovered sausages, rolls, butter, and cheese.

"Why, it's a wedding breakfast!" Freya cried, laughing.

They fell upon it, too hungry to talk, but every now and then pausing to laugh into each other's eyes.

The sun had flung itself full upon them by now and every bud of the kingcups had opened wide its gold.

They ate all they wanted, and drank out of hands hollowed into cups. Slowly into their laughter crept little silences; it was as if their hearts spoke a deeper language behind the screen of their gaiety.

No other life than theirs was in sight. The pine woods lay far below them, a mere dark fringe to the valley floor. The foothills hid the villages, and the valley itself looked a hundred miles away.

Hans turned towards Freya with absorbed, beseeching eyes. "Freya," he asked her again, "why did you come?" Her heart checked its unconscious

easy beat, as if it knew that now she must attend wholly to this question.

“I came,” she said slowly, but without hesitation, “to give you everything I had!”

“Peasant girls give themselves to their lovers,” Hans answered gravely, “and we think it is no sin—if the heart is true—but you were brought up differently. Does not marriage have to come to you, before love is free? Yet the time we have is short, and so uncertain, Freya! But if you want to give this thing to me, you must know what the giving means? I must not be a thief in your memory!”

“I know what it means—and I want to give it to you!” Freya answered, watching the gravity in Hans’ eyes swim into speechless joy.

The words her father had said to her, echoed over and over in her memory—“Love generously, wisely, and without haste!” She thought that wisdom was in the simple joy of her lover’s eyes; about generosity Freya did not think at all—for those who practise it never weigh it—but the word “haste” she blotted out of her mind.

Her lover’s hands rested for a moment upon her shoulders, fell to her waist, and drew her slowly against his heart.

Hans did not frighten or hurry her with the speed of his desire, for to him Freya was as fragile as a flower, and as precious as his own heart.

He carried her out of the sun, under a group of larches. Their shade was light, for their feathery green was still young; the sun filtered through them, shining on their fresh pink cones, and making small patterns of gold upon the moss beneath. On all the mountainside nothing stirred but the sun.

“Freya,” Hans whispered, “this—that you give me—is for the first time?”

Her unshadowed eyes smiled up at him. “The first—yes—” she whispered back.

She did not know which was pain or which was joy in his close arms, she only knew that she gave as she took; and that the core of her being passed into his, filling them both with rapture.

Slowly the golden light that rested upon them, moved away. Hans slept, his head upon her breast, the circle of her arm beneath him; but Freya could not sleep. She lay there conscious of the whole of joy. Her body and her heart were both at home in his arms. All winter long they had spent in a true comradeship; often ski-ing together on the mountainside, with sharp

moments of danger, and through long hours of fatigue and endurance. Once benighted, too high up on the mountain to venture down, but for Hans' knowledge they would have been frozen. Hans had found a *Scheune*, deep in snow, and dug his way to the door, so that they had slept in safety, under the hay's cold fragrance.

Whatever difficulties they had shared together, his slow merry heart had conquered, in the end.

Hans always expected to do anything that there was to be done; as if what he couldn't do for himself, had no real existence. His manners were simple but never ugly. When he thought Freya was wrong he said so, as if being in the wrong was as little to be perturbed about as stepping into a puddle by mistake. It would be easy she thought, to live with Hans.

A sudden pang seized her—it seemed quite literally to wring her heart—for she knew with dreadful prescience that she would not live with him.

She had given herself to him, and he had taken her, because they both knew how frail a hope bound them together. The weight of their young love—that should have had all the future beneath it—had no security but the hour that held them.

They lay in shadow, but the sun still poured its unconsidered gold over the slopes of the mountain. Soon they must start to climb their last two thousand feet to the farm. Slowly Hans opened his eyes—such satisfied, adoring eyes—“At once I knew!” he whispered, “at once I remembered! Oh, Freya—say you are not sorry! Your eyes are not—but your heart?”

“Least of all my heart!” Freya answered firmly. She sat up straight and drew a long deep breath. “Everything in the world is twice as beautiful as it was before!” she said gently. She did not add “and twice as terrible!” She turned her eyes away from him to the peaks above, so that he should not see the shadow of the fear that had chilled her heart.

The noon heaviness had gone; and climbing soon became a lighter and easier business.

They followed the stream's course, through a ravine that narrowed as they climbed. The path above the stream failed them at last; and they took to the rocks. Every moment the air against their lips tasted cleaner and colder. The peaks grew more vivid with the retreating day; distant ranges turned to rose and sapphire, while the crest they climbed towards, dazzled them with its golden clarity.

"Listen," Hans said, clasping Freya's hand, and holding her close against him. Far off—as if it were a sound in her own brain—Freya heard the cold faint tinkle of a cow-bell.

"Those are our cows," Hans said with satisfaction. "The snow must have melted on the southern *Alpe*, and they are still out. I know every cow's bell on the Wetterstein. It is natural that I should, for from the time that I was six years old, I used to bring the cows in before nightfall. They stray far sometimes, so that my ears have grown quick to sound!"

The last five hundred feet brought them close against the sky, only the lifted shining crest of the Wetterstein, was higher than they. The steep slope they were on dipped suddenly into a pocket of green. Like a limpet clinging to a rock, a wooden chalet and its outhouses, pressed themselves against the hillside. The path that led down into the hollow seemed to spring out of a wayside shrine. A high wooden cross stood black against the golden sky; the crucified figure hung heavily upon its outstretched arms. "My father carved that Christ!" Hans said proudly, "when he first came here. It is far, to the nearest church, so that he wanted us to have Him. It marks our land too, all this *Alpe* is ours—and the slopes that dip into the valley between the Wetterstein and the Lärchenkogel! That is our *Scheune* the one that stands alone—it holds our sheep, pigs and a mule. The goats too, sleep there in the winter. The cows sleep next to the kitchen. We shall sleep over them to-night. Ah! here is my brother, Michel!"

The strangest figure Freya had ever seen, started up beside them. His head was enormous, his arms long, and his legs short. He might have been any age, and he would have seemed ugly if it had not been for the innocent kindness of his wide blue eyes. A bright blue apron hung from his chin to his ankles, and in his arms, he held a newborn lamb.

In the hurried crowded world below, looked at as a monster, and treated as an idiot, Michel would have been both stupid and ugly, he might even have been fierce, but upon these solitary heights, with all space to play and work in, he was a most beloved and respected member of his family. His was the task of feeding all the animals, that could not feed themselves, and of caring for all the weak and helpless.

A broad grin spread over his face from ear to ear, as his eyes met Hans, and he gave a high wild screech of welcome, but the sight of a strange girl checked his delight. He glanced uncertainly from Hans to Freya—as if he were testing her by some secret process of his own—then he moved a step nearer. "See," he explained proudly in his thick guttural voice, "this is a new

lamb. I feed him like this!” Gently he placed the tiny trembling body between his knees, slipped the rubber nozzle of a baby’s bottle into its mouth, holding its tiny chin between his massive fingers. “He thinks it is his mother! See how his tail wags!”

Hans slipped a friendly arm across his brother’s shoulder—this monstrous strange lump of a creature had no ugliness for him. Freya held out her hand, and Michel, to whom a handshake was an unpractised gesture, picked up the lamb, and pressed it with generous enthusiasm into her arms.

“Let her carry it!” he explained to Hans. “He has not walked yet—his mother died of him! Are not all girls mothers? This one will do instead!”

CHAPTER XVIII

All through the long winter months of their companionship the thought of meeting Hans' family had lurked with dread at the back of Freya's mind.

Would she understand them? Could she make them conscious of her own goodwill? Would something rough and ugly spread from them into her love for Hans?

Would Hans become uneasy and feel ashamed of the natural and artificial differences between Freya, and his own flesh and blood?

Now that they had reached the farm, the ecstatic sense of unity between herself and Hans helped to quiet her fears.

The sunset light poured down upon the little wooden chalet, and its home-made balconies hung with golden maize, turning it into a luminous shell. Freya and the lamb, Hans and Michel wrapped in a rosy flame, passed into the farm on a wave of beauty.

The door of the kitchen living-room, opened wide upon a balcony, sparkling with cleanliness. Everything within it was simple and primitive, most of the furniture the Breitners had made themselves. There was a large wooden table against the wall, backless benches and stools, a huge shelf above the great open fireplace for pots and pans; a beam that stretched across the ceiling with rows of smoked hams suspending from it.

A crucifix hung in one corner of the room, with evergreen wreaths and bunches of dried flowers in front of it; and close by it a guitar festooned with blue and yellow ribbons. But what the room most held was light—penetrating into every nook and corner—and finding no speck of dust, no possible trace of dirt or ugliness to rest on. A little staircase wound up out of the kitchen to the women's bedrooms, and a second door led straight into the great barn where the cows lived, above them skiers were lodged, and the three brothers slept.

Stooping over the balcony rail, and looking far down into the tiny valley that lay between them and a giant peak opposite the Wetterstein, Freya felt herself separated from all pain and stress, as if she were leaning out over the rim of a safe and inaccessible star. A tall black figure appeared from the door of the barn; and making a reassuring clucking sound, began to throw grain

for the chickens. "That's Mother!" Hans explained briefly. Frau Breitner looked up at them without ceasing her task, or the continuous reassuring sound, that brought the chickens from all corners of the yard, with the agitated speed of a crowd pouring through side streets to catch sight of a procession.

"Come and speak to her," Hans suggested proudly, but for which of them he felt this pride, Freya could not guess. When they reached the barn Frau Breitner did not cease clucking, but she held out a gnarled hand to Freya. Her eyes rested for a long moment first on her son, and then on the girl at his side. Hans only said: "This is Freya!" but it seemed enough.

Frau Breitner's eyes were as blue as washed forget-me-nots, and they had the invading quality of light. Although she looked a wrinkled old woman, she was actually no older than Freya's mother.

Frau Breitner threw the grain with an expert hand, to rectify the inequalities of nature, seeing that no chicken got less or more than its due share.

When she was satisfied that all had had enough, she turned once more to Freya and said: "You are very welcome." Then her eyes wandered back to Hans, and she asked as if she already knew: "There is trouble then?" Yet Hans had told her nothing.

He said quietly: "Well, Mother—the Reichstag has been burned, and they wish to suspect all our people, so perhaps it would be wise to stay up here a little—or perhaps even to go over the frontier into Tirol. When lightning strikes, the mouse is sometimes burned with the farm."

Frau Breitner nodded her head, and turned back into the barn. She did not seem to think it necessary to express an opinion on what had happened, nor apparently did Hans expect her to give it.

A flock of goats came bounding and scuttling down the mountainside, followed by a very small boy in a very big blue overall. This was Anna's Franz. He had a whistle that he had made himself from a model given him by Hans, and this being the absorbing subject of his life at the moment, he held it out gravely for them to count the stops; then putting it to his lips, he drew from it two or three notes that were almost a tune.

Anna came suddenly out of a farther door in the barn. She was a very plain young woman with a very little dust-coloured hair on her head, and the cruel break of the furrowed lip in her kind face; but even about her ugliness there was an assured contentment.

Anna knew that she was a useful person with a son; and that no one thought the worse of her for her physical disabilities. She held out her hand in unembarrassed welcome to Freya, and said proudly: "This is my son!" Having given that explanation of her existence, Anna withdrew into the *Scheune*. Far away, climbing up the steep mountainside from the slip of green valley, Karl could be seen, casually followed at long intervals by twenty fawn and cream-coloured cows.

The air filled and emptied itself from the lazy clamour of their bells.

As soon as Karl drew nearer, Freya saw how like Hans he was, only taller and graver; he had been the head of the house since he was sixteen years old; and the weight of it was written on his young face.

His eyes met Freya's for a brief shy second, before he turned away his head, but Freya knew that he had already come to a permanent conclusion about her. None of the family attempted to talk to Freya. After a brief and friendly greeting, each went on with whatever job they had in mind.

Habit had made so deep a groove in their isolated frugal lives, that it was doubtful if any event—the most joyful or the most catastrophic—would have broken down their routine for more than a chance second. Animals must be fed and cared for; crops planted and secured; wood cut and stored; weather fought against or profited by, though the Heavens fell.

Had the last trump sounded, Frau Breitner would not have stopped milking the cows until she had satisfied herself that the last udder had been pressed free. The Judgement Day, in her opinion, could wait better than an uncomfortable beast; besides, the beast was her responsibility and the Judgement Day was not.

Karl went into the barn and the cows pushed their way in after him, with slow tranquility. Franz disposed of his goats. Michel put the lamb in a basket by the kitchen fire; and Hans took Freya to her room. It was above the cows, and had a tiny wooden balcony, facing the crest of the Wetterstein.

"Oh, Hans," Freya said, tugging at his coat with both hands, "do you think it's all right? Will they ever like me? I could *learn* to milk cows, couldn't I?"

Hans laughed cheerfully. "Will they ever like you—?" he repeated teasingly, "why, that they already do! It is not necessary for you to milk cows in order to make my people fond of you. It is enough for them that *I* like you! You see—living up here all alone by ourselves, most of the year never seeing a soul beyond our own family—we get to know and trust each

other, as people down below seldom can. We know the quality of each one's work, and we have to depend on it. Whatever you don't do—or don't do properly up here, gets found out—and upsets everybody. My mother and father taught us that from the first. And this gives us a kind of confidence in each other, all the way round. If Karl brought a girl up here, we should know well enough what kind of a girl he'd be likely to bring. And it is the same with me—if *I* like you—*they* like you! You are to my mother already a daughter, and to Karl a sister. I don't know what Michel understands, but it is generally more than anyone thinks—he has his own way of arriving at things! It is true that to-night they are all uneasy—that is because they have guessed something is wrong. After supper we shall have to talk it out. Up here we never talk till the work's done. They cannot like my going into another land. Nor can they very well understand the danger, except Karl, because nobody comes up here—but a few skiers—and the only danger we have is from the weather. My mother and Anna have never seen a Nazi."

"It is so safe up here," Freya pleaded, "so far away! Couldn't you stay here always? Would anyone ever come up here to arrest you? And couldn't you hide if they did? We can see for such miles and miles all around us; and no one would dare to climb up the Wetterstein in the dark!"

Hans stood beside her on the tiny balcony, looking across a gulf of fiery colour, to the remote white peaks of the Wetterstein.

"It might be safe for a time," he admitted, "but if they suspected I had taken shelter here—the farm might suffer. That is why Karl has never joined the party, though he is with us heart and soul. He obeys and will support the Nazis, for my mother's sake, and Michel and Anna's, though it makes him sad. I alone am suspect; but if they harbour me, then no one will believe they are good National Socialists. If I go into another land, then they will be safe from me. All will swear that I was never here; and Seppel will see—that when I am safe—the Nazis know I have escaped. And escaped from Munich—not from here. These lies are *theirs*—not ours, since they force lies out of us! Our country no longer belongs to her children—we are as homeless as the Jews. All those are homeless who do not flatter and obey these bandits that control arms and the power of arms. They think it is the greatest power in the world—and for a time it is—until the workers learn to combine together! Enough people who love freedom and justice—enough who can work together, and work honestly—and we need fear no Hitler—no Mussolini—but, Freya, men are slow to work for each other, and as long as we work only for ourselves, theirs will be the greater strength!"

“Up here we feel as if the earth belonged to us, because we work on it, and do for it what it requires. Our animals love and obey us, since we also love them, and serve their needs. We do not hurt their pride; or torture them; or take their lives to prove our power over them. If any have to be killed, it is mercifully done—and for the sake of food to live by—but man is not the food of man, so that it is without reason to kill each other! Why should we kill, or be killed by our brothers?” He stopped and sighed heavily, as if the weight of the murder of mankind was on his innocent heart.

Freya’s heart too, sank into a discouragement so great and fierce, that she longed here and now—with their love fresh upon her—to stop living.

“If I cannot be at peace with you,” she asked bitterly, “why should I not die? What is there about death that would not be better than this senseless parting? I don’t want to go on alone!”

“You are tired and hungry,” Hans said gently. “Mother is preparing supper now, and then we will sleep once more together—even if it is for the last time. Freya, I too do not wish to live without you! But we cannot be wholly guided by our wishes.

“If all who loved peace and freedom died—who could regain them for mankind? Peace is better than war, and a man’s right to speak and think as he believes, is as good for him as food. All this is true—but we must live to prove it true. While we live there is so much the more of this truth in the world. Our little lives are only one grain each perhaps, and one grain seems of no great importance, but the harvest needs every grain!”

The light had faded from the golden slopes. The sky above the peaks was colourless and pure, through its unbroken clarity a small star shook its pale primrose light.

“How young it looks—like that newborn lamb!” Freya whispered, her head against his breast.

A bell rang out to call them down to supper. Hans and Freya took their bowls of milk-potato soup out on to the balcony to eat while the light lasted, and Franz sat with them. After supper they went back into the kitchen, and since it was a great occasion, they each ate a slice of *Brösel* cake and drank a glass of wine; then Franz went to bed, taking his candle and going up proudly alone, except that after a minute or two, Michel followed him, to be sure that he was safe in bed, and blow out his candle.

The lamb slept in its basket; a big chestnut dog of no particular breed, but with every sort of wit, lay in front of Karl, his head across his master’s

feet. Karl and Hans smoked their long carved pipes, and Frau Breitner carded wool, while Anna, with Freya to help her, mended a heap of stockings. No one seemed in any hurry to break the silence of the gathered day.

Hans took his pipe out of his mouth at last. "I must go," he said slowly, "my name is on the lists—they may not have it yet in Berlin, but who knows when they will find the Munich lists! Our arrests have not yet begun, but Uncle Gustav has already been told not to keep me on. That is the beginning of danger. The Reichstag has been burned, Karl—by them, of course—I suppose as a sort of signal of their power to the world. I cannot marry Freya yet either—that too must wait. But I look on her as my wife. If I stay up here, all are in danger with me."

For a long time nobody answered. Freya thought that they were listening still to what Hans had said—turning it over and over in their hearts. Then Karl took out his pipe and looked at his brother. "I too, think it best," he said sombrely, "bad as it is! We have the farm to think of. We could keep you, Hans—but in the end they might find out and visit it on us all. The life of a hidden man too—is that a life indeed? You could have no home in Germany. It is best then to go elsewhere to make one—Austria, if possible—for Tirol is near, and the life there like our own; and we could sometimes see each other! So they have burned the Reichstag in Berlin! It is out of Prussia that all evil has come to us Germans! First Bismarck—then the Kaiser—now this man Hitler—Austrian, though he is—has the Prussian mind—and we know that the *Junker* are behind him. They, and the great industrialists, would sell their live country to a shark for his meal, in order to keep more gold than anyone needs, in their own pockets! Blood and iron is their harvest! What do men find beautiful or useful in these words? Blood is beautiful if it runs in a healthy man's veins—but if it is spilled, who profits? Iron if it is used for ploughing, can make our food, but for tanks and cannon—what use—what joy lies there? Death comes in time to all, but must we make factories to produce it quicker so that we may die in the hot life of our youth?"

"It is you men who make war!" Anna cried bitterly. "We, who have children, would never make it! Why should a woman be broken up in pain, to give her child life, only to see him carried away from her, to make food for guns? What is Hitler? What is my country, compared to Franz? Will they live at my knee, and comfort me when I am old? They are not the child I fed from my breast and gave my blood to bring into the world! Why should Franz be taken away from me to die for Hitler? Why should Hans here—be

taken from Cousin Maria? I will curse this Hitler and these idiots who obey him till I die!”

“That will be of no use, Anna,” Frau Breitner said quietly, and it occurred to Freya that she had not heard Hans’ mother speak since she welcomed her outside the barn. “Curses are children of hate; they belong to the wrong family! Prayers are better than curses!”

Again silence fell upon them; only the flames in the big fireplace rose, and died down again; burned red and sank slowly into grey ash.

Freya’s eyes moved towards the crucifix. The Christ hung there in defeat, after two thousand years; but after two thousand years, the act of love that stretched Him on His wooden cross, was still alive.

CHAPTER XIX

When Freya announced that she would go with Hans as far as the frontier, she found herself gazed at by five pairs of hostile peasant eyes, holding her in like a wall.

Seppel had come over from the *Gaudeamus Hütte*; and they all sat together on the wooden balcony, drinking coffee and making their last plans.

“Such a thing is impossible,” Frau Breitner said to Freya, with decisive gravity; “you have already done enough. A young *Fräulein* is not accustomed to hardship. This is a night upon which anything might happen; and to you, *Fräulein*, enough has already happened. Rest here with us—we will look well after you—and to-morrow you will return to your home. Seppel will go to Munich with news of my son for you, as soon as he can.”

Freya lifted her chin and gazed at Hans, summoning all his strength and her own.

“I must see Hans into safety,” she said quietly. “I must do it. I can climb easily—Hans knows that I can—in summer I have climbed with my father difficult peaks in the Dolomites. I will be in no one’s way but until Hans crosses the frontier, I must be with him!”

“It is not right, *Schatz*,” Hans said despairingly, “you should not ask it. I beg you to stay here with my mother. You are all I have—why should you be risked? Freya, be reasonable! Be kind to me! Stay with my mother!”

Karl and Seppel looked at her sternly—to them, what she asked was worse than useless. It disturbed their pleasure in her. Here was a girl trying to be a man—she had a man’s courage in her eyes—but how could she bear a man’s dangers, and a man’s hardships? They were offended with her for being willing to try. Michel alone understood Freya. He nodded his heavy head over and over again, seeking for words to explain that what Freya wanted was merely what any good dog wants—to follow her master. Even his lamb followed Michel with its eyes, although owing to its legs’ being still too rickety, it could hardly stand. Anna spoke harshly, for she had no very warm feelings for a beautiful girl whose lover was not running away from her, but merely from the Nazis. “You’ll get him caught!” she said angrily, “when *you* fall behind, *he’ll* fall behind! And you’ll fall behind at the first obstacle! Why, you can’t lift the pigs’ food! I saw you try this

morning and it made me laugh to look at you. *Nah! Nah!* a *Fräulein* is no hand at a mountain!”

Anna’s contemptuous words brought Hans over to Freya’s side, he drew his flaxen eyebrows together in sharp protest. “Freya can climb and ski better than any peasant girl I ever saw,” he declared stiffly. “It is not for *my* safety I want her to stay behind—but for her own! If we ran across any Nazis—and they did not actually imprison her—they would send her to a concentration camp for a hostage—she doesn’t know what that means for a girl! *Mein Gott*, Freya—these are not men! They are devils!”

But Freya would not give in—something stubborn in her heart made an implacable protest—not even to save the pain in her lover’s eyes, could she give up this last journey with Hans. Their words beat on her, without reaching the inner core of her resistance. Slowly the golden light grew thin, and they gave up talking.

Frau Breitner rose stiffly and went inside with Anna to pack Hans’ rucksack.

What he would need most, had to be chosen and condensed into as small a space as possible; and who knew what he might *not* need before work was found? Yet the rucksack must not be too heavy. All day long his mother had been thinking of what Hans would most need, and now this silly wilfulness of Freya’s disturbed her thoughts and set them flurrying. “You should not think of what *you* want—you should think only of what is best for Hans,” Frau Breitner said coldly, before she went into the kitchen.

When the door closed after her, Freya found Karl’s eyes grown more resentful than ever, fixed upon her. “Hans,” Karl said harshly, “this girl should obey you if she loves you! You should not give way to her whims. Such a wife is useless to any man!”

Seppel of the *Gaudeamus Hütte* twisted his sun-blackened hands together in great discomfort. “She is a better comrade than you know,” he said earnestly. “She is no stranger to our mountains—but, *Fräulein*, it is not your skill or your muscles that count with us against you. We must do our job—and we don’t want to have to protect you—or to desert you. We daren’t run any extra risks of being seen, whatever happens to Hans, or to you. We must hide—not for our own sakes, but for the party’s—and our farms. It is shameful for a man to leave a girl in danger, but if you come with us, you must take your chance like a man!

“I have taken twenty comrades safely over and I must live to take as many more as I can. Karl, too, has to think of other lives than his own. You

see, you make it harder for all three of us, if you come!”

“If I could force her—I would not,” Hans said, without looking at Freya, “but it goes hard with me, to think of her in danger! I did not want Karl to come, but that I cannot help—he is my brother.”

“I am more than your brother,” Freya said, earnestly looking at them each in turn. “I am in everything but name—your wife!”

“Trouble her no more,” Hans said, letting his head fall for a moment between his hands. “Let her come if she chooses! She *is* my wife!”

“It is his heart and his wishes that I am carrying in my body,” Freya obstinately told herself, “even though he is afraid for me, he longs for me! What is there to be afraid of while we are together? When we are separated we can think again of danger!”

None of them protested any more. They gave her food and drink with the men though the women took nothing themselves. Anna, without being asked, lent Freya her boots and skis. Franz and his goats came in; leaning against Hans’ knees he drank a glass of milk warm from the cow, and with a cheery “*Schlaf wohl!*” staggered off, already half asleep, to bed.

Michel and the dog escorted them as far as the shrine, and then turned back.

Hans’ mother did not come even so far, she stood on the balcony with Anna beside her, until their figures melted into the dusk.

Looking back, Freya could still see Frau Breitner, standing like a black pillar against the dying light.

The farm and the little green cup in which it stood, were soon swallowed up; the shining peaks receded as they climbed.

At first they talked a little in their natural voices, for they could see the emptiness of the world for miles all round them. Karl and Seppel discussed names and farms they knew in Tirol, and advised Hans where to ask for work.

Hans and Freya swung along together, hand in hand. Karl and Seppel insisted on carrying her skis by turns. They must cross two peaks, keeping the crest of the ridge between themselves and Karwendel.

There were long stretches of *Harsch*, so that they moved cautiously, but the cold saved them from fear of avalanches.

The men were pleased to see how well Freya kept up with them, slipping into their rhythmic, unhurrying stride, and taking the bad spots when they came, slowly and with judgement.

Behind them the sinking sun had left a delicate long radiance in the western sky, while before them the main peak of Wetterstein grew colourlessly bright.

A streak of molten silver touched the peak. The disc of the moon drew slowly up behind the ridge, poised like the silvered figure of a dancer, an instant on its razor edge, and then sailed off triumphantly across the limitless stage of the sky.

“Light enough!” Hans said in a low relieved voice, “for the first chimney! We must take off our skis here.”

“From now on, we will not talk,” Seppel said quietly. “For our voices carry far, and we cannot see enough distance to be safe. When I crossed over last, there was no one on the mountains, but now I cannot be sure, so we are safer silent.”

The high uneven rocks jutted upwards, narrowing towards the sky. Soon they stood under their first chimney. Seppel climbed into it, letting down a rope from the top. Karl climbed after him, to make a strong hold, then Freya found herself with Hans steadying her first steps upwards, and only the pull of the rope above to guide her, feeling her way up in semi-darkness.

Her hands and feet grew thoughts; her heart beat fast with an intense excitement rather than fear. She could not see how high she had climbed nor what lay beneath; all her faculties were concentrated upon incredible footholds, and tiny openings for her tortured hands. To hold her fast in her footholds, she had only Hans’ guiding voice below, and the rope above—suddenly Seppel’s hands grasped both her wrists—she flung herself upwards and out—into the silver air. They stood together, on a ridge, alone above a precipice. Freya could see only in flashes their surmounted dangers, but each struggle they had to face came upon them too quickly for fear.

The men, from the moment they had unwillingly accepted Freya’s presence, took her efforts for granted. She did not know that they had thought out all her difficulties and lay in wait for her needs.

In their brief moments of safety and relaxation, Freya saw the light in her lover’s eyes, and felt justified. She was still giving Hans all she had.

Automatically she obeyed Seppel’s sharp low orders, and gallantly showed them, as need arose, her goodwill and her confidence.

Once, she whispered to Hans, after a long tough scramble, while they stood to draw breath, on a narrow ridge above a gulf of air: "Hans—you're glad I came!" He pressed his hand upon her shoulder for an answer.

"Wherever I am—I shall never feel without you!" he whispered back.

Time stood as still as an enemy in ambush. Freya felt as if she had been climbing all her life, when Seppel's voice, peremptory and low, told her that it was the end. All her being cried out then, for half an hour more. "Hans," Seppel said, "look between those two stones! Do you see that one, topped with ears like a hare? Well—leave us now—follow down through it—in five minutes you will be on the Steuerberg—in another five minutes you will be safe! In ten minutes from now we shall know that you are in Austria." Their hands clasped and parted. Freya heard Karl give a little breathless choking sound, like a hurt animal, then she felt Hans' arms close down upon her. She pressed against the darkness of his breast, his kisses touched her hair, her head, her chin—at last his mouth reached hers, then the iron grip of his arms relaxed, and Freya heard a long low sigh, but did not know if the heart it shook and left, was his or hers.

She did not see Hans go. The darkness of the rocks covered them close, like a pall, but below them the mountain slope lay like a sheet of silver—nothing moved on it. Silence held them in a grip as heavy as frost.

Freya dared not breathe until she heard Seppel whisper: "Now—now he must be safe!" but even as his words lifted the load from her heart, a noise split the silence into atoms. A shot rang out, and then another—they tore their way through Freya's heart—but her mind still refused them. She heard herself saying out loud: "He is safe! He is safe!"

Close beside her, Karl muttered: "*Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Er ist getroffen!*" and Seppel's lower, and inexorable reminder: "*Nichts zu machen!*"

She felt Seppel's hand reaching to hold her back, but she slipped between both men, and scrambled through the rocks out on to the moonlit slope; down, down she ran, through the white light—over dead grasses, through heaps of brittle snow, stumbling into *Harsch* and out again, until she came to a dark patch, stretched out upon the silver earth, and knelt beside the body of Hans.

She unfastened the rucksack from his back, and gazed down into his eyes; but they were not Hans' eyes. They looked past her—dulled and without light. His body twitched in her arms, so that she could hardly hold it, and then was still.

“Hans! Hans!” she cried, remembering how he had told her that his ears were quick to sound, “Hans! Hans!” and it seemed to Freya that for a brief moment, something answered her—but not through the body that lay so heavily upon her lap. She took his head in her hands, and gazed down upon the unshut, unliving eyes.

Two men in brown shirts, with revolvers, stood staring down at her, not unkindly. They were human. Freya did not connect them with what had happened, instead she stammered: “See—see—he has been shot—can you help us?”

They looked at one another with shamed smiles, so that after a moment she guessed that they had killed Hans. A horror deeper than any anger shook her to the core of her being. “You—you did it!” she cried, “you *killed* him—but why? He has never done you any harm?”

“Why did he try to get across the frontier then?” one of them demanded blusteringly, as if he were trying to work himself up into a rage, to save himself from the sickness of remorse. “He was up to no good! Now tell me the truth, my girl—were you alone with him—or are there more of you up in those rocks?”

“There are no more of us! He is my lover! I came with him alone,” Freya said, nor did her eyes betray her into looking towards the rocks.

She turned back to the body of Hans, putting her hands on his hair, smoothing it down and closing his dulled eyes.

His lips when she kissed them were still warm, but his fingers grew cold and stiff in hers. One of the soldiers dragged her to her feet, and said something about her being arrested, but neither of them seemed quite certain what to do with her. She saw that they wanted to get away from what they had done as quickly as they could.

They heard rapid footsteps on the snow behind them, and turning her head, Freya found herself staring into Fritz Maberg’s eyes. He was there—and beside him stood Olaf. The two young soldiers looked greatly relieved—but not surprised—to see their officers. Before they had felt ashamed of the dead body for which they felt responsible, but now they became proud of it.

“You’ve come too late!” Freya cried. “Oh, Olaf! Oh, Fritz—they’ve killed him—you came too late to save him!” She dragged Olaf back to where Hans’ body lay huddled on the ground, and begged him to feel the heart, and make quite, quite sure that Hans was really dead. She could not

leave his body in the snow unless she was quite sure. But when they both told her that he was dead, she agreed to go with them. After a few words with the two murderers, they took her, an arm through each of hers, and almost carried her down the mountainside.

There was a little inn at the bottom of the mountain; they had a fire made and were very kind to her, but although they poured rum and hot water down her throat, Freya couldn't stop trembling. It was as if there were an earthquake inside her, that kept her whole body shivering and shaking; nor could she eat anything at all.

CHAPTER XX

On their drive back to Munich, Freya slept; but every now and then, she woke with a frightful jump and saw Hans lying in the snow, and felt her own body stiffen and grow cold.

Olaf drove the car. He sat with his back to her, driving fast, as if he were trying to pass something on the road, although at this early hour it was quite empty.

Fritz sat huddled up beside her in the back of the car, staring out of the window. Neither of them spoke to her.

Freya was glad of their silence, for whenever she tried to listen, it interrupted the sequence of her fixed vision, and drew her farther away from the moment when Hans was still alive.

She was in no hurry to go home, for flying along through the cold dawn air, nothing seemed settled; nor—until they arrived—would anyone else know that Hans was dead.

The fact could pass in her mind for a mere nightmare, and she thought that she might wake up from one of her cruel sleeps and find that nothing had happened. But when she had been awake for a minute or two, Freya found that the return of hope was horrible, and that it was better to be conscious all the time that Hans was dead.

The houses closed about them in the pale dawn; milk-carts clanged and clattered their harsh way through silence; a few stray cats slunk rakishly home to bed.

The Kaulbachstrasse was empty; and their house, very tall and grey, stared back at them like a stranger.

When Olaf opened the door, Freya saw her mother standing in the hall, as if she were waiting for her. She stretched out her arms and Freya fell forward into them, without a sound.

Her mother asked no questions, she drew Freya upstairs to her room and undressed her, as if she were a child again.

When they were alone, Freya grasped her mother by the arm, and demanded accusingly: "Why? Why? Why? They came too late to save him!"

Couldn't the boys have come sooner?"

"The boys—?" her mother asked in puzzled tones.

"Olaf and Fritz," Freya explained impatiently. "They brought me back just now, didn't you notice them? Mother—they were too late! Only just too late! That was what was so horrible!"

Her mother stooped to take Freya's shoes off, and whispered: "Yes—horrible! Horrible!"

"Mummy," Freya went on, "it wasn't because I *would* go with Hans—when they all wanted me not to—was it? Frau Breitner and Karl and Seppel? They can't think that—can they? I didn't once look back at the rocks! When I heard the shots, I ran towards them, for I knew! But I never looked back! I think they must have got home safely! Only we mustn't ask! That seems so silly, doesn't it?—not to ask Olaf, when he has always helped me! The Breitners are our own people—not enemies! Can't anyone explain it to Hitler? Hans was a good German! and he had never done anyone any harm! Oh, Mother! Mother! It wasn't because I went with him—was it—that the Brown Shirts came?"

"I don't think, darling, that it had anything to do with you," her mother said slowly, lifting her steady eyes to Freya's wild ones. "Get into bed now, and I will bring your father to sit with you for a little! The burning of the Reichstag was what gave an excuse to the Nazis to attack Communists, and to kill anyone whom they thought was trying to escape. I am sure that your being with Hans had nothing to do with it!"

Freya got into bed, after that, but she kept feeling that she ought to get up, and climb the Wetterstein to be with Frau Breitner. It was as if, although Hans was dead, Freya still belonged to the farm.

Her mother folded her clothes, and brought her a hot drink; and then her father came into the room, and put something in the drink to make her sleep.

Freya took his hand in hers, and held it fast. He sat down on the bed, beside her, without speaking, and Freya, seeing her own grief in his eyes, told him everything, except what she and Hans had been to each other; this she could not tell him, because for the moment, she had forgotten it.

"I don't see why I should go on living without him," Freya asserted, "do you? It would be too lonely! Such things need not be! Death is nothing to be afraid of, and all the other things without Hans, are not worth while!"

"You need not live alone," her father assured her. "Hans can go on living in you. That is the only way to think of the dead. What you loved in him, is his trust to you. You keep him alive, by living. And—with his qualities, as well as with your own—you can serve life. This belief that you should kill men for an idea is childish! Ideas cannot be shot! It is only the spoilt child that is angry with ideas other than his own, or with the people who believe such ideas. But if you kill yourself, you too show yourself an enemy of life. Do not play even with such an idea, for it would be to throw away all that Hans gave you—and all that your mother and I gave you—for we too love you. We too have placed in you our immortal hopes."

"But I am already dead," Freya pleaded, gazing at her father with all the cruel force of her young life, in her burning eyes. "Cannot you see that I am dead? Surely I have a right to die—since they have killed my lover!"

"Who has killed your lover?" her father asked her gently. "Is it your country—Germany—that you wish to be revenged upon? A country is a mere lump of earth—without qualities or desires. A country cannot be killed or punished—it cannot serve or be served. It is but a part—and that a small part of our poor earth's crust. All ownership of it is imaginary. Try to think accurately of what has happened, for you will find it easier. Two very ignorant and helpless young soldiers were ordered to shoot anyone who crossed a certain piece of land, and because they had no law in their hearts strong enough to prevent their doing this senseless thing, they obeyed the order.

