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Wilhelm Meister

*Wilhelm Meister's Years
of Apprenticeship*

Book One

Chapter One

THE PERFORMANCE WENT ON a very long time. Old Barbara stepped to the window several times, listening for the rattle of carriages. She was waiting for her pretty mistress Mariane with greater impatience than usual, even though she had only a modest supper to put before her; Mariane was delighting the audience that evening in the dramatic epilogue, in the guise of a young officer; on this occasion she was to be surprised by a package which Norberg, a young and wealthy merchant, had sent in order to show that even at a distance he thought of his beloved.

As old servant, confidante, adviser, agent and housekeeper, Barbara had the right to open the seals, and on this evening too she found it all the more difficult to restrain her curiosity as the attentions of the generous lover meant more to her than to Mariane herself. She was overjoyed to find that the package contained a fine piece of muslin and the latest in ribbons for Mariane, while for herself were a piece of cotton, neckerchiefs and a rouleau of money. With what affection and gratitude did she remember the absent Norberg! How enthusiastically did she resolve to mention him most favourably in Mariane's presence, to remind her what she owed him and what he should be able to hope for and expect from her faithfulness.

The muslin, brightened up by the colour of the half-unrolled ribbons, lay like a Christmas present on the little table; the position of the lights enhanced the lustre of the gift; all was in order when old Barbara heard Mariane's feet on the steps and hurried to meet her. But with what surprise did she step back when the little female officer rushed past her without noticing her demonstrations of affection, entered the room with unusual haste and movement, threw her feathered hat and dagger onto the table, walked agitatedly up and down, and did not cast a glance on the solemnly lit lights.

"What is it, darling?" the old woman cried out with surprise. "For Heaven's sake, child, what's wrong? Just look at these presents! Whoever could have given them if not your fondest admirer? Norberg is sending you

the muslin for a nightdress; he will soon be here himself; he seems to me to be more zealous in his attentions and more open-handed than ever."

The old woman moved round and was intending to show the gifts, in which she herself had also been considered, when Mariane turned away from the presents and called out passionately: "Away, away with them! Today I don't want to hear any more about all this; I obeyed you, it was your wish, let it be so! When Norberg returns, I shall once more belong to him and to you, and you can do what you like with me; but until then I want to lead my own life, and even if you had a thousand tongues you would not talk me out of my plan. I want to give my whole self to the man who loves me and whom I love. Don't make faces! I wish to submit to this passion as if it should last eternally."

There was no lack of contrary ideas and reasons on the old woman's part; but when she became vehement and bitter in the continuing altercation Mariane jumped up and seized hold of her in front. The old woman laughed excessively loudly. "I shall have to see to it that you are put into long clothes again," she exclaimed, "if I am to be sure of my life. Away, get changed! I hope as a girl you will apologize to me for the injury inflicted on me by yourself as a fugitive young gentleman; off with the coat, and the other things! It's an uncomfortable outfit and one that's dangerous for you, as I perceive. The shoulder ribbons are carrying you away with enthusiasm."

The old woman had placed her hand upon her, but Mariane tore herself away. "Not so fast!" she cried out, "I'm expecting another visitor this evening."

"That's not a good thing," the old woman interjected. "Surely not the young, fond, unfledged son of the merchant?"

"The very person," replied Mariane.

"It seems as if generosity might be becoming your dominant passion," the old woman answered mockingly: "You are very keen to make yourself responsible for those under age and those without money! It must be wonderful to be adored as an unselfish donor."

"You can make fun as much as you wish, I love him! I love him! It is with such delight that I pronounce these words out loud for the first time! That is the passion as I have imagined it so often; it is something of which I earlier had no conception. Yes, I am willing to throw myself at him! I would like to clasp him as if I were going to hold him for ever. I want to show him all my love and to enjoy his love in its whole compass."

"Calm yourself," the old woman said quietly, "Calm yourself! I must interrupt your joy with *one* thought: Norberg is coming! He's coming in a fortnight. Here is his letter, which came with the presents."

“And even if the morning sun were to rob me of my friend, I would want to conceal it from myself! A fortnight! What an eternity! What cannot happen in a fortnight, what changes there can be!”

Wilhelm came in. With what liveliness did she fly towards him! With what rapture he embraced the red uniform and pressed the little white waistcoat against his breast! Who would venture to describe the bliss of two people in love, for whom would it be appropriate to make such a declaration! The old woman went to one side grumbling; we depart with her, leaving the happy pair to themselves.

