



Csardas

DIANE PEARSON

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To
*Nicholas Vilag, dear friend,
who inspired and encouraged me
to write this book*

From the east came the tribes—the seven tribes—Megyer, Nyek, Kurtgyarmat, Tarjan, Jeny, Ker, and Keszi, and of these the greatest was the tribe of Megyer. And the leaders of the seven tribes chose Almos, chief of the Megyer, to lead them into a new land, a land of mountains and forests and rich plains. The seven opened their veins and mingled their blood and drank it. And thus the Magyar nation was created, out of a brotherhood born of blood. And so the story would continue.

For one thousand years the land was ravaged. The Mongols came to kill, the Crusaders to scavenge on their way to a holy war. Protestant fought Catholic, peasant fought lord. The Turks came to conquer and rule, and the Habsburgs stole the land from the Turks and ruled in their wake. And with each survival they mixed their race a little more—with the Mongols, the Franks and Saxons, the Turks and the peoples of the Holy Roman Empire, with the Jews and the Slavs and the Russians—until at last there was little of the race of the seven tribes left in the new nation; but the tradition of Almos remained, the tradition of a people whose brotherhood was born of blood.

Part 1

It was generally agreed that the Ferenc sisters were the prettiest girls in the town. Not only had they a style and poise considerably in excess of their years but also, when they were together—at a party or summer picnic, for example—the effect of the two contrasting beauties produced a most devastating result.

It was more than just complementing each other in appearance, although that was part of it—Amalia, tall, stately and gentle, and Eva, small, quick and vivacious—it was as though unconsciously, they played to a public, laying aside the daily irritations and jealousies of one another and demonstrating to everyone just how enchanting and lovely they could be.

Now, on their way to Cousin Kati's birthday party, sitting one each side of the coach so that their tulle skirts were able to flow untrammelled over the seats, they began their instinctive transition from sisters who were separated in age by only one year, and who were therefore annoyed one another, to sisters who loved one another and were aware that in public they were referred to as "the enchanting Ferenc girls."

There was an added test to this particular evening—interposed with terror because of Papa—because they were going to the party alone and unchaperoned. Papa was on one of his long business visits to Budapest, and Mama, irritated because she had forgotten it was Cousin Kati's birthday party and had arranged to play cards, had said impatiently, "Surely you will not need your mama this evening, my darlings! Uncle Sandor will fetch and carry you, and after all—you will be in Aunt Gizi's house." She had paused, wrinkled her pretty forehead, and added slowly, "I suppose your papa would expect me to go but"—smiling suddenly like an irresponsible child—"Papa won't be back for three weeks, and by that time no one will remember that you went to Cousin Kati's party alone."

The girls had looked at each other quickly, then looked away. They were both thinking the same thing: how daring and *moderne* they would appear. The Ferenc girls *would* be the ones to arrive without a chaperon at Cousin Kati's birthday party.

Mama showed a moment's indecision when seeing them into the coach. "Oh, dear, suppose it is all right? I just hope Papa doesn't hear of it I wonder... perhaps I should come?"

But the girls tumbled hurriedly into the coach, waving their hands out the window and calling, "Good night, Mama! We shall be late if we wait any longer! We will give your love and birthday wishes to Cousin Kati!"

Mama remained standing, a small hesitant figure in the courtyard, and then the coach turned into the road and she could be seen no more. They faced one another, smiles of excitement and conspiracy breaking out across their smooth faces.

"Your dress is lovely, Eva," said Amalia warmly, although earlier, as they were getting ready, she had scolded her younger sister for having the neck cut too low. Eva tweaked her skirt and straightened a cascade of roses. The quarrelsome scene in the bedroom was already forgotten.

"You don't think it a little... insipid?" she asked, confident of Amalia's denial. "I mean white tulle and pink roses. I don't want to look dull."

Amalia considered, her head tilted to one side a little. Then she laughed. "Oh, Eva! You

know very well you couldn't look dull, even if you tried," she said, and suddenly they reached their hands towards one another in a gesture that was both spontaneous and affectionate.