"But of what are they guilty—or those who gave them the order—since they too, must be ignorant, ill-taught, helpless? Would you have men so ill-taught? You would then be an ally of such action! It is your business to learn science so that you may practise truth. I am tired of hearing people speak of their 'rights.' Such things also are imaginary. Your lover—a wise boy—believed in sharing. A man can share only what he has. You have much, and your 'right' is to share it! Leave it to those who have nothing—to kill and die! Such people have been defeated by themselves, before they have reached the feast of life. Like a hungry, half-witted giant, they stamp out the food that would have kept them alive. But you know better than this! You have a little of this food in your power to give—and you can make it more. But to give—you must go on living. And your first step towards living is to sleep!"

"But if I sleep," Freya explained, playing with his old fingers and thinking how strong they still were, and how many lives they had saved, "I shall wake up suddenly and remember it all as sharply as if it were new!"

When I slept in the car, I heard the hare screaming—and I dreamed that it had never got away from the men of St. Johann!”

“It would have got away in any case,” her father told her, “for those heavy mallets they kill hares with, kill quickly; and the escape is final. Now that I have given you the medicine, you will sleep more deeply than before, and perhaps you will not dream at all!”

“Have you told Rudi?” Freya asked her father anxiously. “Poor little Rudi! Hans was his first grown-up friend! And he was so proud of his friendship! He will think it so strange that any German could kill another German, as if he were an enemy!”

“It is indeed strange,” her father agreed. “Later I shall tell Rudi—myself; unless you would like to tell him? It is better that he should know from one of those who loved Hans but there is no hurry; a time for such things happens of itself!”

Freya burst into tears. “Tell him—tell him,” she sobbed. “I can’t—bear to see his face! It—it will disappoint him so much!”

“Yes, I will tell him,” agreed her father. He did not seem to mind Freya’s tears, and indeed—once she had begun to cry a strange thing happened to her—it was as if the stiffness of death passed out of both her body and her mind.

CHAPTER XXI

When Rudi heard that his father wished to see him in the study, a creepy feeling ran up his spine.

It was not guilt, for if he had done wrong he knew that his father would not have sent for him; he would have come to meet Rudi, with an apologetic expression and had the mistake out—man to man—in as easy a manner as was compatible with the nature of Rudi's crime. No! What Rudi felt afraid of, was some sudden choice, throwing him back upon his own insufficiently trained desires. He remembered with a pang that he had had to choose last summer between a holiday with the others on the Starnberger See, full of bathing and unknown delights, or the grown-up role of accompanying his father and mother to Sweden, to see his father receive the Nobel prize. He longed to see his father get this prize, to swell and thrill with the thought: "I am this man's son. His greatness is mine! None of the other boys have such a father!" On the other hand he wanted to get on with swimming and Emil had promised to teach him to crawl. Besides, what might not the older children discover or enjoy during his absence?

It was an irrevocable, anxious choice, and Rudi felt that he had made the wrong one. He started off with his parents to Stockholm; but on the way there he was very sick in the train. His father, after attending to him three times in the lavatory, and putting eau-de-Cologne on a head bursting with hidden disappointments, had hit on the happy thought of sending Rudi home from the next station; but the Starnberger See had been nothing like as exciting as Rudi had expected, and Emil had been too impatient to teach him how to crawl.

Something like this might be going to happen again, and his father would do nothing to help him. "*Ach*, Rudi!" he would say, with those little eyes far back in his head twinkling like sparks of fire, "but this is none of my business! Do what you like! A man who cannot find out what he really likes, will never find out anything!"

Rudi took the last stairs very slowly, and was relieved when he opened the study door, to see that at least his father was not twinkling—studying the map of his father's face with the swift knowledge of a trained explorer—Rudi saw that he was not going to be called on to make a choice, on the contrary he was going to be told something that had no choice about it.

His father gave him a long, measuring look, and said: "Well—how was it at school to-day?" but there was not the eager note in his voice that usually went with this familiar question. Nor was Rudi very anxious to impart what had taken place at school that morning. He leaned against his father's desk and began to fiddle with a paper-weight made like an elephant, a present he himself had given to his father long ago, when it had cost him something to give away even the vestige of so choice an animal.

"It was not bad," Rudi began reluctantly, "not too bad—but a funny thing happened. Herr Müller said once more—all that about Nordic blood we have to learn; and a boy sitting next to me asked to change his desk, he said I smelt like a Jew! Is it true, Father, that we Jews smell differently from other people?"

His father twirled his heavy eyebrows in a comical way he had, as if they also could talk. "Ah!" he asked, "and how long had this boy's desk been next to yours, my son?"

"We have sat together nearly two years now—Peter was once my friend," Rudi explained.

"And he has only just noticed this strange smell!" his father commented, "it cannot then, I think, be very strong or very unfavourable—or else he would have suffered from it before—*nicht wahr?* What did Herr Müller say to him, my boy?"

"He told him to go on with his work," Rudi explained, "but after recess his desk was changed and now I sit alone by the window. After school Herr Müller kept me, and was very kind. He asked me if I minded very much being a Jew. I told him what you had said about Jews, and he said, 'Believe always those words of your father's, but do not repeat them to anyone. If you are out in a storm you must bow to it.' But then he asked about my work, and if my marks were as usual—and they are not—some of the masters mark me always lower, though I work as hard and he said not to be discouraged about this—for he was after all the head master, and he would from time to time examine me in all my subjects, and see that I was fairly marked. So now I am less anxious than I was; but he said about play he could do nothing and I must look after myself."

His father nodded his head. "Müller is a wise man," he agreed, "it was because I greatly trusted him that I sent you to his school. Whatever school you went to would be the same—or worse."

"But if we left this country would it be as bad for us?" Rudi ventured. "I talked to Isaac Cohen in the recess, because the others would not let us play

with them. I have never liked Isaac before, but now I talk to him a good deal—and he said his father was going to take him to another country where he would be any boy's equal, however Nordic they were! I find this strange, for Isaac has a bigger nose than mine, and his hair shines, and his skin is dark!"

His father was silent for a long while. At last he said: "Italians also have dark skins and black hair—the Japanese yellow skins and shining hair—they will be, if they are not yet, the respected friends and allies of Germany—this difference of skins and features will be easily overlooked when the interests are the same. It need not concern you, unless such errors in the minds of others, make it too difficult for us to use our powers. I, too, have thought of flight but there are things against it. We break up our home if we fly and your mother loses her elder sons. There is another thing, if all Jews that can fly go, then those who cannot fly, will be more cruelly—because more secretly—injured. Those of us who are rich, and well-known outside Germany, can, by remaining, help the unknown and weaker Jews. I do not think that I personally *should* fly before this storm; but I am not so sure about you and Freya. Perhaps it would be best to send you to another country, so that your education and future careers might be free. I could do this for I have friends in many other countries."

"But not alone!" Rudi gasped, a horrible dread rushing up from his heart until the future looked like a precipice. "We could not be without you and Mother—it would be better to smell like anything, and be spat at, and have stones and mud flung at us every day—than to go alone to a strange country—and leave you behind! Oh, Father, do not make us do such a horrible thing!"

"These things have already happened to you?" his father asked, ignoring Rudi's appeal.

"Well—they have—sometimes," Rudi admitted, "but always worse to Isaac, whose clothes are torn nearly every day. You see, I throw back stones and mud, and fight anyone who hits me! I find it better so!"

"And I think that you are right——" his father agreed. "You should tell Isaac to do the same! Still, if many try to attack you at once, it would be as well to let Herr Müller know—many together might do you or Isaac a real injury!"

"But I think they will not do that," Rudi explained, "for after Herr Müller told us about the Nordic blood, he said that to hurt even a Jew or a Communist—by numbers—was not fair play and that would be a worse disgrace to a Nazi than even to have the blood of a Jew! And he said also,

‘Boys, while I am your head master, these things shall never be done in my school, but if you do not want me—I will go!’ You know how all of us love him and so, though the other masters are not so careful of us as he is one can get on very well—! Do not send us away, Father, out of our country and our home!’

His father gave a short laugh that had rather a painful sound, Rudi thought. “When have I ever forced you, or Freya, to do what you did not want?” he asked. “As long as you are happier staying here with us, and I see that your work gets done, you shall stay—that I can promise you—though remember in such times as these, we can but live a day at a time and promise only within the conditions that now exist. You are strong—you have an easy, brave heart. I think that you can get on very well through your present difficulties. It was about your sister that I wished to speak to you. I am unhappy about your sister, Rudi!”

Rudi’s heart sank, for he could not remember ever having heard his father express unhappiness before. He did not feel either, that he had much strength to spare to fight Freya’s battles, for he had rather under, than over, estimated the scope of his new difficulties. Freya was so big too—why couldn’t she look after herself?

His father seemed to have read his thoughts for he said: “She is a grown-up girl, and hers are not the same kind of battles as yours. It is not your fists I want for her! She is persecuted, like you—she has not told me of her troubles, but I know that girls say cruel things to her. Girls are less violent than boys, but what they say hurts sometimes worse than blows. Still, these things Freya can stand—it is what happens to one’s friends that hurts most! Perhaps lately you have not seen much of her friend Hans Breitner, but I expect that you very well remember him?”

Rudi stiffened, he swallowed pain, for he had for a very long time felt jealous of Freya. She had kept Hans away from him. And Hans was still his hero every bit as much as Freya’s friend. Hans could ski-jump forty metres. Twice he had won the championship against Tirol, once at Kitzbühel and once above Kufstein.

It was hard to be given a hero for a friend, and then not be allowed to see him as often as your sister did.

Hans had no prejudice against Jews, either—nor was he one himself, he was the plainest Nordic—a buttercup could not be more purely flaxen—but he had only laughed when Rudi had anxiously questioned him as to this drawback to their friendship.

“The wool of a black lamb weighs as much as the wool of a white one, doesn’t it?” Hans had reassuringly suggested.

It was just selfishness on Freya’s part that kept Hans away from him! And now what had happened to Hans? What could happen to him? For did he not know all about mountains and their dangers?

“I remember him, Father,” Rudi forced himself to say through shaking lips. “Of course I remember Hans—is there anything the matter with him?”

“It is not only Jews who suffer from the Nazis,” his father said gravely. “Communists suffer as much—or more. You have heard about the Reichstag fire? The Nazis accuse the Communists of starting it. They have arrested many—and some they have killed!”

Rudi’s body grew stiffer and stiffer, as if his strong elastic muscles had turned to wood or stone; his heart thumped and his eyes riveted themselves upon his father’s face.

They read the truth there before his father said very gently: “They have killed your sister’s friend, Hans. But without pain or torture. He died a clean, swift death—shot through the heart. Your sister had to see this thing done. That is why I am unhappy about her, Rudi.”

His father did not look at him or touch him, he got up heavily and wandered away to one of his bookshelves, as if he were looking for something in a book that might help them, although nothing in a book could possibly bring back Hans.

It gave Rudi time to shake the tears from his eyes, and pretend that they had not fallen.

“It is hard for you,” his father said without turning round. “You are now twelve years old. It is the coming-of-age of a Jewish boy. You remember Jesus Christ left his parents then to talk with the heads of His race? I have sometimes wondered if this persecution of the Jews by Europeans—is not a revenge because one of our sons has given them a religion that they wished to accept—and have failed to practise! It is a very dangerous thing to have an idea that you will not practise. It might well make anyone angry with those from whom the idea came. I was just hunting for something that Shakespeare said about a young man’s death—I thought it might be useful to us. I find that I remember it without looking it up. ‘The readiness is all.’ The young man himself said this to a friend, when he was about to fight in a duel, and thought that he would be killed. He *was* killed; and as he died he

told his friend to go on living, so that his friend might, as it were, represent him fairly to the world that he had left too soon.

“Perhaps you may have wondered why you did not see more of Hans lately, for I know that he was your friend as well as Freya’s? She found that his being a Communist would be dangerous to us as a family, so although she had my permission to bring him here, she would not. She met him only where she thought no one could punish us for her friendship. Freya is like that; and she has taken her punishment alone.”

“I will see her!” Rudi exclaimed in a choking voice. “I will go to her *now*, Father—I would like to!”

“It is what I hoped that you would do,” his father agreed. “None of us knew Hans as well as you did—so that she can talk of him to you, more easily than to us—and this might do her good.”

Rudi nodded, he longed to ask how Freya had seen Hans die, but the words would not pass his quivering lips, nor could he see Hans as dead—he saw him so vividly as alive—a happy grin on his face, eating a chocolate *Torte* or running to catch a tram. Hans was such a funny fellow, and so strong that he could lift a large calf right off its four feet into the air!

Rudi had never seen a dead human being; but he had seen a rabbit once—alive one moment, and a limp piece of fur the next—a drowned cat—and many stiff frozen birds.

He tried to think of Hans as still forever, but all of a sudden a pain ran right through him, as if Hans’ bullet had found its way to his heart.

“Father!” he cried aloud, before he could check himself. “Father, do Nazis only kill Communists?—could they kill Jews too—just for being Jews?”

His father spun round quickly, and put his hand on Rudi’s shoulder as if to steady them both.

“This death,” he said quickly, “is not a great affair! Think—it happens once only—to each of us—as birth does. What do you know about being born? That—and no more—will you know about the act of death. Do not exaggerate what can happen to us!”

“But *could* they, Father—” Rudi persisted, trembling violently from head to foot. “*Could* they kill—you?”

It was such a terrible thought that when he had given it utterance, Rudi hid his eyes against the rough cloth of his father’s sleeve—inside was his

father's warm, living arm—it passed round his shoulders and drew him closer.

“If they kill me,” his father said in a cheerful voice, “it might be useful! People would hear of it—in other countries—and think the less of the Nazis for such an action. It would not help to spread their creed. Fortunately the ideas that we stand for, cannot be killed! Communism, for instance—whatever its value as an idea—will grow the stronger for the death even of Hans! He was not well-known but all those who knew him, loved him, and knew that he had done nothing to deserve death. It is those who kill who are weakened, and what ideas they have, are greatly discredited by their acts.

“All persecution is a sign of fear; for if we did not fear the power of an opinion different from our own, we should not mind others holding it. Truth is its own defence. If the Nazis should kill me, for instance—although I do not think for a moment that they will—such an affair would have its good side!

“When you had recovered from the natural grief of no longer having your father with you, you would see that no great disaster had taken place! On the contrary, I should have done the Nazis a bad turn and they would have done my beliefs a good one. But do not be afraid of losing me—I am no Communist—for they, too, kill and persecute those they disagree with. I do not think my Jewish blood alone will annoy the Nazis sufficiently for them to take my life. And you are still safer—for your mother is strikingly Nordic. This is a very new regime and may improve with time. There is no particular danger to any one of our family at present. It is a good thing to learn early that other people's opinions do not matter, unless they happen to be true. Your reason is given you to test them. *Think* a great deal, my dear boy, but do not think it necessary to *say* what you think! That a Jew is despised or persecuted is bad for him, of course—but far worse for the Christian who does it—for although persecuted he can remain a good Jew—whereas no Christian who persecutes can possibly remain—if he ever was one—a good Christian!

“It is time for you to see Freya. And I must go to the university to see what I can arrange about her return to work. The sooner she can go on with her studies, the better. But it must not be too soon!”

Rudi dragged at his father's arm—it was all very well to say he would go to Freya in the heat of the moment when his jealousy had died—but all of a sudden, Rudi's responsibility loomed too large—what would he say to

Freya? Too much had happened to her! A girl who had seen her lover shot before her eyes could hardly be his spirited, care-free sister—Freya!

His father drew him gently towards the door as if there were no difficulties in store for him, beyond the physical descent of a few stairs. “But what can I say to Freya?” Rudi demanded almost hysterically, “about Hans—to comfort her? When people are dead—they are dead—they cannot come alive!”

“It is you yourself that will comfort her,” his father murmured soothingly, bending down to kiss him, as if Rudi were not so old as he had urged him to be a few minutes earlier, “therefore it does not matter in the least what you say!”

When Rudi opened Freya’s door, and saw her lying very still, face downwards on her bed, he ran and lifted her face towards his own, crying: “Freya! Freya! It’s me!” She seized him in her arms and hugged him, so that after all what they said to each other did not matter very much—but it was as if while they talked of him together—they made Hans come a little more alive.

CHAPTER XXII

Amélie heard the front door open, and quick, light steps running up the shallow stairs. Her heart rose to her eyes but when she saw who stood in the doorway, the light in them died down, and she smiled at her son Emil with grave, impersonal kindness.

The change took place in a flash but Emil had seen it. Her glance fell like ice on the warmth of his heart.

This was his mother, but never in the sense that she was Olaf's, Freya's or Rudi's mother.

To Emil alone, though he shared every right and privilege possessed by the others, she gave that controlled kindliness, instead of love.

"Come in, my dear," his mother said gently, "and talk quietly, for Freya is asleep. Your father has given her a sleeping draught. Perhaps you already know more than I do about what happened on the Wetterstein?"

Emil sat down on the edge of the bed, and looked at his mother with a curious intensity. It was as if he wanted her to understand what he *meant* rather than what he *said*, but how was she even to understand what he said, if she would go on sorting clothes—as if the wants of any poor child were more important than his own?

She knelt in front of a deep drawer, and only half turned to face Emil, gazing consideringly at each small garment as she picked it up.

"Yes," Emil said defensively, after a moment's pause, "I *do* know something about what happened on the Wetterstein—something that I ought to tell you—but you must promise me first not to repeat it. No one else must know!"

"Not tell your father?" Amélie murmured with a startled glance. "But, Emil, suppose that I feel that he *should* be told? Can you not trust me to use my own judgement as to what I *should*—or should *not* repeat? I do not like accepting a responsibility without the power to do what I think right about it!"

Emil sprang impatiently to his feet, and brushed past her, to the open window. The chestnut tree into which he stared was not yet in leaf, but there

was a faint mist of green about its thickening buds. Wood-pigeons called insistently to each other. The mild sweet clamour of their voices filled the room. From time to time they crashed clumsily through the branches, the sun shining on their pink breasts—or on the sweep of a wide grey wing.

Emil neither saw nor heard them; but perhaps their calls reminded him of the cry he had never allowed to pass his lips: “Mother! Mother! Mother!” He sometimes thought that behind everything else he asked for was that blind cry. Nothing had ever filled the hole left in his unfurnished heart by the lack of his mother’s love. Beauty was less beautiful to him because of it—joy was less joy.

“If it is a question of trust,” he said at last in a strained voice, “suppose you begin by trusting *me*! You risk breaking up Freya’s whole life, if you refuse to promise what I must ask of you!”

“How like he is to his father,” Amélie Roth thought, regarding with distaste the bullet shape of the head rising from his thick short neck, covered with flat dry hair. “But I must not think of that now! I must think only of Freya, and of what he can do, for Freya!”

Aloud she said: “We live in strange times, Emil, but if this confidence of yours concerns Freya’s safety, I will consent to keep any promise that you choose to exact from me—I must! But I am quite unable to imagine anything that would not be as safe with your father as with me.”

Emil wheeled round and faced her. “It’s not that,” he said quickly, “you won’t *be* questioned—but Father might be—and if he is, he’d better—for his own safety’s sake—know nothing! He’s so damned honest! Who do you think killed Hans Breitner?” He saw fear flash into his mother’s eyes, as if it were already waiting to be called up.

“Surely,” she said in low, anxious tones, “it was a sentry who shot him—Freya saw it!”

“No she didn’t!” Emil contradicted, “she saw Hans lying on the ground with the Brown Shirts standing over him. Olaf and Fritz had taken them up *to* shoot him! They gave the order—and they are responsible for the death of Hans!”

The garment in Amélie’s hands dropped to the floor, she fumbled blindly for it, murmuring incredulously: “Olaf—killed his sister’s lover?”

“I don’t know which of them actually gave the command,” Emil explained, “but probably Olaf, his is the higher rank. They had both agreed to it. We saw this business had to stop. We tried to get you and Father to put

an end to it, but you wouldn't! We tried to do it ourselves—but you stopped us! When you got that note of Freya's we suspected what she was up to. Fritz had found out about the farm on the Wetterstein. It seemed likely that she had gone up there to say good-bye to Hans and that he would do a bolt over the peak, to Karwendel. It's practically unguarded up there—only an expert climber would risk it, and he could only manage it when the moon was at the full—still we knew Hans *could* climb! It was a frightful shock when they saw Freya—naturally they had expected she would stay at the farm. Besides they had no right up there. They had broken their discipline. No one had given them leave to shoot Hans. They gave themselves up when they got back—Olaf insisted on it—and they've been put under arrest—but nobody except Fritz's father and I—know what they've been arrested *for*! And no one *must* know!"

His mother's eyes widened in horror.

"They are arrested," she whispered, "Olaf and Fritz, for—for murder?"

Emil gave a short bark of laughter. "To shoot a Communist running away is no murder!" he explained scornfully, "it's a summary execution! Still an execution without a direct order means at least detention for a month or two—and if it were publicly known what they had done, Olaf and Emil would lose rank. Naturally, nobody *minds* their having shot Hans but to take two Brown Shirts off to shoot him without orders—was terribly high-hatted! Olaf wanted to go alone—but Fritz refused to risk it. There might have been a whole gang of Communists trying to get over after the Reichstag fire—and they're definitely dangerous fellows! As far as we know however, Freya and Hans were alone!"

"Two little lovers," his mother murmured, as if she were speaking to herself, "on a spring night, under the moon! When I was young, Emil, my home was in Tirol, and every May when the moon was at the full, the herdsmen spent half the night yodelling on the mountainside. It was a sort of call to the spring—to love—to youth—as if they were drawing together all the dreaming earth to greet the promise of new life. No one used our mountains *then* as a place to murder lovers."

Emil kicked nervously at the carpet. He did not want to think of love and moonlight.

"It's all very well," he said savagely. "Ours is a military age, and such an age must be harsh in its methods. You cannot lift a country like Germany back to its old honour, without bayonets!"

“You think that such an act as Olaf and Fritz have done—enhances the honour of your country?” his mother asked ironically, raising her arched eyebrows with disdain. “I should hardly have thought myself that bayonets or bullets were intrinsically honourable!” Emil frowned, there were moments when he hated his mother more than he hated anything in the world. She had a quality of cold dauntlessness that exasperated his male ardour. It was as if what she stood for, was invulnerable to the strength of man; and could not be affected by it.

“What we’ve got to find out,” he told her after a pause in harder tones, “is, if anyone else *was* there! If they *weren’t*—it doesn’t half so much matter about Hans! Of course the natural thing would be to ask Freya!”

“The *natural* thing — —?” his mother demanded. She turned a strange glassy white, and her eyes closed as if she were going to faint; but she still remained upright on her knees. After a moment she opened her eyes wide, as if she had only closed them to give herself time to brush back the horror she felt in the depths of her heart. “I think Freya would go out of her mind if she were questioned at present,” she said quietly, “and then her evidence would cease to be valuable, would it not?”

“It’s damned hard luck!” Emil admitted irritably, “and that’s just why I’m trying to give you this chance. If *you* ask her, don’t you see, Freya won’t *be* upset! She’ll not mind telling *you*! And then all you’ve got to do is to tell *me*, and our commander will take my word for it without pressing to see Freya himself!”

“Emil,” his mother asked in a voice suddenly turned to ice, “are you asking me to *spy* on your sister for you? Hasn’t it been treachery enough—to kill her lover? Must you ask me to betray her friends—so that they too may be shot?”

“I know it sounds like that,” Emil muttered despondently, “but only because you’re all out to take things personally. This is too big a business for personalities! In the service of the State, such men as Hans Breitner have to be stamped out. For us—there are no private lives—not even our own. We are simply parts of a machine—and move, or should move, like a smoothly-running piston—any speck of dust or grit has to be ruthlessly cleared away!”

“Ah, these cheating, senseless analogies!” his mother said bitterly. “Man is *not* part of a machine! Hearts are *not* yet dust! You cannot—however hard you try—sweep away the spirit of man!”

“Are Communists any freer?” Emil demanded angrily. “Why, everything they do—every meal they eat—every journey they take—is regulated for

them! It is the workmen in their State by whom such regulations are made. And you little know what that means! Here in Nazi Germany—and in a very little while all Germany will *be* Nazi—we are out for fairness. We do not stamp out the class that has built up our land. Fairness, in the future, will be the right of all who serve the State—no wholesale murders of half the country and slow starvation for the rest! You don't know what we are up against, Mother! We have to take sharp measures to protect ourselves. But let Germany once be strong—and she is going to be strong—and see how she will lead all Europe out of the false morass into which it has fallen!”

“By what methods?” his mother demanded, speaking lower still, but with savage irony. “By the persecution of Jews? By the murder of Communists—by armaments—concentration camps—torture chambers, and a muzzled Press? And is it by such methods that men produce millenniums? I see no difference between what you are doing and what you accuse Russia of doing! If you choose to call one savage a ‘Nazi’ and the other a ‘Communist’, it is all the same to me! From the moment that you deny tolerance to those who disagree with you—you are equally a barbarian and a savage! Men are what they believe—and what they believe shows in their every act. Ask yourself, Emil—with what are you going to replace this life of peace and goodwill that once at least we set before ourselves as a goal? Will you learn mercy from murderers—truth from liars—fidelity from police spies? You ask me to betray your sister to you? Emil, are you my son?”

“You have told me so!” replied Emil with equal bitterness. “Olaf is also your son! Why do you not reproach *him*?”

Amélie Roth flung back her beautiful head. She was glad of the rage that wrapped her like a flame, for she knew that she was being unjust to Emil, and she wanted an excuse for being still more unjust to him.

“For one thing, Olaf is not here to reproach!” she asserted, “but in prison, where he ought to be! And for another—he has not yet asked me to spy upon his sister!”

“You never understand me, or what I am trying to do for you!” Emil burst out passionately. “It is always the same! I don't know why. I was born in the wrong with you! It is true Olaf is not here. Why? Because he is responsible for the death of Hans! Is it for this—that he is to escape your reproaches? I refused my consent to the shooting. Never mind why. I *did* refuse it! And this is why I am here. I wanted Hans out of the way as much as they did—I admit, but not like that! If Olaf has not asked you to find out from Freya who else was in the business, it is because he thinks she should

be questioned by the authorities. He won't go against Party discipline—except to *serve* the Party. He thinks shooting Hans was an act of service. And he excuses himself for its having also been a family convenience. I accept his attitude, but I do not share it. Nor will I have Freya exposed to the question-by-police methods—if I can help it—and for these things I get, as usual, the wrong side of your tongue!”

“You are very merciful,” his mother said mockingly, but she held out her hand towards him. “Forgive me,” she murmured, “I was mad to speak so harshly to you! It is because I have been with Freya—I *am* with her! But I have no right to blame you, for what you have not caused and cannot avoid. Indeed I am grateful for your help. It is something that one of my sons felt a disinclination to murder his sister's lover! Let us see if we cannot act together to help her still further! I am not exaggerating when I tell you that Freya will kill herself if any more suffering is inflicted upon her!”

Emil did not take his mother's outstretched hand, but he moved nearer to her, and once more sat down on the edge of the bed. “Fritz has a suggestion,” he said slowly. “He wants you to take Freya at once to Maberg. The Graf will be in Munich at five o'clock this afternoon. Will you meet him at the Café Haag? He knows that Fritz is responsible—with Olaf—for the shooting. He had to be told—but of course he wants to keep it hushed up. No one else is to know. If Freya leaves here soon and goes straight to Maberg—it is not likely that anyone will suspect that she was with Hans! We'll see that it's kept quiet this end—if you'll attend to the other! If it breaks out later—it might be awkward—but you see it might *not* break out later. Besides—well—besides Fritz still wants to marry her!”

His mother rose to her feet. She looked incredibly tall and terrifying. Her eyes were fastened on her son, but not as if she saw him, she seemed to be looking through him, at someone who was not there.

“Ah,” she said at last in a strange whispering voice, “it is to happen again, is it—this thing I thought was over? Another girl is to be tortured—to have the life of her soul frozen—and her senses seared with shame! I thought we had escaped from the world where women were at a man's mercy—considered only as his tools or his toys. You are a man, Emil—your body is your own. Your strength is free! How little you know or imagine what it is to be a human being, at the mercy of another human being to whom you owe intimacy without love! Send for your police spies—let them rack your sister. Better that she should take her life, than to have to live it in such a servitude. I will neither sell her—nor see her sold!”

“Mother! Mother!” Emil gasped, appalled by the ferocity of the clear eyes bent on him. “Why do you say such things to me? And why do you keep staring at my hands as if you hated them? It was not I who killed Hans—and God knows I have no wish to sell or to humiliate Freya! She needn’t marry Fritz if she doesn’t want to! He isn’t a brute and he *does* love her. She can’t mourn *all* her life for a dead peasant boy she has only known for a few months!”

His mother looked at him more naturally; the terrible blind rage, that had wrapped her like a flame, sank; her hands began to tremble and she said sadly: “I am to blame! I must forget! No! No! It is not your fault! I know that very well, Emil! You are a good boy, trying to help us—in a time so mad that one suspects even one’s helpers! It is not true that I love you less than the others. And I have always trusted you!”

“Don’t lie to me,” Emil said roughly, “that’s worst of all!”

They remained silent for a long minute, their eyes fixed on each other, his mother’s were full of self-reproach, and Emil’s eyes held a yearning stronger than his rage.

He could not understand the barrier that stood between him and his mother, and although she understood it, she had never told him what it was. How could she say to him: “Your real father—whose image you are to look at—was a degenerate, a pervert, who nearly murdered me, and made me suffer for four years the torments of the damned! Whenever I look at you I see him—and whenever you touch me I turn cold.”

The war had not only hidden her final escape from her husband, it had covered his memory with a merciful cloak of oblivion; so that no one but the von Röhrs themselves knew the details of his end, or that Rudolph von Röhn had died, not of wounds heroically acquired in battle, but of a disease that he had merited.

“Emil,” his mother said gently, “you have much to forgive! Not all that you think is true—but some of it is. Because of something that I have never told you—and for which you are in no way responsible—because of a wound that I have tried to hide—I have been cruelly unjust to you. But far less than you think. I know you for what you are! An honest boy with a brave heart! And in my soul—and with my mind—I love you as much as I love the other children. But you came at a bad time in my life—you remind me of cruel things. When you see me shrink—it is not from you that I am shrinking! When you feel a coldness in me it is a defence against something that is no longer attacking me—but that once—when I was young and

defenceless—attacked and overwhelmed me. Perhaps you cannot understand this now—you are too young, and the pain this accident in me has caused you, has been too sharp! But perhaps some day you will understand!”

“I understand now,” Emil said with a gentleness that matched her own. “It is, as I have always thought, Mother—my own father was some kind of a mad brute! Olaf had the idea he was a hero—and you never said he wasn’t! But it hasn’t made much difference to either of us, has it, whether he was a hero or a brute? We had our *real* father to bring us up—and you!”

“Ah, my dear,” said his mother, sitting down on the bed beside him, “you had yourself! Such a good brave self! I am ashamed I let my selfishness hide you from me. But we will work together now with no more fear of separation. If you think it best I will go to meet Ulrich von Maberg. If they wish to have Freya again for a visit while Fritz is not there—I agree—more you will not ask of me. We could not let her marry Fritz, even if she wished to—unless she knew that he had been part of the force that killed Hans; but if we wait long enough, she will recover her strength and be able to face any question that comes up!” Amélie took his hand in hers, and smiled at him. She made no further excuses.

Emil threw himself on his knees in front of his mother and buried his head in her lap, she stroked his stubborn hair, and touched his forehead with her hands; but even though she longed to, she could not force herself to draw his head against her breast.

CHAPTER XXIII

Ulrich von Maberg hastened across the Odeonplatz, his heart swelling with a sense of importance and relief.

Never for years had his spirits risen so high, or his sense of satisfaction with himself and life, felt so thoroughly justified.

He had been granted an interview with the General in command of Munich; and he was hastening to meet the woman he had always adored and never possessed.

His son, whose mere existence Ulrich had always resented, was in prison for murder.

Fritz, however, was not going to be executed, but by the goodwill of an omnipotent parent, assisted by the proper authorities, he was—after a suitable period in a fortress prison—to be let off. What more could a fond father desire, than just such a slight but salutary punishment, inflicted upon a tiresome young person who had always got the better of him? What Ulrich would have enjoyed in an only son was deep respect, untrammelled by any effort on his own part to live up to it; instead of which he was well aware that his son had no respect for him whatever, and yet presumed to expect his father to behave in an exemplary manner. Hermine, too, through some unplumbed feminine idiosyncrasy, had always had the bad taste to prefer her son to her husband! But when had *Ulrich* ever been in prison? What life had *he* ever cut off—except those of countless birds—chamois—and through the proper instrumentality—fish and foxes?

The Nazis at least took Ulrich at his true value—the General had said: “A son of yours, my dear von Maberg, will naturally receive every consideration!” The Nazis, Ulrich told himself cheerfully, were really going to turn out very well indeed. Dear old Hindenburg would “come across”, as the Americans so wittily put it, at the right moment—he and von Papen—both *Junker*, with their hearts in the right place, had the interests of their class at heart. They were not likely to back that fellow Hitler without knowing what it would lead to!

Rather startling, of course, to talk about an Austrian customs officer’s son as a “*Führer*.” Still, look at Napoleon, “a Corsican upstart” who became an emperor!

These Social Democrats would be very easy to put in their places: a few policemen would see to that—and Hitler would be useful to bring the work-people over. Once you had them feeding out of your hand, and that cold-blooded Catholic *Fisch*—Brüning—was passing emergency bills that swiftly put the State in von Schleicher's pocket—the good old times might be counted on to come back—better than ever. Soon you could kick the proletarian riff-raff off the pavements with impunity and see women only where they belonged, at the cooking-stove or in your bed!

Not that Ulrich wouldn't have treated Amélie like a queen if he'd had her; but he'd have known, and she'd have known, that he needn't—that was the sort of feeling that gave a man real self-respect.

Where was the virtue of *not* thrashing your wife or your groom, if you'd be punished for it—if you did?

Noblesse oblige was good enough for Ulrich von Maberg.

Of course von Röhn had always been a skunk. How Amélie could have been such a little fool as to choose *him* rather than Ulrich remained a mystery.

Still the Trattenbachs, Ulrich's Austrian cousins, were the most old-fashioned stock in existence and they had kept Amélie in such a state of purity and innocence that she'd actually never spoken to a man alone—until her marriage night—the poor little snowdrop.

Tears came to Ulrich's rather small round eyes, as he thought of what Amélie must have had to suffer; and what he had failed to enjoy.

When he'd seen her next, after her marriage, all the glow and bloom of her eighteen years had vanished, she was just a little frozen flower.

Ulrich, however, had always kept a warm corner of his heart for her, and it would have been warmer still, if Amélie had ever had the sense to work it.

But once frozen, she had remained frozen for life. You could not count her second marriage to an old Jew!

A mutton-headed old fool who had thrown away a fortune! Still, in spite of her father's having let a younger brother take the greater part of the Roth money to America, Freya would have a solid portion—a thing not to be sneezed at in these hard times. But she'd never be the looker her mother was—hair like ripe corn, falling in a sheet below her knees—long slender flanks; high small breasts and a colour no peach could better! Those startled wide grey eyes too could turn your bones to water!

Ulrich crossed the street to the Café Haag, flung wide his shoulders, twirled his moustache, and set his hat a little farther to one side.

Although they had seen each other fairly often, through the years that stretched between them and their youth, they had never met without the clumsy impedimenta of time—husbands—wives—children—cluttering up their path. This meeting was different, it bore all the marks of an assignation. It was just as if there had been between them, what there had never been, and now of course never would be. Still a fellow—even at fifty—has his dreams!

Ulrich swaggered gallantly into the small downstairs room, glanced at the bar-counter rich with incredible cakes and pastries, and took a table in the upstairs room, far enough away from the herd, to permit of private conversation. Not merely for sentimental reasons either, Fritz' Nazi authority had suggested that one couldn't be too careful nowadays, with everybody stretching their ears to find out the kind of secrets nobody knew.

The rather menacing feeling that even Ulrich had been conscious of, for the last few months, as if a heavy thundercloud were rolling up in the sky, blotting out daylight, passed from his mind. If the clouds did break he knew now that *his* fields would not be ruined.

It was as if, since his talk this afternoon, Ulrich's personal prospects had been lifted up into a golden ark. The floods could come now; but he and his family would float securely upon the waters.

Meanwhile he could talk with the nearest waitress, about appropriate food. The Café Haag had the best cakes in—or probably out of—Munich.