Chapter Two

WHEN WILHELM GREETED his mother next morning she told him that his father was very annoyed and would very soon forbid him to pay daily visits to the theatre. “Even though I occasionally like to go to the theatre myself,” she continued, “I am all the same often inclined to curse it, since my domestic quiet is disturbed by your excessive passion for this form of entertainment. Father always asks what use it can be and how people can waste their time with it.”

“I’ve already had to listen to him as well,” replied Wilhelm, “And perhaps I answered him too hastily; but for Heaven’s sake, Mother, is everything useless which does not immediately put money in our pockets and which does not procure us possessions near at hand? Didn’t we have room enough in the old house? And was it necessary to build a new one? Doesn’t Father spend a considerable part of his business profits in embellishing the rooms? Aren’t these silk tapestries and English furnishings also useless? Could we not content ourselves with less? I at least admit that these decorated walls, flowers, flourishes, little baskets and figures repeated a hundred times make a wholly disagreeable impression. At the best they appear to me like our theatre curtain. But how different it is to be sitting in front of this! Even though you may have to wait a long time, you do know that it will be raised, and we shall then see the most varied things which will entertain, enlighten and elevate us.”

“Do take things calmly,” his mother said. “Father also likes his relaxation in the evening; and then he believes that you will find it distracting and in the end, if he gets cross, it’s my fault. How often have I had to listen to reproaches about the wretched puppet theatre which I gave you for Christmas twelve years ago and which first gave you a taste for plays!”

“Don’t attack the puppet theatre, don’t have any regrets for your love and care! These were the first pleasurable moments which I enjoyed in the new,

empty house; I can still picture this moment for myself, I know how strange it seemed to me when, after receiving the usual Christmas presents, we were told to sit down in front of a door which led from another room. The door opened, but not for going to and fro in the usual way; the entrance was filled with an unexpectedly festive atmosphere. A portal was built up high which had been covered by a mysterious curtain. At first we all stood at a distance and, as we became more curious to see what gleaming and rattling things might be concealed behind the half-translucent covering, each one of us was provided with his little chair and asked to wait patiently.

“So now everyone was sitting quietly; there was a whistle as signal, the curtain was raised and revealed a prospect of a temple, painted bright-red. The high priest Samuel appeared with Jonathan, and their alternating, unusual voices seemed to me most venerable. Shortly afterwards Saul came on the scene, much embarrassed because of the impertinence of the huge warrior who had challenged him and his man. How happy I felt when the dwarflike son of Jesse skipped up with shepherd’s staff and pouch, and a sling, and said: ‘O most powerful King and Lord, let no one lose courage on this account; if Your Majesty will allow me, I will go forward and engage in conflict with the mighty giant.’ The first act was ended, and the audience was very keen to see what would happen further; everyone wished that the music would soon stop. At last the curtain was raised again. David dedicated the monster’s flesh to the birds of the air and the animals of the field; the Philistine spoke scornfully, stamped a lot with both feet, fell down finally like a log and gave the whole business a magnificent turning of the scales. When afterwards the maidens sang: ‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’, and the giant’s head was carried in front of the little conqueror and he received the King’s beautiful daughter as his bride, I felt annoyed in spite of all happiness that the lucky prince was so dwarf-shaped. For, following the idea of the great Goliath and the little David, the opportunity had not been missed to make both figures truly characteristic. Please, do you know what has happened to the puppets? I’ve promised to show them to a friend whom I gave a great deal of pleasure by talking to him recently about this children’s entertainment.”

“I’m not surprised that you remember these things so vividly: for it was you who straight away became the most involved in them. I recall how you took the little book off me and learnt the whole play off by heart; I was not aware of this until one evening you made a David and Goliath with wax, got them both to speechify to one another, gave the giant a push finally and fixed his unwieldy head on a big pin with a waxen knob in little David’s hand. At that time I took such heartfelt motherly pleasure at your good memory and

your lofty talk that I at once determined to hand over the wooden troupe to you myself. I didn't think that it would cause me so many tiresome hours."

"You mustn't have any regrets," Wilhelm answered, "for these amusements have brought us many a happy hour."

And with these words he asked for the keys, hurried away, found the puppets and for a moment was transported into those times when they had still seemed alive to him, and when he had believed that he could bring them to life with the vivacity of his voice and the movement of his hands. He took them with him to his room and kept them carefully.