Through the window of the coach came a breeze that was cold but that also had the feel of spring, a wind from the north bringing the freshness of the mountains and the scent of new growth. The winter had been mild and Amalia had overheard the housemaid, a girl from the Matra Mountains, saying that violets had been blossoming in the mountains soon after Christmas—winter violets, without any smell. How sad, Amalia thought, to bloom early but have no smell. She was given to moods of swift sadness—moments of controlled melancholy that, in a sighing, reflective fashion, she quite enjoyed. They never interfered with her common sense or her down-to-earth practicality. Even while she was mourning the scent of the wild flowers and savouring the winds of spring, she was trying to fasten the window of the coach, partly because it was cold but also so that they should not hear Uncle Sandor swearing up on the box.

"Don't close it because of me," Eva said. "I've heard everything Uncle Sandor has to say. And anyway, he only swears when the young men try to cut in on him with their horses."

Uncle Sandor was a huge, taciturn ex-sergeant of hussars. He had come to the family along with the coach and two horses, as part of Mama's dowry—the only part, for the rest had never been paid. Papa had neither asked for nor expected a dowry. The whole point of the Bogozy family allowing their younger daughter to marry a rich banker of Jewish extraction was that Zsigmond Ferenc would assist the Bogozys in their numerous financial predicaments. But the Bogozys—charming, feckless, gay, and irresolute—had felt it incumbent to prove to the world (and to Zsigmond Ferenc) that they were gentry and knew what was expected of them. A dowry was promised, and over the years it was periodically referred to: "The attorneys are settling the deeds this very month" or "Are you *still* awaiting the papers? We must speak to someone very soon!"

And then, at some point during the twenty years of Papa and Mama's marriage, the references to the dowry, although still made just as frequently, changed in character. The Bogozys had either convinced themselves or were in the process of convincing Zsigmond Ferenc that the dowry *had* been paid—paid in full, splendid, aristocratic munificence. It was constantly referred to, especially when Zsigmond Ferenc was in the process of settling yet another Bogozy financial catastrophe. "Well! And after all, it is right that he should help us. Did we not settle Marta most generously with a dowry?"

In fact all Papa had ever had was the coach, a pair of horses, and Uncle Sandor, always resplendent in his old hussar uniform. Strictly speaking, Uncle Sandor was not anyone's to give, but the transfer of employment was considered most expedient at the time. Uncle Sandor (by no means averse to the change as his wages hadn't been paid for months) departed quite happily, and the Bogozys felt splendid at making the supreme sacrifice of parting with their coachman—a sacrifice which, incidentally, relieved them of the burden of finding 200 korona for his arrears of pay.

Uncle Sandor rarely spoke, and when he did it was to his horses. But he knew his duty to the young ladies of the house, who were also granddaughters of the Bogozy. With or without their chaperon, Amalia and Eva would be collected punctually according to instructions. And if they tried to avoid departure, Uncle Sandor would knock on the door and ask a servant to inform the young ladies that it was time to leave.

As Eva had observed, he swore in front of the girls only when young men on good horses

tried to cut in on him. She had a theory that it was because the old ex-hussar really wanted to be on the back of a horse himself instead of driving young women around to parties and balls. Eva had once tried to spur Uncle Sandor into racing the coach against two young officers. For a second she had seen a maniacal glow in the peasant's tiny black eyes; then his hands had tightened on the reins and he had rumbled something unintelligible about "not fitting for the ladies of the Bogy." Eva had never been able to rouse him again.

Amalia, the window closed, settled back into her reverie of spring and mountains. Eva rustled fretfully.

"Malie. Do you think he'll be there?"

Amalia stared at her sister, trying to recall what the subject of their previous conversation had been. "Who? Who'll be there?"

"Felix. Felix Kaldy. Do you think Cousin Kati will have invited him?"

"I expect so."

Eva relapsed into silence, staring out of the window although it was too dark to see anything, and Amalia experienced a pang of envy because she knew exactly what Eva was thinking. Eva was planning how to bewitch Felix Kaldy, and undoubtedly she would do it very well. The Ferenc girls could bewitch any man if they so desired. Amalia's problem was that eighteen she had not yet met a man she wished to ensnare. Sometimes it worried her. Eva had been in love at least seven times during the last eighteen months. The year they had spent in Vienna had been one long drama of passion for Eva, beginning with the fencing master who taught at the *Akademie* opposite their school and ending with the leading tenor at the Theater an der Wien. Amalia had waited for the disease to strike her; now, with Eva settling into a new adoration, she was beginning to wonder if she were incapable of falling in love. She sighed again and thought of the scentless violets in the Matra Mountains. Beautiful but unfulfilled. Perhaps she would write a poem about them....