What they couldn't sell fresh, they didn't try to sell at all. Their cook was a genius. Their *Crèmeschnitten* for instance, or their *Sachertorte* melted before your teeth met in it—and not even Ulrich's morals were lighter than Haag pastry. There was one fault though the café had—the chairs were not sufficiently substantial for middle-aged figures. Probably they did not want their customers to be too comfortable, or to sit too long.

What would Amélie look like, coming up the stairs? Would she be kind to him? Would she let those cool grey eyes soften into delicious laughter?

Amélie wasn't such a prude as she looked—and yet wasn't she? He had never dared to try to find out!

Somehow or other he had always wanted to be nice to Amélie. She'd had a bad deal, and when he held her hand in his, he had never done more than brush it with his lips.

The door at the top of the stairs opened without force. Amélie stood there for a moment looking about her, with the old unruffled considerate dignity. She would always wait—or turn aside—for a servant with a tray—but she looked at men who brushed too close to her with eyes that matched the Arctic Ocean.

The years had dealt extraordinarily kindly with Amélie, it was enough to make you think she'd been happy with her queer old Jew.

Her skin was still white, her grey eyes clear as spring water, the lovely lines of her head and throat unblurred; and when she smiled across the room at him, Ulrich's heart literally danced in his tough old breast.

"I hope I'm not late," she said gently, subsiding into the chair he held out for her, with the old slow enchanting smile. "My boy Emil told me to be here at five—but there was a good deal to be done, and I did not like to leave Freya until her father was at home."

"Yes, yes!" Ulrich murmured, reverently removing and hanging up her squirrel coat.

It was an old one, but she had kept it in good repair, and beneath it, she wore a dress that had come from Vienna. Ulrich knew that at a glance—not even the stoutest Bavarian denied that his lighter neighbours—the Austrians—had a taste it was hard to copy, and impossible for Bavarians to create. Amélie had wisely taken time to change her dress—black, with a touch of jade-green velvet on the shoulder—and its long simple lines gave her figure the easy slenderness of youth.

Ulrich took a long time eliciting exactly what she wanted to eat. There must be no mistake about so serious a question. The best, Ulrich told himself, would be none too good for his early love. Amélie took his preoccupation charmingly. She was just as serious as if it really mattered a dropped *Pfennig* to her which cake she chose, or which savoury sandwich led up to it.

She compared flavours with him; she made him describe past meals; their pre-war memories rang together like silver chimes; and all the while she tasted nothing—she saw nothing but Freya lying broken—face downwards on her bed.

At last Amélie cut across Ulrich's choice reminiscences to murmur: "It is marvellous, Ulrich—reliving our old lives, but I must soon go home. I suppose that you wanted to talk to me about this sad affair our children have got themselves mixed up in. You will perhaps give me your advice about it."

What a woman she was! Ulrich thought, as he swelled and preened himself before her—these wretched boy-girls of to-day with their hard legs and snappy manners—could they ever make a man feel and consequently sometimes act—like a hero?

Of course Ulrich would give poor Amélie his advice, it was just exactly what he wanted to give her. He felt himself bursting with the most generous—the most delicate advice.

“You see, my dear,” he said, with a suspicious glance about him, calculated to rivet any curiosity that might have been roused already in their neighbourhood, “our young people as you very truly observe, *have* got themselves into a mess! You mustn’t think I uphold what my boy Fritz has done! No—I thought when I was told of it in a really pleasant and friendly way by one of our foremost Nazis—one mustn’t mention names here but I’ll tell you afterwards who he was—*verfluchter Kerl*—he *has* put his foot into it!

“A good honest boy, Fritz, but sadly clumsy. He takes after his mother’s side of the family. You remember perhaps what *I* was at his age? More polished—more informed—more discreet— —! No doubt I owed it to my upbringing!

“You can’t expect nowadays to see examples of our old Bavarian breeding under fifty. Motor cars and aeroplanes—though I say nothing against them as conveniences—take the glitter off people’s manners. You remember our old silver helmets. Ah, how I would have flogged my servant, had I not been able to use mine like a mirror! But I always could—I always could— —! And the harness on my horse too—how it sparkled! Where was I — —? Yes—well my first impression of this little *gaffe* on the mountains—was that it might be serious—very serious indeed! You see, these Nazis haven’t been with us long enough for one to be perfectly sure of their good sense, but I want to tell you, Amélie, that to-day they made a good impression on me—a very good impression indeed!”

Ulrich blinked and paused, it was a good moment to put down the final morsel of chocolate cream *Torte* and to decide between a cherry pastry, or something a little sharper—just to wind up with.

Amélie listened to him with that serene, effortless attention, so precious to an aimless talker; not attempting to chip in, or to head him off. It would be of great service to her, Ulrich told himself, to accept the Nazis at their true worth. It could not be denied, however fond he was of her, that Amélie had been strangely remiss as a mother. Fancy allowing Freya to be seen

about with a peasant boy—even Hermine would have been less supine as a domestic authority. Sophie—a sly puss—had taken some watching, but there she was—pure as a lily—to be handed on to young von Röhn on her bridal night.

One could hardly be surprised that Fritz, who if he were going to marry Freya, would naturally not wish her to be blown upon, had picked the fellow off! A good thing that the peasant boy was a Communist, when you came to think of it.

“Freya,” Ulrich said aloud, having tasted the gratitude he expected, from Amélie’s smiling eyes, “poor child, has always—if you will permit me to say so—run too wild! With due allowance for our modern freedom—do you not yourself think that as a parent you carried it too far? In a little girl—with three brothers—to be a tomboy is, I think, understandable, but I must say, Amélie, in your place I should have called her in at twelve, or at latest thirteen—I certainly should!”

“Perhaps you are right,” Amélie said with the ghost of a smile hovering over her curved lips. “It may be that you are right, Ulrich. I had a very sheltered girlhood myself, as you know, and I was not, you see, altogether convinced of its usefulness. This modern world is tough and I thought that I would like to see my girl self-reliant and capable of taking care of herself.”

“Ah, well,” Ulrich admitted, touched to the heart by what he took to be Amélie’s delicate apology for the mistaken choice of her youth, “one must admit your people were exaggeratedly careful! A girl *should* know more than they taught you, Amélie! But Freya has gone a good deal too far in the opposite direction—if I may say so this running about alone with peasant boys—is regrettable and bound to lead to some kind of trouble sooner or later! I know, Fritz tells me that it was merely ski-ing! Still he seems to have taken it a good deal to heart. He shot the fellow himself you know, Amélie! Although Olaf—as his superior officer—gave the order. It seemed the two Brown Shirts they took up with them, to do the actual shooting, muffed their shots. Fritz thought the fellow would get clean away—so he took a sporting shot at him—and got him through the heart. A good shot—over twenty yards! and a moving quarry; moonlight too! Won’t you have another *Kaviar Brötchen*, Amélie?”

She shook her head. There was a queer veiled look in her eyes, and though he paused—for quite a long time—for her to make some appropriate comment, she did not speak.

"The point is," Ulrich went on at last, leaning forward so that he was close to her small shell-like ear, "that it mustn't be *known*, you see! They shot him not only without orders—but it appears that he was actually over the border, a yard or two only—but of course they dragged the body back to our own side—and who cares for the Austrian border line anyhow? I beg your pardon, Amélie—I'd forgotten you were an Austrian by birth—and I mean *now* of course—before the war—it was quite a different thing! A great empire, Austria in those days, and she had to be treated accordingly!"

Amélie drew back her head, but she did not look offended—only a little dazed. The room was hot, and there was a good deal of noise going on that might account for it.

"Fritz," his father went on, in his guttural undertone, "will have to stay where he is—cooling his heels for a bit—two months at least—but that won't do him any harm! Three separate counts against him, you see—a summary execution, without orders; absence from barracks without leave; and that frontier question! Olaf is merely detained for a month. They don't either of them lose rank!"

"They don't lose rank!" Amélie repeated just above her breath. She must have been a good deal relieved, Ulrich thought.

"And now you see," he went on, giving her arm a friendly, not too friendly, pat, "we've come to the question of Freya!"

She woke up then, and looked at him as if her life depended on his words. "Now, Amélie, my dear friend," Ulrich observed protectingly, but with due caution because he knew that he must not let the generosity of his feelings run away with him, "I will speak quite openly to you! We have—on your side and on mine—always, I think, anticipated marriages between our children. One is to take place—with our mutual blessing—and I am quite sure to our mutual satisfaction. But this second one—one must admit that it does not appear such straight sailing! After I had heard this story—and bearing in mind the rumours that had crept in about Freya and the peasant boy—I had really rather given up the plan, and Hermine—well, Hermine was quite emphatically against it from the first. I have always been attached to the child, and as far as that goes I still am! You see, Amélie, I am a broad-minded fellow, and the girl looking like you—I was ready to discount the story! The Roth blood I must acknowledge is in some ways a pity—still, since you are a Trattenbach, and Freya has a good *dot*—that, too, I think need not be taken too seriously! Fritz has for Freya a real and solid attachment—such feelings as I very well know to my cost—are not lightly

broken and can last a lifetime. One marries, of course—and perhaps other little incidents take place—but the heart remains forever faithful! If Freya gets over this little upset and if you can assure me that there has been a—er—nothing serious between Freya and this peasant lad, I would still not be altogether against the match!

“Let Freya come to us for a time—until Sophie and Olaf’s marriage! Naturally my wife and I beg that you will accompany her—for a time at any rate—and I hope, my dear friend, that you will see your way to putting an end to her medical studies.

“I understand that if you bring her soon—an early and private start before anyone is about, is advisable—Emil can bring you in your own car, and we shall be delighted—more than delighted to receive you both.”

“You are very kind, Ulrich,” Amélie said after rather a long pause. She seemed to be trying to smile again, but though her lips curved, her eyes looked curiously empty. “I will bring Freya to Maberg with great pleasure, but I can make no undertaking about the marriage. You see, such things no longer remain in the hands of parents. The young people must settle it for themselves. Naturally my husband and I have nothing whatever against the match, but we should not press it on the child. I think, too, that I ought to tell you, that though I do not believe there was anything of a serious nature between Freya and the boy Hans—the shock of seeing him killed before her eyes—is no light matter! She is very ill—not altogether physically perhaps. It is even possible that though I *can* bring her to you as soon as you suggest, both her mind and body have received one of those sharp impressions that are difficult to get over. As to the university, she cannot go back there for two months. Her father thinks it will take quite as long as that to get over the physical shock, and the authorities prefer her being away for the rest of the term. My husband has, however, made arrangements with the university and with the hospital, so that she may return after the summer holidays are over. He has, as you know, retired officially, but he has remained on good terms with his late colleagues, so that it has been possible for him to make these arrangements, and to safeguard her future.

“I beg that you will not discourage her studies! For her mind needs that particular diversion—we cannot foretell the future, but at present we do not contemplate her resigning her career.

“It is an honourable one, and Freya has already won great distinction. It is possible, the authorities told my husband, that there may be women doctors allowed for women—though only a limited number.

"I am deeply grateful to you and Hermine for your invitation, but I cannot accept it, unless it does not imply any definite agreement either as to the marriage, or to Freya's giving up her profession. I could not bind the child in any way just now—she is already too unhappy."

Ulrich was a tender-hearted man, much as he disliked having to return to Hermine with her conditions set aside (for she had insisted on refusing Freya their hospitality unless she came as a penitent, with a future to be moulded entirely by themselves), he disliked even more giving pain to his old love. He saw that Amélie was suffering, and he thought of little Freya, with her jolly laugh quenched, and her sparkling eyes dimmed with tears. No! He would not have anything more taken forcibly away from her—not at the moment anyhow—later on they could try new methods of persuasion. Besides, who knew but what the Nazis would tighten up this question of men's professions, so that not even a few exceptional women would be allowed to work out of their sphere? As to the marriage with Fritz—since this peasant boy was safely dead—Fritz would soon assume a glamour that he seemed formerly to have missed. Girls, as Ulrich von Maberg had occasion to know, are very seldom adamant—where they have no choice. He made a large and sweeping gesture with his hand. "We will leave both questions open!" he assured Amélie. "Sensitive creatures, girls, I admit—and I remember the first man I saw killed myself! A dead man is a serious sight! And if she had a childish fancy for him—all the worse!"

"You are very generous, Ulrich," Amélie told him, with that queer faint smile on her lips again. "There is one more point you should understand, Freya has no idea at all that Fritz killed Hans—or that her brother Olaf took any part in the murder. She believes that they heard it was to take place, and came up the mountain to help her too late to stop it. My husband and I think that, for the present at any rate, she should keep this idea."

"Perhaps it would be wiser," Ulrich agreed kindly. "It might put her off Fritz, if she heard of it too soon. But I'm pretty confident she'll turn to Fritz in the long run! You see, things will become very different in the future, with Hitler in power. I got a whiff of something to-day, and when the supreme power drops into his hands—well then, look out for the Jews; I can't say I'm sorry, Amélie—your husband and his family excepted—they're not a race I care to see battenning—like leeches—on our good German blood!"

"Nasty, sharp-witted, grasping fellows—you Austrians have always turned up your noses at them! So you'll agree with me, I feel sure, that it won't be a bad thing to see them put in their places!"

Amélie said in a very low voice, with her eyes cast down: “Not altogether, Ulrich.”

He felt for a moment a little taken back. Amélie ought, as a Trattenbach, to despise Jews. She’d married one, of course—but only a second marriage! Penniless (for von Röhn had soaked up all her money as well as what he could lay hands on from the von Röhns’ estates) with two infant sons—it was the only sensible thing to do—and like the sensible young woman she was—Amélie had done it! Still there should be no reason to suppose that she’d liked it much better than her first marriage. The Nazis had quite seen his point about Freya fortunately. With her mother, a Trattenbach, once married to von Röhn—and with a considerable Roth fortune—Freya should be protected, especially if she married a Maberg and devoted herself to the Nazi cause.

Amélie rose to her feet, a very faint light scent came from her squirrel coat as Ulrich lifted it, a scent that reminded him of sunshine in a wood, and that brought back to him in a flash the image of a boy face downwards on wet leaves, crying his heart out for a girl who would never be his.

He had forgotten that he had once possessed such wild and romantic feelings, but as he slipped the fur coat over her slender shoulders, Ulrich wished that he could kiss the whiteness of her neck. The Café Haag was unfortunately too public a place for such a demonstration.

Amélie shivered as she felt his eyes upon her; Ulrich thought, with a pleased sense of mastery, that she realized what he was feeling—and reciprocated it.

CHAPTER XXIV

As long as Rudi stayed with her, Freya felt human again, he reminded her of a Hans she had nearly forgotten—the live Hans of her joy. She felt released from that terrible twitching figure on the snow, but as soon as Rudi was gone, the other figure came back. She could not rid her eyes or her heart of him.

Time did not show her how it passed; but one by one the things in her room grew shapeless, until the soft twilight blotted out the intolerable day.

Her mother came into the room, very slowly and quietly. She pulled the curtains across the windows, and turned on a small reading-lamp behind the bed. She bent over Freya, to see if she were still asleep; seeing that her eyes were open, and said very quietly, but with firmness: “Freya, we shall have to go to Maberg soon.”

A blazing anger tore through Freya’s heart—to go to Maberg was to insult her grief. It was to mock that pitiful figure on the snow, by the insane injustice of Fritz—alive and well.

Even though her mother said, over and over again, “Darling—Fritz will not be there!” Freya failed to understand this violation of her privacy. At least at home she could be alone with her grief—and now her mother of all people in the world—the one who knew her best—suggested this fresh outrage!

Her mother kept repeating like a cuckoo-clock, her one mad note: “Darling—we *must* go to Maberg!”

“But why—? But—why?” Freya demanded.

Her mother said something inconclusive and incredible about the Nazis, and their police methods.

Freya sat bolt upright, and let her anger quicken her whole body so that she could once more move swiftly and drive her will into the shapeless hours. She tried to think how she could shake her mother’s inflexible decision—something, behind Freya’s anger and dismay, hid itself from her—there was an ally who might spring to her help, could she but think of his name. At last the name flashed before her eyes, and filled her with wild relief. “But, Mother—Olaf—where is Olaf?” she cried. “If the police want

to see me *he* could stop them! He could tell them everything himself—for he was *there*! I saw him standing by me in the snow! Let them ask *him* what happened!”

Her mother’s face did not change its expression, it still held its tender but implacable look—only it was older—so much older that Freya thought, “Yesterday can’t *be* yesterday! All this must have happened years ago!”

“Olaf has been sent away from Munich—by the Nazis,” Amélie explained gently; “he—and Fritz von Maberg! For the present, darling, he cannot help us!”

Freya’s eyes widened into a deeper horror. “Mother! Mother,” she whispered, “have they killed Olaf for trying to save Hans?”

Her mother said quickly: “No! No! I give you my word—Olaf is safe! He will come back—but not for several months—Emil is still here. He will drive us to Maberg. Your father has been to the university—you are to go back there. Your work can go on—but you are to take two months’ leave. It is almost a condition that you should go into the country—and indeed you will be better there for a time.”

“Into the country?” Freya said slowly, pressing her temples with her hands, as if to push the pain back, out of her way. “But, Mother—if I am to be in the country, I do not belong to Maberg—I belong to Hans’ people on the Wetterstein! It is *there*, that I must go!”

There was a long silence. Freya watched her mother under knitted brows; every nerve and muscle of her body was tense and stiff, as if she were preparing for the stroke of an enemy. Her mother wanted her to be safe—to be with rich, powerful people—she wanted to take away from her the simplicity and the blessed hardness of the life Freya had accepted. “Never! Never will I go back to that—even without Hans!” Freya’s heart cried out to her; and then her mother said with a curious sternness, as if she had had to school herself as well as Freya, before she spoke:

“The reason you must go to the Mabergs is not what you think, Freya—nor is it for *your* sake that we have a right to stop you from going elsewhere. If you go to the Breitners *now* you will make it harder for *them*, as well as for yourself. The Nazis will feel sure then that you came from them—with Hans—they will not believe that you and Hans were alone. They would question the whole family—they might even imprison them!

“Their safety is that you do *not* link yourself with them. Later you can go there—but not now!

“Your father and Rudi will go to the *Gaudeamus Hütte*, on Sunday—there they will tell Seppel Neuner how you are, and he will take messages from you to the Breitners, and explain why you cannot see them now—and that for your safety and theirs—you must be at Maberg for the next few months. I promise you that your father will do whatever is right and safe for Hans’ people, as if it were you—yourself—doing it.”

Slowly the tensivity and antagonism passed out of Freya’s body, there was too long and sure a confidence between her and her parents for her spirit *not* to trust her mother’s words. She said at last reluctantly: “If I must go then—I must! But I will work there. I will not idle! Who will help me with my work? Ask Father to come to me! I cannot afford to miss two months out of the course. I must think out a plan!”

Freya saw with surprise the relief come into her mother’s face, so that it grew less set and old. She wondered dully, what her mother could be relieved about? Nothing that they were planning to do made anything any better.

Now that Freya was no longer angry, her body felt weak and tired again; and as she sank back against her raised pillows, she remembered how—a thousand years ago, at dawn under the mountains—someone she once knew had wanted to see those soft pillows again, to lie safe and warm in the daffodil-yellow room, and to get rid of Hans!

It made her laugh, to remember that she had wanted to get rid of Hans.

Freya was still twisted with this cruel laughter when her mother came back again, bringing her father with her. They did not ask Freya why she was laughing, but her father began at once, to tell her in a business-like way—as if he expected her to understand it—what he proposed for her to study. She must, he advised, choose one of her comrades, whose work she approved of, and ask to see his notes once a week. Did Freya feel sufficiently friendly with any of the students to ask such a favour? In the intervening time, Freya could work from textbooks, and between the student’s notes on the lectures and her own studies, she need not lose much of the course. Her father himself would go to Maberg every now and then, to test her work.

Her mother sat down on the other side of the bed, and between them they ran over the names of the men and girls of Freya’s own standing at the medical schools.

Freya tried to fix her mind on the name of each in turn, but she found that they had drifted away from her since her friendship with Hans. She had

not noticed this, while every free moment was spent in his company, or in planning for fresh meetings, but now she realized that in these months of comradeship with Hans, her friends had one by one gone away from her, so that she could not ask anything of them as a favour.

"Perhaps Anton Kleinmetz," she said at last. "I do not know that he *would* help me—but if he would I should trust his work." Her father went at once to the telephone, and came back to tell her that Kleinmetz had consented.

There was nothing left to do now, but for Freya to eat and sleep, until they started.

She still could not eat; but she drank some milk that her mother brought her from time to time, and for hours watched her mother moving softly about the room, collecting and packing her things. Her mother would not let Freya move from her bed to help her. The windows of the room were all wide open. There were no sounds in the street. The spring air blew softly behind the curtains. Once Freya caught a sudden gust of lilac and its sweetness hurt her so, that she cried out; but nothing else happened, and at last while her mother was still packing, Freya fell asleep.

When she woke on the day of their departure, it was broad daylight and all her senses wavered in a curious blind fear, until she remembered.

She got up then, very quickly, and dressed, as if her life depended on rushing from one thing to another, without a moment's pause between.

It passed through her mind that she had not yet seen Emil, perhaps he was afraid that since he was a Nazi, she would hate to look at him. "But after all," Freya thought to herself, "he *was* Emil—long before he was a Nazi—and even though he didn't try to help Hans, as Olaf did—he *is* still Emil!"

She was glad when she heard his knock at the door. He had brought her coffee, and prepared an early breakfast, to save their mother's getting up any earlier than she need. When Freya smiled at Emil, he put down the coffee-cup very carefully on the dressing-table, and turning, kissed her so hard that he nearly knocked her down.

"You must eat something!" he said hurriedly, trying to butter the roll he brought her, nicely in the middle; and to please him Freya swallowed the first food she had eaten since Hans was killed; but it hurt her to swallow it.

Her mother was waiting in the hall, all dressed and ready, with the luggage Emil had brought down, and her father in his dressing-gown,

hovered uselessly about like an enormous bumble-bee, anxious to help but confused in his directions.

Rudi still slept, and the servants were not yet downstairs.

It was not so difficult to go away after all. Freya sat in front of the car with Emil, for if she sat behind him, she knew it would remind her too much of the drive from the frontier with Olaf and Fritz Maberg.

The air was fresh and keen, a very thin gold light washed the new leaves.

Emil drove fast, so that Freya felt each thing as they passed, melt into every other. Nothing had any separate meaning. Houses ran into the sky—roads flashed into trees—whatever they passed swished by them like a racing wave. Freya did not have to be sure of anything, in such a strange, peaceful jumble.

Once or twice Freya spoke to Emil about something usual, because she felt that he was still frightened of her pain, and had not lost his guilty feeling. Talking of outside things made no difference to her at all, since what went on behind them, was the same. Emil grew more and more reassured, and once he ventured on a joke, and Freya laughed quite easily.

“I can go on like this,” she told herself, “all the while I am at Maberg—except when I am by myself—or alone with Mother.”

She knew that she could not deceive her mother by such tricks; and this would make it sometimes a great relief to be with her mother alone—and sometimes a great deal harder.

They took the least frequented road, out of Munich.

There was only one thing that Freya dreaded. She did not want to see “The Three Red Crabs” again.

They passed it very quickly, Freya had barely time to recognize the little lane opening into an apple orchard, with its small fir copse on the farther side, through which Hans had led her in the dark. She shut her eyes, and it was gone.

They branched off quickly after that—away from the road the lorry had taken towards the Wetterstein.

All around them soft green fields flooded to the foot of azure hills; white geese sparkled under chestnut trees by small blue ponds; red roofs huddled together while the road whipped past them; and no cloud broke the sky’s immovable blue calm.

Unless peasants, with sheep or cattle blocked the open road, so that they had to slow up and push their nose gingerly through the uncertain, clumsy mass, they went like the wind.

Freya thought once, with a feeling like relief: “Now I don’t need ever again to mind about being killed!” Lately she had felt so precious with happiness, that sometimes a little danger had shaken her steady nerve.

When they reached the long valley below Schloss Maberg, they stopped for a second breakfast, at a wayside inn. Freya felt hungry at last and was glad of the new laid eggs and rolls and butter, spread before them. In her desire to make Emil feel more comfortable still, so that he could really enjoy their breakfast, Freya made a mistake, she asked him suddenly, “Emil, do *you* know where the Nazis have sent Olaf and Fritz?” He looked so terrified that Freya felt quite sorry for him. His eyes fixed themselves helplessly on their mother and he began to stammer, but their mother said quietly:

“No doubt Storm Troopers are not allowed to speak of what their brother Brown Shirts are ordered to do—even when they know!”

And Emil muttered: “Well, it *is* better not!” and then brightening up, he added cheerfully: “I know they’re all *right*, Freya—and we can send letters—addressed to their corps— —!”

“Can Olaf answer?” Freya persisted.

“In time—oh yes—of course, he’ll answer!” Emil replied rather nervously, “and I dare say I shall be allowed to see them before long!”

He got up quickly and paid for their breakfast, as if it relieved him to have something to do, that broke off their conversation.

“I suppose,” Freya said to her mother as soon as Emil was out of earshot, “that one of the worst parts of having anything awful happen to one, is that it makes the people you love best, feel strange to you! Emil behaves as if he had just met me for the first time!”

Her mother smiled at her with an answering irony. “For the young to share grief is difficult,” she admitted, “for they are not—or *should* not be *used* to it; but you are the same to me and to your father, forever!”

“Yes, I know that!” Freya admitted, and felt for the first time vaguely comforted. Losing the enormous value of what she had been to Hans, had seemed to make her useless to everyone else. She had not only lost him, she had lost what she had meant to him. It was as if—without ever having abdicated—she had been dethroned.

After her mother's words, Freya felt a new flicker of hope: perhaps she was not, after all, so wholly valueless, even though Hans was dead.

CHAPTER XXV

When Olaf proposed to Sophie, she had thought all her difficulties over forever.

At last the dazzling prize that had been dangling over her head for so long, had fallen into her lap! But this prize of Olaf's love did not lie there passively, a mere tribute to her maiden charms, it developed an awkward life of its own. Prize or no prize, Olaf's love was going to be as difficult a possession as Sophie had found it unpossessed.

Day by day, Olaf expected more from her—and not at all the kind of things that an engaged lover should have expected. For Olaf, to be a Nazi, was not a fashionable form of government—it was a spiritual crusade; and he seemed to think that Sophie wanted to share it. When she heard that Olaf was to be imprisoned in a fortress up to the date of their marriage, it came upon Sophie with a positive shock of relief.

Now she could buy what clothes she liked for her trousseau—she could settle upon expensive furniture for their Munich flat—she could even find quite conclusive reasons for having a much larger flat, in a more expensive quarter, than the one Olaf had already suggested.

Once married, this problem of handling Olaf, so that Sophie could get the maximum of satisfaction with the minimum of effort, would be safely over. Husbands are legally there, whether you please them or not, nor is it very easy for them to be elsewhere.

Sophie's real pleasures would then begin; she would be Gräfin von Röhn; she would have more money than she had ever possessed; and prettier clothes would be ordered, whether Olaf liked it or not. She would entertain; and—by buying expensive substitutes—make meatless days not too much of a sacrifice. She would have a very handsome, respected young husband to go about with, and love—this precious, aching, glittering substance—could be left to look after itself.

Sophie did not actually formulate these relieved and pleasant thoughts, while sitting in her mother's boudoir waiting for her father to return from Munich after his visit to headquarters, but the sense of them floated through the open windows with the soft spring air.

Fortress prisons are not very uncomfortable, and Olaf and Fritz were to have their food sent in from an excellent restaurant in the neighbourhood.

The Gräfin sat near her daughter, reading a French novel, and casting from time to time a speculative eye at a small gold travelling clock at her elbow. It meant more to her mother, Sophie knew, to have her coffee punctually at four-thirty, than that Hungary should regain her lost provinces; and this is saying a good deal for a patriotic Hungarian. Sophie sympathized with her mother, her own mind worked on parallel lines. She sewed delicately upon a flimsy garment for her trousseau; and hoped that her father would have the sense to bring back a box of chocolates, as well as the latest news of Olaf.

"If your father is late," the Gräfin at last observed, "it is to be supposed that he will have *had* coffee on the way. Bad coffee, of course, but his is not a discriminating nature! I told Maria to give him five minutes' grace. Should she wait longer than this, I must ask you to ring the bell to remind her of the time. It is a very serious thing—as you will find—when you start housekeeping—to allow a maid-servant to postpone a meal. Still, one should always consider one's husband—up to a certain point."

This remark seemed to Sophie to open up an interesting field for discussion. She gazed long and curiously at her mother, who had already survived a quarter of a century of married life, and looked none the worse for it. The Gräfin's hair was not grey, her complexion—always her greatest charm—was unimpaired, and her tranquillity of so deep a nature that it indicated an unruffled history.

"I have often wondered, mamma," Sophie said, neatly biting off her thread, "how much one should give way to one's husband. I don't mean about love-making, of course—one knows all that by instinct! Besides, Olaf is almost tiresomely controlled. I have never been able to make him lose his head once. I shall have children, of course—two, like you, I think—so I hope one will be a boy—but not at once, whatever Olaf thinks—and as for this idea of the Nazis, about large families—I find it simply revolting! Peasants no doubt should—and *can*—have litters—but not people in our class! What I *don't* quite know is how much one can afford *not* to do what a man wants—*without* really upsetting him? Olaf wants such different things from me! And keeps on so about Labour Camps—and the spirit of fraternity, although it means mixing with quite common people. It's not what *I* mean by entertaining, having camps full of Boy Scouts, or gymnasium contests thrust upon us!"

Her mother looked across her book at her daughter with the sympathetic eyes of a fellow conspirator.

She and Sophie had no illusions about one another. Neither had ever been able to get much out of the other. Each had fought for supremacy; and having failed, had given up the secret contest, without antagonism. Now they merely respected each other, and went their separate ways; but there were more subjects upon which they agreed, than upon which they disagreed.

“It is an interesting problem,” the Gräfin murmured thoughtfully, “but it is a pity that you cannot make Olaf lose his head. Such accidents help a young bride greatly! I have noticed these modern young men seem to have very weak passions! However, you may find later on that you can shake Olaf more than you now suppose. He has a rigid and controlled nature. Still, such an attitude on a man’s part is quite suitable towards a young girl before marriage. He may let himself go all the more—afterwards—that type of man often does, and you then have something to draw on! I should, however, not emphasize the difference in your wishes—either now, *or* later.

“Personally I have nothing against speaking the truth. I have even myself done so—when I found it to be necessary, as it sometimes is, but I have far more often found—even with your father who—on account of his many defects—is a comparatively easy husband that it is far better to withhold one’s point of view. Nothing is ever gained by an open difference with a man! Listen to all that Olaf believes and wishes—as if it came from Heaven; and act as you had previously intended to act, without drawing attention to it.

“Of course, if Olaf finds out, he may object, and then you have a variety of expedients open to you—that of appearing considerably simpler than you really are, is often the wisest! But I need not point out such tactics to you—for I have often observed how you get your own way against the wishes of others—without too much friction.

“Always remember that no relationship is so easy as marriage, whatever people say to the contrary. A husband is generally within reach; he is of the opposite sex; and his main interests must be the same as your own. Besides, a man in love with you should always be easy for a girl to deal with. And when he is no longer in love with you, you need have no further dealings with him. From the moment your father was unfaithful to me—and this happened almost immediately after our marriage—I took my own way; and if he questioned it—I had my argument ready!

“Olaf, of course, may not give you such a good excuse—but at the worst, what do you lose by annoying him? Your husband’s love? I assure you, my dear, very few married women retain their husband’s love for any length of time or wish to.

“Naturally you think the opposite now, and very rightly—but when the time comes for all this excitement to die down, you will find that life can be a very pleasant and respectable affair, without having a young man on his knees to you!” The Gräfin seldom made such long speeches; but the question interested her; and it was a subject upon which she had spent a great deal of careful thought.

Sophie, however, although she too felt as if there were more important things in life than Olaf’s wishes, still believed that there was nothing more important than Olaf, so she merely sighed and murmured: “I shall do what I can to please him—but it is hard that he has so many ideas that have to do with common people! Why should we associate with those who are not of our class? And it always means that one has to spend money on them, sooner or later! Poor Freya might never have had all this trouble, if peasants were kept in their places!”

“For that silly little Freya,” said the Gräfin firmly, “I have no sympathy whatever! Naturally she would never have been happy with that ridiculous peasant boy, who got shot the other day. And I think it wholly irrational to invite her here—to get over, what should never have happened. It is all the doing of that fantastic Trattenbach woman—who has managed her own life so badly that in spite of being considered a beauty in her youth—she first married a spendthrift, and then a Jew! I gave way to your father about this visit simply because Fritz was not here—and they both made such a fuss about it! However, I shall not concern myself with either of the Roths! Amélie is quite uncivilized. She does not play bridge and her conversation has never been of the slightest interest to me. Since she is to be your mother-in-law one must, of course, be polite to her. Fortunately the Schloss is large, and she and Freya both like the open air. As far as I am concerned, they are welcome to it! It is time now for our coffee—please ring the bell.”

Sophie rang the bell, but she sighed as she got up, the virtuous sigh of an altruist. She did not agree with her mother about Freya. Her own joy—and it was great in spite of her few misgivings as to Olaf’s pliability—made her feel genuinely sorry for this other girl who had lost her lover. Without her mother’s knowledge, Sophie had fervently urged Freya’s visit upon her father.

The mere fact that God had given Sophie all that she wanted, and in a way that relieved her from having to break any of His laws in order to get it—whereas Freya had been forcibly deprived of both these satisfactions—increased Sophie’s pity for her friend.

Freya had done wrong—very wrong indeed, publicly and on lines that could not be overlooked—but she had lost her lover; and she was still Olaf’s sister.

Sophie had more heart than her mother, and she was also a great deal more curious. Freya’s disaster sounded exciting, and up till now Sophie knew very little about it.

“Mamma,” she said, after she had returned to her seat, “what do you suppose *really* happened at the frontier? Why did Olaf and Fritz turn up just when they were most needed? And how did Freya get there at all—and at the exact moment that her Communist boy was shot?”

“We know nothing,” her mother said promptly, “nothing at all; but we have not been deprived of our natural intelligence, so that we can draw a good deal from your father’s bungled attempt to conceal *all* the facts over the telephone! A pitiful performance on his part! Considering that he lies so often, one would have supposed that he might have evoked a less crystal-clear method of giving himself away!

“A mouse blowing a trumpet to reveal his whereabouts to a cat, could not be more naïve!”

“Still I don’t quite see what *did* happen?” Sophie ventured.

Maria knocked at the door, bringing in a heavy silver tray, which she laid with desperate care upon a small *Biedermeier* table, beside the Gräfin’s tapestried chair.

The room filled with the delicious aroma of immaculately made coffee. A plate of *Brötchen* containing *pâté de foie gras* and *Kaviar* was placed on one side of a dish of whipped-cream, and upon the other a plate of *petit-fours*. The Gräfin’s eyes rested upon the tray with austere vigilance. She touched the delicate porcelain cups, to see if they were already warmed. Nothing had been overlooked.

Maria stood nervously, her eyes fixed in an agony of suspense upon those of her mistress. The Gräfin nodded her head with grave satisfaction.

“It is well, Maria,” she observed with the solemnity of a Divine Power conferring the final sentence after death. The instant relief upon Maria’s face

indicated her escape into Paradise. "It is well! You may now go! If the Herr Graf arrives still later than it is now, you may tell him—that we waited! And supply him—before he comes upstairs—with a glass of sherry accompanied by one of those dry English biscuits. They *can* be eaten—with alcohol."

Maria retired murmuring her gratitude. She had nothing to be grateful for, since the Gräfin paid her the lowest possible wages and exacted the hardest amount of work from her, nevertheless the utterances of the Gräfin to her servants seldom failed to inspire gratitude.

After the door had closed upon Maria, the Gräfin poured out their coffee, delicately scooping the whipped-cream with a silver trowel, over its clear brown surface. She tried a small mouthful in turn of each *Brötchen*. Finding nothing wrong with either, she once more returned to the calamitous adventures of Freya.

"What your father *said*," she observed, "over the telephone was, that owing to Fritz and Olaf's behaviour in assenting or conniving at the escape of this loose Communist—who nevertheless fortunately did *not* escape—the Nazis were keeping them under arrest, though in a mild manner, for a few months, in a prison fortress. Does this appear to you *like* the Nazis? Or indeed like Fritz and Olaf? Why should they wish a Communist—so inconvenient to their own family let alone the State—to escape? The only person who behaved with any consistency, according to your father, was the Communist peasant boy, he ran away—and was very properly—shot! What Freya was doing there *with* him—I leave to you to imagine! No doubt it will be described all over Munich! Into such a family we were supposed to marry our Fritz! I do not count *your* marriage since the von Röhns really *have* nothing to do with the Roths, there is no admixture of blood—*Gott sei Dank!* Let that hoyden Freya dig her own grave and lie in it! For such a funeral I do not send flowers!"