Chapter Three

IF FIRST LOVE, as I have generally heard maintained, is the most beautiful thing that a heart can feel, whether earlier or later, we must praise our hero as triply happy because it was granted to him to enjoy the bliss of these unique moments in its whole range. Only a few are favoured so pre-eminently, while most people are led away from their earlier feelings only through a hard school in which after scanty enjoyment they are compelled to forgo their most ardent wishes and to learn permanently to do without what appeared in their minds as the greatest happiness.

Wilhelm's yearning for the attractive girl had risen on the wings of imagination; after knowing her a short while he had won her affection, and he found himself in possession of someone whom he loved, indeed adored, so very much: for she had appeared to him first in the favourable light of a theatre performance, and his passion for the stage combined with his first love for a woman. His youth allowed him to partake in rich joys that were enhanced and maintained by a lively imagination. The circumstances of his beloved also gave her behaviour a quality of mood that very much supported his own emotions; the fear that her lover might discover the rest of her affairs prematurely gave her an attractive appearance of worry and shame, her passion for him was intense, even her uneasiness seemed to increase her fondness; she was the most delightful creature in his arms.

When he awakened from the first ecstasy of joy and looked back on his life and his situation, everything seemed new to him, his obligations seemed more solemn, his inclinations keener, his knowledge clearer, his intentions firmer. Consequently it became easy for him to make an arrangement which would allow him to escape his father's reproaches, to calm his mother down and to enjoy Mariane's love in an untroubled manner. During the day, he got on with his business punctually, usually did without going to the theatre,

made conversation at table in the evening, and when everyone was in bed he slipped quietly out to the garden wrapped in his cloak, and hurried impetuously to his beloved, his heart full of romantic thoughts.

"What have you got there?" Mariane asked, when one evening he brought out a bundle which the old woman, in the hope of agreeable presents, looked at very attentively. "You'll never guess," Wilhelm replied.

How surprised was Mariane and how horrified was Barbara when the serviette was untied and revealed a confused heap of puppets, each the length of the span of a hand. Mariane laughed out loud when Wilhelm made efforts to separate the tangled wires and to point to each figure separately. The old woman crept to one side, irritated.

It only needs something slight to entertain two lovers, and so our friends were very well pleased that evening. The little troupe was mustered, each figure closely examined and laughed at. Mariane refused to take pleasure in King Saul in black velvet robe with golden crown; he looked too stiff and pedantic for her, she said. All the more did Jonathan please her, with his smooth chin, his yellow-and-red dress and his turban. What is more, she could turn him neatly this way and that by means of the wire, make him bow and cause him to make declarations of love. On the other hand, she was reluctant to pay the prophet Samuel the least attention, even though Wilhelm sang the praises of the little breastplate and recounted that the shot taffeta of the frock coat came from an old dress of his grandmother. David was too small for her and Goliath too big; she held firm to her Jonathan. She knew how to act so agreeably with him and in the end to transfer her caresses from the puppet to our friend that again this time a commonplace game became the introduction to hours of happiness.

They were aroused from the sweetness of their fond dreams by a noise that arose in the street. Mariane called the old woman who, still busy as was her custom, was occupied at adjusting the variable equipment of the theatre wardrobe for use in the next play. She provided the information that a company of merrymakers was just staggering out of the Italian cellar close by where they had not been sparing of the champagne with their fresh, newly arrived oysters.

"A pity," said Mariane, "that we didn't think about it earlier, we too might have indulged ourselves."

"I expect there's still time," Wilhelm rejoined, handing the old woman a louis d'or, "if you get what we want, you can partake with us."

The old woman was nimble, and in a short time an agreeably laid table with a well-arranged collation stood before the lovers. The old woman had to sit at the table too; they ate, drank and enjoyed themselves.

On such occasions there was no lack of conversational material. Mariane brought out her Jonathan again, and the old woman was able to turn the conversation to Wilhelm's favourite subject. "You have already entertained us once with an account of the first performance of a puppet play on Christmas Eve; it was jolly to hear about it. You were just interrupted when the ballet was due to start. Now we have met the magnificent cast that achieved those great effects."

"Yes," said Mariane, "go on with the story, how did you feel?"