"Quick, Malie, we're here. Oh, look! See what Uncle Alfred has done to the trees! Oh Malie, did you ever see anything so magical? So like a fairy tale?"

Uncle Alfred's house was one of the oldest and grandest in the town. Small baroque balconies ran along beneath the first-floor windows. Every window was lit and the curtains were not yet drawn; a blur of colour and costume shifted across the glass. But what had inspired Eva to joy were the trees that lined the street outside the house. Each one was hung with a multitude of varicoloured lanterns.

The wooden doors leading into the courtyard were pushed well back, but Uncle Sandor didn't try to turn the coach. The archway was too narrow in such an old house and he stopped outside and climbed down from the box. In the courtyard a gypsy violinist was playing to welcome the guests. Uncle Alfred had employed him *and* a full group of players for the dancing upstairs. The gypsy scraped and sawed, encouraged by the promise of a bottle of *barack* to warm him when the cold spring night made his hands too numb to play.

The lights in the trees, the gypsy, the glimpses of the party seen through the window turned the evening into a night of breathless excitement, a magic night when anything could happen. For a moment Eva was completely overwhelmed by the unprecedented splendour of her cousin's party.

"How incredible! Fancy wasting all this on poor Cousin Kati!" she said, slightly awestruck. Amalia giggled, then remembered she was the elder and should set a good example.

"That's a cruel, unkind thing to say," she reproved.

Eva looked abashed. “Oh, well, I suppose it isn’t a waste really. Uncle Alfred has no one else to spend his money on so he might as well give Kati a good party.”

Uncle Sandor opened the coach door and they waited for him to put down the steps. Breathless, excited, they remembered who they were—the Ferenc girls—and how they had come—unchaperoned—and they arched their necks like young racehorses, stepped demurely down from the coach and through the archway, and turned towards the door leading to the house.

They were late. The altercation in the bedroom and Mama’s indecision about whether or not to come had resulted in their arriving when there was no one to receive them at the foot of the stairs. From the big drawing-room above came the sound of music and the shuffle and thump of dancers. Their eyes met. Eva bit her lower lip guiltily, then shrugged. “They’ll forgive us,” she said loftily. “We’re the Ferenc girls! They’ll be so pleased we’ve come they’ll forget that we were late.”

The music was exciting—a mazurka—and their bodies began moving, heads nodding, eyes shining bright at the thought of all the young men who were waiting to dance with them.

“Hurry!” said Eva, leading the way out of the hall and up the stairs to Cousin Kati’s bedroom. They thought it would be empty, but when they hustled in they found Kati—poor Cousin Kati—in a white satin dress waiting for them. She was hunched into an awkward, miserable shape at the foot of the bed, but as soon as she saw them she jumped up and hurried forward.

“You’ve come,” she said anxiously. “I thought you weren’t ever going to come. Why are you so late? I wanted you to help me when everyone came. You know how I hate receiving on my own. I asked you to come early. I especially wanted you early!”

Amalia put her arms round Cousin Kati and kissed her. “Happy birthday,” she said gently. “We’re sorry, very sorry, but we’re here now—and we have a lovely gift for you.”

She had wrapped the package beautifully—violet ribbons on pale gray paper. Kati, slightly mollified, unwrapped it, and her face changed immediately from nervous anxiety to gratified pleasure. “It’s beautiful, Malie! A fan—real ivory! It is real ivory, isn’t it?”

“Mama brought it back from Vienna especially for you.”

Kati gazed at the fan, and then the mention of their mama made her ask, “Where is Aunt Marta?”

“Playing cards,” said Eva airily. She too leaned forward and kissed poor Cousin Kati. “Happy birthday, Kati.”

Kati smelled of soap and attar of roses. The dress smelled the way new satin always does—fresh, smell, papery and dry. Eva wrinkled her nose and Amalia said quickly, “You look so pretty in that dress, Kati. The dress is most becoming.”

“Do you really think so?”

Kati’s need for reassurance was genuine—not just a demand for a compliment as Eva’s had often been—and Eva, who could be kind enough on the rare occasions when she stopped to think about other people’s feelings, added quickly, “Oh, yes. You look very pretty.”