The Gräfin's mild eyes positively snapped as she helped herself to another *Brötchen*.

Sophie leaned forward breathlessly. "But, mamma—then you mean ——" she exclaimed incoherently, "you really think—that it was Olaf and Fritz—! The other way round! I couldn't help wondering—poor Freya! It would *kill* her to think they did it! Why, she worships Olaf. She must *never* be told the truth—no matter *what* happens! Father must have guessed it or been told by the Nazis! And that is why he lied to us! And Olaf in his letter to me, said nothing at all!"

The Gräfin tried a *petit-four*, and then went back to *Kaviar*.

“No doubt,” she murmured in her quiet, equable voice, “it *would* displease Freya very much to know the obvious truth—though you probably exaggerate its effect upon her. Still I see no reason why she *should* be told at present. One never knows, however, when such a fact may not come in useful. Sisters-in-law are sometimes very obstructive. Ah! I hear your father’s steps! Be careful that he does not guess that we know what has happened. Maria should have detained him longer with the sherry. Now we may have to sacrifice our second cups. This is what comes of being late for meals! The innocent are deprived of their just deserts for the sake of the guilty!”

CHAPTER XXVI

As Emil turned the car up towards Schloss Maberg, large heavy flakes of snow began to fall, among the pink crocuses, melting as they fell.

The sky itself was like a gigantic flower, shedding its life away, petal by icy petal.

The walls of Schloss Maberg stood up thick and stark, defrauded of their spring background.

The big iron gates swung open as the car approached, and the Graf and Sophie ran out to meet their guests, exuberant with sympathy. Sophie clasped Freya in her arms, her eyes filling with easy tears of remorseful joy, the Graf seized her elbow as if she would be unable to walk unassisted into the courtyard.

It was fortunate that pain had made Freya invulnerable to embarrassment, for Ulrich's main idea of sympathy was to overwhelm her with large slices of cake, cushions stuck into the small of her back, and glass after glass of steaming *Glühwein*.

The hall was lit by a roaring fire; wet dogs warmed themselves in front of it, filling the air with their steam, and got kicked by their master, for taking up too much room; so that their pleased barks of welcome soon changed to anxious yelps. Through all the turmoil the little Gräfin sewed passively on, raising her eyes from time to time, to give her visitors a glance of frigid curiosity. In contrast with the noisy anxiety of her husband, and Sophie's sentimental solicitude, the calculated indifference of the Gräfin came upon Freya and her mother as a positive relief.

What conversation there was broke into Freya's mind like fragments of a language from another plane—a Hitler speech—a meatless day—a local flood—a house struck by lightning.

She could, with a great effort, piece some of these words together to form appropriate images; but when she tried to join in the conversation, she saw by the overdone enthusiasm of Sophie's replies that she must have been nearly as unintelligible as she felt.

At last her mother suggested unpacking, and Sophie led them upstairs, to their rooms.

When Freya saw that hers was filled with primroses and cowslips, she had an impulse to open her window and throw these cruel, unconsolatory little blossoms into the falling snow—their purpose and their sweetness so mocked at her rebellious heart. “I remembered how fond you were of ground flowers,” Sophie fondly murmured, following the direction of Freya’s hostile eyes. “Father wanted to put real ones in here—from the conservatory—but I told him that cinerarias looked *far* too gay!”

“I think I could bear a cineraria to look as usual,” Freya said scornfully, “even if the Nazis decided to shoot us all!”

Sophie stared at Freya in horrified surprise. What, her eyes declared, was the use of trying to be kind, to a creature who was unable to appreciate tact, generosity, or even personal safety? For one did not allude to Nazis shooting anybody, even in private—especially when they had only just been forced into a summary execution of a personal friend.

Fortunately Amélie came in, and Sophie kissing them both once more with renewed fervour—for were they not Olaf’s mother and sister and therefore, temporarily at least, precious to his future bride?—was able to withdraw gracefully, in order to talk over their failings in peace with her mother.

“I wish you’d tell them,” Freya said savagely, almost before the door had closed with exaggerated noiselessness after Sophie, “that I’m neither an invalid nor a maniac—and that there is only one thing I ask of any of them—and that’s to be left alone!”

Her mother did not offer to help Freya unpack, nor comment on Freya’s only getting so far as to take out her books. They were her sheet anchor; but she had the same impulse to get rid of them, as she had had to get rid of the primroses. It would, Freya thought, have been a relief to send them crashing—book by book—down upon the tops of the pine trees, on to the soaking ground.

In the slow, grim weeks that followed, Freya sat hour after hour with her books open before her; but although her eyes moved mechanically up and down the pages, they registered no meaning whatever, their contents were like the wind that came and went through the boughs beneath her, leaving no trace of its passage.

Her mother stood between her and the Mabergs; and after a time they accepted this new Freya—her long hours of silence—that were supposed to be study—her curt replies and bitter silences—her long walks by herself—although the Gräfin said on one occasion to Amélie: “Take care, my dear

Amélie, that Freya does not pick up another peasant boy! A young girl's desire for loneliness lasts as long as there is no one there to change it!"

Ulrich forgot to be kind to Freya, when he discovered that she was like wood—making no flicker of response to the most harmless paternal flirtation—and Sophie forgot—soonest of all—to hide her happiness.

The night before Amélie left Freya, she went to her daughter's room.

Freya was in bed but not asleep; her eyes met her mother's with the accusing gravity of a sick child's.

Freya could not bear to have her mother leave her, but still less could she bear to urge her to stay. She wanted to punish her mother for her grief and how could she punish a mother who was not with her to be punished?

It was a curious feeling, but as all her feelings were curious at the moment, Freya felt herself at liberty to let it take its course.

"Freya, are you well?" her mother asked her, standing at the foot of the bed, and looking at her with eyes that for once did not attempt to hide their anxiety.

"Hideously well, of course—why do you ask?" Freya demanded.

"Because," said her mother after rather a long pause, "you are not like yourself! I don't mean that you are sad—for of course, this you cannot help being—but you look something else besides sad—can you not tell me what it is that you are feeling?"

"I eat—I sleep," Freya said harshly. "I put on my clothes and take them off again at suitable moments. What more do you expect of me? After one has been at Maberg for a few weeks, one begins to understand Russian novels—where the hero never gets out of his dressing-gown and is always drunk!"

Her mother sat down by the bedside, hiding any astonishment she may have felt at this observation. "Well, darling," she murmured, after a pause, "you have your work—and the mountains!"

"I have the mountains and my work," Freya reiterated scornfully, "and it is as easy for me to lift one—as it would be to lift the other! I thought you knew I couldn't work—I only pretend to! You must have known that I have done no work since we came!"

Her mother continued to look at Freya with the same concerned and tender eyes; but she said something that Freya thought was extremely cruel.

“It is time I left you,” Amélie observed, “for I see that I stand between you and reality.”

“What do you mean by reality?” Freya asked crossly. “I don’t believe there is any such thing myself. And if there is what advantage should I gain by meeting it alone?”

Her mother made no direct answer, she leaned over Freya, kissed her good night, and moved slowly towards the door, as if she expected some further explanation from Freya, and was unprepared to give an answer to any of her questions, until she received it.

Next day, at the little station in the valley below Maberg, Freya woke up suddenly with a sharp pang to the fact of her mother’s departure. She would have liked to hold the train back with her bare hands.

Yet when her mother said—those age-long senseless words of love—that have perhaps been uttered by women oftener than any others, “Take care of yourself, my darling,” Freya could say nothing in return, she only stared at her mother dumbly, with stricken eyes. She longed to cry out: “I’ve been horrible to you I know! I’ve quarrelled with your tenderness—I’ve been as selfish as a pig and as cowardly as a rabbit—but don’t you see that’s just because you *have* been such a comfort to me!”

When the train began to move Freya ran along beside it, ignoring her mother’s anxious eyes. She ran faster and faster, as the train gathered speed, in a desperate attempt to show her mother something of her love and her gratitude. She ran till the last carriage jerked itself into a tunnel out of sight, then Freya stopped abruptly, to swear at herself for the uselessness of her spectacular race.

There was no one in sight. The air was summer-warm and fragrant with the scent of wild flowers, and hidden sap.

The woods were full of hepaticas and wind-anemones, pushing up through the slowly thawing earth; even where snow still lay, crocuses lifted their frail pink cups.

The cuckoo’s detached, unfeeling notes, dodged in and out of the foothills, cool as the melting snows.

There was no need for Freya to go back yet to the Schloss. She had left Sophie wrapped in the joys of furniture catalogues; and the Graf chained to the bridge table, for not even to see off his early love, had the Graf been allowed to break up the sacred time-table of the Gräfin. If people chose to travel in the afternoon between the hours of four and seven, they must go to

their trains unescorted. “You need four in order to play bridge,” the Gräfin had caustically reminded him, “whereas I hardly suppose that Amélie Trattenbach will miss her train to Munich, should she be accompanied to the station—by *less* than four.”

Amélie had hastily repudiated any such extravagance; and she and Freya had escaped together.

Now, Freya reminded herself grimly, there would be no more such companionable escapes. Her mother had been right—however cruel—this bitter business of life had got to be taken up alone.

Climbing steadily higher, but turning aside from the direction of Maberg, Freya reached a little lake that lay in a cup of the hills.

It was a silent, solemn spot, surrounded by dark fir trees. The level rays of the sinking sun had escaped their guard and broken the black peat water into golden ripples.

Here and there, startling in its whiteness, a silver birch flashed its slim body against the sombre background of dark firs. Heather and blueberry plants grew close to the bright cold ripples.

Freya had not meant to come there; her feet had brought her unconsciously along accustomed ways. The borders of the lake were an old playground. Olaf and Emil, Fritz and Sophie had played there with Freya, year after year, in their summer holidays; and every spot was haunted by their old laughter.

Freya found a seat on a tuft of dried heather, close to the water reeds.

They creaked and whispered fitfully together, without disturbing her sense of solitude. Sometimes a water bird broke the unearthly silence by a sudden splash or cry; once—close by her side—a fleet of scarlet-crested, sedate black moorhens swept in a perfect fan, out on to the lake.

A water rat scuttled past her, with incredible velocity, giving her a hard start of concern, for having dared to fool him into thinking her part of the bough she leaned against. But though her eyes took in the world they rested upon, nothing within Freya responded to what she saw.

She was trying to make up her mind whether it was worth while to go on living; if it wasn't, and she found no reason to suppose that it was, this struck her as a suitable place and moment to bring her life to an end. No one could prevent her, nor would there be any certainty afterwards, that she had intended to take her life.

People fell into lakes and got drowned inadvertently, far oftener than they walked into them, to be drowned on purpose.

This was, Freya knew, a particularly deep lake; and it was deep close to the edge; one could choose a likely looking place where there was a bough to fall off, and water-lilies sufficiently near it, to act as an excuse for falling.

The glittering ripples knew their placid business, and would close over her quickly. Even if she screamed and struggled, the shriek of a wild bird is not unlike a startled human cry; nor was there anyone to discriminate between them. Freya would not disturb the lake for long, after a brief hurricane of flustered wings, ducks and moorhens would re-establish themselves upon its untroubled surface—the sun finish setting—the long shadows spread into a closer darkness. The deed itself would be a simple affair, but there was of course the other side of the business—the people still alive—who would be involved in what Freya did.

She remembered her half-promise to her father to go on living; but surely this hopeless urgency of distaste gave her excuse enough to break it? Why continue to live in a country turning into a prison; and without personal hope? Besides—her mother shouldn't have left her alone with her grief! Suddenly, a queer sick feeling seized Freya—she had been liable to this feeling ever since Hans was killed—but not so overwhelmingly as it came upon her now. Great drops of icy sweat sprang out upon her forehead, Freya had barely time to move back from the water, before the golden air heaved and turned dark before her eyes.

When her consciousness returned, Freya found herself lying so close to the lake, that she could have slipped into it without the slightest effort; but now the intention of taking her life—when she remembered it—struck her as wholly cruel and absurd. How could she have dreamt of making all those who loved her unhappy, simply because she was unhappy herself? Had she set out in life, to cure disease, only to finish it by inflicting pain of a lasting nature upon those she loved? Where had her courage gone? Was her happiness to be the measure of her acceptance of life? “Take care of yourself, my darling”—those foolish words made the colour rush back into Freya's face—the care *not* to be useful to anyone else—was what she had been prepared to take!

“I could frighten her by running after the train—but I couldn't hold myself back from breaking her heart!” Freya told herself savagely, and springing to her feet with passionate self-contempt, she flung herself through the darkening wood. There was still light enough to see the path; and when

she came out on to the nearest *Alpe*, it had not yet been deprived of the sun's last gold. A mother sheep cropped close to the wood's edge—her two lambs were hurling themselves into the air in an ecstasy of irresponsibility—their tails swung out—their black hoofs lifted—their pink ears transparent as screens—holding the last light.

Their wild woolly bodies left it purely to chance, where or how, they came to earth again. Their mother cropped on unconcernedly, hers but to supply sustenance for fresh joy, and theirs to do what they liked with it.

As Freya watched the flying lambs entranced, she suddenly knew what was the matter with her. Hans had escaped the Nazis after all! The child of their love would link him to the blossoming earth forever.

She had nearly robbed him of this chance; but the secret within her crying out for life, had checked her, just in time.

The sky grew darker—the gold vanished—before the lambs had tired of their play. They leapt on against the darkening sky, as if they need never stop. Slowly, the first unfettered joy of her discovery ebbed from Freya's heart. It was no use pretending that this new possession was not also a burden.

What could she do with her future handicapped by a child? How could she pass her examinations? Would she be allowed to remain on at the university? Where could her child be born? Where could it live after it had been born? She must think, too, of what it would mean to each member of her family, for none of them would be untouched by her fate.

Nevertheless it was not of her own family that Freya found herself thinking most often as she ran quickly down the hill to Maberg.

She saw instead Michel with the lamb in his arms; and Anna coming out of the barn to show her the one pride of her broken life.

It was Hans' mother now, and not her own, who seemed closest to Freya. Karl, too, would look at her with kinder eyes than Olaf or Emil. She would not come with empty hands to the Wetterstein this next time.

Quick and strange, a host of new thoughts and feelings sprang into Freya's heart till there was no longer any room for the passivity of grief. Fear and joy, shame and pride fought over the field of her consciousness together.

It was a Freya filled to the finger tips with life, no longer a victim but one who has set out to conquer, who re-entered the strong stone walls of

Maberg.

The Gräfin, looking up at her from the bridge table, said to herself: "It does not take four hours to reach the railway station and to return from it; Freya looks as if she had met someone rather than seen them go. Now we must prepare for some fresh complication!"

Aloud she murmured: "You will find cold meat and salad in the dining-room, dear child, and will perhaps clear the table when you have finished eating, since it is too late to demand more of the servants!"

CHAPTER XXVII

To wake, to this new great secret, was a startling experience; Freya's burden had not lessened, but she found that her grief had receded; and her strength to bear it had suddenly increased.

In the weeks that followed her discovery by the lakeside, Freya fell upon her work like a famished dog upon a bone. She soon stopped feeling sick, but she became more and more certain of her new physical life. She studied all day, and far into the night. Only for an hour at sunset would she yield to Sophie's expostulations, and allow herself to be dragged off to bathe. In this hour Freya's mind relaxed; she even found herself able to take in, with a half-ashamed relish, the details of the bridesmaids' dresses.

The chief question that Sophie wished to discuss—although she had not yet reached the point where she in the least wished to decide it—was whether natural or artificial flowers would look best, for the bridesmaids' wreaths—artificial flowers were so dear, and natural ones so uncertain. The dresses were to be a deep creamy white, embroidered with ears of corn, a shade darker than their background, and blue cornflowers were to be worn as wreaths and girdles.

It was important, Sophie explained, for the dresses to look reassuringly economical—and also to appeal to the Nazis' delicate notions of fertility—while behind the camouflage of simplicity lurked the expensiveness that only the initiated would divine.

Olaf was pleasantly surprised when Sophie wrote describing the Spartan inexpensiveness of her choice; she thought it would hardly be necessary to let him see the bills afterwards. "Fortunately bridesmaids' dresses," Sophie explained to Freya, "come under the head of 'trousseau'! And I can tell dear Olaf, if he asks, that most of it was sheets and towels. I told him I chose satin instead of crêpe-de-chine—because it was so much cheaper! One must always, of course, have one or the other—taffeta is charming, but doesn't wear, and Olaf has no idea that wool-backed satin is terribly dear—one can only get the real kind from Paris. I think mamma is right when she says that one ought always to say *something* that is true to men—for then if they find out afterwards and get cross, you have that part to fall back upon! I would not upset Olaf for the world, but we simply must have wool-backed satin!"

Freya hesitated, but on the whole, though she knew *how* upset Olaf had a right to be, she too wanted wool-back satin. She was to be Sophie's chief bridesmaid, and there was no use denying that cream satin and cornflower-blue would be remarkably becoming to her.

In order to quiet her conscience, Freya took with ardour the natural flower side of the wreath question; and never deviated from it.

One afternoon, when they had reached the lake just before sunset, Freya, standing on the bank preparing for a dive, caught sight of her reflection in the water. Her arrowy neat body was curved for the plunge, but she held it back, staring anxiously at the quivering figure on the shining surface.

Was it her imagination, or had her body already become a trifle blunted by the secret life within it? Was her clear outline already blurred, and its primary neatness ruffled out of shape?

Sophie stood, within a few feet of Freya, slim as a silver birch and light as an early summer leaf. Her childish breasts were pointed and hard, like closed buds, and her thin flanks straight. Was not Freya's shape—filled with the definite promise of life—at once more curved, and softer than Sophie's? But Sophie, who observed all physical points with a relentless ardour, had as yet noticed nothing strange about Freya's figure; she returned Freya's anxious look with reassuring unconcern, merely observing: "I've brought the new lacquer with me for our toe-nails afterwards—but we must be sure that our nails are *absolutely* dry, before we pull our stockings over them!"

Freya was still safe. She swung her cupped hands above her head, drew in a long full breath, and dived straight and clear, into the black lake's depths.

The dark water bubbled and clung round her, but let her rise at will, to its heavy surface.

Now that she was using it rightly, according to its laws, the lake was wholly Freya's friend, though less than a month ago, she had tried to turn it into an enemy.

Freya lay deep in the water, her face brushed softly by the ripples she had so nearly turned into gravestones.

It was pure ecstasy to feel the power of her young strong body, cleaving its path across the living water.

Sophie's voice monotonous, but musical, reached Freya with a ringing sound.

Freya turned, and floated idly upon her back, dipping her arms rhythmically behind her head, so that she could stay afloat and look up at the sky. How bland and blue it was—and how free! Nothing moved in it; nothing obstructed the warm golden light—it was the same for everyone.

When Sophie reached her, they swam side by side in friendly rivalry, to gain the farther bank. The stability of their old memories enfolded them, bringing their spirits closer to each other. They talked in snatches, with the old familiarity, and for the first time since Freya's arrival they spoke naturally of Olaf and Fritz.

As they neared the farther shore, Freya, who had fallen a little behind in the race, called out to Sophie: "Sophie—only *four* weeks more for Olaf and only two more for Fritz?"

Sophie's stroke became spasmodic, as if she had been startled into breaking its steadiness. She called back something that Freya could not catch. And after all it was Freya who reached the shore ahead of Sophie; but had Sophie swum as well since Freya had asked that question?

Freya herself had to answer it, sitting on her towel in the sun. "Perhaps it's just a question of Olaf's rank," she said consideringly, "or perhaps he was the one who had the *idea* of getting them to help me! But I shall be just as grateful to Fritz, Sophie—for *wanting* to come, even if it wasn't his own idea, I've often thought that it was very generous of him!"

"May I have your towel," Sophie interrupted her, "after you've finished sitting on it—I left mine on the other side. I didn't think to bring it across first, like you did! About some things you are more sensible than I am, Freya."

"I think what I mind most about the Nazis," Freya went on, ignoring this doubtful compliment, though she surrendered the towel, sitting on the less comfortable grass instead, "is that one never knows with them, *why* things happen! For instance, Sophie—why put up rude orange placards on our houses saying '*Jude!*'—and then take them off again—they should have left them on—we are still Jews! Why must a foreign country be flattered one day and abused the next—it cannot have changed the roots of its being overnight? Why talk of peace, and then turn every boy child into a soldier—since what you prepare for, you will certainly want to become? Why is one person to be punished more than another for the same crime—like Fritz and Olaf—as I first asked you? And you answered nothing—for indeed there is no sane answer! I feel sometimes as if we were being cooked for by a madman's rule of thumb!

“How can you tell whether a mad cook wishes to poison you—or whether even if he *doesn't* wish to—he may not do it inadvertently, since he follows no accepted receipt?”

“You should *never* speak like that of the Nazis, even to me!” Sophie said in a shocked voice. “Why is it, Freya, that you are always doing and saying such dangerous things? To talk against such a great power as the Nazis even behind its back—is *worse* than foolish!”

“If it had a face I should slap it!” Freya retorted with a mischievous grin; but when she saw Sophie turn white with terror, she quickly apologized. “We are alone,” she pleaded, “look—there is nothing near, except light and air! You didn’t mind taking all your clothes off. Is there anything more shocking in a naked mind? Why are you so frightened? The Nazis haven’t yet got the better of space. And certainly the moorhens won’t turn informers!”

“Don’t! Don’t! Please don’t!” Sophie repeated almost in tears. “It is better *never* to talk of the Nazis! It is safer *only* to do what we are told! We can be just as happy then, as we used to be. Only we *must* be careful enough! My toe-nails are dry now—let’s go round to where we left our clothes. I’m too cold to cross the lake again. Besides, you’ve made me *shake* with fright, so that I couldn’t swim properly! After all, Freya, there *is* nothing to grumble at about Hitler and his commands. We are allowed to talk about clothes and food, and men— —! And what more was there to talk about *before*—that really mattered? Nothing except your mouldy old books—and those I could *never* talk about anyway! So it wouldn’t be any use if you began. I like the magazines much more too, now—there’s nothing in them but clothes and sport. One never has to pay now for what one doesn’t want!”

“You are quite right about the magazines,” Freya said in a dry little voice, “you might say the newspapers too, while you are about it; and the films—and the concerts. Have you asked yourself how a great people’s minds are to be fed? Are they to live forever without the meat of thought?”

They finished dressing in silence—all their happy comradeship had fled.

Freya could not reconcile herself to Sophie’s fears; but she saw that they were genuine, and knew that she must respect them, or lose Sophie.

If it were only losing Sophie it would not so much matter, but with Sophie she would also lose Olaf; even more than she had already lost him. Worse still, what if Olaf himself was behind these new precautions of Sophie’s? And had he perhaps a share in that other curious fact—a fact

Freya had tried to brush from her consciousness for days—the strange difficulty there had been in arranging her father’s visit?

Professor Roth seldom paid visits; but when he did, he was usually the most welcome of guests. Even the Gräfin had thought it something to say over the bridge table to her greatest friend, the Baronin von Eberhardt, “Professor Roth, the world-famous scientist, is to be with us this week-end! Such a dear old friend!” well knowing that the Baronin had nothing to hit back with, but the mere acquaintance of a minor royalty—not even proscribed—who drank like a fish! Whereas Professor Roth was not only a finer but a cheaper guest—since he drank nothing but water! Now, however, it had become strangely difficult to fix a date for this dear old friend’s visit.

First the Gräfin said in the placidest voice in the world, that she was suffering agonies from toothache, and could entertain nobody until the acuteness of the pain had passed—except of course her bridge cronies—since bridge seemed to divert the pangs.

As soon as the Gräfin admitted relief, Sophie filled all the habitable spare-rooms with bridesmaids, in order to discuss blue velvet slippers versus gold sandals. When this burning question was solved, Ulrich discovered that he must accept instantly an important invitation to fish on a friend’s estate. “One must take fish at their moment,” Ulrich explained to Freya. “It is the same as with a—I mean it is essential! And I could not possibly go away at a moment when I was expecting your father!” It was useless for Freya to explain that as her father only wanted to come for one night, in order to examine his daughter’s progress in her studies, the presence of his host was not compulsory. Ulrich declared that of course he must be on the spot to receive the Professor and that the work of a mere girl was neither here nor there!

“A father is one thing—a bridegroom is another!” he observed, and then turned purple with remorse and rushed from the room, remembering that Freya’s bridegroom was dead.

At length the date for the visit—shorn of all its glory—was settled. Tomorrow Professor Roth was to come but for one night only, and nobody had been invited to meet him, or even informed of his prospective visit.

An hour ago Freya could have asked Sophie straight out what was at the bottom of these delays and evasions; but now although the words sprang again and again to her lips she held them back; besides did she not already know the answer!

They walked back to the Schloss together, after their happy bathe, silent and with troubled hearts.

Sophie suffered because she was afraid both of—and for—Freya; and Freya because her escape into their old equality had been so short.

However free she had felt while she was in the water, she had to be a Jewess again now she had reached the land.

CHAPTER XXVIII

No one but the Professor got out at the Maberg halt. Freya sprang forward to disembarass him of his heavy rucksack, strapping it firmly over her strong young shoulders; there was no other luggage; and she noticed that her father had got out of a third-class carriage.

The Professor evinced no surprise, that there was only Freya to meet him, nor made any comment when they walked out of the little station, and found no conveyance to take them to the Schloss.

"It is good to see you," he remarked cheerfully, beaming at Freya with his usual imperturbable benevolence, "and how is the work going?"

They talked only about Freya's work as they climbed, until they reached a shrine, that had a wooden bench beneath it; with one accord they sat down on it and became silent.

The late evening air had a sweet icy fragrance. From a hazel copse, near by but invisible, they could hear the tinkle of a hidden waterfall. Forget-me-nots covered the ground at their feet; they were not more blue than the distant mountains, only the valley was completely dark. Out of its deep shadows, the first lights glimmered, as faintly as the evening stars glimmered overhead in the pale sky.

"*Ach!* it is a beautiful world!" the Professor broke their silence to exclaim; "in so far as we do not interfere with it! And you, my little one—have you begun to see its beauty again?"

His eyes fixed themselves on Freya with a vigilance that belied his serenity.

For a moment Freya hesitated, should she tell him her secret now, in the soft kind dusk, on their first evening together?

It would be a great relief not to bear the weight of it alone. She had nothing to fear from telling him except his pain. But could she bear to dash his frugal hopes with a fresh anxiety?

"I can work again!" she said after a moment's pause, slipping her hand over his. "Daddy—I was horrid to Mother while she was with me. Somehow I couldn't help it! But I won't be horrid to you!"

Her father laughed his deep rumbling laugh.

“Horrid! Horrid!” he repeated, “and to a parent what does that signify? As your mother used to say, when you yelled lustily as a baby and I accused you of self-will, ‘I am sure that it is not naughtiness, Johann, it must be a safety-pin that has become unfastened!’ So she looks always—the mother of the horrid child—for the unfastened safety-pin!”

“I’m terribly glad you’ve come,” Freya whispered, pressing his hand between both of hers. “It’s so funny at Mabergh! Not worse than I expected. They let me alone—I can work! And Sophie tries to be the same to me—but I can feel her trying! They seem all of them to have got so frightened that they daren’t be natural. They talk of nothing that goes on—and if I ask what is in the newspapers—never having time to read them myself—they look at each other in a guilty way and say ‘Nothing! Nothing!’ Tell me truly, Daddy—is it worse at Munich?”

Her father was silent for a long time before answering. He even looked cautiously about him, as if to see that the innocent mountain slope was free of listeners. “Yes,” he said at last in a low voice, “it is bad, I must admit, and not only is it bad but I fear it will grow worse! It was thought by some, that with the completeness of Hitler’s power, there might be a relaxation of all these new suppressions and cruelties. But I had no such hope! For a dictator is never safe! He cannot therefore relax precautions. On the contrary, as Hitler’s power increases so will his sense of danger increase, and the cruel steps he takes to save himself must become more and more cruel.

“Fear is in the air, and as everyone becomes more fearful, he becomes the more exposed to danger! People are already beginning to tell tales of each other. Men become spies upon their neighbours, since they feel that to have tales to tell of others, increases their own safety. You will see people in cafés, who once talked happily over their *Bocks* with strangers, now refuse a chat even with their own friends; they drink down their beer as if it were medicine and hurry home, to shut the door between them and this new world of enemies!

“It is as if there were a dragon abroad that might devour them! And it is true that such a dragon exists! Last week, Frau Meyerhof—the fat one that thinks I should cure her chilblains because I concern myself with science—was walking across Odeonplatz with her daughter-in-law, Elisabeth; she ventured to say half-laughing, ‘This Herr Hitler might employ himself better I should think, than by making all these fine speeches, if he brought down the price of sausages for instance!’ A police officer’s hand fell on her

shoulder, she was led away, and no member of her family has heard of her since.

“The prisons are so full of political prisoners that the criminals have been released! These concentration camps are starting up everywhere, and the tales of what goes on in them are terrible. They cannot *all* be false, I fear, and if even a small percentage of them is true—then we are back in the Middle Ages again, with far more power of inflicting pain than those earlier murderers ever possessed. It is not surprising that people grow silent, or talk only nonsense!

“Only within a man’s own mind is he safe—and perhaps not even then very safe—for it is hard to keep thoughts clean and disinterested—in this duststorm going on all round us! Even in a man’s own family, the young are against the old and brother against brother!

“On the surface in Munich all is well. Ignorant foreigners are well entertained; fresh orders have gone out—contradicting the one that ordered us to be less polite and ‘servile’ to foreigners. Some great economic brain—perhaps our wise Schacht—discovered that tourist traffic might suffer by such bluntness, so that now to be a foreigner, especially an Anglo-Saxon, is to be given the right hand of fellowship! What the left hand is doing meanwhile is easily overlooked!” The Professor gave a long troubled sigh, drew out his pipe and lighting it, sank once more into silence.

It was so new to Freya to hear her father complain, or to see him troubled, that she hardly knew how to answer him. Part of the load on her own heart, was that she felt a new sense of the perils surrounding her parents. They could no longer be looked on as sufficient protection from the outer world, since they were themselves menaced by it; and their children’s dangers now added a weight to their own.

“Father,” Freya said at last, “it is three months now! Would it be safe for me to visit them on the Wetterstein?”

Her father took out his pipe and gave her his whole attention.

“I could not tell you much about my visit to them in a letter,” he began cautiously; “all our letters are liable to be opened; but what I did tell you was true. Your friends there were well! They were going on with the business of life. Hans’ mother had her grief in her eyes but she had much work to do, and her good son Karl helps her. All were eager for news of you and understood fully why you could not yet visit them.

"I took Rudi with me, it was his wish and I thought it could do him no harm. He is old enough now to keep a still tongue in his head. Michel showed him all the animals and Rudi was happy there. It is not very easy for him now in Munich. Your mother and I are thinking, Freya, that perhaps it might be best to send you both out of this country. I want you to turn this project over in your mind, without fear! No! We could not come with you. If I leave my post—my friends and fellow doctors—I should feel myself a deserter. Your mother, too, has her other two sons to think of—if she left them, it would have to be a final parting. I think we have no right to ask this of her. Not yet, at any rate! I am having Rudi specially taught English out of school hours, and I advise you to brush up yours. It is to America that you should go. We have my nephew Roth in New York, but he is young and does not perhaps remember us very well. My sister Hildegard, however, in Los Angeles, although it is many many years since we were together—and we had little in common—has a loyal heart. She could take you into her house, and the University of California is free, you could take your doctorate there and become an American citizen.

"I am making all enquiries beforehand, since they involve us in nothing, and we might have to act speedily. The government has sequestered my private fortune; I am now a poor man, your mother has nothing. This matters very little. I have my pension, and the house is our own. We can live more simply. Still, it concerns you, since you were to have had a good '*dot*' and now you will have nothing but what you earn. This will make your future in this country more difficult!"

"I shall earn my living," Freya answered promptly, "wherever I am—and I shall never marry! But also I shall not leave you and Mother—that *cannot* be necessary!"

Her father smiled. "Necessity is beyond our control," he said gently. "We must bow to her—not she to us! There is one more thing to tell you—that is also not very nice, but when that is over, we can enjoy ourselves. The Nazis have requested your mother to leave me. She is not forced—but she is warned; if she refuses, she will be suspect, and must live under their displeasure. Perhaps I need not tell you that she *did* refuse!"

"Father! Father!" Freya cried aghast. "How *can* they do such things? How *can* they make us lepers? What have we done—as a race—to turn this mad dog on to us? Why do other Germans in authority bear it? Surely all are not mad?"

“No! No!” said her father. “All are not mad, but you must remember the Germans have slow brains, and are a timid people, otherwise they might not work so well, and might also not care so much for militarism, to defend them. People who are not timid do not need great armies! Our Jewish race has a certain ruthless and separate intelligence that the Germans may well envy. Also we are a small unarmed remnant, and such a remnant, within their gates, is very easy to mishandle. The Germans are a discouraged people—shaken by defeat—they have too a certain military craftiness—they have seen Russia, their great neighbour, destroy her capitalists. In good time the German *Junker*—not unsupported by our timid bourgeoisie always unaccustomed to think or act for themselves—have seized the power they need, to keep their wealth defended against possible revolution. Hitler—a working man himself—fooled our working-classes for them. And continues to fool them. This is a great service, and it has been greatly rewarded. Who stood in their way? Communists who wanted revolution, and Jews—who are always internationalists and in favour of peace! Upon us then they try out their power—we are their ‘*Versuchskaninchen*’! From their point of view, they do very well to persecute us both!”

Freya drew a long frightened breath.

“Father,” she asked, “must we always live under their heel? Will they always despise and hate us? It is as if we were in a state of war against our own brothers!”

“But it is war!” her father said, rising and putting out his pipe. “It is a war to exterminate the brotherhood of man! And it will exterminate many men! But brotherhood will survive since it is an eternal principle, and not subject to torture or execution. There is no mine that can permanently explode the heart of man. Nor yet a poison gas that can stop the breath of God, that has created the spirit of man. As soon as men learn to love each other faithfully in spite of danger, we shall recover security and peace!”

Freya rose slowly and heavily to her feet. “You are tired, my child,” her father asked her anxiously. “More tired than I have ever seen you! That is curious in this fine air! We will soon find out how the work goes, and then you must amuse yourself a little more. For we Jews have that within ourselves that survives disaster.”

Once more Freya hesitated, her secret rose to her lips, but did not pass them. “I cannot tell him! Not yet!” she told herself; “he is too tired! Too sad! Why should I add to his burdens now? Let him get rested first!” but these reasons were not wholly the cause of Freya’s silence. She flinched from

letting her father know of her impatiences. She knew now that she had taken love—and had nearly taken death—without being ready for them. If she had realized the hardness of the future that lay—not only before her but before her family, and her race—Freya would not have weighted the dice against herself, so that she could not use her full strength and freedom to combat the dangers ahead. The whole of her young strength should have been theirs to count on; but now all that she could offer her father was her weakness. She could not save Rudi, with Hans' child as a first claim upon her. She thought again of the Wetterstein, and determined to go there without again asking her father if it were safe. It was not her own people she must tell first of this secret within her; it belonged to Frau Breitner, to Karl, and to the Wetterstein.

They walked up the rest of the hillside, talking of indifferent things.

Nobody was there to meet them at the iron gates; only the dogs barked their vociferous welcome. The pigeons on the roof rose in a great flurry of silver wings, high into the colourless evening air, sinking back a moment later, one by one, to their accustomed places, with a nonchalance as unanimous as their panic.

The Graf had gone up the mountain to inspect a reservoir and had not yet returned; the Gräfin was still playing bridge in her boudoir and could not be disturbed. Sophie was at her dressmaker's.

Finding out that her father was thirsty, Freya ran to fetch him a glass of water from the well in the courtyard.

"There is no finer drink," her father said, with a spark of irony in his deep-set eyes, "than well water! Also it costs nothing! Let us be grateful to our Aryan hosts that they still permit us to share it with them!"

CHAPTER XXIX

Freya crept noiselessly out of her room, and down the long stone staircase; it was four o'clock in the morning and she was on her way to the Wetterstein farm.

The dogs in the courtyard woke only to wag, following her with wistful rapture, to the gates, and turned back—checked at the heart—with tails hanging, to the dull business of sleep.

The slopes were empty and hushed with dawn; the shadows looked fixed upon the grass, incapable of yielding to the hidden sun. Their suspense and darkness invaded Freya's heart.

The laws of her old existence were broken; her country itself was against her and the child in her womb. She was an outlaw and a fugitive, stealing secretly away—like a thief—to make terms with mountain peasants, who were strangers to her. This was not the way that through all her proud and happy girlhood Freya had envisaged—in half-reluctant and half-delighted flashes—the coming of a child.