"It is a beautiful feeling, dear Mariane," Wilhelm replied, "when we remember old times and old, harmless mistakes, particularly if it happens at a moment when we have been fortunate enough to reach a high point from which we can look around and survey the path by which we have come. It is so pleasant to have a complacent memory of a number of obstacles which we often used to think of with a feeling of embarrassment as insurmountable, and to compare how we have now developed with what we were like then in an undeveloped state. But now I feel inexpressibly happy, as I talk with you at this moment about the past, because at the same time I am looking ahead to the delightful country which we can wander through together hand in hand."

"How about the ballet?" the old woman interposed. "I have a fear that everything did not proceed as it should have done."

"Oh yes," Wilhelm rejoined, "very well! A vague memory of those strange leaps of Negroes and Negresses, shepherds and shepherdesses, and dwarf men and women has remained in my mind for the whole of my life. Then the curtain fell, the door closed, and the entire little group hurried off to bed, as if drunk and staggering; but I do know that I couldn't go to sleep, that I asked for a further story to be told me, that I still put a lot of questions and that it was only with reluctance that I let the nursemaid go who had settled us down in bed.

"The magic structure had unfortunately disappeared again the next morning, the mysterious curtain had been removed, it was again possible to move freely through that particular door from one room to the other, and so many adventurous happenings had left no trace. My brothers and sisters ran this way and that with their toys, I alone went creeping up and down, it seemed impossible to me that there should only be a couple of door posts where yesterday there had been so much magic. Ah, he who looks for a lost love cannot be unhappier than I appeared to myself at that time!"

A glance that was intoxicated with joy, which he cast upon Mariane, convinced her that he did not fear that he might ever get into that position.

Chapter Four

“MY ONE WISH NOW,” Wilhelm continued, “was to see a second performance of the play. I entreated my mother, and she endeavoured to persuade my father at an opportune moment; but her effort was in vain. He maintained that a rarely experienced pleasure could acquire value for people, and that children and old people did not know how to esteem good things that came their way every day.

“Indeed, we should have to wait a long time still, perhaps until Christmas came again, if the constructor and secret director of the show had not himself felt the desire to repeat the performance and along with this to produce in an epilogue a harlequin figure that had been very recently completed.

“A young artilleryman, endowed with many talents and particularly skilful in mechanical tasks, who had performed many important services to Father during the building work and who had been amply recompensed by him, wanted to express his gratitude to the little family at Christmas time and presented to the house of his patron this completely furnished theatre which he had constructed, carved and painted during idle hours at an earlier time. It was he, with the help of a servant, who worked the puppets himself and who spoke the various parts with a disguised voice. It was not difficult for him to persuade Father, who conceded to a friend as a favour what he had refused his children as a matter of conviction. Enough – the theatre was once more set up, a few of the neighbours’ children asked in and the play repeated.

“If on the first occasion I had experienced the joy of surprise and astonishment, it was the pleasure of attention and investigation that dominated the second. *How* it worked was now my concern. I had already said to myself the first time that the puppets did not speak themselves; I also conjectured that they did not move of their own accord; but why was it all so attractive nonetheless? And yet why did it look as if they were speaking and moving themselves? And where might the lights and the people be? These enigmas disturbed me all the more, the more I wished to be at the same time among those who were enchanted and among the magicians, both to have a hand in the play and be a spectator enjoying the pleasure of the illusion.

“The play was over, preparations were being made for the epilogue, the spectators had got up and were chatting amongst themselves. I pressed closer to the door and heard from the clattering inside that people were busy clearing up. I lifted up the lower tapestry and peeped between the framework. My mother noticed it and pulled me back; however, I had seen this much, that friends and foes, Saul and Goliath and the rest of them, were being packed

into one drawer, and so my half-satisfied curiosity received fresh stimulus. At the same time I was most astonished to see the lieutenant being very busy in the holy of holies. Now Harlequin, however much he clattered with his heels, could not keep me entertained. I became lost in deep thought and after this discovery became both calmer and less calm than before. After I had learnt something, it began to seem to me as if I knew nothing, and I was right: for I did not see the connection, and after all this is the whole point.”

Chapter Five

“IN WELL-ARRANGED AND ORDERLY HOUSES,” Wilhelm continued, “the children have a feeling similar to that experienced by rats and mice; they pay attention to any chinks and holes by means of which they can have access to forbidden sweets; they enjoy these with a great deal of stealthy voluptuous fear, which comprises such a large part of childish happiness.

“I was more attentive than any of my brothers and sisters whenever a key was left in a lock. The greater the reverence was which I carried around in my heart for locked doors, which I had to pass by for weeks and months on end and into which I could only occasionally cast a furtive glance when Mother opened the sanctuary in order to take something out, the quicker I was to make use of a moment which the carelessness of housekeepers on various occasions caused to occur.