Nothing stirred on the mountainside but Freya's hurrying figure. When she reached the Maberg halt, it was empty, except for a row of milk cans.

A few minutes later the silence was broken by the little bustling train, puffing and jerking itself to a standstill, while Freya and the milk cans boarded it together.

She was its only passenger. When the train stopped at St. Johann, the village was still asleep, but the shadows across the fields were less long and dark. The birds had begun to stir and chuckle, aware before the light came, that the day was at hand.

Freya would have liked to hold back the cruel glory of the sun; for every step of the familiar way attacked her like an enemy. The distant peaks of the Wetterstein were already on fire, and when she entered the wood, the stems of the pine trees were striped with gold. The scent of frozen moss—the last year's brambles—tore at her starved senses. Sight and sound took it in turn to torment her. The stocky figure of Hans wavered on the path ahead, cut out by shadows; from time to time, Freya stopped breathless, listening for the unreal silence to break into his friendly voice.

When she heard the faint scratching rustle of a squirrel overhead, Freya dared not raise her eyes, for fear that she should capture too unbearably the memory of the little friendly animal who had made her forgive Hans for the discomfort of the dawn.

It was a relief to leave the wood, for the mountain at any rate had changed its aspect; the kingcups and crocuses were burned away; the snow had vanished from the slopes; even the waterfalls had thinned themselves into silence. The Wetterstein was a long, hot climb, seldom dangerous enough to occupy Freya's mind, but consuming all her physical energies.

She was so tired when she approached the ridge that she nearly missed the way to the farm; but at last she saw the shrine standing in a blue noon shadow, with beyond it—in its shallow cup of green ablaze with buttercups—the farm of the Wetterstein.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning and by this hour, the heaviest work of the day was already done.

Frau Breitner was alone in the kitchen, cooking *Knödelsuppe*; Anna and Michel, Franz and Karl were not yet back from a distant *Alpe*, where they were making hay.

Freya stood, a little shyly, in the open doorway, unsure of her welcome.

At the sound of strange footsteps, Frau Breitner turned slowly round from her stove, and faced the door. For a long moment the girl and the woman looked at each other without speaking; then Frau Breitner moved forward, and drew Freya into her arms with an awkward tenderness.

"*Nah! Nah!*" she muttered. "So God has not forgotten that I had a son called Hans!"

Freya had wondered—half the night—if it would be easy or difficult to tell Frau Breitner her secret. She had not dreamed that to the keen experienced eyes of a peasant woman, living in hourly familiarity with nature's processes, there could be no secret.

What had escaped the Gräfin's piercing, suspicious eyes, was plain as day to the simple, kindly peasant woman, tutored by reality.

Frau Breitner asked a few direct, practical questions, nodding her head with business-like satisfaction at Freya's answers.

"Sit here, out of the sun," she said at last, "while I bring you something to drink. You should not have taken this long climb. The child is not firm in you yet! A young girl must spare herself for her first child—her body is not

as tough as an older woman's. Even I—with Karl my first—took my work less hard. My man spared me—as Hans would have spared you—poor child—had God heard our prayers! To learn patience I sometimes say to myself: 'But Mary too—the mother of God—lost a grown son!'

"Remember you are not accustomed to rough work! Your father said nothing of this when he was here a while back; but it was early days then, of course. We thought him a good man—would there were more such—down there in Munich. We liked your brother also, the little Rudi! Hans had spoken often of him. But it may be that it will be difficult for you, all the same—alone among fine people—without a father for your child. So remember the child's home is here! A father's people, they are responsible for a girl's child. For the sake of Hans—alive or dead—we will stand by you and the babe!"

"I have not told my own people yet," Freya explained. "I was to go back to the university—when the holidays are over in September—but now they may refuse to take me back! I should have liked to come here, for its birth. But, because of the Nazis, my father is thinking of sending Rudi and me to another country—and perhaps now, this plan would be best. The child would be safer anywhere than Germany; and I should be allowed to work for its support!"

"In Tirol?" Frau Breitner questioned, her mind refusing to envisage a country that was not at least a neighbour with mountains like her own, and the same speech. "I have heard it is easier there! They have Nazis, but of a less severe kind! The Church also is able to prevent crimes—perhaps it is nearer to the Pope—here he can do nothing for us!"

Frau Breitner moved quickly into the kitchen, and came back carrying a bowl of milk, with thick cream standing on it. "Drink this," she said, leaning her arms on the table, and, gazing across it at Freya, the whole of her being at work upon the business of this new life, for a few moments Frau Breitner did not even start peeling the potatoes she had brought out at the same time as the milk.

"*Nah*—better here!" she said, after a pause long enough to turn over Freya's plan in her slow clear mind. "Hans' child would be safe here with us! A peasant's babe on a mountain—more or less—will not concern the Nazis! I am not yet an old woman—forty-three next birthday, and had my man lived I might have had another child.

"This one, I promise you, shall be as my own! A child born here in December need not be notified down below till the late spring. Saying '*Heil*

Hitler! will not stop an avalanche! No one will disturb us till the melting is over. Then whose child is it? For by then it will need parentage! Up here we turn it into a Christian when it is born—with or without a priest—sprinkling and the baby's name are enough. After the melting, Karl and his cousin Anna can call themselves the child's parents; so it will be neither a Jew nor a Communist. The Nazis are pleased with every German child—there will therefore be no danger for it!

“Gossip we escape also—for I do not need a doctor or midwife for a child's birth—I looked after our Anna with her Franz, and she was at work again in three days—and Michel knows as well or better than I! Nature does all, but the last!

“Later on you can send us money for the child, if you like—but on the farm for the first year or two, there is always enough for a child. Whenever you wish you can come up here and see it. Do you not yourself think it would be safer—and for you also—with your career to make—if the child belongs to us, up here, rather than down there in the valley, where nowadays there seem always upsets, and no man belongs to himself or to his family any more?”

“It would be safer!” Freya admitted slowly. She drank her milk and gazed out over the balcony rail, across a gulf of blue air to where the Lärchenkogel stood cloaked in violet shadows.

“We skied down there,” she said after a long silence. “Hans and I—the first day we met! I was thinking—how easy the run was—so satin-smooth and free! It is a long run, but we were down it in a flash! We did not think of time—or what could end it!”

“*Nah! Nah!*” Frau Breitner murmured compassionately. She took away the empty bowl into the kitchen and washed it up. When she came back, she started peeling the potatoes. “He was always strong on his feet—Hans!” she observed reflectively. “I hope this one of yours will be as strong! I think it will, if you act sensibly; eat many apples and drink milk. Love children are almost always strong! What child can be healthy if a mother's heart is against her man? You will not have that trouble, Freya, for you loved my son!

“This child may be a girl, of course! I have nothing against girls—though life is hard for them, as you will find. I had two myself—one died at birth after a cow had kicked me—the other one I lost with diphtheria when she was five years old. Her name was Marie. Her father carried her in the little coffin he made for her to the Friedhof—on the other side of the

Wetterstein. It was a heavy journey even for a strong man, but he wanted to carry her for the last time.

“I hope for your sake this child will be a boy, for all girls like their first child to be the same as his father!”

“Yes,” Freya whispered, “I too would like him to be the same as his father!”

Her eyes filled slowly with easy tears, the first ones she had shed without anger, since Hans was killed.

Here, in his home, with Hans’ mother sitting beside her in the sunshine, Freya lost the sense of hatred that had dried up her heart. Grief seemed a simpler and more natural thing.

Frau Breitner broke the companionable silence that had settled down upon them, to remark: “I hear the others coming! We need not tell them yet! But before you go I shall tell Karl. He will be pleased. He had spoken of it as unlikely, but I told him that I knew Hans had been satisfied; I saw it in his eyes—he had lived—*Gott sei Dank*—before he died!”

Freya bowed her head. A warm and happy feeling flooded her empty heart. She knew now that she was more than forgiven by Hans’ mother for whatever added risk her love had brought to Hans.

When the others arrived, Freya rose to greet them with outstretched hands and a new assurance in her manner. It was curious to think that up here, alone with nature and her laws, the fact of Freya’s unmarried motherhood gave her fresh dignity and strength, while down below—in her own social world—the same fact would make her feel ashamed and despised.

They were all kind to her, even Anna, for now that Hans was dead, Freya was no longer in a favoured position, indeed she was less fortunate than Anna, who already had Franz; even though she had also to put up with a hare-lip and a general appearance which did not justify the expectation of another lover.

None of the family put themselves out, any more than they had done on Freya’s first visit. Since four o’clock in the morning they had been at work in the fields, and had climbed several thousand feet into the bargain, so that they were hot and weary.

Each in turn washed thoroughly at the trough outside the door, before going into the kitchen to eat. Frau Breitner went in to attend to their wants,

and after they had finished they came out one by one, and sat on the bench opposite Freya's for a few minutes' rest, before resuming their labours.

Franz showed Freya a trap he had made to catch weasels, for the fierce little creatures were a great danger to the young chickens; and Michel dragged before her a large unruly lamb, reminding Freya, with enormous pride, that it had been a newborn weakling when she had last seen it.

It was now a family pet, though before long it would have to go to the butcher.

Michel, however, had always been kept away from butchers, so that he serenely accepted the lamb's future as a form of early promotion.

Karl watched Freya with friendly eyes, and occasionally asked her how one of the new regulations of the Nazis worked. Freya was surprised at the shrewdness of his questions. None of the family was the least taken in by the propaganda that poured out steadily day and night over the radio.

"What kind of stuff is sold, and how much it costs," Karl observed, "that tells us all we need to know about any government. If what is sold is poor stuff and the price is high, if we are taxed unfairly for what we ourselves produce—then we know well enough that our government is bad—whatever it says for itself. But if stuff is worth what is paid for it—and we are taxed lightly—what more do we ask? We are not criminals to need new laws. Nor are we children to ask for war playthings! Our father told us about war—and he himself need not have died before he was old—except for the wounds he got in it! The government sent Russian prisoners up here to us, as farm workers—and told us they were our enemies. We soon found this to be a lie! No farmer ever had better friends! They worked for us—and with us—as hard as we worked ourselves. *Nah! nah!* What people say of themselves is seldom worth hearing! When the Nazis let those who are *not* Nazis say of them what they like—it will be time enough to start listening! Now, when this new government begin to speak of their doings, I turn off the radio. If there is a fresh order that concerns us we shall hear it soon enough.

"A Nazi came up here once—after they had killed our Hans! He saw Mother—that seemed to have been enough for him!" Karl gave a short bitter laugh, and began to whittle a stick furiously, as if it were the head of the Nazi who had shot Hans.

Frau Breitner's close shut lips relaxed into a grim, reluctant smile. "He had killed my son," she said quietly, "I had not killed his! Let *him* speak!"

"They said since my mother was dumb, I must go down to be questioned," Karl explained, "so I went—and lost a day's work—for which they did not pay! The men I saw spoke to me worse than to a neighbour's dog! But in the end they let me go without further trouble. I said: 'I am on no list! I have joined no party! I have done my service! I am a farmer on the Wetterstein—punish me for that if you choose!' Well, they said: 'These Bavarian peasants are as simple and stubborn as their beasts!' Simple, we may be, but I should like to see a Brown Shirt take one of our calves down the mountain to market—away from its mother—it might teach him that everything does not get done by a shout or a blow!"

Freya stayed for two hours more at the farm, until the full heat of the sun had passed.

Michel showed her a new litter of pigs and a brood of buttercup-coloured ducklings.

He could not talk to Freya, but he looked at her with shining eyes full of love, and when she left, he ran after her with an old green hat of Hans', that had a real chamois beard at the side by way of ornament.

Michel pressed the hat into her hands, and then ran away as fast as he could, for the hat was worth all the world to him and he feared that his generosity might not outlast the strength of his desire.

Karl caught up with Freya, after Michel had left her, and walked with her as far as the shrine. He was silent, until they reached it, then he held out his hand, and grasped Freya's with a strong, firm grip. "I am glad of what my mother has told me," he said earnestly. "The Wetterstein is your home. Come back to us when you need us! I have not forgotten that Hans said you were his wife. Do not let anyone frighten you! They have strange ideas down there in the town. But up here with us, you would be always respected!"

Freya thanked him with flushed cheeks and a lighter heart.

It seemed to her, no way at all down the Wetterstein. When she reached the woods they were still warm; and the air full of the scent of sun-baked pines.

St. Johann looked a friendly little town, whose men would never attack a defenceless girl; and when she reached Schloss Maberg, it was to hear that Olaf's sentence had been shortened and that he was to arrive next day, with Fritz.

CHAPTER XXX

The fortress terrace was not very long; if you walked from end to end of it twenty times, it hardly felt like exercise; but it was a privilege, and as Olaf and Fritz strolled its full length for the last time, they were both conscious of a queer sense of depression. Their prison life had not been a painful affair. Their superior officers had given them plenty to do, and seen that they did it; but the sense of their solidarity with the young soldiers who had, after all, only done a little more than their duty, remained unbroken. When they left the fortress, Olaf and Fritz would go unsheltered into a world whose orders were not the same. Opinion had changed in Germany, but not altogether changed. What Olaf and Fritz had done still looked like a crime to some of their friends and relatives; nor did such people see or understand any compulsion of a splendid sort, behind their act. Olaf was not afraid of criticism, but he loved his family, and he knew that they would be against him—even Emil, a Storm Trooper, moved by the same ideal as himself—had refused with passion, to share his brother's intention to catch and shoot Hans. Emil had said: "We cannot do this—let someone else! We cannot hurt Freya like this!" He had completely failed to see that just because Olaf loved Freya, he *must* remove a danger that was hers, as well as the State's. Walking up and down the terrace in the bright moonlight, with the heavy shadow of the old castle behind them, at either end of the smooth sward, motionless guards, while beneath the terrace lay the huddle of a sleeping village, Olaf felt cruelly alone. Nor was the figure of Fritz at his side—depressed and silent, held in the grip of a quite different compunction—any real companion to him. They had been friends all their lives, but only in a superficial sense had they ever been companions.

They went to the same schools, did the same things, knew the same people, but their hearts were always separate. How differently, for instance, each had taken his spell of captivity! It was a curious feeling to be the guarded object of eyes that if not actively hostile, would in a flash, be changed to hostility, should either of them try to enlarge the cramped measure of their freedom. Although they were allowed every privilege—cigarettes, newspapers, books, food sent in from a good restaurant—they could not leave the fortress grounds; and they were watched day and night.

When they had finished the hard physical drill, and textbook work provided for them, they had comfortable beds to rest on; but they had no one to speak to, but each other.

To Olaf, this regular rigid life had no great drawbacks. It was merely a number of set tasks for him to accomplish, in the same spirit of perfection with which he would have undertaken, however free, any other task. But Olaf viewed with deep concern, Fritz' reaction to captivity. His good-humoured, slightly slovenly nature resented supervision, and rebelled against extra discipline. They both had the same deprivations, but whereas Olaf took them unmoved, and made the most of all that remained, Fritz took all deprivations as personal insults; and his attitude to what remained, was disastrous. His sleep was disturbed; he lost appetite; he hated his work and annoyed his guards. He was not sure of anything round him, and he felt even less sure of himself.

Nor were their inner compunctions and anxieties the same. There was, for instance, the perfectly simple question of the death of Hans. Surely Fritz knew that he had done a right action with promptness and efficiency; so that there could be no occasion for remorse; and yet remorse gnawed at him night and day. Olaf did not feel the slightest compunction for the death of Hans. The fellow was a menace to the State. He was killed trying to escape the just penalty of a crime. Death was but his due; and for giving Hans his due, why feel pity? It was curious, and Olaf was prepared to admit hardly pleasant, to think that the first man Fritz had killed as a Brown Shirt was a German—not even a German-Jew—but a real undeniable Nordic with every hair of his flaxen head, a man who spoke the same tongue, and acknowledged the same Fatherland; but then, as Olaf so plainly saw, the worse his crime! This man who was a Communist—and also a peasant—had dared to make love to a girl out of his own class!

Fritz was making a fuss about nothing, but how far worse was the real dilemma in which Olaf found himself! He had no remorse for giving the order that had sent a petty criminal to his doom. Some day he might have to give an order that would send a regiment of noble-hearted German soldiers to die for what they believed and he would do it willingly—and if he could—die with them! He would even more willingly die *for* them and yet feel no regret, but to trick Freya—to let her think they were punished for conniving at this wretched boy's escape, instead of themselves destroying him—this pricked Olaf's conscience to the core!

He flung away a hardly started cigarette with exasperated fury, and said with a sharp sigh: "Here we are, Fritz—it's our last evening—and I'm

damned if I don't wish it were the first! I've given my mother a promise to hold my tongue to Freya—and I simply daren't look her in the face! Never in my life have I lied to Freya or hidden from her what was the truth. How can I begin now—when owing to things we can't control—she already thinks of me as less her friend than I have always been!"

Fritz raised his head and glanced at his companion's trim, erect figure, with a kind of envy. "You think that matters, do you?" he demanded half satirically. "You'd rather she had to take us both on as her enemies for life! Your mother was right—for not only would Freya do some fool thing out of pure horror—and I know that's what she'd feel for both of us—but you'd put a spoke in the wheel of her ever marrying me—or becoming a contented Nazi. I tell you this, Olaf—you may understand men—though not if you think they're all like you are—but God knows you've never understood women—and never will! Don't you see that even if you give Freya time to take me, you risk undoing it all by a word of this business however long you graciously consent to postpone doing it? We've got to hold our tongues about it for life! And to everyone! No one knows the truth but our parents, Emil, and our own officers, and they have every reason to keep their mouths shut! My old man is as cunning as a fox now—he made a fool of himself once by blabbing when my mother suspected him of being unfaithful—and see what he got for letting the cat out of the bag—he hasn't been able to make her do a damned thing he wants since! No! I'm not going to begin marriage by letting my wife have a grievance to throw up at me!

"What we did—up there on the mountains—well, I didn't like it myself but I admit shooting Communists is part of our job, granted that we weren't to shoot that particular one, still he *was* one! And how else could we have stopped him from hopping the border?

"We *did* stop him—and that's enough for us—or should be, but it would never be enough for Freya! Even if she hadn't taken a fancy to the chap—a young girl's first flare-up—I'll never believe it was anything more—she hasn't got the type of mind to understand what we had to do, and we'd be misboughten idiots to tell her—now or later!"

Olaf shook his head. "That's just it," he said gloomily. "To hold our tongues is to take advantage of her ignorance. We are getting her to do, what she would never do otherwise. I don't believe it's right to play such a trick on her even at the risk of her sanity.

"It is true, what my mother told me, Freya acts as if thought and action were the same thing; and if her thoughts are desperate, she might very well

do some desperate thing—take her own life, for instance! I know this—and it has made me agree to silence—but I cannot respect myself for this agreement. She would herself have wished it otherwise. I remember when we were young, that I once told Freya how I wanted to be—for Germany—a second Siegfried, and I have not forgotten her answer: ‘I should never respect you again if you played such a trick as Siegfried played on Brunhilde! I infinitely prefer the Dragon. After all, a Dragon has to behave like a Dragon. But Siegfried is supposed to be a hero—and he behaved like a cheat. How can you behave like a cheat if you are not a cheat!’ and she begged me to model myself upon some other—more real hero. After all, it is I myself who tried to teach her reality; and now I fob her off with this paltry lie!”

Fritz gave a half laugh, his light hunter’s conscience was merely amused at Olaf’s relentless honesty. “But it is for us to judge what *is* good for her,” he explained reassuringly. “After all, we know that Siegfried acted for his friend Gunther—it was no selfish trick—and he gave Brunhilde a fine husband! We have already acted for Freya to her great advantage without her knowledge, then why stop?”

Taking a young man’s life haunted Fritz but fooling a girl would never haunt him. He could not understand Olaf’s long impatient sigh.

“I’m tied,” Olaf said. “I’ve promised! I shall go through with it—but don’t expect me to like it. Or even to admit that it’s right!”

The evening bell rang out from the fortress behind them; it was their summons to go in for the night. To-morrow there would be no more such summoning bells; they would be free to act as they chose—if what they chose *was* freedom.

Olaf turned instantly, before the sound had died on the sultry summer air, murmuring half to himself and half to his companion: “To live always—by such sure means as a bell! To have for every act—every decision—such a symbol—what merciful finality—and what release for the striving soul!”

“Mad as a hatter!” Fritz thought to himself. “*Gott sei Dank*—I don’t have to hear the damned thing ticking me off again!” They both went in, their minds holding their separate compunctions, to the last.

The Gräfin was very much pleased, but not at all excited by their arrival the next evening. She went upstairs to her boudoir to play bridge five minutes later than usual.

The Graf hung about downstairs with the young people, for a few minutes longer, hoping that the girls at least, would beg him to remain; and finding that they didn't, went off down the hill in a huff, thinking worse of the modern generation than ever.

Fritz turned on the gramophone and flung wide the hall door, leading on to the moonlit terrace.

A miracle had happened to him. He saw the world with eyes that were raw to its beauty; and he saw Freya as if her small supple body held all the beauty in the world.

Her face, a little shadowed by its grief, with faint purple marks under her wide grey eyes, was no longer that of an absorbed open-hearted child's.

There was a new bloom and softness about her, as if some inner ripeness had moulded her afresh. Her body, too, was no longer that of a lean adolescent—it had taken on the rounded curves of completed womanhood. Her eyes were veiled as well as bright.

Fritz knew suddenly, as the music drew them into unity, that Freya was now aware of the heat and ardour that stirred all his senses; imperceptibly as they danced, he felt Freya responding to the pressure of his arms.

Yet when the music stopped, and Olaf and Sophie slipped with clasped hands and blind lovers' eyes into the friendly darkness, Fritz could not persuade Freya to follow them.

She stood by his side in the open doorway, drawing in deep breaths of the summer night, but she refused to mingle and be part of the magic.

She murmured gently with a firmness that Fritz knew he must respect, "No, Fritz. I am not going out to-night!"

"But the garden's so beautiful!" he pleaded. "It's such magic—out there in the moonlight with the whole mountainside free—you can't think what it's like, to go where you like, with no one to stop you—to say and do any damned thing you want—and it spoils it all if you aren't there with me! The others don't want me you know."

When Freya answered Fritz, her voice was gentler and sweeter than he had ever heard it. He felt a pang of real remorse when he realized that he was profiting by having misled her for what Freya was trying to express by this new gentleness was gratitude.

"Dear Fritz—I do know! And I hate not to please you! I have not forgotten. I never will forget that when I needed you most—you put aside all

that you felt for me—to serve me. It was not your fault, I know, that you arrived just one moment too late. I had a right to expect help from Olaf but from you—feeling as you did for me—it was a splendid gift!”

“Don’t—don’t thank me—anything but that!” Fritz stammered. “I always mean to serve you! I won’t say any more—just yet!” He reached down in the darkness, and just touched her hand with his lips.

“Not yet!” Freya murmured, and was gone, before he had caught what her two words implied. Joy rushed in a great wave, from his heart—over all his senses—every roused instinct in him drove him to pursue Freya and force her into a physical response but he held himself back. She had given him all she wanted to give for the moment, to ask for more now would be nothing but selfish greed. If he were patient with her, she would soon give him more.

He flung back his head and shoulders with a wild ecstasy of relief, feeling as if not only the mountain on which he stood was his, but all the mountains in the land-locked world, and all the untravelled seas.

He knew now, that the laughter and kisses that were Sophie’s to-night, would be his to-morrow. He would be denied no longer the exquisite ardours and surrenders of an unbought love.

Well enough, Fritz knew how little he had had from other girls—the least a healthy young animal overgrown in spirit, could profit by—but lately something had been making Fritz’ spirit grow. He was ripe now for the reality of love. To-night he had shown himself for the first time, obedient to beauty.

But suddenly—for no outward reason, since the magic of the garden had not changed, nor the sweet-scented air grown cold—the glory and riot of Fritz’ senses died down.

He could see, as if it lay before his eyes, on the moonlit grass—the young cold body of Hans—the shadow across the lawn might have been the dark patch on the snow, that slowly grew larger and larger, as the life blood flowed away from it. Had Freya forgotten? For all her kindness—would she ever forget? And if she once knew the hand that had sent Hans to his death—would she ever forgive?

CHAPTER XXXI

It was a relief to Freya to find herself sitting beside Fritz in his car, driving at full speed, towards the Austrian frontier. In a few hours they would have to come back; but for those hours she was free. They drove so fast that Freya could think her thoughts undisturbed by the clamour of Fritz' sympathy. She wanted no sympathy, what Freya wanted in so far as she wanted anything, was to get clear away.

She had waked to find Sophie in tears, sitting at the foot of her bed, declaring that she didn't know what to do. Freya saw at a glance that Sophie not only knew what to do, but had made up her mind to do it; her expression of indecision and her tears, were merely a tribute to her natural tact. What Sophie had come for, was to get Freya to agree to her decision and to give up being chief bridesmaid, because Pauline Steyer und Stein objected that Freya's presence made it a "Jewish wedding."

"What does Olaf say?" sprang automatically from Freya's lips. Her whole being hung on Sophie's answer. She was to know, at last, how strong the tie still was that bound them to each other.

Olaf hadn't exactly repudiated her; he had said: "Freya is my sister. I can therefore say nothing—it is for Sophie to decide." And now there was Sophie, gazing at her through her careful tears, waiting for Freya to do the only really sensible and graceful thing, voluntarily retire from a situation that could otherwise be made most painful all round. But Freya would not retire. A storm of queer and angry feelings had swept over her. She hadn't known that she could still feel so much about anything. She *wanted* to be Sophie's chief bridesmaid! She actually wanted to wear the corn-coloured satin dress, and the blue cornflower wreath. She wanted—just for this last time—to be a young girl in the full pride of her girlhood—and to let it end on this one gay triumphant note.

Everything else might take its course! Let the Nazis blot her out of the new German State! Let her young body be wrenched by its mateless motherhood—let her carry the burden of her maternity alone through life—all this must be—and Freya was willing to bear it uncomplainingly and with courage, but not till she had first enjoyed this last hour of irresponsible pleasure.

Her whole being craved for it. Why should Pauline Steyer und Stein—with her long nose and sickly face—prevent it? Pauline wasn't even one of the main relations! There were the two von Röhn cousins—who wouldn't dare to attack Olaf's sister, however much they wanted to—since it was for Olaf's sake they had been made bridesmaids. There were the two sport-loving Maberg cousins—far more devoted to Fritz than to Sophie, and always friendly to Freya—and there should have been Sophie herself—with the life-long bond between them!

"No!" Freya had cried out roughly, "I *won't* give way to Pauline! I'm what I've always been! You chose me—knowing what I was. If the Nazis make such a difference to you, you should have asked me to give it up long ago. Have they suggested it now? To Olaf? To the Graf? No! I thought not! It's only Pauline's spite because with her yellow skin she doesn't look nice in corn colour. And she knows I do! Sophie—have a little courage! Stand by me—and get another girl to take Pauline's place—we can get the dress made over!"

Then the whole Schloss had blown up. Everyone had opinions, from the Graf to the stableboy. The bridesmaids took sides—the von Mabergs for Freya, the von Röhn, emboldened by Olaf's silence, against her. The Graf was definitely for Amélie's daughter—the Gräfin blinked and refused to give any opinion—but Fräulein Rosa, her factotum, and Sophie's old governess, would not have dared to say so firmly that the name "Roth" in the newspapers was hardly desirable just now—if she hadn't guessed that the Gräfin had no particular objection to her saying it. Sophie herself, while continuing to weep copiously, had rather suspiciously listened with unusual respect to Fräulein Rosa.

Then Fritz suddenly went up like a rocket. Never had Freya—never had any of his family—seen Fritz master a situation as he had proceeded to master this one.

He held a meeting of the bridesmaids and terrified the von Röhn cousins into retracting their opinion. He drove Pauline out of the Schloss by an indelicate reference to a peasant great-grandmother. He reduced Fräulein Rosa to complete and prostrate subservience. He had all the servants on his side and when he triumphantly returned to the Schloss after a short absence, with both the village priest and the doctor (on whom the Gräfin relied for a permanent alibi whenever an illness would be convenient) prepared to uphold Freya, the Gräfin herself blandly asserted that she would telephone to Pauline's mother, and had no doubt that if Pauline would not retract, she could be replaced.

Pauline had retracted, and Fritz had invited Freya to accompany him on a secret mission to Kufstein, while the Schloss settled down.

The victors drove off in a cloud of dust, leaving the vanquished to pick up the broken pieces. But there was one of the pieces, Freya realized, that could not be picked up.

Freya was going to be chief bridesmaid, but the foolish childish joy that had made her fight for it, had died out with her victory. What she was grateful to Fritz for, was not that he had won for her what she wanted, but that he had cared enough for her, to fight against his entire world.

She looked at the profile so close to her own, as if she were looking at it for the first time. She had thought she knew everything about Fritz. His warm-hearted rather ruthless egoism was as familiar to her, as the way in which—when the odds were against him—his matter-of-course unimaginative courage invariably broke down. But to-day it hadn't. He had made up his mind—with Olaf standing coldly neutral beside him—to get Freya what she wanted. He had told his mother and Sophie that as far as he was concerned, if Freya was not chief bridesmaid, neither he, nor any of his friends, would come to the wedding.

Fritz had a great many friends; and he was the future owner of Schloss Maberg. His rather loose, self-indulgent mouth had settled into lines of such surprising firmness, that both his mother and Sophie saw that he actually meant what he said.

He did not try to talk to Freya—the pace he was driving at, ensured silence—but their silence had never before been so deeply companionable.

They were driving towards freedom. The farther they went, the emptier grew the road. The new law—closing the Austrian frontier to Germans—had been passed to punish Austria; but the greater country had turned the key of its prison upon itself, in order to injure its smaller neighbour.

Fritz' permit to cross included his companion. Freya was going to pass unchallenged the frontier where Hans had lost his life.

She began: "Isn't it funny—Fritz—?" and then stopped short, blushing to her forehead, for what was even stranger than her pulling herself up, was her having for the moment before she did it, expected Fritz to share what was in her mind.

He hadn't of course even for a second, understood what she was feeling. "What's funny?" he demanded, his mind still on his own surprising victory, "the way they caved in or the way they carried on? I thought it all

disgusting! It's one thing having to obey an order—one has to do that whatever one feels to the contrary—but I've no patience with these ultra-Nazis who set up a barrier when there isn't any! Everyone knows your father isn't a Jew at all—according to what's meant by one. He hasn't any religion. It's only your grandparents—and they're both dead—that have to be reckoned with at all! We talked the whole Jew question out with our commander at the fortress. It turned out he had a Jewish grandmother himself! He said the Nazis don't intend to take up these remote cases unless they have to—they're more than willing to let sleeping dogs lie.

"I tell you what would make the whole thing easier, Freya—if you could only agree to look at it as I do—Jew-baiting is just a stunt to show foreigners what we aren't going to put up with! These silly intellectuals have got to be hit all round—and it's easier when they're Jews—to round on them than when they're only intellectuals! All you've got to do is to agree roughly to the Nazi aims—a strong Germany—going its own way and getting back what it knows belongs to it! Once the Nazis realize that you're going to be a faithful citizen to the new regime, they'll ride light over your back relationships."

To Fritz' relieved astonishment Freya did not indignantly repudiate this suggestion, she even appeared to be thinking it over.

A curious sense of flatness stole over her mind, what could she put up against the overwhelming power of the Nazis?

She was not a Communist in fact whatever she might feel she was in theory. She had not joined the party. If Hans had lived she would have joined it; and for a time after his death, she had intended to join it; but she had never been able to forget her father's warning—by becoming a Communist, she would lose her chance of being allowed to practise as a doctor—or she must leave her country. To leave Germany meant cutting herself off from her parents and her friends. She was twenty years old; and she was already aware that grief—even such grief as she felt for Hans—could not outlast her youth.

In a few years time, she might wish to marry. She would still be young, and life was strong in her. Since she had given herself to Hans, her senses were more alive than they had ever been as a girl. Her pride no longer rose with repugnance against the attraction she aroused in men. She would have to give up her child—to the upbringing of a peasant—but free of this one tie, she could marry again.

Even what she felt for Fritz was stronger than her old half-friendly, half-antagonistic feeling. It was not only because he had served her that she felt for him such a deep, confident kindness. His touch, though it could not thrill her, no longer enraged her. On the contrary, if he put his arms round her, she felt that it would be a comfort—not an extravagant comfort, she was still without desire—but the sort of comfort Olaf might have given her and had not given her.

“I don’t see why Olaf is angry with me!” she burst out, as if it were part of the argument for the Nazi regime, “even if I’m not a Nazi—I’m no *less* a one than before—am I? Since you’ve both come back from prison, you’re so much *more* my friend—Fritz—and Olaf’s so much less! I can’t think why! I’m glad about you! But about Olaf—why does he make me feel sorrier than I need? I’m not *against* the regime! I wouldn’t act against it—in order to overthrow it—even if I could! Though I should like people to think out something better and freer! I hate all forms of militarism—this constant preparation of children for death and murder—seems to me race suicide of a far worse kind than the wrong people marrying each other or not having babies. I shall never believe in a muzzled Press or in persecuting people for their opinions. But I do see that we weren’t getting anything done—until Hitler came to power—we were all feeling defeated and divided. Very few of us had any ideals or cared to behave even decently. Well, I see how that’s changed and for the better. People *are* behaving decently again. They all want to work for something—not for themselves only. Still I’m sorry it has to be the State. I don’t believe—and I never shall—in State worship. The State ought to be organized *for* people—not people organized for the State. After all, Fritz, what *is* a State? Isn’t it only a convenience for a lot of human beings living in one place?

“Why should it be this puffed-up sacrosanct scarecrow Hitler and Mussolini are making of it? A sort of Juggernaut, to dash over its own children? I can’t accept such a ridiculous and cruel plan—and is it sane that just because I can’t—my own brother should refuse to be my friend? *You* are my friend and yet you’re a Nazi! You believe as he does?”

Fritz began to drive slower. The mountains were closing in upon them and a topaz-coloured rollicking stream raced by their side. “I suppose I don’t believe exactly as Olaf does,” Fritz agreed with a puzzled frown. “But then I’m *not* a cast-iron fellow, Freya! Olaf always has been! He was the same in prison—in a way he didn’t seem to be *more* in prison than when he’s outside of it. I’m more human than Olaf—that’s where I break down over you! Theoretically I swallow all the Nazi stuff—it seems to me the right dope for

all of us—but not to the point of making a fetish out of it, and breaking up all one's life-long ties. I don't see that it matters about the Press for instance! You might just as well tell people what to think—they've got to think something—and after all, the government knows the facts better than we do! And what can you expect for a country as strong as Germany that's been defeated, *but* militarism?

"We had the world against us before and rather poor allies—well, next time we'll set out better prepared and choose better-prepared friends and less overwhelming enemies.

"I can see the sense of that—and I'm with the Nazis—from the word go! It's an odd thing to tell you, Freya—but it happens to be the truth—in a sense, it's for your sake, that I'm a Nazi! I saw from the first that if I'm a real one—I'll be worthier of you. I wouldn't crumple up like my father has done—just shooting and drinking—playing bowls with the peasants and running after their girls!

"I might have been like that if I hadn't got hold of this Nazi idea!"

"Yes," Freya agreed slowly, "but there's a catch somewhere, Fritz—you haven't got hold of *it*—*it's* got hold of *you*! You aren't allowed *not* to be a Nazi! Now I couldn't be one, unless I was free *not* to be!"

Ahead of them was a small striped stick on either side of the road; across the torrent stretched a guarded bridge. On each side of it stood armed sentries. Freya stared at them with blank eyes, trying to hide the havoc of her memory. She could not follow Fritz' answer. He showed their *Grenzscheine* and after a joke or two they drove on. A few moments later, they drew up before the Austrian frontier; the same speech—the same featured men guarded it—only the soldiers wore a different uniform; then they were over the frontier—they were free.

The torrent by the roadside was the same torrent, as bright as if it ran over gold, nor were the mountains different, the summer heat, the summer flowers were the same.

The peasants who passed them gave the same "*Grüss Gott*" for greeting, but their eyes, Freya thought, met theirs with a more direct and friendly gaze; and on people's faces there was an innocent unguarded expression. They looked as if no one had ever watched them.

Freya did not say what she thought to Fritz. She did not want to disagree with him. Her heart was filled with kindness, but to admit that in order to

behave decently one had to be ordered about by a Nazi, seemed to Freya to be childish nonsense.

When they drove through Kufstein, Freya asked Fritz to let her climb up to the castle by herself, and join her when he had finished his business.

She stood for a long time on the terrace above the little town, looking across it, to the Kaiser Gebirge.

The brilliant last light of the summer day rested on the slopes of the mountains, as if it could not bear to leave them. Here and there a little *Heustadl* took a rich orange hue, or a small green *Alpe* flamed as vividly as a jewel. The huddle of red and brown roofs below shone as if a flame had licked them.