“As may easily be imagined, of all doors it was the door of the pantry to which my senses were most sharply directed. Few of life’s anticipatory joys could compare with the feeling I had when my mother called on me from time to time to help her carry something out, and I then owed a debt of gratitude either to her goodness or to my cunning for a few prunes. The heaped-up treasures embraced my imagination with their abundance, and even the strange smell exhaled by so many kinds of spices in confusion made an impression of such tastiness on me that I never neglected, whenever I was nearby, at least to gloat at the atmosphere revealed there. This noteworthy key was left in the lock one Sunday morning when Mother had been overtaken by the ringing of bells and the whole house lay in a deep Sabbath calm. No sooner had I noticed it, when I walked gently up and down a few times, pressed quietly and artfully close, opened the door, and with *one* step felt myself close to so much long-desired bliss. I cast a quick, doubting glance upon coffers, sacks, boxes, cases and jars, to see what I should select and take, in the end seized hold of the beloved prunes, provided myself with some dried apples and, modestly enough, took in addition a piece of candied

orange peel; I was about to slither backwards again with this booty when I noticed a few boxes standing side by side, from one of which wires provided with hooks at the top were hanging out because of the badly closed bolt. I fell upon this with premonitory feelings, and with what unworldly emotion did I discover that my world of heroes and happiness was stacked up there. I was going to lift up and look at the ones on top, and pull out those at the bottom, but I very soon entangled the delicate wires and got myself into a state of uneasiness and anxiety, especially as the cook made some movements in the nearby kitchen, so that I pressed everything together as well as I could, bolted the box, only taking out for myself a booklet that had lain on top and which contained the comedy of David and Goliath, and made my escape with this booty quietly up the stairs into an attic.

“From this time on I spent all my secret solitary hours in repeatedly reading my play, learning it off by heart and thinking to myself how magnificent it would be if I could also give the figures life with my fingers. In my thoughts I became David and Goliath myself in the process. I studied the play and absorbed it into my being in all corners of the attic, stables and gardens, in all kinds of circumstances, I took possession of all roles and learnt them by heart, except that I usually placed myself in the part of the hero and left the rest of the characters to jog along in my memory only as followers. So David’s magnanimous speeches, with which he challenged the arrogant giant Goliath, haunted me night and day; I often murmured them aloud, but nobody paid any attention except Father who occasionally noticed some exclamation and commended to himself the good memory of his boy who had been able to remember such a lot after so little listening.

“Because of this I became bolder and bolder, and one evening recited most of the play to my mother, while moulding for myself a few pieces of wax as actors. She became alert, was insistent with me, and I confessed.

“Fortunately this discovery took place at a time when the lieutenant himself had expressed the wish to be allowed to initiate me into these secrets. My mother at once told him about the unexpected talent of her son, and he was able to arrange for a few rooms on the top floor which were usually empty to be put at his disposal; in one of them once more the audience was to sit, in the other the players and the proscenium should again fill up the doorway. Father had allowed his friend to arrange all this, while he himself only appeared to look on tolerantly, following the principle that one should not let children notice how fond one was of them, or else they would take liberties; he believed that one had to seem to be serious when they were enjoying themselves and occasionally to spoil their pleasures so that their contentment should not make them immoderate and presumptuous.”

Chapter Six

“THE LIEUTENANT NOW PUT up the theatre and looked after the other things. I noticed indeed that he came into the house several times during the week and surmised the purpose. My eagerness grew incredibly, as I certainly felt that I should not be allowed to take any part before Saturday in what was being prepared. At last the longed-for day arrived. My guide came at five in the afternoon and took me up with him. Trembling with joy I stepped inside and saw on both sides of the frame the puppets hanging down in the order in which they were to appear; I examined them carefully, ascended the step which raised me above the theatre, so that now I was hovering over the little world. I looked down between the boards not without reverence, because I was in the grip of the memory of the magnificent effect which the whole had from the outside, and was sensitive what secrets were being revealed to me. We had one try, and it went well.

“Next day, when a group of children were invited, we managed very well, except that in the heat of the moment I dropped Jonathan and was compelled to put my hand down to pick him up: a mischance that destroyed the illusion very much, caused great laughter and wounded my feelings unutterably. This slip also seemed to be very welcome to Father, who with circumspection refused to reveal the great pleasure he obtained from seeing his little son so capable, and immediately picked on the mistakes when the play was over, saying it would have been really nice if only this and that had not gone wrong.

“I was deeply hurt, I became sad for the rest of the evening, but by the next morning I had already slept off all ill humour again and was blissful in thinking that I had performed excellently, apart from the mishap. Added to this was the applause of the spectators, who emphatically maintained that although the lieutenant had done a great deal in the use of rough and refined voices, nonetheless his perorations were mostly too affected and stiff; on the other hand the new beginner rendered his David and Jonathan very well; Mother in particular praised the candid manner in which I had challenged Goliath and introduced the modest victor to the King.

“Now, to my great joy, the theatre remained set up, and as spring was coming and it was possible to manage without a fire, I stayed in the attic in my free time and my play periods and had the puppets performing in sturdy confusion together. I often asked my brothers and sisters and friends to come up; but even when they didn’t want to come, I was up there on my own. My imagination brooded over the little world, which quite soon assumed another form.

“No sooner had I performed the first play, for which theatre and actors had been created and primed, a few times than it already ceased to give me any pleasure. However, the *German Stage** and various Italian-German operas which were among Grandfather’s books had come into my hands; I became engrossed in these and each time only reckoned up the number of personages in advance and then proceeded without further ado to the performance of the play. And now King Saul in his black velvet robe had to play Chaumigrem, Cato and Darius;* at this point it may be noted that the plays were never performed completely, but for the most part only the fifth acts, where the slaughtering took place.

“It was also natural that opera, with its multifarious transformations and adventures, would attract me above all. Here I could find stormy seas, gods descending in clouds and, what made me particularly happy, thunder and lightning. I assisted myself with cardboard, paint and paper, could produce a first-class night, the lightning looked really terrifying, it was only that the thunder did not always work, but that didn’t matter all that much. What is more, the operas offered more opportunity to bring on David and Goliath, which couldn’t be managed at all in ordinary drama. Every day I felt more attachment to the narrow little seat where I had so much enjoyment, and I admit that the smell which the puppets had acquired from the pantry contributed not a little to this.

“The scenery for my theatre was now fairly complete; for it now proved very useful that from an early age onwards I had had a talent for handling compasses, cutting out cardboard and illuminating pictures. It upset me all the more when the servants quite often hindered me in the execution of great achievements.

“My sisters, when dressing and undressing their dolls, stimulated in me the idea of gradually providing my heroes also with clothes that could be changed. The bits of clothing were separated from their bodies and put together as well as could be managed, new ribbon and finery was bought with money saved, many a piece of taffeta was procured by begging, and gradually a theatre wardrobe was collected in which farthingales for the ladies had not been forgotten.

“The troupe was really provided now with clothes for a play on the largest scale, and one would have thought that now in fact one performance would follow the other; but it happened to me as it often happens to children: they conceive far-reaching plans, make ambitious arrangements, indeed a few attempts too, and then everything is left. I must also indict myself of this failing. For me the greatest joy lay in discovery and in the occupation of the imagination. This play or the other aroused my interest because of a

particular scene, and at once I again had new clothes made for it. As a result of these ventures the original costumes of my heroes had got into disarray and had been mislaid, so that not even the first big play could be performed any more. I let my imagination take over, was eternally rehearsing and making preparations, built a thousand castles in the air, and did not realize that I had destroyed the foundation of the little building.”

Throughout this narrative Mariane had exercised all her fondness for Wilhelm to conceal her sleepiness. Amusing as the happening might seem from one point of view, it really was too simple as far as she was concerned, and the comments about it too ponderous. Tenderly she placed her foot on the foot of her beloved and gave him apparent indications of her attention and approval. She drank from his glass, and Wilhelm was convinced that no word of his account had been lost. After a short pause he exclaimed: “Now it’s your turn, Mariane, to tell me about your early childhood pleasures. Up to now we have always been too preoccupied with what is happening now for us to have been able to concern ourselves mutually with our earlier ways of life. Tell me: under what conditions were you brought up? What are the first vivid impressions you remember?”

These questions would have greatly embarrassed Mariane if the old woman had not at once come to her aid. “Do you believe, then,” the shrewd woman said, “that we pay so much attention to what happened to us at an early stage that we have such agreeable incidents to relate, and if we did have them to relate, that we should also be able to present them with such skill?”