The white road, with the torrent at its side, wound its free and easy way towards the Kalk Mountains; their woodless slopes had already turned into walls of amethyst and rose. A tiny sickle moon, ice-white and feathery, pierced its way through the colourless light sky.

A wave of desperate longing broke over Freya's heart, to run and run anywhere after that last light, to hide in that deep gorge, she saw as a purple shadow in the distance, to lose herself before Fritz came back and never to be found again. Not to go back to that prison—to the endless harrowing scorn—to the pitiful attempts at friendliness bound to become as useless as they were frail, to the living lie she must choose if she were to keep alive at all! Why could she not escape and keep intact both her life and her self-respect? She was already safe! She was over the frontier—only a few miles away she had friends who would protect her. She would only be doing—a little sooner—what her father had advised her to do. She would only be escaping to save herself—instead of to save Rudi.

To escape now—before she had passed her examinations and become a doctor—before Hans' child was born, in the home that was prepared for it, was to *be* a burden—not to carry it.

There was another way. She could return to Maberg as Fritz' promised wife. She could fool him and cheat him—cheat them all with Hans' child in her womb—and cheat herself for ever into the bargain.

You could, Freya told herself bitterly, always wrench fate to suit yourself if you wrenched hard enough; and if you didn't mind wrenching. If you believed in yourself rather than in those laws of life you were breaking in order to get your own way! Looking into the soft warm world and its cruel beauty, Freya cursed herself and her parents, because they had made her

aware of the life she knew that she was bound to serve. She could not escape without Rudi! If Fritz asked her to marry him she would have to tell him the truth!

She would have to go on alone, until she had taken her degree. She would have to bear her child unfathered and to give him to the Breitners for his own and Hans' sake. She must wait for freedom until she had won the training she needed in order to make her way in a world where there was no freedom without training—no safety without hardship. It was like going back into a trap, when she saw Fritz' cheerful figure swinging across the terrace, to reach her side.

They had supper together at an inn by the side of the torrent. The *Stube* was full of soft-voiced boys and girls, fresh from the mountains, with bunches of edelweiss and alpine roses strapped on their rucksacks—fine healthy creatures, sunburnt and full of laughter. After supper they joined their tables together, calling for fresh draughts of beer, and sang. They sang outspoken merry love songs with absurd and hearty choruses; and when they had sung enough they started to dance. It was hard to tear themselves away from such an easy company.

"That's the first really jolly evening I can remember," Fritz said, as they left the *Stube*, in a hail of friendly farewells, "since we had that day's ski-ing at the Gaudeamus *Hütte* in January. A hundred years ago—do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember it," Freya agreed, without reminding Fritz, of what had made it memorable to her.

They drove out of the little town in silence. The sickle moon was in possession of the cloudless sky but not large enough to light it. The air was full of summer scents and the dark meadows gleamed with fireflies.

"Freya," Fritz said in a voice she had never heard him use before, "don't go back into that damned dangerous unfriendly atmosphere again! There's a way to make it safe and friendly. Why won't you take it? Marry me. Not because I love you; but because I can make it safe for you. I couldn't before; I didn't love you enough to let you alone! It's different now—I want you to be safe—more than I want to have you! I wouldn't bother you now with my love! I'd be as patient as you like!"

"I know that," Freya said. "I know that you really love me—that's just it! It doesn't make it simpler! Not for me!—for you—I can see that it does! I can't love you yet but I've gone further towards it than ever I thought I could. I *could* marry you now! No—go on driving! It's not so easy as it

looks—what I am going to say—and you won't like it! Neither of us can like it!"

She was silent for so long that Fritz could stand it no more, he turned the car off the road and stopped his engine.

"Turn on the light," Freya demanded, and as he obeyed her, she faced him, her dauntless clear eyes fixing themselves on his, as if she dared him not to look past her words into her soul. "I don't suppose you *can* marry me," Freya said quietly, "whether I wish it or not—when you know that Hans was my lover before he was killed—and that, in six months' time, I shall bear his child."

It was only the innocence of her eyes that kept Fritz' hands from her throat.

For an endless moment rage so enveloped and possessed him that he longed to tear her to pieces. All his roused and thirsty senses were in torment.

His rage with her, and against her, overcame his new-found tenderness. He could think of nothing but that she had been possessed—the object of all his passionate desire—and not by him! All her new loveliness—ripening, as he had thought for himself—had been ripened for another! Freya never could be his, in the sense that she had once been Hans'!

Freya made no excuses; her silence was free of the slightest shame; her eyes rested on his without fear or expectation; and suddenly gazing into their unsullied depths, it occurred to Fritz that from her own point of view, Freya had done no wrong.

She had made a gift of herself to her lover. If she had made such a gift to Fritz himself, under the threat of death, would he have blamed her for her generosity? It was but part of her purity!

He leaned forward and covered his face with his hands to shut out her eyes; but even after he had shut out their cruel beauty, her goodwill and her courage stood between him and his rage. He could not wreck his baffled passion on her body—as he longed to do—while she so held his spirit with her own.

He sat there shaken and tortured by the images of his body's cruel needs, and for a long time, although he heard her voice, Fritz could not hear what she said.

“We’ve both got to be hurt, Fritz,” he heard her say at last. “I feel quite differently to you now—I could have loved you very easily. Any girl would love a man who’d been as good to her as you have been to me! Just now, before you came back to me, I wanted *not* to tell you! I’d have liked just to marry you for the sake of being safe! I have no money now—Father told me—the Nazis have taken it—they can, you know, since they control the banks. I got frightened, remembering that I was responsible for this child—and they mightn’t even let me through the schools—and then I couldn’t earn my own living. But you’ve been too good to me, for me to cheat you! I owe you the truth! I can see it hurts you horribly—but not as much as if you’d found out for yourself, after I’d fooled you. Anyhow, the truth is all I have to give you.”

Freya was silent after that; and she had the sense not to touch him.

“Why didn’t you fool me?” Fritz’ heart cried out to her. “Why didn’t you fool me?” For what would anything have mattered once she was his? But now he felt flung back upon himself. He could not take a peasant’s whore for his wife—neither could he get the good of her really being a peasant’s whore. For with the best of his nature Fritz respected Freya still, and knew that neither the best nor the worst of him could possess her. If only she were dead like that cursed Hans!

He let his hands fall, and stole a glance at Freya’s face. She wasn’t looking at him now. Her eyes were tearless. She looked sad but composed—as if there was nothing in him to frighten her. She hadn’t guessed that he still wanted to kill her. She turned her fearless sad eyes back to his face. “I know how you must hate me,” Freya said gently, “but I can’t help it! That’s one reason why I didn’t run away, when I was alone on the terrace. I felt you had a right to hate me!”

“I do hate you,” Fritz said quietly, “but I know it isn’t your fault—what you’ve done! I won’t do you any harm!”

Her lips parted in the strangest sweetest smile. “No,” she said, “I don’t think you will—the only thing I might mind now would be to have to think less well of you—and I don’t believe you’ll ever make me do that!”

Fritz turned out the light and backed on to the road. The air was full of tiny blue and silver moths, beating themselves against the front lights of the car. He drove for a long while in silence, his outraged senses sinking into quietness.

He could never have forgiven Freya, if she were going to be safe and happy, but he knew that what lay before her was disgrace and danger. The

new love he had for her wakened at last into a passionate pity. After Olaf and Sophie's wedding Freya would have to go back to Munich. Then her people would find out her condition and have to try to smuggle her out of the country; if this were impossible, they would have to keep her as best they could and bring up the child. No one would employ Freya—no one would marry her either. No one! But suppose, after all, that Fritz himself married her? Suppose he did voluntarily—what Freya might have fooled him into doing—what he still wished she *had* fooled him into doing?

Once more he stopped the car, and turning towards her in the darkness, whispered hoarsely: "Freya! Look here—how far has this thing gone? Couldn't it still be stopped?"

He was glad he could not see her eyes as she answered him. "Do you mean—the child? But, Fritz, I don't want to stop having it! It's all that I've got of Hans! It's a sort of heritage!"

"You know what it means—your having it unmarried—with Hans dead?" Fritz demanded roughly.

Freya said: "Oh, yes!" Her tired voice was more final than anger.

"Does anyone else know?" Fritz asked her after a long pause.

"Hans' people know," Freya told him, "they will bring up the child. I think it is best—if I earn money or not—the child will have a happier, safer life up there at the farm than if he were with me."

Once more the silence flowed and deepened between them, without estranging them.

Fritz thought with an intensity he had never known before, almost as if thought were an animal and he were hunting it.

"Look here," he said at last, "you can have your child. I've thought of a way out—a sort of way out, I mean—for both of us! I'll manage somehow to get you out of Germany before anyone knows. You can have the child in Switzerland or Austria—and hand it over to its people to bring up—as you suggest. I don't know how long it'll take—but when you're fit again, will you come back—and marry me?"

"Do you still want me to marry you?" Freya asked, he could hear the surprise—a surprise without gratitude—in her voice.

"I suppose I still want it!" Fritz grudgingly admitted. "After all, I've wanted it all my life! Just as my father has wanted your mother all his. It's funny when you come to think of it! Both father and son wanting the same

mother and daughter—who don't want them—and never quite getting the better of it!"

"I'm not like Mother," Freya said quietly, "and if I marry you, I think I shall love you—I very nearly love you now!"

Fritz cursed aloud and bitterly, without, as he realized, in the least shocking Freya. She had accepted his anger as part of the nature of his love—what she had confidence in—was the other part.

He drove on again at last, his mind swinging between disgust and attraction. He felt like the little blue and silver moths—banging their delicate wings forever—against the burning glass. Yet at the bottom of his heart there was a growing satisfaction. It wasn't only that he had no real desire to blot Freya out of his life forever, but for the first time—since he had sighted the running figure of Hans and shot the life out of it—Fritz' heart felt clearer of remorse.

CHAPTER XXXII

It was quite strange, the Gräfin remarked, how long this last rubber of bridge had lasted.

It might perhaps have been over earlier had not the Gräfin herself revoked on two occasions just when she had the final game in hand. These unfortunate accidents prolonged the rubber, until Freya and Fritz returned from Kufstein.

Fritz' face was extraordinarily white, and his eyes had a hard curious glitter, like an angry dog's. The Gräfin saw at a glance that he had not enjoyed his little trip to Kufstein. Freya looked tired and plain—oddly plain, the Gräfin thought—for a triumphant girl who has got her own way. But the oddest part of the business was that Fritz' anger did not seem to rest upon Freya. He said good night to her with unusual gentleness, before glaring all round him at the various members of the family still sitting up; and then stalked off to his room without another word. "If he has proposed to her," the Gräfin decided, "she has lost her head as usual and refused him. Still, it will be better to find out exactly what the situation is before she leaves the Schloss. Young people are so uncertain and secretive! The whole thing had better be cleared up as soon as the wedding is over—but before Olaf is out of the house—Sophie will never have the strength of mind to do it for herself and pet sisters-in-law always make trouble sooner or later. I shall have to buy another pair of shoes for Rosa—hers creak so when she listens outside doors. It is no use whatever having such a habit unless she wears the right kind of shoes—and she's sure to tell me that they're too expensive. They're not, of course—felt soles are always cheap! But people in Rosa's position always try to get the last ounce out of one!"

The Gräfin sighed gently, stacked the cards, and put them carefully into their little leather cases. Fortunately, she had won the last rubber in spite of having had to revoke twice.

The wedding atmosphere spread once more over the Schloss, but although everyone was being very nice to her, Freya had lost all sense of pleasurable excitement.

There was no further hitch in any of the arrangements except that Emil alone of the Roth household, was coming to the wedding. This seemed

incredible, but the Gräfin assured Freya that they had all been asked. Some unexpected pressure of business prevented the Professor, and Amélie had begged to be excused. An error in printing also had taken place in the press. Freya found that the chief bridesmaid's name had been given as Fräulein Freya Trattenbach too late for it to be rectified.

The little Gräfin agreed that it was most tiresome and careless! She herself had sent in a list of names to all the papers, and therefore could not see how such a mistake could possibly have occurred, although she knew how stupid reporters were—particularly society ones.

The wedding day could not have been more satisfactory. The sky was an unflecked gentian blue; the sun shone from dawn till dusk. Sophie was so wafted to the skies, by her accomplished dream, that she looked nearly as beautiful as she felt. Olaf made a splendid bridegroom—a dignified and flawless figure—and only Freya noticed that his eyes never smiled.

There was some difficulty in getting a tree out of one of his highly-polished military boots, and Freya found a shoehorn to dig it out with. Fritz, who was Olaf's best man, had begged her help while he dashed off to find a white carnation buttonhole for Emil, who had just arrived.

Freya was already dressed, and crowned with the cornflower wreath. She had barely looked at herself in the glass—wondering at the strange face that glanced back at her—unmarred by grief; but when she met Olaf's gaze she saw with surprise, the old satisfied tenderness shining in his eyes, and felt her own shine back at him, to meet it. He began to say "Freya—I'm glad — —" and then stopped short, as if he could not trust himself to say anything more.

Freya got the tree out of his boot, and said: "Olaf—do you remember in 'Parsifal' how Kundry puts on his boots—I never liked seeing her on her knees before him!"

"Well, don't do it for me then," Olaf said genially. But what Freya had really meant was, that she would *like* to do it for him. She couldn't explain, because Emil came in, and then Fritz, with the proper buttonholes. Olaf said (to give Fritz a chance to look at her): "Freya doesn't show up too badly in that gold and blue contraption, does she?" but Fritz wouldn't look at her; and only Emil really took the trouble to turn her round, and do up a hook that had come undone.

The wedding was held first in the Parish Church of Maberg, with a bishop to perform the ceremony; bus-loads of friends from Munich; and all the peasants from five or six villages round in full costume; then there was a

civil ceremony at the Rathhaus; and after that the Schloss filled with wedding guests, and breakfast was served in the Knights' Hall, which held seven hundred people quite easily.

The Graf had been bitterly disappointed. He had stayed awake, at least half an hour after getting to bed, rehearsing in his mind the touching speech he was going to whisper in Amélie's ear; and only at the last moment, when he could do nothing but lose his temper—was the news broken to him—that Olaf's mother would not be there. He had to make quite a different kind of speech at the wedding breakfast, though he managed to bring in a touching allusion to the weddings that didn't take place, as well as the weddings that did—hoping that Freya or Emil would remember to repeat it to their mother.

Freya, still in her bridesmaid's dress, ran upstairs to help Sophie change.

She found only Sophie, Fräulein Rosa and the Gräfin in Sophie's room.

Sophie had drunk two glasses of champagne and been kissed by everybody. She could hardly bear to take off her wedding dress, or touch the orange-flowers that fitted so beautifully into the careful waves of her daffodil-coloured hair. "Oh, Freya!" she cried, "wasn't it all just perfect!" and with a sudden burst of generosity she added: "And I want *you* to have a wedding just like it—with dear old Fritz!"

"Take off your flowers now, dear," the Gräfin said firmly. "I will keep them in water for you, if you like—though being natural orange-blossoms, they are certain to fade before long. I have no doubt whatever that Freya will make someone a very pretty bride one day—but not, I should suppose, your brother Fritz!"

This was Fräulein Rosa's cue, and she took it, after clearing her throat, in rather an affected manner. "A little bird," she said, drawing off Sophie's white stockings—delighted to see how well the lacquer held on the beautifully polished toe-nails of her nursling—"a little bird—dear Gräfin—told me that our Fritz was already engaged to Fräulein Freya!"

"I think your little bird must have been misinformed," the Gräfin remarked drily, "or else Freya must be even more generous and forgiving than I had supposed! It is not every girl who would consent to marry the man who shot her lover—within four months of the event! Although, of course, we know that Fritz merely acted upon an order received at the time—from Olaf, his superior officer. It is therefore really her own brother that Freya has to thank for checking her rather unsuitable little romance so suddenly."

The room went round and round—Sophie half-dressed—half-undressed—in her cobwebby new underclothes seemed to swing at Freya from every angle. The mirror caught her little face, her mouth wide open, struck dumb with horror, and was repeated, from the bed on which she sat. Poor Sophie very well knew all the facts, but she hadn't for a moment supposed that they would come out like this! And she thought it quite extraordinarily cruel of her mother to let them come out, before she and Olaf had got safely away.

"Whose orders did you say?" Freya heard a cool, determined voice demanding, a voice so steady that she could hardly have supposed it to belong to so unsteady a person as herself. For everything in the room was still rocking to and fro—the heap of white satin and tulle on the floor, the wreath of orange-blossoms on Sophie's bare pink knees, and Rosa's face staring up at Freya from the floor—while she repeated again and again, with the mechanical click of a cuckoo-clock, "*Mein Gott! Mein Gott!*"

"Your brother Olaf's," the Gräfin answered quietly, and that seemed to steady everything in the room, once and for all. "And now, my dear Rosa," the Gräfin's little flat voice went on, "the blue hat with the spotted veil hanging at the corner of the looking-glass! Sophie, you will find some money—brides should always carry a little of their own—the right change is most important from the first—your pocket handkerchief, keys and passport, all in this blue leather bag! I have had your new initials put on it, in silver. Be careful not to lay it down anywhere!"

The Gräfin was still saying things like these when Freya turned, and walked out of the room, nearly knocking over Fräulein Rosa in her flight. She ran down the stone stairway and met the Graf, who held out both arms to stop her—he was a little drunk—and asked her for a kiss. Freya managed to evade this by the simple expedient of spitting in his face. His horrified eyes and dropped arms told her what she had done before she realized that she had done it. Olaf, Emil and Fritz were together in the smoking-room.

Fritz was handing over railway tickets to Olaf, who seemed more likely to remember where he had put them than Emil, who was driving them to the station; but when Freya rushed in, Fritz spun round hastily, and seeing her face, cried out: "Freya! Freya! What's wrong with you?"

Freya did not look at Fritz—he was blotted out of her mind—his voice meant no more to her than the distant barking of a dog.

She seized Olaf's arm, and looked down at his hands as if she were surprised to find them clean, then she looked up at him and met the saddest eyes she was ever to see. "Then you did it?" she whispered. "You gave the

order for Hans to be shot?" All her movements seemed to have become slow, her body felt heavy and powerless. She had to hold Olaf's arm or she would have fallen. His eyes continued to meet hers unflinchingly.

"I gave the order, Freya," he said firmly. "I alone am responsible for the death of Hans. I promised Mother not to tell you—because she was afraid of the consequences to you—but I know that I did wrong to give any such promise. I do not ask you to forgive me—for I shall never forgive myself! I owed you the truth!"

Someone gave a high-pitched freezing laugh, it helped Freya to speak. She stammered—staring up at Olaf with incredulous eyes—"The truth—? No! No! How could you owe anyone such a truth! You—you killed Hans? And for nothing! Why, Olaf—why? Even Cain killed his brother because he envied him! You had nothing to envy Hans?"

"He was a Communist!" Olaf said sternly; "an enemy of the State! To kill all such enemies is every good German's duty! I do not regret having killed Hans. Only to have deceived you—*that* I shall always regret!" There seemed nothing more to be said—by either of them to each other.

Freya felt that there was no air in the room, and that she had better get out of it as soon as she could. On her way to the door, she saw Fritz standing like a kicked dog, who still feels that he has not been punished enough. He said, so that she had to stop and listen: "*Can* you forgive me—ever?"

"Oh no!" Freya said ruthlessly. She felt quite glad to be certain of something again. "How could I possibly forgive you? I told you what stood between us yesterday—rather than fool you—! And you were all the time fooling me! You told me nothing!"

"I shot him!" Fritz admitted desperately, "but, Freya—I don't feel like Olaf—I've been sorry I shot him ever since! I can't get it out of my mind! I thought if I married you—in spite of what you told me—it would make up for it!"

Freya knew this time, that the laughter she heard was her own. "How funny!" she gasped, "how *really* funny! You thought having a child a crime—and that murdering its father—was much the same thing! I understand *now* why Nazis want to get rid of people who can think! A fine state you two murderers are going to make for your future children—but look for some other kind of girl—to bear them for you! Fritz—let me pass!"

He stood aside, and when Freya reached the door she ran through the servants' quarters, to avoid the wedding guests, and out into the courtyard.

The courtyard was empty. There were only the pigeons strutting and bowing on the roofs and no sound but their gentle monotonous voices; then suddenly Freya heard footsteps running across the cobblestones behind her, Emil's voice shouted her name, with something in its urgency that made her turn and wait for him.

"It's all right," he panted when he reached her, "I mean—I'll come with you—you'll have to let me—Mother'll tell you—I was always on your side!"

"My side," Freya said angrily, for it seemed worth while being angry with Emil, "I haven't got a side! Do you think—murdering or not murdering—is a personal matter?"

"No," he said, "I don't mean that, Freya—I mean—I'll drive you home."

"I don't think there *is* such a place any more!" Freya said harshly, and then she read the passionate pity in Emil's eyes, and knew that what he felt for her was more real than her own anger. She turned and followed him without a word to the garage where his car stood.

"They can get to the station by themselves," Emil explained. "Freya, we have a home and we've got to get there as quick as we can. Nobody knows yet—I was to tell you after we'd got them safely off— They've taken Father to a concentration camp!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

The last Freya saw of Schloss Maberg, as Emil drove furiously down the hillside, was the flying bunting from the castle walls, a swastika on a white ground, and Olaf's name gaudily written above the great iron gates in late summer flowers.

"Olaf! Olaf! Olaf!" His name flung itself across the sky—the dust of the road held it—and unwaveringly it burned on in Freya's heart.

She had no thought to spare for Fritz von Maberg, for a short time she had schooled herself to think Fritz other than he was, and to respect him for qualities that she had never found in him before; but how easily and quickly she found herself dispossessed of his brief image! But Olaf could not be blotted so unceremoniously out of her heart and mind. He had to be torn out by the roots; and with him went all the confidence and safety of her childhood.

"Does he know?" she asked Emil in a choked voice, when they reached the valley floor, and saw the long straight road open before them.

She could not bring her lips to form his name, but Emil knew whom she meant.

"No one knows," he said promptly. "I had to give Father my word I wouldn't tell either the Mabergs or Olaf—the old man was afraid they'd try to help him, and spoil their honeymoon. Hadn't you better take that wreath out of your hair? We don't want to attract more notice than we need—your dress doesn't matter!"

"I'm glad to take it out," Freya said viciously. She began to tear the blue cornflowers to pieces and throw the torn petals over the side of the car into the dusty road. "Now tell me everything, Emil—I can listen. I've stopped feeling so angry I could die of it!"

"There isn't any use being angry," Emil replied sombrely. "One's got to go through with it. Father'd have been left alone all right if he'd been able not to help his friends. I explained it all to both Mother and Father, over and over again—they can't *have* any private lives! That's all there is to it! As long as they would obey the new orders—and live in the *spirit* of the new orders—no one would interfere with them. Even the question of Mother's

leaving Father could have been managed if they'd listened to me. It sounds rather bloody, but lots of middle-aged couples rather like leaving each other. All Mother had to do was to agree in theory—get leave of absence for a few months, so that she could go abroad and look natural—and then come home without drawing too much attention to it. If anybody started the question up again, she could plead they hadn't the means to live under different roofs or that she was ill and Father had to look after her. In a few months things may have become a good deal less rigorous. It is a bloodless revolution—that is to say that if people accept it with absolute obedience they are not killed! It seems to me perfectly fair and far more humane than any other revolution has ever been. Only people who *will* ram their heads against stone walls, have to get broken up! All Father had to remember was not to see any suspect person, and not to act in any suspect manner.

“Well, he's done three quite awful things—any one of which he deserves to be shot for. First he got that rank red internationalist Bühler out of Germany! He gave him money—he drove him to the frontier into Holland, disguised as a peasant woman! Can you beat it? As if that wasn't bad enough, he hid little Isaac Meyer—Rudi's friend—in the attic for weeks—even I didn't know he was there—but I got into trouble over it, of course—and then somehow smuggled him over into Switzerland by night—to join his mother. The Nazis found out a few hours after Isaac escaped that he'd been under our roof—by questioning Kathi. She'd seen Mother coming down late every evening with plates to wash up. Kathi didn't mean to give Mother away but they frightened her into doing it!

“Naturally my captain told me there wasn't any question now, but that the old man would *have* to be put away! I fought like hell against it and finally, after I'd waited for eight hours in a corridor, I got a word with Röhm himself! You know he's rather Leftist, and he practically *made* Hitler, by bringing the working people over to his side, and I don't believe Röhm really cares about this persecuting Jews either—anyhow, not the mere accident of race Jews—like Father—who've served Germany. He listened to me, and promised to give me one more chance to keep the old man at home if he would never by act or word disobey the new regime again! Father eeled out of promising—made jokes and flattered von Arlberg—who came with me to warn him—you know what Father's like. Still, we all hoped he'd keep quiet for Mother's sake—and yours and Rudi's! He knew then what he was doing, for von Arlberg warned him it would mean death or prison for himself and punishments of one kind or another for all of us. But when he heard that David Löwe, the bacteriologist, was going to commit suicide because he'd been turned out of the laboratory and didn't like living on his

English wife, Father started interfering again. This time he didn't actually try to smuggle David over, but he gave him money to bribe a fisherman to take him across the Lake of Constance. The banks are all controlled now, you know, and after a bit they traced the money back to Father—that was the last straw!

"They took him last night to Obermansdorf, but they've been awfully decent about him. They gave him a doctor's certificate to shorten his day's work—they may even use him as a doctor part of the time—and they let me see the commandant. He wasn't too bad a fellow—though they have to choose them for being harsh—of course! Anyhow, he agreed to let one of us visit him every fortnight, after the first month; if Father doesn't do anything seditious they may let him out before long—I don't think he will—for he never says anything against anybody when you come to think of it. And there isn't much he *can* do in the camp. He knows they shoot anyone promptly who tries to escape. He gave me his word not to do that! Father says he has always *wanted* to study the reactions of manual labour upon the brain at first hand and never had the time to try them out before so that we're all to remember he'll enjoy it! But, of course, he *would* say that! Still, I don't believe they *can* help liking him—and then they won't be too hard on him!"

"I don't believe they can help killing him!" Freya said between dry, shaking lips, clenching her hands in her lap.

Emil made no answer; he drove fast; his eyes fixed intently on the white dusty road.

"You're to see him first," he said at last, "before Mother even. You see, he guessed—what I gathered from you up there—about your going to have a child!"

"Father—guessed?" Freya asked, with a little gasp. "Why, I was hardly sure myself then—I meant to tell him I thought I was—but I didn't want to worry him!"

"Well—he knew all right," Emil muttered. "He told us all—except Olaf—he wouldn't let me tell Olaf. He said Olaf hadn't behaved like a member of the family in shooting Hans, and therefore he had no right to be told family news! He told the rest of us—the way you'd like—so that we could feel—well proud of you—you know, and all that! He said only a pure and generous girl would have had the courage to make a gift of her love to a threatened lover—who might not live to protect her—and that any child

born of such love and courage was a gift to the whole world! He told us we must all help you over it and stand by the child as if it were one of our own.”

Emil gulped, and two large tears dropped on the hand he steered with.

Freya could not cry, her heart and eyes felt as dry as dust. She had a feeling as if she were being chased; and as if all that was kind and beautiful in the living world was being squeezed out of it. At last, after a long silence, she forced herself to speak.

“I’m glad he told you,” she said mechanically. “I’m glad you all know, and don’t mind too much! The Breitners don’t mind either—they’re pleased Hans had it—and they’ll take the child. It had better be brought up there on the Wetterstein. What about my work at the hospital—can that go on?”

“Father thinks they’ll let you go on working there, if you’re careful and don’t turn Communist!” Emil told her with relief. “You see, although the Nazis naturally control it, and have put well-affected doctors in all the highest positions—still Father never made any enemies, and a lot of people have spoken for you—quite well-thought-of people—so that you stand quite a chance!

“You can wear a wedding ring, and call yourself ‘Frau Breitner.’ No one will question it—and it’s a good German name. The idea is that you can go on working till December, and then have two months’ leave for the birth of the child.

“It’ll have to be brought up a Nazi, of course—but that it would have to be in any case—no German child will ever be anything else now—*Gott sei Dank!*”

Freya shot a bewildered glance at him. “Emil,” she exclaimed, “I don’t suppose I shall ever understand you! In a way it’s harder understanding you than any of the others! One saw what they got out of being a Nazi! But what on earth can *you* get out of it—when you’re as human and real as you are—that I simply *can’t* conceive!”

“It’s only because you insist on being old-fashioned and blind!” Emil said angrily. “You shut your eyes to reality! Being a Nazi *is* being real! We see the way we can make the modern world—not through individualism and competition—not through the wiping-out of a whole class, as the Communists have done—and made their country a generation behind the intelligence of the meanest bourgeois! But by complete State obedience. It is true that in the long run this will make one class only—that’s why Leftists like Röhm and Georg Strasser support it—but it will be a mixed class

conserving all the culture of the intelligentsia—all the courage of the *Junker* with all the comradeship of Labour! Only those who seek to put back the clock, by defying our *Führer* and his splendid plans will have to be stamped out!

“We know the Jews are bound to deny this spirit of exact military obedience—individualism is in their blood—and their religion has always isolated them from the open brotherhood of other nationalists. To be a Jew amounts to a caste system! You see why they have to be attacked! It’s because they’re the brains of the only opposition there is to Hitler! They have both intelligence and money. Look at the way that even Father has promptly pitted himself against us!

“It’s no wonder—from our point of view that the Jews must go—or at any rate, all power to rebel must be taken from them!”

“Let me drive for a bit,” Freya said suddenly. “I’ve finished tearing up my flowers—if I sit still much longer doing nothing—I shall go mad!”

Emil slowed up, and changed seats with her.

“Drive carefully,” he warned her. “We don’t much like girls driving on the road.”

Freya laughed harshly. “That, too,” she said, “and yet you don’t see what you or your Nazis are aiming at—or where you will come out. You want anything and everything that isn’t human. What you object to in Father isn’t really his disobedience—it’s his kindness! And what you object to in women isn’t their weakness—it’s their strength! Break down the strength in us, and you’ll have—and deserve to have—weak-nerved babies. Are great men’s mothers weak domestic women? I think not. Napoleons have strong mothers! And you, Emil—who are at heart kind and have never been a weakling—what are you going to do with your kindness, and your strength, ‘Serve the State by obedience’? So you tell me! And when it comes to slaughtering us because we don’t agree with it? Will you still ‘Serve the State’—or will you try to save us—as you have tried to save Father—and as you are now trying to save me?”

Emil frowned and fidgeted, wishing that he had the wheel under his firm hands again.

He sat staring away from Freya, his eyes on flying objects that they did not see. For a long time he was silent, tussling with the gritty sense of a truth he could not swallow.

At last he said: "How can anyone tell what they'll do—before it happens—unless they're like Olaf? He can, because he's got it all mapped out, and cut off from the rest of himself! His blood doesn't run through everything he's thinking! But some of us think with our hearts as well as with our heads—we can't cut ourselves up! Freya, don't make any mistake about it. I'd die for this new Germany! I'd die for Hitler or Röhm. Perhaps one day I'll get the chance! Remember if I do—that I die gladly! But if I'm ordered to kill someone I love—then I might not be able to do it! I hope they won't ever order me to do that! If I thought the person I loved was really doing our country a grave wrong, I would try to steel myself to shoot him! But I'd have to *be* sure!"

"Yes," Freya said with a kind of fierce pride, "you've been taught to think for yourself, and you can't get out of it, Emil! No one can ever get out of thinking for themselves, when they've once felt how it works. You *can't* shut yourself away from your own heart when you're a *whole* human being. Why should you? Your heart's part of everything you think—it's *got* to be! You have a right to think with your blood! A thought without passion is dead as frozen meat. See how right your heart is—how could you think a man like Father would harm his country? You know very well he doesn't harm it by saving the lives of his friends!"

"I know nothing of the sort!" Emil snapped at her. "On the contrary! He helps the enemies of the State to escape its power. I think this supremely wrong! Such men ought to die—and Father ought to help to bring them to justice!"

"Those three poor little Jews!" Freya exclaimed scornfully. "One a child—one an expert chemist—one a first-rate bacteriologist! What harm do you suppose they were doing the Germany they loved? She is their home, and they were prepared to serve her with all the power they had and with their educated wits! How does your State use them? She breaks up their homes—takes away their jobs—and threatens their lives!"

"I'm glad Father saved them! Yes! Even though he's in a concentration camp because he saved them—I'm glad! I'm *terribly* proud of him for doing it—and what's more, I believe you are too!"

"Damnation!" Emil shouted. "You can answer for your own silly girl's feelings, if you like! Not for mine! If you take that tone, I'll do nothing for you! Or your father either! He risked not only his own life, by his acts of private judgement, but your future and Rudi's—and our mother's happiness. She's never loved me, as she's loved the rest of you—still, I'm her son—I

wanted her to be happy. And you want me to think that noble of him!—well, I don't—I think it's a damned selfish mess!"

Freya glowered at him, rocking the car with speed. She had a longing as savage as thirst—to wreck it—with them both in it. She wanted to rush out of the world that was hunting her—as Fritz von Maberg hunted the fleet-footed chamois across the snows and got them in the end—as he had got Hans—they were never fleet enough to escape the flight of his bullet.

Her heart was so hot with anger—so fierce with impotent desires—that to go on living and to let Emil who opposed these desires go on living too, was positive torture.

She wanted to end—once and for all—the stinging sense of defeat that possessed her heart and mind.

Suddenly she felt Emil's hands close down over hers on the steering wheel, with an iron grip. The engine slowed, and the car swung itself to a standstill. Freya turned in a flash, and dragging her hands away from his, struck Emil across the face.

She struck with all her force, and then felt all the strength go out of her. She heard him say her name in a surprised, not angry, voice: "Freya!" All the years through which they had fought each other—cried and made it up—and fought again—swept over her. She found herself in his arms—her head against his breast—sobbing as if her heart were still alive.

Emil pushed her away at last, taking out his big coloured handkerchief and tenderly wiping her face clear of its tears. "What you want, my girl, is food!" he told her briskly. "When did you eat last? Last night was it?"

"I thought as much! Well—we'll stop here, and stoke the engine!"

Freya could not help feeling glad of the coffee and eggs that were soon placed before her. They sat under a chestnut tree at the inn where they had breakfasted four months before, and Freya tried not to remember what food there might be to eat in a concentration camp, but after a while she couldn't help asking: "Is the food awful, Emil?" and then choked, while Emil pretended to believe out loud to her, that it wasn't too bad for their old man to eat.

When they reached Munich, everything looked incredibly the same. Her mother greeted Freya with rather more than her usual tenderness, and Johanna and Kathi (looking shamefaced, for she'd been taken back and only Johanna had told her what she thought of her) had made the house look as sparkling with cleanliness as usual.

Rudi flung himself into Freya's arms, and for a moment she felt his slim young body trembling, as if too great a weight rested upon his childish heart. His eyes—fastening themselves upon her—burned with such an anguish of pity and tenderness that his pain hurt Freya more than her own pain had ever hurt her.

“It's all *right*, Freya,” he whispered, “you know! It's all right—a concentration camp isn't *quite* a prison! And Emil says he can get him out soon! And—and we're all awfully glad you've got that baby from Hans!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

Freya was on her way to see her father, but she could not fix her mind upon his image, or sort out, from the thronging thoughts that welled up within her, what she most wanted to say to him in their short hour together.

The faces of the people sitting opposite her in the tram, kept distracting her attention, she felt uncomfortably aware of her changed figure and irritated by her extra weight, upon the narrow wooden seat.

The sweet tartness of the autumn air blew over the empty fields, as if the ghost of their gathered riches still lingered near the earth. The summer had not been torn, with fear and violence, out of the gradual year.

The pale turning leaves, happy in their unconscious frailty, were released gently by the wandering air, falling upon the familiar earth out of which their life had sprung, to make a mould for the returning spring and not dragged out of their sockets and flung, with mortal agony into a storm of terror. Why was her young body so menaced—her eager life so precarious? Within these few months of the turning year too much had happened to her. Her father was in prison; her lover shot; her brother had become a murderer; her womb held a fatherless child; her future was not only unknown but so threatened that to look ahead ate up the strength she needed for the actual hour. Freya sighed heavily, constantly shifting her seat in the tram, but never finding one position any easier than the other.

When the tram came to its final halt it was nearly empty.

Only Freya, and an elderly peasant woman loaded down with parcels, stopped at the turn that led to Obermansdorf.

The woman told Freya that she was going to visit her married son. She knew nothing about the concentration camp or its whereabouts and looked shocked at Freya's wanting to know about any such place.

She began to speak at once about the beauty of the Hitler train, she had gone to Munich to meet the spring before.