“As if that were necessary!” Wilhelm cried out. “I love this sweet, good, dear creature so much that I resent every moment of my life which I have spent without her. Let me at least take part in your past life in my imagination! Tell me all, and I will tell you all. Let us deceive ourselves wherever possible and try to regain those times that have been lost for love.”

“If you insist so eagerly, we can satisfy you, I’m sure,” the old woman said. “Only tell us first how your enthusiasm for the theatre gradually grew, what practice you had, how you improved to such an extent that you can now be considered to be a good actor. Certainly, there won’t have been any lack of entertaining incidents. It is not worth our while to go to sleep now, I have another bottle in reserve; and who knows when we are able to sit quietly and contentedly together again?”

Mariane looked up to her with a sad glance, which Wilhelm did not notice, and he continued in his narrative.

Chapter Seven

“AS MY CIRCLE OF COMRADES began to increase, the distractions of youth were detrimental to solitary and quiet pleasures. I was by turns hunter, soldier or rider, as our games required; but I always had one small advantage over the others in being able to construct skilfully the necessary implements. Thus the swords were mostly of my manufacture, it was I who decorated and gilded the sledges, and a deep-rooted instinct would not let me rest until I had remodelled our militia in the classical style. Helmets were constructed, decorated with paper plumes, shields, even suits of armour were made, labours over which the household servants, who happened to be skilled tailors, and the seamstresses broke many a needle.

“Some of my young companions I now saw well arrayed, the others were also equipped gradually, though to a lesser extent, and a splendid corps was formed. We marched about in yards and gardens, bravely gave each other blows on shields and heads; there were plenty of disagreements, but they were soon settled.

“This game, which greatly entertained the others, had only been played a few times when it ceased to satisfy me. The sight of so many armed figures stimulated in me ideas about knights which had been filling my head for some time, as I had started reading old romances.

“*Jerusalem Delivered*, of which Koppe’s translation came my way, at last gave my rambling thoughts a definite direction. It is true, I could not read the poem in its entirety, but there were passages which I knew by heart and whose images haunted me. In particular everything about Clorinda fascinated me.* The amazon-like quality and quiet completeness of her existence had more effect on a mind that was beginning to develop than the artificial charms of Armida,* although I did not despise her garden.

“But hundreds and hundreds of times when I walked in the evenings on the balcony which is placed between the house gables, when I looked out over the district, when a trembling light from the disappearing sun was visible on the horizon, when the stars came forth, when night emerged from all angles and depths and the chirping of the crickets sounded shrilly through the solemn stillness, did I recite the story of the sad duel between Tancred and Clorinda.

“However much I was on the Christians’ side, as was proper, I nonetheless supported the pagan heroine with my whole heart when she undertook to set fire to the great tower of the besiegers. And the way Tancred now meets the supposed warrior at night, the dispute begins under the cover of darkness and they fight fiercely – I could never pronounce the words:

Yet now the measure of Clorinda's life is high
 And so the hour draws near when she is doomed to die!

without the tears coming into my eyes and flowing profusely as the unhappy lover plunges the sword into her breast, recognizes her and tremulously fetches water to baptize her.

“But how my heart was moved when Tancred's sword strikes the tree in the enchanted forest, blood flows after the blow has been dealt, and a voice resounds in his ears telling him that here too he is wounding Clorinda, that he is destined by fate to injure what he loves wherever he goes and without knowing!

“The story so took possession of my imagination that what I had read of the poem formed itself in my mind to a whole which captivated me so much that I thought of performing it in some way or other. I wanted to play Tancred and Rinaldo, and I found that two sets of armour which I had already prepared were quite ready for this purpose. The one made of dark-grey paper with scales was to adorn the serious-minded Tancred, the other with its silver-and-gold paper was to embellish the splendid Rinaldo. In the liveliness of my conception I told everything to my friends who were much delighted by it, only they could not really understand that it was all to be performed, and, what is more, performed by themselves.

“I overcame these doubts with great readiness, I immediately believed I could count on a few rooms in a neighbouring playmate's house, without envisaging that the old aunt would never release them; the same applied to the theatre, concerning which I also had no definite ideas, except that it had to be set up on joists, that wings out of divided folding screens had to be put in position and that a big cloth was necessary for the floor. But where the materials and implements were to come from, I had not considered.