“We were without God,” she told Freya, “after the war—two of my sons were killed—and my man died from eating bad potatoes on a weak stomach, but my crippled boy married and has children—and now we are all happy knowing that Hitler will care for us! We have only to serve and obey—it is

like Paradise, for all our needs have now their remedies! Even holidays are provided for us! Whenever my heart is low I say to myself ‘*Heil Hitler!*’ and I find it rising again! It is to be hoped though, that the wicked countries surrounding us, will not want to fight my grandsons—and that child you are carrying! Perhaps your father was killed in the war—poor girl! For I see you are too young to have suffered from it in any other way!”

“No,” Freya told her drily, “my father is a world-famous doctor—who is now in a concentration camp—and I have no husband to be killed in the next war—he has been shot already in a time of peace by his fellow countrymen before we even had the chance to be married!”

“*Heil Hitler!*” the peasant woman ejaculated in shocked horror, and breaking off the conversation, moved hurriedly on ahead, leaving Freya alone on the dusty road.

The concentration camp was not in Obermansdorf but beyond it, in an empty field. Freya came at last upon a row of huts, and knew by the sentries, and the high barbed-wire fence, that she had reached her destination.

She was kept waiting at the gates for a long time. The guards stared at her coarsely with suspicious hostile eyes, while the order Emil had given her was being investigated. When at last they were told to admit her, they unlocked the gates with an unwilling air, and barked orders at her, as if she were deaf.

She walked, with a Brown Shirt on each side of her, through a big open space of dried-up earth to an isolated hut, standing at some distance from the others.

In the distance were little groups of men, dressed like scarecrows. Freya was conscious that they all turned their heads to stare after her, but she was not near enough to see if they looked ill-fed or suffering. She was only conscious of their fear. The very air smelt of it, even more than of cheap disinfectants. There were no natural or happy sounds, only sharp clicks of iron on steel, or hoarsely shouted orders, as if the human voice came from a machine that produced only anger.

Freya’s guards ushered her into a bare white-washed room, with dirty curtainless windows, covered with torpid flies.

Freya could not know that she was being accorded a great privilege. She might have had to wait many hours—she had to wait only thirty minutes; she might have only been allowed to see her father standing in the open, overlooked camp—she was allowed to see him alone in a private room.

There was even a bench to sit on; as well as the almost life-sized head of Hitler upon the wall.

When they had left Freya alone, except for an armed sentry, a few paces away from the door, the spirit of fear invaded her altogether.

It seemed to be staring at her through the curtainless windows, and to hang from the barbed-wire fence, like an invisible body.

The occasional footfalls she heard, sounded as if they were being pressed forward or held back by fear.

Once she heard a shrill scream of terror but the complete silence that took its place was more frightening than the scream.

Once, an un-uniformed figure flitted silently past the window, with a face that was dreadful in its greenish pallor, and eyes that flickered like live creatures trapped in clay.

Freya wished that there was a spot in the bare little room where she could get away from the window, but soon tiring of suspense and inaction, she got up from the backless bench that was its only furniture, and looked out once more. She heard a faint pattering sound, as if dry leaves were being blown, in a multitude, on to hard ground, and saw a company of prisoners, escorted by armed soldiers, being driven through the gates. They were a forced labour party, returning from their day's work at a distant quarry.

The same fear that Freya felt in her heart, looked out of all their faces, and bowed their shoulders, though many of them were young; nor were the guards themselves free from this fear although they were forcibly braced to bear it.

For they knew that these men they were in charge of, were not normal prisoners. They were criminals, who had committed no crimes.

There was no saying what they would do, exposed to conditions for which they had had no training.

A real criminal understands prisons; he has made his plans against familiar drawbacks. He is accustomed to forced obedience; he has no indignant will; and is not stirred by the passion of innocence. But these men had led respected, useful lives; their consciences were unimpaired by vice, who knew of what they might not be capable, in their reactions from prison authority?

From the swift terrified scrutiny, Freya gave the band as it was driven by, she saw that her father was not one of their company.

The door opened suddenly, and shut again with a sharp click. A shadow had stepped across the threshold between these two sounds. Freya knew that it was her father.

He wore the same ill-fitting shoddy garments as the other prisoners, and he was thin as a spectre; but he had not changed. His eyes shone at her with their old clear delight, and when his arms closed round her, she felt safe.

Later she noticed other differences beside his thinness, his eyes had retreated more deeply into their sockets; his beautiful healing hands were scarred and roughened by heavy skill-less tasks; his back was bowed, but something she had not dared to hope could still be there, was present in his face. His spirit was free and without fear.

“Here you are,” he murmured as he released Freya, and gently pushed her on to the low bench, “to tell me everything I want to know. Some of nature’s old secrets are still good, I am glad to find, and one of them I see that you can no longer hide. Fortunately we are no timid prudes to fear motherhood—or to be ashamed of its form. Do not the buds swell in the spring before the blossom breaks—are they less beautiful for that? I cannot say that you have chosen an easy path for yourself, my Freya, but it is one I take a pride in! And as I have often told you—what we have to face is not of real importance—only *how* we face it! We can make mountains—molehills, as well as molehills—mountains. I must confess the latter is the more usual though less useful practice. At any rate I am greatly pleased to find that in spite of the Nazis, I am to be a grandfather. We can say what we like, though we must speak in low voices—our sentry is a good friend of mine—who, for my sake, will be—for this afternoon—a little deaf!”

Freya took both her father’s hands in hers and looked at him accusingly. She found it quite easy now to remember what she most wanted to say to him.

“Olaf killed Hans!” she said. “Why did you not tell me this? I touched—by mistake—in *kindness*, the hand of his murderer! Fritz, too—would you have let me marry the man who actually shot him down?”

Her father shook his head solemnly, but his eyes twinkled. “I had a ‘hunch’, as the Americans say, that you would not marry Fritz,” he explained gently, “and after all, you would have mentioned any such intention to your mother or to me before you carried it out! We had plenty of time! The truth is always necessary, but it is not obliged to catch any particular train—*nicht*? Besides, had you come to love Fritz, you might well have overlooked his

clumsy obedience—for as you know, a spirit must be more naturally agile than that poor boy’s—to escape the danger of authority!”

“Have you excuses for Olaf, too?” Freya demanded bitterly. “Was it the act of a hero—to order the shooting of an unarmed man?”

“Your brother Olaf and I,” her father told her, “have always understood each other very well, and I have a great respect for him, although I think he has made some big mistakes. I can understand even the rough action that has brought us all such cruel pain. Olaf thought that he was saving *you* as well as his country—from a dangerous enemy! This dragon of Siegfried’s has much to be responsible for!

“It was a mythical monster that your brother shot at—not that fine good young Hans, who was no man’s enemy.

“To be unreal, Freya—that is the worst of all dangers—since you are turning a thing that does not exist into an enemy. And when you start to kill a person, who is only by a misconception your enemy, you find that you have killed a brother! That is the mistake all our people are making—and also everywhere the same. We talk of ‘defence’ against whom? Our brother men! Or we talk of ‘working for peace’—there is only one way to work for peace—and there will be no peace till it is learnt—and that is how to become friendly with each other! Then there will be nothing to be defended *from*—and it will not be necessary to ‘work for peace.’

“Peace is a by-product of love! It is for love, that we must work, and live!”

“It is for love I wanted to die, Father—I nearly killed myself for love!” Freya whispered.

“Ah no,” said her father with a strange and unexpected sternness, “you had no such thought, my daughter—if you nearly killed yourself—it was for hate! You wanted to be revenged upon this unpleasant world that had brought you so many sorrows—upon your wicked parents who had not protected you sufficiently from them. But who told you life was to be only pleasant—I? Or your mother? I assure you, she had some excuse when she was your age—to die! She gave us instead a mother and a wife, to warm the very cockles of the heart! Would you destroy in yourself, such a capacity?”

Freya hung her head. “I shall *never* forgive Olaf,” she said after a long pause. “You may forgive him if you like, I shall not! Anyhow, even though I see I was wrong—to think of suicide—it was before I knew I was going to have a baby and I only wanted to kill *myself*!”

“All this talk of forgiveness—or unforgiveness! I do not find it very interesting!” her father observed mildly. “There are other more practical issues! We will both admit that your brother Olaf acted in a very unreal manner and leave it at that!”

“And what about your being in a concentration camp? Are you a dragon?” Freya asked angrily. “Couldn’t Olaf have helped *that*? We know *now* that he could—we know that even before his ridiculous marriage to that little cat Sophie, he knew what you were threatened with! People who are as unreal as that, should be shut up in mental hospitals!”

Her father shook with laughter. “Very true,” he murmured, “and how large a hospital would you need? One sufficiently large for all the armies of Europe! I do not mention the other countries, for I do not know how far ‘advanced’ they are! But your brother Olaf has still those great qualities you used to admire so much and by your admiration helped to make stronger. He came to see me on his return from his honeymoon, and he said to me: ‘If I believed as you do, I should act the same!’ Well! I thought it very generous of him to admit so much and what is more I knew he spoke the truth. What your brother Olaf thinks right—that he will always do. The trouble is that his thoughts are not always as real as his earnestness in carrying them out.”

“I don’t deny that he is preoccupied with being in the right,” Freya answered grimly, “but what *isn’t* possible—and you know very well it isn’t—is that you should *ever* act as Olaf has acted!”

Her father rubbed the side of his nose, and gave a shamefaced chuckle. “Oh well,” he said, “that also I do not dispute! But you see I have never wanted to be a great hero—nor had I a little sister, who insisted upon making me one and is therefore not wholly without responsibility for the result. I had always the desire to find all mankind my brothers—and to be such a person myself—and I still believe that is a more useful ideal than to be a great hero and perhaps not without a spark or two of heroism by the way. But you see that I have not been wholly successful. And I have come to believe, Freya, that perhaps to be wholly successful is no part of our problem. But to choose successfully a right object to aim at—that is essential! And if we have done that—and devoted to it all our powers—perhaps when we come to die, we shall know there is—on this earth—no higher form of success.”

Freya brushed this idea aside, she thought it ill-timed, and when every moment was so precious, out of place; instead of going on with the subject she told her father briefly and firmly what were her plans for the birth of her

child, and was greatly relieved to find that he agreed with them. She then asked him questions about his daily life, but of this he told her very little, only that it gave him opportunities he had never had before and that he had found several friends among the other prisoners and even among one or two of the guards.

Freya then cleared up satisfactorily some of their financial problems—her mother had already written to friends abroad, who would send them paying guests—they were to let the flat at the top of their house (where they used to put their friends), and that still left them Olaf's room, the library and their father's room for visitors. Rudi could sleep in Emil's room, and Freya in her mother's if necessary, there would be even five free rooms for the paying guests. The guests could be taught German; and that would bring in still more money.

Freya told him about her studies, but her father seemed less pleased than Freya had expected to find him, at her unexampled progress; he even appeared to be uneasy.

“Do not,” he advised her, “go too far ahead of the others! This is a bad moment for Jews to do well in. As a people we have always made that mistake; and now we see the result! Everywhere we are hated! Perhaps that was the trouble with the dragon Siegfried had to kill. He may have gone too far ahead of all the people round him and so become a dragon!

“You will find at present far too many Siegfrieds, all listening to wild animals in order to learn the spot of our vulnerability. And the wild animals are very willing to part with their secret. Are you learning English as I asked you? This is important! I beg of you to do it even if you do less brilliantly at anatomy!”

Freya said impatiently that she already knew enough English.

“You cannot know it too well!” her father urged with curious gravity. “Freya, our plans that your mother and I had talked of much together—and for a long time—have had to be greatly changed. They were built on the idea that we should have money enough to carry them out.

“It is impossible for you now to take Rudi with you nor is it necessary. Your brother Olaf has promised to take the best possible care of him. Rudi is to change his name to von Röhn—your mother has agreed, though she liked very much his being called by my name, but she will now be able to keep him safely in our own country—and free of persecution. Your brothers love him, and will care for him always, and he is so young that no doubt he will grow up to be a very good Nazi. I could not take him away from his mother

now—besides, there will only be—however clever and careful your mother is—enough for one escape!

“I think that this escape may have to be yours! We cannot be sure that you will find a career of medicine open to you in this country. I therefore beg of you to do nothing to prevent this escape from becoming possible! You should prepare in every way you can for life in an Anglo-Saxon country. They are a good strong race—a little careless and arrogant—but these are the faults of a strong people. The English have always been practical, and ruled themselves and each other with common sense. They have a love of freedom for themselves which makes them—occasionally—fair to others. America has larger opportunities and more of them but it is the same race!

“There are your Roth relations in New York who are rich, but I do not suggest your joining them, for I am told they are not anxious to see German cousins at present. But there is also your aunt in California—my sister *is* my sister! Emil will help you to go to her, should it be necessary! Tell Rudi to trust your brother Emil—he is a good boy—and do not discourage Rudi from becoming a Nazi! For it is better to have good Nazis than bad ones.”

“But, Father,” Freya cried out, with a sudden pang of fear at her heart, “you— —! It is *you* who must leave this country! I will go with you! But you cannot stay here! Why are you making plans for us all—as if we must live without you? They will let you out soon! Emil is sure that they will!”

“On the contrary,” her father said quietly, with his eyes again twinkling, “I am a very dangerous criminal. I have sinned so gravely against the Fatherland that but for my stepsons, and my former reputation, I should have been already shot! Or beheaded! They will behead soon, I am told, it is more old-fashioned, and robust! So that I may still live to be beheaded! Freya, your father is a very bad and obstinate old man—if they *do* let me out, I have every reason to suppose that I shall go wrong again. I do not want to frighten you, but I want you to realize, as your mother realizes, the probabilities that lie ahead. I have told you already that I have done my work—you will go on with it. Always what is of value remains, and increases. Your brothers beg me to change my heart and my actions—if not for my own sake, for your mother’s and yours—but this would not be worthy of the love we bear each other!

“Your mother and you, who are women, and have the special virtue of understanding better than men the hearts that beat for months within your womb, will not make this mistake! You will not ask me to become less than

myself, to spare you pain! You will help me to act as I have always tried to act; I must believe as I have always believed, that man should be prepared to love his brothers—and if need be—to die for them! I have prepared myself—and I am very ready to die!”

Freya could not speak. She watched the torpid flies moving with terrible slowness up and down the deceptive glass that they would never pierce to reach the living warmth of the sun.

She sighed at last, as if her whole body had sunk into regret.

“I know,” she whispered, “I know you will not change—nor do I ask it of you!”

“A wicked old man!” her father whispered tenderly. Her tears splashed on the scarred hands she held between her own.

A voice barked at them from the doorway, to tell them that their time was over.

Once more, Freya felt her father’s arms close round her, and his voice speaking to her, as if from within her heart.

“Courage!” the voice said. “I will live on in you—and in your child!” but if he actually said these words, Freya did not know, she felt his old worn body trembling in her arms, with the weight of her grief, rather than his own.

She lifted her head from his breast, and saw that his eyes were smiling though they were full of tears. Freya tried to smile back at him, but he moved quickly away with his guard, and did not once look back at her. Freya had a curious feeling—that was not wholly grief—as if she was carrying away with her outside the barbed-wire fence into the open world his living heart between her careful hands.

CHAPTER XXXV

Freya sat by the window of the *Café Schwarz und Weiss*, propped up before her was a treatise upon adrenal glands, but she was not reading it, her eyes were fixed upon the street outside.

The cold had come early this autumn, but it had come in sunshine and all Munich shone with sparkling frosts and golden leaves.

It was two months since Freya had seen her father. She did not often let herself think of him. Until she slept, she studied; and when she woke, she plunged again deep into the tunnel of her work.

She was no longer conscious of the veiled hostility, or the frightened friendliness her presence roused at the university, or in the hospital. These things with all the eager excitements and pleasures of her student life seemed to be now part of an unreal world. The easy past had been a stage existence, and with the drop of the curtain, such small fictitious happenings were forgotten. Even her growing size and awkwardness hardly brushed the fringe of Freya's fixed attention. She did not know that fellow students, prepared to make a scandal out of her, felt their excitement slacken and grow flat. Their insults petered out, because Freya had no ear for them; and against the breakwater of her tragic indifference—spite, malice and jealousy—scattered like spent foam. All that concerned Freya was to pass her examinations; and to keep her child alive. She did not want either to feel or to hope.

There was some talk of releasing Professor Roth and allowing him to leave the country. America and England had been rather embarrassingly curious as to what was happening to him; and after all he was an old man and very inconveniently popular. That was, Freya told herself, eating her brown bread and cheese without tasting it, the best that could happen. She might go with him but the rest of the family would have to remain behind.

It had been already settled that Rudi could not be allowed to leave Germany. Even if there were money enough, the Nazis had no intention of letting a future piece of cannon-fodder pass beyond their control; and they had strongly intimated that Amélie Roth, as the mother of three promising young Nazis, was much better off where she was. She should *wish* to stay in

a Fatherland enriched by her three sons; and if she didn't wish to—she would find herself disposed of—without her wishes.

“It's no use my going on thinking of things like this!” Freya told herself desperately, “nothing pleasant can happen to any of us—one has got to accept the *least* cruel unpleasantness that comes—and make the best of it! Fancy there having been a world where one could *like* one's plans!”

Her eyes caught sight of a familiar figure upon the opposite side of the road. It was Rudi, with a heavy rucksack on his back, coming home from school, only he was not on the right road for such a performance for the *Schwarz und Weiss* was in the vicinity of the university and nowhere near his school.

He walked to the turn of the street in a business-like way, turned and walked back.

Freya knew then that he was a messenger.

She paid her bill quickly, threw her *Loden* cloak round her shoulders, and slipped out of the café as unobtrusively as possible.

Rudi walked on ahead of her, towards the English gardens, whistling casually.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon; and at this hour there was neither very much light, nor very many people in the gardens.

Rudi did not turn his head, or slacken his pace, until he reached the black solitude of the lake. The water had not yet frozen over, nor had the trees round it lost their last leaves. He stopped when he reached the borders of the lake, and sent a pebble skilfully skimming across its placid surface; then he turned and faced his sister; his face was as set and stern as a grown man's, so that Freya guessed what he had to say, before he said it.

She felt the beat of her child's heart in her body, and a thought went through her—sharp as the thrust of a knife—that her father would never see it.

“He's dead!” Rudi said in a low shaking voice. “We shan't have him any more! They say he died in hospital of heart failure—but they won't let us see him! No one is to see him! We shan't ever know now what happened to him!”

Freya looked round her, at the coldness of the grey sky, and at the black unruffled water. She heard a duck quack, and watched the ripples spread and die out behind its flirting tail. Nothing close to them stirred or made a sound.

It was as if the earth itself was caught in the clutch of a fierce hand that would not loosen its icy grip.

“Then they killed him!” Freya whispered half to herself and half to Rudi. “If they won’t let us see him—they killed him in anger—they could do that to Father! It was their own anger—never his! He always got the better of them—for he understood them and they never understood him. Oh, Rudi! Rudi! As long as I knew he was alive I never really minded about anything! Now how can we bear to live at all?”

Rudi’s lips trembled, but with a tremendous effort he steadied his voice. “He belonged to *us*, Freya,” he said with fierce pride. “No one can take him from us! We’ve got him in our blood! He said so when they took him away—he bent down and whispered to me: ‘Rudi—I leave my blood in you!’ And, Freya, it’ll be in your baby too, so that he’ll be mine as well as yours!”

Freya nodded. She could not speak. She felt as if the earth had been drawn away from her, so that she was standing on an icy mist; but she could still see Rudi’s eyes—liquid with unshed tears—and fierce with his pride. He put out an arm to steady her, but Freya would not lean on him. She was too heavy. There was a seat near them; and somehow or other Freya managed to drag herself to it. She did not faint. She knew that the mist and blackness that surrounded her were only what she was doing with her pain. She was trying to project it outside herself, so that it should not weaken her, or affect the life within her.

After a long pause, she asked: “Why did you come to tell me, Rudi, instead of waiting till I got home? Is there anything else that has happened?”

Rudi sat down beside her, taking her hand between both of his, and twisting it nervously.

“Someone telephoned to us from a Public Call office,” he explained. “We think it was Olaf’s voice—but we’re not sure—anyhow, it was one of them! He said ‘Our sister had better visit someone outside Munich.’ There was an official letter too, at lunchtime, to say you couldn’t go any more to the university, or take your degree. Mother thinks they’re afraid you’d talk about Father—to our English visitors—and they might make a fuss in England about it, when they got back. I hope they will! *I* shall talk to them! They thought Mother wouldn’t tell me perhaps! But we always tell each other everything. Father said we were to. Freya, do you know where to stay? I have money for you!”

He stopped breathlessly, gazing at her with eyes that pierced her heart—they were so like and so unlike their father’s.

"It'll be all right, Rudi!" Freya said reassuringly. "I'll go to the 'Three Red Crabs' and the Bauers will help me to get to the Wetterstein if it's fine to-morrow! I can stay with them till it is. And you can be sure I'll be safe there! Don't come up to the Breitners' farm yet yourself! Go for news of me to the *Gaudeamus Hütte*—Seppel will tell you everything; they see each other nearly every day. Tell Mother not to mind too much about the university, I should have had to leave it in another month's time anyhow. And tell her I'm not upset about Father! I knew when I saw him, we couldn't keep him long, besides, so little of him *can* die—you'll remember that, won't you? He always said 'Whatever is of use, survives, nature sees to that!' Well, you know that *all* of him was of use—so practically nothing *can* die! It's our job to see that we use what he gave us! I'm not going to be upset about Father, Rudi—*ever*—it's the one thing *now* that one need never be upset about!"

"You've had him longer than me!" Rudi said in a choked voice. "I'm only twelve! You're twenty!"

"Time doesn't make any difference," Freya said firmly, "not about Father. We've both got him forever! And so has Mother. She has him most—because she gave most to him. She won't need you to tell her that from me. But I'd like her to know that I know it. Rudi—take care she doesn't suffer any more than she need! She's all we've got now. I'm going to tell you—just as Father did—*everything*! Once, when I first lost Hans, I nearly killed myself. I meant to! I got impatient—I wanted him so—and angry! Angry with life for being so—well, so *bestly* as to let him *get* shot! I wasn't thinking of anyone but myself! Not of Hans—for he'd have wanted me to go on living. Nor of any of you—and it was silly too—for I found out, just on the top of meaning to do it that I was going to have Hans' baby. I should have looked a pretty fool—shouldn't I—letting Hans down like that—if I'd killed his baby as well as myself just because I couldn't have what I wanted! Well anyhow, whatever the Nazis do, don't get impatient and lose your head. You *are* Father's just as you said. Keep hold of that, and I shall too! We can't have things the way we wish—or we'd stay together—but we can give what we've got and get trained so that we have something *worth* giving! Tell Mother if I can't be a doctor in this country, I can in America or England. And if I can't—I can be something else. I'll wait with the Breitners till the baby is born and then I'll leave it with them and go! I'll find out what the life over there is like and later on perhaps you can both join me. There are still some places where people can live in freedom."

"I've got your toothbrush and night things in the rucksack," Rudi told her, with the pride of returning childishness. "Mother packed lots of socks and things she thought you'd specially need, and she's sent you a hundred marks. Father got quite a lot of money out of the bank before they began limiting us. I'll come up to the *Gaudeamus Hütte* on Sunday, and Emil too, if he can get away. I must get back now or Mother'll be worried! I promise I won't ever forget about not hurting her. I suppose it's all right having a baby up there without a doctor or anything— isn't it?"

"It's much the same anywhere," Freya assured him, "it hurts; but you're glad when it's there! Frau Breitner and Michel know all about it. I'll take the rucksack and, Rudi, I'm sorry for Emil. He loved Father nearly as much as we do—and—and even Olaf loved him! They'll have to know their friends the Nazis did it and that will be horrible for them!"

"They shouldn't have such friends then!" Rudi said with a savage toss of his black curls. "Why don't they give them up, now they can see for themselves what cruel and awful things they do?"

Freya shook her head. "I can't tell you," she murmured. "They believe to obey is right! They don't really believe in life! They don't really believe in themselves, I think and that makes them glad to be ordered about—they feel more powerful that way—however horrible the things are they're told to do. I can't explain properly. You'll work it out some day for yourself. But I don't think you'll ever *be* a Nazi!"

Freya wondered, as she watched Rudi shuffling his feet on the iron-hard earth and staring at her with his eager unfrightened eyes, what they would make of him. It was like cutting off part of herself to leave him; but it seemed to Freya that she possessed a new strength with which to do painful things without showing what they cost her. She did not have to force the smile that she gave him. For a moment, Freya caught and held Rudi close, then she released him quickly and turned away without once letting herself look back. He might be crying, and she knew that he would not like her to see him cry.

For a mile or more, in the growing darkness, Freya followed the frost-bound black water; until she came at last to the outskirts of Munich, and the "Three Red Crabs."

The orchard merged into the pine wood, and the trees hid the little Inn with a close darkness, but inside, the *Stube* was full of light, and friendly noisy men smoked and drank at the little tables with their red and white checked cloths, content to be together after their long day's work. They

glanced up hurriedly as the door swung open. Herr Bauer moved forward and looked keenly at Freya, for a moment he did not recognize her: for the happy girl he had welcomed with Hans was dead; but Frau Bauer knew her instantly and beckoned to Freya to follow her behind the bar into the kitchen.

There was no one there, but a black cat and two small kittens, getting their faces washed. “*Nah! Nah!* I see how it is with you, my dear,” Frau Bauer murmured compassionately. “Our Hans, I suppose? Well—they go off and get shot—and it’s just as well they leave something behind them! What the world’s coming to though, I’m sure *I* don’t know! Once we had a real war with battlefields at a distance, and men being killed by their enemies, in a natural way—though even then a great waste *I’d* call it! And now there’s this ‘Home Front’ that they keep talking about! And our own men go shooting down their brothers in our fields and on our mountains—as if they liked it!

“But women have to go on having babies all the same—whatever happens! Stay here for the night, of course—and we’ll get you up the Wetterstein to-morrow if the snow doesn’t fall. And now put your feet up here, and I’ll get you some hot milk to drink. You look as if you’d been through more than you ought already! And there’s a good deal more ahead of you—as you’ll soon find out for yourself!”

Freya drank the hot milk obediently and only when she had finished it did she say very quietly: “My father is dead, Frau Bauer—I think they killed him in the concentration camp—but we can’t be quite sure how it was done!”

Freya knew then, that she had not really believed that her father was dead, until she saw Frau Bauer spin round upon her with horrified eyes, and outstretched arms as if she were her mother.

CHAPTER XXXVI

No one asked questions in the “Three Red Crabs”—they told their needs and if they could be met they were met—automatically and without explanations—and if they could not be met, one or other of the Bauers said: “*Es geht nicht!*” and there was an end of it.

The next morning—out of the ice-fed darkness—Seppel stepped into the *Stube*. They had not met, since Freya had run down from the rocks, when Hans was shot.

“He will see you up the Wetterstein,” Frau Bauer announced to Freya. “The path is still open half-way up, but there’s snow above—you must take skis. We always keep a few extra pairs handy and we can fit you out easily! Seppel will return them!”

When they set out, a white and frosty mist clung against their eyes and lips, the precursor of a winter’s dawn. Seppel, striding ahead of Freya, carried both her rucksack and their two pairs of skis. “You must start light,” he told her, “for what you are carrying is heavy.”

An instinct told her that Seppel already knew of her father’s death, but she knew that his pity would not go into words. He would use it for her through his tireless muscles; and in the risks he ran to help her.

They had not been long on the road before a lorry overtook them, and carried them on to St. Johann, as it had once carried Hans and Freya together.

This time there were no flour bags to whiten them, but sacks spread for Freya in a corner, and beer barrels to lean against.

Someone had put a heavy sheep-skin coat for her to creep under, but in spite of the sacks and the sheep-skin, the jolting hurt her cruelly, and the icy air bit into her like an acid.

Seppel sat in front with the driver—but as far as Freya was concerned the lorry might have driven itself—for she neither saw the driver’s face nor heard his voice. It was still dark when the lorry slowed, and let them down by the pine woods under the Wetterstein.

There was no stir or sound on the mountainside. The air smelt of snow, and of the dead pine needles, they crunched under their feet.

Seppel's flashlight cast an opal ring about them and the ice-bound trees.

"The path is easy," Seppel broke the silence once to say to her, "until the climb begins—so take it easy, *Fräulein!*"

His words ran on in her mind with a curious sense of release. She wondered if Seppel had guessed the tension of her memories. To be no harder upon oneself than life is—taking what ease there is, and manufacturing no further difficulties of one's own—suddenly seemed to be feasible.

She was not in pain; the stiffness of the long ride was wearing off; the trees hid the intensity of the cold; she felt that Hans' child was alive in her and the mystery of once more walking through this wood where she had not yet known love and now bore the fruit of it—filled her heart with a strange content.

"Seppel," she asked suddenly, "you knew Hans—well?"

"I knew him," Seppel told her, "as a man knows the child he was once himself! On this mountain—between our hut and the Wetterstein farm—there is no other house. Hans and Karl were like brothers to me for I had no brothers. What I do for you, I do as for a sister."

"Yes," Freya agreed, "I know—he told me once that you would always help me—and I think that I shall need your help. After the child is born, I must leave our country. I have been thinking a great deal about this, because if my father had lived, they might have let us go together, and now I must go alone. Nor do I think that they will be willing to let me out now for I know too much about them!"

"Anything you knew would be too much," Seppel said with quiet bitterness.

"When you are ready I will take you. I have found another way of getting across—there will be less danger this time. Though their sentries are unaccountable, and there is always danger. Will you hold the light while I strap on your skis? The path stops here."

The trees opened up and scattered, as if they were an army retreating in disorder from an invisible enemy. A silvery twilight lay across the long snow slopes and far above them the outline of the Wetterstein cut darkly into the sky.

Seppel, kneeling at Freya's feet, fitted them carefully on to her skis. She felt his kindness like a physical warmth in the icy air.

"How strange," she thought, "to teach men to fill the air with fear instead of kindness!"

Seppel rose slowly to his feet, they could see each other's shape now, and taking the lamp from her, he clicked it out.

"I will go ahead," he told her. "Call to me if you have not light enough! There will be more every moment now." He gave her no more help than that, although he must have known how difficult and clumsy this motion on skis was to her heavy body, for he knew that she must try out the best way for herself, and after a little slipping and stumbling, Freya found a position she could tolerate. They had to move very slowly, and the icy air caught at her breath as if it were trying to hold her back; but soon the snow grew visibly whiter and the distance lifted.

Every quarter of an hour or so, Seppel would stop for a minute or two, to ease Freya's rocking heart.

These were wonderful moments, when the soft crunch of the snow stilled itself, and the heavy beating of her heart grew slowly lighter.

They did not speak, for the added effort of attention or the taking of a longer breath, would have thrown out the rhythm of their climb. It was on this physical rhythm and on Seppel's unquestioning confidence in her, that Freya felt her strength to make fresh efforts depended.

Only by economizing every breath she drew, and every movement that she made, could she lengthen out her powers of resistance—and these themselves would altogether fail—unless Seppel believed in her unstinted willingness to go on.

She must feel him so certain of her, that his anxiety need not be added to her own. If he had thought, "She cannot stand much more!" she could not have stood any more.

Sometimes Freya was without thought for a long time, and conscious only of her physical movements. The next step into the shifting snow—the weight she must throw forward or hold back—and sometimes her mind filled with images, as if she were a stream inhabited by countless separate small lives, all sweeping on together in the same direction. She saw with crystal clearness Hans and herself sitting on a rock in the sun above a riot of golden kingcups. A bare larch became suddenly plumed and green before her eyes; she strained her ear for the far-off tinkle of a cow-bell as if it must

be audible in the empty air; and then she was sure that she stood where she had given Hans all her love. The colourless snow had a strange vividness, as if the substance of light shone from beneath its surface.

These thronging images moved clearly along the path of her stretched intent, nor did they interfere with the steady movements of her body. Time passed while she remembered them.

At last Seppel said: "The sun is up!" and Freya saw, above the ice-white ridges, a widening pool of gold.

Long, clear rays stretched across the snow, like steady fingers smoothing away pain.

Freya knew how cold she was when the rays reached her; and she began to shiver.

Digging his skis firmly into the snow above her, Seppel unfastened his rucksack and drew out a thermos filled with hot coffee. Freya drank eagerly, and life poured through her again, until she felt warmed within and without.

After their brief halt, they climbed in silence for another hour, but now the sun no longer helped them, the weight of it was like a burden bound to their backs.

Nothing could have kept Freya moving but the knowledge that if she lay down in the snow, Seppel would try to add her to his other burdens.

At last, she heard his voice above the drumming in her ears. "Rest now," he told her. "In a few minutes Karl will be here, with a milk sledge. The snow is firm. Lucky there has been no *Föhn* wind for the last week! I will take off your skis!"

"But shan't I have to put them on again?" Freya asked, clutching dizzily at his outstretched arm. "I couldn't take them off and put them on again—Seppel!"

Her voice trembled and she was afraid that she was going to cry. It seemed so cruel of Seppel to think that she could put on her skis again, once she had taken them off.

"You don't have to," he said gently. "Once off, they can stay off! We'll pull you up all the rest of the way!"

This prospect sounded more unreal to Freya than a heaven with harps and angels and small cushioned clouds to rest on. She stared about her at the wide, silent slope stretching ahead and around her—a shining emptiness—so

vast, that it seemed to have no exits and no entrances, only a sense of weight.

She sank down on Seppel's short leather jacket obediently, but although she obeyed him, she could not believe him. Time stood still while the sun poured through them, and the soundless air was as motionless as the frozen earth.

At last a long faint *Jodel* broke the stillness, and Seppel flung back his head, and by way of answer filled the air with wild, rollicking unearthly screams.

Karl, Michel and a milk sledge slid into view as if by magic. Freya felt as if she had never left them. Her hands were clasped by Karl in a long firm grip and Michel's eyes rested upon her with bright incredible kindness.

It was curious how near Freya felt to these wordless people, who shared none of her thoughts but were at one with her heart.

Like Seppel, they said nothing to her of her father's death, but she saw that they knew it by the bared tenderness of their eyes.

They spoke only of her comfort and of the fortunate firmness of the powdered snow. The milk sledge might have seemed comfortless and jerky if it had not come after so severe a climb, but now Freya clung to it as if it were a bed of roses.

She had never seen the farm in snow before; it looked smaller and more frail. The cows were all in the *Scheune*—dark comfortable sweet-smelling shadows—and the chickens wandered alertly between the kitchen and the barn.

In a half-circle round the chalet was a protecting wall of logs, so beautifully constructed and fitted together, that they looked like some delicate twelfth-century mosaic rather than the gradually dwindling store of the winter's fuel.

Karl's dog rushed out to greet them in a startled frenzy of acceptance; and Frau Breitner, after one brief glance from the kitchen door, retreated to the stove, as if her real welcome was best expressed in "*Knödelsuppe*."

Anna and Franz were feeding pigs in the distance and could do no more than wave. The two men lifted Freya from the milk sledge, for to her surprise she found she could not stand.

Seppel smiled at her for the first time. "It was enough, *Fräulein*," he told her. "I knew that you could do it—but I thought that it would be enough!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

The crowding snowflakes were so large, that they blocked the tiny square of window Freya had pushed back, the better to watch their quiet fall.

The sky was a grey woolly mass; there was no light except the lividness of a sunless dawn. The little space between earth and sky was filled by a broken veil of drifting flakes as white as pear blossoms.

Freya gazed enviously into the turning, twisting mass; how thankful she would be to wander irresponsibly through the air moving backwards upon her path, like one of these frozen petals, denying its need to reach the sodden earth!

There was no wind to guide the flakes, some melted; some broke; some clung to what they reached.

They were as purposeless and barren in their flight, as memory.

The room Freya slept in was bare and spotlessly clean. It was used in summer time as an extra dining-room for visitors, when the kitchen was full. Frau Breitner had not moved its long trestle table, nor the benches pushed back against the wood-panelled walls. She had only placed a small truckle bed between the window and the door that led into the kitchen, so that Freya could feel herself part of the life of the house and not cut off from warmth and fellowship.

The night before, Frau Breitner and Anna had taken turns in rubbing Freya from head to foot, with warm oil. They had rubbed deep and long, until at last, worn out by her climb, Freya had slept under their hard, firm hands. When she woke she found no stiffness left; but she knew that her hour had come.

Deep within her burned a strange and bitter anger. What was she doing here on the top of a mountain, in a bare shell of a house, against the relentless sky?

What were these peasants to her with their hard horny hands, their silent tongues and rough, narrowed existence? Wave after wave of fear and resentment swept her heart. Her feeling for Hans looked indescribably mean and paltry. How could she have given her life into the keeping of a peasant boy? If she had only withheld her love, and kept to her own circle of friends,

she would now be safe, her life filled with successful uninterrupted work; Olaf would still be her hero and her friend; her father might never have been torn from his home, and hounded to an ignominious death.