“We found a good source of supply for the forest: we spoke politely to an old servant of one of the houses, who had now become a forester, to ask him to get hold of young birches and pines for us, and in fact they were brought along more speedily than we could have hoped for. But now we were in the awkward situation of how to put the play on before the trees withered. This was a critical situation; we lacked a site, a theatre and curtains. The folding screens were the only things we had.

“In this embarrassment we once more turned to the lieutenant for whom we provided a lengthy description of the magnificence which was to be forthcoming. Although he understood us only dimly, he was very helpful, he pushed together into a little room whatever tables could be found in the house and the neighbourhood, put the screens on them,

made a rear view of green curtains, while the trees were also brought in and put in a row.

“Meanwhile it had become evening, the lights had been lit, the maids and the children were sitting in their seats, the play was due to start, and the whole band of heroes was dressed up; but now everyone felt for the first time that he did not know what he had to say. In the heat of my inventiveness I had forgotten what after all everybody has to know, that is, what he has to say and when he has to say it; and in the excitement of the construction activity it had not occurred to the others either; they believed they could easily perform as heroes, easily act and talk like the personages in whose world I had put them. They all stood in astonishment, asking each other what was to come first, and I, who had thought of myself as Tancred from the start, began to recite a few lines from the epic, having appeared on my own. But because the passage only too soon continued in narrative style and I finally appeared in my own speech in the third person, and because Godfrey, the subject of the speech, refused to appear, I simply had to walk off again, amid the loud laughter of my audience: a mishap that hurt me deeply. The enterprise had come to grief; the audience was sitting there and wanted to see something. We were dressed up; I pulled myself together and in short decided to play David and Goliath. Some of the company had performed the puppet play with me of old, they had all often seen it; the parts were handed out, everybody promised to do their best, and a funny small lad painted a black beard on himself, so that, if a gap should appear he could fill it as Harlequin with a farcical episode; an occurrence which I was very reluctant to allow, as I considered it to be contrary to the seriousness of the play. However, I vowed that, once I had escaped from the present embarrassment, I would never venture upon the performance of a play without the maturest consideration.”

Chapter Eight

MARIANE, OVERCOME BY SLEEP, leant against her beloved who pressed her firmly to him and continued in his narrative, while the old woman enjoyed with careful reflection what was left of the wine.

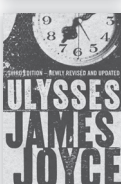
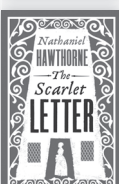
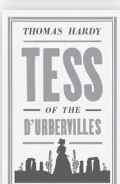
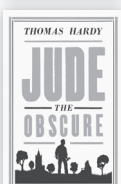
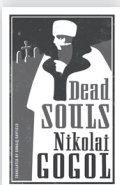
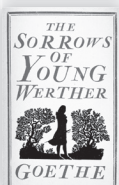
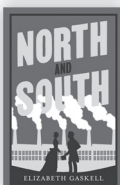
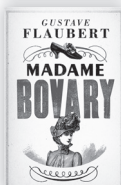
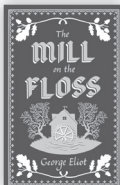
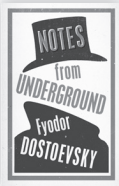
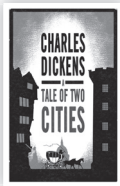
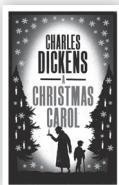
“We soon forgot the embarrassment in which I and my friends had found ourselves when we undertook to perform a non-existent play. Even the most recalcitrant material could not resist my passion to depict in a play every novel which I read, every story that was taught me. I was fully convinced that everything that was entertaining as a story would have to have a much

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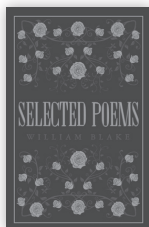
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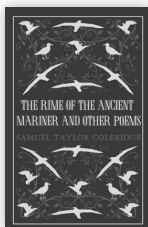
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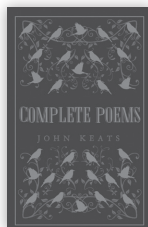
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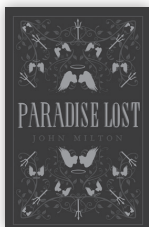
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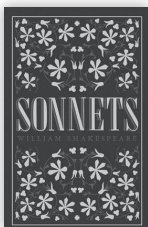
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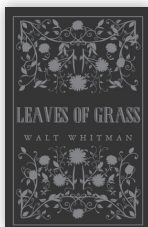
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