Love was a little worthless thing—as Emil had once told her. She should have thought first of her home, and not brought all these griefs upon her family and upon herself. Upon Hans and his family too—for was he not shot for being her lover, as much as for being a Communist? Was it so very strange that Olaf and Fritz had shot him? Were not the Nazis right after all? What were they working for but to build up a mighty and orderly race welded into a common whole, serving each other, as well as themselves!

She found herself remembering Schloss Maberg and Fritz as if they were lost treasures. Nature had sprung a cruel trap upon her. It had taken from her all that she most prized and what had it given her in return? Nothing but these hours of sickening pain, and the burden of a fresh life, to thrust into the shambles of a world. She was in terrible danger and alone. This was a time when she should have had parents, doctors and nurses; all that love and science could do was not too much for this sharpest of human emergencies; and there was no power to lean on; no mother's love to reassure her—no wisdom but her own.

The fluid greyness of the sky—into which she so desperately gazed—gave her back no comfort. A wild longing seized Freya to run out naked into the snow and break this cruel new attempt at life and herself with it—against the freezing earth.

Why should she be stripped of all her joys, her wishes frustrated, left to face loneliness and pain?

She reminded herself bitterly of how she had loved life only a year ago. Her very veins had felt full of joy. Her work was one leap forward after another into freedom and knowledge. Her heart sustained by happy human love was as light and free as a wandering snowflake, and as irresponsible.

That autumn morning when she had slipped out by herself, to make her way up the Wetterstein, Freya had had no single weight upon her mind, and nothing that could be called a trouble. What wrong had she done to life to be so punished? She was not a bad selfish girl, nor an indifferent scholar, nor a child cold-hearted towards its home!

Why had this curse—this compulsion of physical emergency—been thrust upon her? Surely she had a right to hate her life and to lose it!

Suddenly across Freya's mind flashed the image of the cornered hare—once more with dreadful clarity she watched it being hemmed in by brutal men with raised sticks—once more the safe earth round it grew narrow as a grave. The hare with its wits at full stretch zigzagged and leapt now here and now there, but in spite of its superhuman efforts, the space round it closed in—the brutal clubs struck nearer—but it was no passive victim, it would have gone on trying to escape, until death caught it. Had Freya less courage than a hare? What of this little life fighting its way out from within her?

Was she deceiving herself in her wild self-pity, into thinking *she* was the hare, while in reality instead of the victim, she was more like one of the men ready to strike it down?

Her love had called this new life into being. For *her* desire this little heart had beat through the slow dark months, and now that nature had quickened it to fight its way out into the light, was its own mother prepared to strike it back into the dark?

With a long shuddering sigh, Freya gave up her wilfulness. She fell back on her pillows, letting the pain grip her—leave her—and return to rend her again.

She felt as if she were looking down, from a high window, upon a street accident.

Soon the cows began to stir, and call out. Freya could hear their every movement, through the wooden wall. It comforted her to think that these dreamy sweet-breathed animals were awake and near her. There was no urgency in their calls; they were a mere familiar summons to the caretakers they trusted.

Freya, too, was in the hands of those who cared for life.

She heard the stairs creak above her, and in a minute Frau Breitner stood at the open door, peering in upon Freya with intent kindly eyes.

She did not need to be told what was taking place. "*Mein Gott, es kommt schon!*" she exclaimed cheerfully. "Well—well, to be too soon with a child is always easier than to be too late! See how it wants to live, this little one! And that climb you took yesterday will loosen everything up nicely!

"You foolish child! Why have you opened the window—do you want the sky in your room? Surely there's enough snow on the mountainside to satisfy anybody! But I know what fancies the rich have, and all because fuel comes so easily to them. But your hands and feet being frozen won't help anything on just now—I must get a hot drink inside you at once. Now don't

you go thinking there's anything to be afraid of! Every cow in the *Stall* knows what it costs to get a calf—and is glad to pay it! I shouldn't wonder but what we have a fine little Hans with us well before nightfall!"

Freya did not feel lonely any more. She knew herself one with the household; and there was even something reassuring in the way they left her alone, to carry on their daily tasks, as if nothing important were happening.

The door into the kitchen was left open all day long, so that Freya could hear their voices, or make any of her wants known quickly.

All through the slow long hours they came and went, bringing her hot drinks, and cheering advice. The men asked in muffled tones every time they entered the house: "*Nun—wie gehts der Freya?*" They too wanted to take their share in whatever she felt.

Frau Breitner and Anna seemed to look on the drama of birth with the same pleased excitement as Karl or Hans would have felt at a wrestling match or at a ski contest. They would have admitted that having a child had its awkward moments, and they were ready to rush in with sponges and lemons after every round; but they enjoyed the rounds; and apparently expected Freya herself to enjoy them.

Neither Frau Breitner nor Anna had any quarrel with life, they knew well enough how hard it was. What could they expect of this child, for instance, when it came? It would be a burden for years upon their slender resources, and yet Freya saw that it was not as a burden that they looked forward to Hans' child. From the eagerness of their excited eyes, they might have been assisting at the birth of a star.

"They do not expect pleasure," Freya told herself, strangely moved by their companionable joy, "that is why they are so patient, and so ready for it when it comes. I'm glad they didn't know how angry and impatient I felt—and yet this baby is going to be mine, not theirs! I couldn't *be* disappointed now I couldn't let *them* be disappointed!" And she fought with fresh strength, feeling that as her pain increased, her love for Hans increased with it. Once Frau Breitner said, bending over her:

"We don't only make men with our blood and bones, Freya, we make them with the stoutness of our hearts!" but Frau Breitner did not speak often, beyond brief orders, and a joke or two. She was the captain on the bridge, and Freya was the ship she must bring to port. Towards evening, Frau Breitner seldom left her side.

The men came back from their last outing, thickly covered with snow, and with long icicles hanging from their ears and their hair. They made their way into the house with a cautious tread, and Franz refrained voluntarily from the rapture of a mouth-organ.

It was as if all the threads of the household centred in Freya's struggling life. To a mountain peasant cut off from the world, every member of his family is a live part of himself, so that the pain of one is the pain of all; even Frau Breitner and Anna attended to Freya now, with an anxious urgency that they could not hide. This was a hard first birth, and they knew that Freya's flesh and blood was more delicate than their own. After the men's supper, Frau Breitner said to Freya: "I shall not leave you again, my daughter!"

Freya was not sure what happened in these last hours, her mind slipped from its control and registered fancies for facts. Her father came in once and spoke to her, although nobody else seemed to notice him. "Give," he told her, "you cannot give too much! Give *all*! All is not enough!" The feeling that she must not be allowed such sharp suffering left Freya after he had spoken. She saw with surprise the great drops of perspiration standing out on Frau Breitner's weather-beaten face, as she leaned over her, and watched the wrinkles on her forehead thicken into ridges. Anna kept covering her mouth with her hand, as if she must scream instead of Freya. At last she ran out of the room and called Michel from the byre. He came in, after washing his face and hands, and knelt by Freya's bedside, gazing down upon her with great eyes full of pity. Freya forgot that he was a misshapen dwarf with a huge head, who could not speak plainly and had no thoughts. It was as if his hands held the wits nature had denied his brains. Michel had spent his life in perpetual attendance upon the urgent needs of living creatures, and to his almost creative skill, he added a love without human barriers. As he looked into Freya's eyes, she knew instantly that he would save her. His strong hands were slower and gentler with her tortured body than his mother's had been, and when the end came he gave her a live and flawless child.

"It is a man!" Frau Breitner called excitedly into the kitchen, before Freya heard its small thin cry.

The rough simple faces crowding in upon her to see their new relation confused Freya's mind; where was she lying—in a stable, and were these two-thousand-year-old shepherds who thronged forward to see her child? She felt sure that Hans was kneeling close beside her. She could hear his voice murmuring: "Freya—Freya—it is always like this!" then his voice sank back upon itself like the turning snowflakes, his shining eyes were gone, but he had not left her comfortless. A calm certainty invaded Freya's

whole being. She felt the struggle that she had been through, was worth more than any pleasure she had ever known.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

He was not more beautiful than other babies. His face had a red crumpled look; his blue-washed eyes were small; his hands skinny with long square-tipped fingers; his nose a button; his mouth a hole. He was wrapped from head to foot in layers and layers of warm red flannel covered over by a knitted rug and he lay on Freya's knees in the sun, blinking upwards at her between white eyelashes.

Why should she care so deeply for so small and recent an addition to her acquaintance? Why should she feel so desperately certain of a love for him that was at once unflinching and irrevocable.

It was his first time out of doors and Frau Breitner, although the day was hot and golden with light, had said rather caustically that winter babies should not be taken out before the ice men had come and gone, in May.

Freya had not explained that she wanted to have him to herself—upon his own mountainside—and Frau Breitner, though she disapproved, had said no more.

Freya had only a few days longer of her young motherhood. After that Hans' baby would belong by right to his grandmother, and could be brought up—as she intended to bring him up—exactly like his father.

It would be a good thing for the baby, for they all thought Freya spoiled it with her soft pretty ways. She cared too much for its few tears and took it up too often—feeling her arms would soon be loose and empty without it. Frau Breitner glanced with compassion out of the door, at Freya walking a little unsteadily down the snow pathway. She felt the pity she always felt for a cow that must lose its calf.

It was quite a good path, and the snow was firm under Freya's feet. When she reached the farthest barn to which it led, there was a rough bench to sit on, out of sight of the farm, where she could nurse her baby in peace and look down into the blue gulf of air that separated them from the Lärchenkogel. Above her the sky burned a deep cloudless gentian, and the long icicles thick as a man's flank hanging from the eaves, shone like great ropes of sapphires.

The Lärchenkogel was as smooth and glistening white, as when she and Hans had taken their first run together, down its long uninterrupted slope.

Freya looked at the mountain with half dazzled eyes, so conscious of its majesty—its nearness—and the sense it gave her of being part of her life, that she could not believe she would soon be looking at nothing but waves—hearing a strange tongue in her ears—and living in a land utterly unlike her own. The baby in her arms would grow up a child of the mountains.

The little heart that was still so near her own that she did not feel quite separate from its beat, would learn its first sharp joys and sorrows under the mighty shadow of the Lärchenkogel.

The little path that led from Freya to the farm, and that was neither uphill nor downhill, would be where he would learn to walk. She would not see his first uncertain balancings, nor hear him speak her name before he spoke any other.

Until he came, Freya had thought with comparative lightness of this question of parting with her baby. She had not known what leaving a child meant.

You never did wholly leave a grown-up person, because you were known to them and could remain known, but a child had nothing to remember you by; nor could you reach its mind unless its eyes were on you. If Freya left her child, she would lose him forever, but if she stayed in the same country she would also lose him, for she could not support Hans' child except by leaving him.

Her mother had been with her for two days and a night; and it was perhaps her visit—to which Freya had looked forward as to the one blessing not yet denied her—that had shown Freya the meaning of motherhood. Amélie had taken for granted that there was only one possible thing a mother *could* do with her child and that was the thing that seemed best for the child. She had not been able to envisage any other possibility. Amélie had come prepared to take Freya's child and bring it up for her—Nazis or no Nazis—but after her visit to the farm she had said to Freya: "You were right, and your father also thought so—the child is safest here! He is his father's and this life up here will be the easiest and wisest for him! If he could have had you, I would not have said this, but since he must be without his mother, the life of his father's people—and their ways for him—is the next best thing!"

The mountain was so fixed in stillness, that Freya could hear every drop that fell from the icicles. The barn behind her stood in a deep-blue shadow,

cut sharply off from the golden snow. Far away outside the byre, Anna appeared, followed slowly and sedately by the twenty cows. It was so good a day that she was taking them to the *Quelle* to drink, instead of to the trough beyond the kitchen door.

It was a great winter treat, and the cows always enjoyed it, following with becoming gravity, the narrow snow pathway in single file, solemnly waving their tails, surprised, with so much warmth upon their backs, that there should be no flies to tease them.

Anna was in no hurry, the cows were in less hurry still, with infinite serenity they came and went, hardly appearing to move at all—one creamy back after another floating into Freya's vision and out again. After they had all disappeared, a man's figure cast a long shadow down the path.

It was not time for Karl to come back to his midday meal, and this figure was too tall and thin for Michel's. Perhaps it might be Seppel, Freya thought, not without pleasure, for she knew that Seppel felt for her not only the loyal acceptance of the Breitners but also a touch of romance.

It was not a serious romance, Freya thought with a half smile—but grew like some fugitive untimely flower in a sheltered niche—bound to perish quickly when she removed the brief sunshine of her presence.

Still it was nice to be like light to anyone again! But the figure advancing steadily towards her—passing both the byre and the farm without stopping—was not Seppel's.

Freya knew before she could see his face, that it was Olaf.

She had time while he advanced towards her to remember her anger; the last words she had shouted at him; and those that had ached ever since in her heart; but she could no longer feel the fire that had burned behind her words.

Too much had taken place since then; pain had shaken her out of the net of judgement.

Nor was the Olaf, whom she looked at now, the same Olaf. His beauty was still there but so worn and thinned with trouble that he looked robbed of his youth.

This was no happy young bridegroom, strong and complacent in his completed manhood. It was instead a mature man dulled down by sorrow, with his spirit in chains.

Olaf's lips moved, as if to speak her name, and it startled Freya more than anything else could have startled her, to see that he did not dare.

To help him, she said quickly: “You came—to see me—Olaf?”

“I had to,” he said with a long shuddering sigh of relief. He sank down beside her on the bench, gazing down at the bundle of warm life she held so close against her breast.

“I am *glad* you had to!” Freya said warmly, almost without volition, “very glad you had to, Olaf!”

Olaf ignored this opening; he spoke as if he were still listening to the last words she had said to him at Schloss Maberg. “Of course, I *was* responsible,” he admitted. “I know that! I have never denied it! Fritz merely carried out my orders. You were wrong to throw him off as you did, Freya—but what you said to me—well, I have never got it out of my head! In a sense I know that I betrayed you but I had to think of your reason. I had to think of your whole life!”

“You thought too much of me—and *for* me!” Freya said with stern gentleness. “That was your mistake, Olaf. Our responsibility to ourselves comes first—because in a sense what one is oneself *is* the responsibility that one has for others!”

“How curiously you say that!” Olaf exclaimed with a quick astonished glance at her—“as if you *were* your father! Mother told me everything—after his death. I wish she had told me before! I ought to have known that my own father was a brute and a pervert! If I had known that long ago—I should have taken my life differently. I know that she meant to make it easier for me to escape any taint or weakness from discouragement but it made me look at things wrong. I had a secret fantasy about my own father and this fantasy prevented me from really knowing—really caring—except as one *had* to care—for *your* father!”

“I saw him twice before he died. He never changed. He never gave up anything he meant to do. He died free.

“I do not believe in his ideals—but I had to tell you—that no one was ever—not Christ himself—not Hitler—more wholly consistent with his creed! It was not mine, but I owe it to his memory to tell you that he died as he had lived—not otherwise in one iota.”

“Not otherwise!” Freya murmured into the little bundle in her arms, as if she wanted him to hear even before he could understand.

“He was not angry with me at the last,” Olaf went on after a pause. “He knew I loved you. If you wanted me to, Sophie and I would take this baby and bring it up as one of ours. I know very well that what he said of you was

true. He said: 'There is a chastity that comes from courage, and there is another commoner chastity that comes from cowardice—your sister Freya was never a coward—and for *her* courage called in another direction than physical chastity.' It was hard for me to understand this but I do now! I had always wanted to protect and help you—you were to me a symbol of something holy in our German womanhood!"

"I am not holy!" Freya said quietly, "and if I had been—holiness is its own protection! As for German womanhood—I do not see why you should think it different from any other kind. To me, there is only one womanhood and of this I had no true knowledge until my child was born!"

She did not know if Olaf even heard what she said, he was looking away from her, into the unearthly purity of the distant peaks.

"Mother has told me everything now," he said at last. "In a sense I think she has forgiven me. Though she said to me—things so terrible—that I can never forget them. Do not think I blame her. Since she thought them, she did well to say them, and they have not altered her love for me. Mine for her is I think—even deeper. I know *now* what she has suffered; and I can understand what I never before understood—her occasional unfairness to Emil. She told me also of your plans. I see, Freya, that you ought to go to America. Since you cannot accept the new faith of our country, you will be happier in one that as far as I can see, has no faith at all. I hope you will not have to speak against our new regime. All governments make mistakes sometimes, but ours has, I am sure, the only right direction. At least give us the credit of thinking it right—and of having altered with passion—our lives to serve it! I do not ask anything else of you! I know well enough I have no right! But I am here to serve you. And I must tell you on what my heart is built!"

"Olaf—say anything!" Freya cried quickly. "I am not angry any more! That I can ever understand what you *did*—is impossible! But that you are still Olaf—I *can* now see!"

"Yes! Yes!" he said, fixing his eyes upon her in a passionate appeal, "try—try to see that! try to believe it! I have been humbled to the dust. Not by anything I did! I ordered only what I felt was right—for the security of all. Even such men as your father at times threaten the security of a State. Your father saw that, he died without anger against those who—who had decided that he must die! One of them said: 'Forgive me!' and Father said: 'You are human beings!' those were the last words he uttered. I tell you this, Freya, although I have told no one else—not even Mother! I am under an oath not to say how he died! But I feel that I owe it to you—even to break my oath.

Some might think what he said a reproach, but I do not think it was—nor did the man who told me, for he said: ‘After that—I felt better.’”

“I know what Father meant,” Freya murmured. “He meant the man to feel better but to remember that only if he acted *like* a human being, *could* he feel better! The man who said ‘Forgive me!’ would understand what my father meant!”

“Well,” Olaf said, prodding the snow with his stick and making little azure holes in it, “I am a human being, too, I suppose! I saw I had been too proud! Knowing—what I now know—about my own father, has shamed me to the core! I think if I had known it earlier I should have felt less certain how *wrong* you all were. I could never have agreed with you but I might—well, I might not have acted exactly as I acted!”

Olaf said this with his eyes turned away, and after he had finished speaking, there was a long silence. Freya knew what it cost him; it was the nearest he could get to an apology without dying of it.

“Are you happy, Olaf?” Freya asked him at last, “happy I mean, in your marriage?”

“Oh that—?” Olaf said looking up at her in sudden relief. “Yes. I am happy enough. Freya! I know you don’t understand Sophie. She seems to you too light! But in a sense I find that a relief! You know what love is—well, I have always loved her. Not perhaps as one could love an ideal woman, but as most men love—most real ones. She is in my eyes and in my heart!”

“Yes,” Freya agreed softly. “Well, that is a great deal, Olaf! I think it was the way I used to feel for Hans, but my love grew greater when I knew him better—and it goes on growing. He was very simple, but he acted as he believed. Very few people are like that, I think. He did not deceive himself very readily, he did what he knew how to do and when new things came he always tried to meet them. Perhaps if he had lived, I might have loved him less—I hope not—but it is true, that it is always lonely to live with people who have not shared one’s habits and one’s thoughts. You were right about that! Mother, too, thought that it would have been difficult later on—!”

She saw the colour rush into his face with relief. “That was a part of it!” he agreed quickly, “that was a part of it—Freya! But the rest of it was—I can’t explain—I’m not even sure myself—but when you asked just now if I was happy in my marriage—that seems to me so little a thing—my happiness is in this new ideal that is integrating us into the splendid nation

we are destined to become! Whatever serves *that*, I love most! I do not think I love anything else now!”

Freya said in a low voice: “Then why did you come up here?”

He said again, impatiently: “I *had* to come!”

He looked down at the bundle in her arms, and drawing back the flannel surrounding it, Freya showed him her baby’s face. Olaf smiled a little. “I used to hold you in my arms when you were a baby,” he said in an embarrassed voice. “Mother always let me nurse you!”

“Well—hold him now,” Freya said, putting her baby in his arms, “with your hand behind his little head, so that it shan’t waggle!”

Olaf held the baby with a surprising tenderness. “What are you going to do with him?” he demanded, “leave him here as Mother says? I have a sort of message for you from old Fritz! He was awfully cut up at first, of course—now he says that if you’ll leave the country for a year or two—and then come back, he will still want to marry you!”

“How stupid of him!” Freya said severely.

Olaf laughed. “I should like to take your baby,” he repeated, looking down at the child. “I have a sort of idea that he’ll look like you! You were a hideous baby!”

“Well, he isn’t!” Freya said indignantly, “and I expect he’ll be like Hans—anyhow, I’m going to leave him up here. He will have a good life—not too easy—and I hope not too hard! I don’t expect ever to see him again. Probably I had better not! I go to America next week. He has had a short weaning, and now takes a little milk. It hasn’t upset him. I will go to our Aunt in California, and when I can afford it, I shall ask for Rudi!”

“You need not,” Olaf told her hastily. “I promised your father to treat him always as my own son! I will do so. He shall bear my name, and share my fortune!”

“But, Olaf,” Freya said gently, “I love Rudi, and he is nearly thirteen. I have a feeling that he will not change in order to become a Nazi. Father wanted him to choose. Let us abide by his choice.”

Olaf sighed impatiently. “What I really came here to tell you,” he said a little stiffly, “is that if you leave here next Thursday night there will be no sentries between the *Gaudeamus Hütte* and the frontier. It is important that you should act on this! As for Rudi—he may choose, as you suggest, after he has done his military service. He owes that to the country of his birth! He

is your father's son—and I will see that after he has done this he has a free choice whether to go or stay!”

Olaf put the baby back in Freya's arms, and rose to his feet. “How you have suffered!” he said, looking down at her—“Freya—how you have suffered!”

She looked up at Olaf, half surprised at the deep compassion she saw written on his face and half touched by it, for she felt that she had not suffered as she saw Olaf himself had suffered. What had happened to her had come from without, not from within. Her pain had set free in her a new life. She was not defeated; but Olaf had suffered a defeat. In his heart of hearts the act that he had committed and still said was right—he did not really think right—this was his defeat.

He was so nearly honest a man, that his undigested lie, mortally disagreed with him. He could not reject it and he could not accept it. The conflict was written in the ravaged beauty of his face.

Freya—who had worshipped her brother, and now no longer worshipped him—felt that she understood and loved Olaf, for the first time.

“I will act upon what you tell me,” she said quietly, “and I will do nothing to influence Rudi's choice.”

Olaf did not kiss her good-bye. He had not once touched her, but suddenly he stooped down, and kissed her child. Then he turned quickly away and swung off out of sight, without looking back.

Freya thought: “They will see him pass the farm—and they will guess who he is—but they will not ask me anything! However, I shall tell them—I shall say: ‘That was my brother Olaf!’ but I cannot ever feel what I used to feel when I said to people: ‘That is my brother Olaf!’” and Freya, drawing her baby closer against her heart, wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Until Freya opened the outer door, she had not known there was a wind. It had seemed so very still, in the warm room, next the kitchen, where the baby slept. She had stood there for a long time bending over the high oak cradle, where Hans too had lain, and wondering if the baby would open its eyes before she had to go; but it did not open them. No one came near them or disturbed her last vigil.

It was almost a relief when she stood outside, with Seppel, to find the wind so truculent; for no one can think much, even of a deserted child, who has to fight a gale blowing on a mountainside at a temperature below zero.

They climbed slowly and unsteadily, bent double and taking their breath in short precarious snatches.

There was no use pretending that the snow was safe for ski-ing. It would have been dangerous had there been no wind. The sudden drop of temperature after a week's thaw, had frozen its upper crust into a scratchy hardness; at any moment the loose base might shift, and carry away half a mile of snow, six to eight feet in depth.

Both knew this, but they had to get over the snow, so they climbed as if neither knew nor cared.

What precautions it was possible to take, they took, and Seppel a few paces ahead and above Freya, shouted back warnings.

Sometimes they reached her, sometimes nothing reached her but the attacking incoherent roar of the wind.

Wild gusts struck down at them with formidable swiftness. There would be sudden deceptive lulls; and then with a furious feline pounce, the wind would leap upon them again, as if it had been calculating to catch them off their guard.

The gale seemed to have only one purpose, to pick them clean off the mountainside, and hurl them into its own cauldron of driving space.

Like the violence of an uncontrolled mind, the storm was out, to shatter all purposes but its own.

They plodded on, blown flat against the side of the slope they were zigzagging up, or suddenly propelled forward into unknown space but repulsed or shaken out of their tracks, they still plodded on. "If I were not light and firm on my feet again," Freya thought, "this would be the end!" There was no colour in the sky, and the morning light was a mere uncertain visibility.

Seppel crouched like a black spider on the snow above her. Once he leapt clean over Freya's head into the snow beneath, to hold her back from a fifty-foot drop, concealed from her eyes. They rocked for a moment in each other's arms on the verge of destruction; the next they had disentangled themselves, and were crawling, on a side track above the fall, into precarious safety. The icy wind drove against their weak faces, while their eyes streamed, their lips caked; and their jaws stiffened. Their noses, ears, fingers and toes felt as if they were being stung by nettles, and then slowly, ominously, all feeling went out of them and they became numb, in the first dangerous stage of frost-bite.

At intervals, Seppel checked their crawl, swooped down upon Freya, and gazing anxiously into her face, rubbed any exposed part with what wet snow he could scoop up; accepting from Freya a fellow ministrations. If in spite of the shifting snow, and the deceptive grey light of the still-born day, Seppel had not known the mountain itself like the back of his hand, they must have perished almost as soon as they set out, so many were their pitfalls. But just as Freya had begun to wonder whether they had moved at all, the wind drove through the swirling loose snow-screen, and for an instant they caught a glimpse of the black roof of the *Gaudeamus Hütte*, a thousand feet below them.

"It's a straight dive now—steer to your left—and follow!" Seppel shouted in her ear. It was their last risk, and at the same time their last chance, for Freya knew that she was nearing the end of her powers. There comes a moment when to push against an invisible wall in front of you—with sliding feet—over a surface that threatens to let you through—becomes a superfluous motion. As it was there could be no style left in taking the sheer slope before them, nor was there any great likelihood that the slope wouldn't take them instead. All they could do, was to crouch on their heels and trust to luck and their muscles, to do the rest.

"Don't fall if you can help it!" Seppel shouted before he plunged, "and if fall you must—keep still—don't struggle—I'll get back to you somehow! The slope'll go, if we play any tricks with it! Ride light!" He was off—she saw a black dot spinning far beneath her in the shaken light, and felt the

wind tear at her with renewed vigour, as if it knew that she was alone, and defenceless—then she too drove forward. The snow blew up into her nose, eyes and mouth—it leapt at her from beneath—it whirled round her from above—she rocked in a white blindness more terrible than the dark.

The surface shook and bumped under her skis—if a crack came above her there would be no chance, or if the slippery brittle *Harsch* she sometimes drove over caved in—she would be helplessly trapped. The wind shrieked like a maniac as if the suppressed grudge of a lifetime had suddenly spilt itself free. Something black rose up out of the whiteness ahead of her—Freya drew her tired muscles together for a spring—she heard a shout, and found herself flying through the air for an uninterrupted eternity. A crash wound up her flight; she rolled over and over, out of and into, consciousness. Seppel stared down at her. One of her skis was broken, and the other appeared at an odd angle above her head. “You went over the roof,” Seppel informed her. “Are you all right?” He seemed to expect this unlikely issue although he drew her out gingerly; but beyond a flustered, pumped-out feeling, and bruises not yet brought to light, Freya found that she could agree with Seppel’s optimism. She *was* all right. She had fallen well, and a drift of snow that she owed to the storm, had befriended her.

It was curious to be safe again, to hear the wind, yapping and tearing at the door—quite harmlessly—while its victims sat, and drank hot *Glühwein* at a reasonable distance from the fire.

Frau Neuner and a guide friend of Seppel’s rubbed their extremities, and any part of them that had been exposed to the air, from a tub of snow. Neither of them had any deep frost-bites, but toes and fingers needed very careful handling, and under it, soon became fiery particles of agony, although ever through the agony, Freya was conscious of the strange relief of physical safety. She and Seppel looked across the room at each other and smiled, no one but themselves knew how near they had both come to never smiling again.

“It was not a day for the mountain,” old Neuner murmured apologetically to Freya, as if a favourite child had refused to show off before visitors, while he pushed a wooden spoon between her shaking lips. “The Wetterstein seldom gets wind, but if a gale catches him—he is apt to turn playful with it! It was good the snow held!”

“We had to take what we could get,” Seppel explained. “We shall have the moon later; and Fräulein was told the coast was clear for to-night. Still she’d better be put between hot blankets now and get what rest she can. The

run took over four hours, when it ought to have taken only one; but the moon won't rise before eight to-night, so you'll have time enough to rest out!" He spoke as if he himself needed no rest.

Frau Neuner led Freya off, to a warmed guest room, wrapped her in hot blankets and asked no questions; but she noticed the little gesture Freya gave involuntarily—after she had got into bed—as if to take a weight upon her arm, that was not there. Sleep fell upon her swiftly and with mercy.

She woke, from a deep dreamless sleep, to see Seppel looking down at her.

"In another hour," he told her, "we must be off again. We have time for supper. But before you get up, there is something I want to ask you!"

He drew a wooden chair forward and sat down opposite the bed. He was dressed as if he were going to a dance in his best leather breeches and a spotless shirt, embroidered in many colours at the wrists and neck; his heavy leather belt with its ancient buckle was, Freya thought, rather a splendid finish to his slender waist.

She wished that she herself wasn't clothed in the heavy flannel nightgown lent her by Frau Neuner, while her own clothes were drying. She knew she couldn't look nice in it yet Seppel's eyes contradicted this knowledge. "It's this way," he began bluntly. "Hans had the luck. But before he saw you, you'd got into my mind. I couldn't do anything about it—you only came up here from time to time through the winters and you were always with your brother and that young Fritz Maberg. I'm only a guide and a wood-cutter, though I'm better off than Hans was, because this *Hütte* gives the best ski sport of the district. It's good for climbing too—so we get guests both ways—winter and summer. What we've saved we put into cows. We have thirty—that's a great help as well. When I saw you were playing fair with Hans, there wasn't anything for me to do about it, but to stand by him. I told you we were brothers? If I couldn't get you, I'd rather Hans got you, than that young Maberg—who wasn't fit for you—he hadn't the guts!

"Well, Hans *did* get you! I'd have died before I let anyone know then what I felt! But I'd still have felt it! If he'd lived I should have married a girl I've been with—and like well enough—but I'd dreamed of you!

"That's a woman a man never forgets—whether he's had her or not—the woman he's dreamed about.

"Now the coast's clear again, and I feel just the same—I know you better, that's all, but you're what I thought you were.

“If I take you, you can have Hans’ baby here; and you can live safe. Perhaps some day the Nazis—or the mountain itself—will get me, but not likely, for I know them both pretty well. But if they did, my father’d keep you well, and our children. If you go off to strange lands—and I’ll take you safe over the border in another hour if you choose it—will you ever find a man to serve you better than I can?”

Freya’s eyes were fixed on Seppel’s sparkling brown ones. He was a better-looking man than Hans had ever been, trimmer, smarter, of a finer height and carriage. His gay bright eyes burned deep.

Freya knew his heart. She knew the supple, long-enduring strength of his trained body. The power and passion of his youth shook her; but still more the thought of his dreams shook her. She had not known that she had been for so long alive in his silent heart. But her temptation was deeper even than the appeal that Seppel made to her. When she had waked, before she had recognized Seppel or met his summoning eyes, she had felt the emptiness of her arms, and the strange hollow feeling beneath her heart. If she stayed with Seppel, this could be filled. She could hold her child in her arms again. She had courage enough to face the life of a peasant. The tasks she would have to do, were not beyond her powers, nor did she think of them as beneath her. But the powers of her mind would not be used.

She could not carry on her father’s work; and his wisdom would not blossom again in her; nor reach out to a larger world. She would be refusing the main adventure of life. She sighed and shook her head. The light went out in the eyes watching her. Seppel had not touched her, but his eyes had drunk up her every movement. One instant of flustered thought—one shock of faltering in her steady eyes—and he would have known well enough how to win the rest of her.

“I must go,” Freya said gently. “I’d like to do what you ask, Seppel, but I can’t! I couldn’t for Hans! It’s different since Father died—he left something with me—something I’ve got to carry—and give to the world. There are only two of us—Rudi and me! Father had the strength of hundreds of people. He could do anything for others; and he counted upon me. He thought I could be trained to carry on his work. Well, I can’t train here—in my own country. So I must go where I can. I can’t only be a wife and mother. If I could, I would be yours! Remember—that I’d rather be yours than any man’s! But I should be unhappy and useless here. Knowing I had a work that I was fit for—and could not do. Hans was free of the Farm. I thought I could have done my work where Hans was working, but now I am not so sure even of that! I think I’ll have to find out alone what I’m fit for!”

Seppel rose, and looked down at her with wild longing eyes. "He is looking at me," Freya thought, "as I looked at my baby that last time!"

A shout from the kitchen made Seppel turn—in a flash, he had opened the door, and closed it again after him—without a sound. A moment later his mother came in, with Freya's clothes over her arm. Her blank eyes rested on Freya's face, as if she knew nothing of her son's secret, or perhaps everything. "In the kitchen there is food, and a guest for you, *Fräulein*," she told Freya.

"A guest?" Freya cried. "For me?"

Frau Neuner nodded and went out without enlightening her further.

With her heart beating fast, Freya flung on her clothes, and rushed out. She did not know whom she hoped or expected to find, but when she saw it was Emil, she knew that she was neither surprised nor disappointed.

He sprang up and held her fast for a moment, and it was as if all their childish enmity blossomed in that moment into a confidence so firm and permanent, that not all the kingdom of the Reich could divide or change it.

They were given supper by themselves in a corner of the *Stube* where they could talk together undisturbed. Seppel gave them a full hour.

The wind still raged when they left the *Hütte*, but the moon had risen clear into the scoured sky. The stars had a startled look, as if only by a fluke could they keep their ancient places.

Never had Freya been out upon the mountain in so wild and clear a night; its bitterness and its beauty blazed in one icy flame together.

Over the zigzag precarious track Seppel led them, like a great bird, swooping and darting, now this way and now that.

No one but themselves was out on the brilliant, empty mountainside; and nothing moved but the wind.

They had crossed the frontier, before either Freya or Emil knew that they were off the Wetterstein.

"They shot him five hundred feet below here!" Seppel told Emil, as they sheltered for a moment in the lee of a black rock. "He was across all right! I'll never forgive that treachery. Let them take him where they had a right to him. But he was safe—beyond their right—and *yet* they took him! I believe in God, Herr Emil—something will smash them sooner or later! I pray God uses me to help Him—when the smash comes!"

Freya overheard his muttered words, and said to herself: "It's all right! He loved Hans more than he loves me!" She could not hear Emil's answer. Looking down, from where she stood, she saw the distant valley lights; as if the stars had been blown beneath her feet.

"These are the lights of Kufstein!" she called back.

"We'll take you nearer!" Seppel answered.

The snow beneath them had grown firmer—the wind was behind them—it seemed but the flash of a moment before they had skimmed down the slope to the foothills close to the little town.

Freya caught them up, and stood, with one of them on each side of her. A man as old as their three lives put together, would still have had strength in him.

She flung her arms round Emil, and whispered: "Mother! Rudi!" and felt his hot tears on her face, then she turned and Seppel's arms closed round her in a vice.

"I'd like to die against your lips!" he murmured.

Freya clung to him, saying nothing, all that she could deny him, she had already denied.

When his hard arms slackened, she slipped away from them, crouching low, so as to go faster. When she reached the level, and looked back, they were still standing there, slim and upright like black pine stems upon the silver snow.

"There isn't much difference between them," Freya thought, as she pushed unsteadily forward, blinded now by her own tears. "They've got the same sound hearts—the same hot generous blood—they're both Germany!"

Then the wind drew a veil of snow across their figures, and she saw them no more.

Seppel had told her where to go. When she reached the road that led into the town, she had only to knock on the door of the first Inn on the right and say "Seppel—of the *Gaudeamus Hütte*—has sent me!"

They would have a room ready prepared for her, and would help her on her way. When she reached the Inn, light and music streamed out of it, as if to welcome her. The *Stube* was full of dancing peasants, snapping their fingers, tapping and yodelling—they might have been the same kind easy

young people—with unhunted eyes—that she and Fritz had watched together before her child was born.

As Freya opened the door into the *Stube*, a girl cried out at her snow-powdered figure: “*Mein Gott!* A ghost is at the door!” but her partner laughing at her frightened cry, said:

“Nah! Nah!—it is only a *Wandervogel* blown in out of the storm!”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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 *The Mortal Storm* by Phyllis Bottome]