It wasn’t true. Kati—poor Cousin Kati—had never looked pretty in her life. If the Ferenc girls were known as the loveliest in the town, then Kati could claim the distinction of being the plainest. She had a large shapeless face and a large shapeless nose that overshadowed everything else. Her hair and eyes were nondescript, her teeth badly spaced and irregularly formed. All this could have been overcome if she had only had some style of carriage and

manner, but Kati had nothing, nothing at all, to redeem her drawbacks. She was small of stature, diffident in speech, and completely lacking in presence of any kind. Amalia had once overheard Mama saying to Papa in her thoughtless Bogozy way, “I find it quite impossible to understand why your sister had such an incredibly ugly child. Gizi was a very pretty girl, and Alfred was considered handsome in his time, but poor Kati! It’s as well that she’s the richest girl in the town, for certainly she’s the plainest.” Papa had been very angry and hadn’t spoken to Mama for two days, but even Zsigmond Ferenc, when he looked at his own daughters and then at Kati, was forced to notice the difference.

Amalia, in addition to feeling sorry for Kati, also rather liked her. Kati was completely without envy, and she never once referred to the fortune awaiting her on her parents’ death. She should—and could—have been extremely jealous of her two beautiful cousins who completely obliterated her at every gathering, even her own. But Kati’s delight on meeting Amalia and Eva at a ball or supper was always genuine and seemed at times to be tempered with relief, as though in the company of the Ferenc sisters she need not even try to be what she was not.

“Is Felix here, Felix Kaldy?” Eva asked, and Kati for some unaccountable reason flushed.

“Of course. Both Felix and his brother, Felix and Adam, both here....”

Her voice trailed away as Eva removed her wrap and Kati saw the extent to which Eva had goaded the dressmaker in the matter of the neckline.

“Oh...” she faltered. “Oh, Eva!”

Eva had not forgotten Amalia’s disapproval and was instantly defensive. “Oh, Eva, what she asked aggressively.

Kati blinked. “How... how *moderne* you look!” she answered with unfeigned admiration.

Eva was pleased. “I designed the entire dress myself,” she said complacently. “Even the flounce and rose was placed at my instruction!”

Kati stared, worshipping, adoring, but without envy. As though obeying a silent word of command the three girls turned and stared into the mirror. Kati’s ugliness was emphasized because her dress, like Eva’s, was white. Eva, with her tiny but curved, provocative figure and her thick mass of black curls piled high on her head, made Kati look like a peasant woman dressed up in her mistress’s clothes. Hastily Amalia turned away from the mirror. “I think we all look very nice,” she said firmly. “And if we don’t go in soon there won’t be any partners left for us.” With a final flutter, a plucking of skirts and a smoothing of hair, they moved toward the door, two white dresses and one of pale rose, drawn by the pulsing, sentimental strains of a gypsy orchestra.

Uncle Alfred had done his best for Kati. After considerable pressure from his wife and with only a little protest he had consented to the outlay of a sum of money that would provide his ugly daughter with a party more suited to the aristocracy than to a middle-class landowner (albeit he was related to the minor nobility). His wife had explained the situation to him patiently and repetitively, and he had been forced to concede that as he was the richest man in the town, and as Kati was his only child, it behoved him to launch her in a style that ensured a reasonable chance of her securing a husband. His wife, he considered, fussed too much about Kati. There had been dancing lessons, deportment lessons, painting lessons (the only item in an expensive education for which poor Kati had shown any aptitude), visits to Budapest dentists, hairdressers, and beauticians, visits to spas renowned for their effect on

the complexion, expensive dresses from Vienna, and at the end Kati had emerged the same shapeless lump as when she began. It seemed to provoke in his wife a frustrated, impotent rage, and he could only attribute it to the fact that poor Gizi felt guilty because she had borne him only the one child and that child a daughter. The fact that he had no son did not bother him at all, any more than the fact that Kati was so plain. Uncle Alfred was very happy with his lot. He had a smart, efficient wife who managed his houses, his land, and his factories with far more perspicacity than he could ever have aspired to. He had his friends, his café circles of mild intellectuals, his penchant for artistic liberalism, and the money to indulge himself in these same stylish hobbies. He was not burning with any dynastic desire to carry on his particular branch of the family, and by and large he was contented as long as he was left alone and not bothered too much.

So, for the sake of peace, he paid uncomplainingly for Kati's party (two lots of musicians and specially printed dance cards!) and, on the orders of his wife, saw that some of the young officers from the garrison were commanded to attend. He stood at the top of the rather gloomy staircase and smiled a greeting at several little girls who all seemed to be dressed in white, at several matrons whom, no doubt, the girls in white would one day resemble, and at a variety of young officers and sons of the town's gentry and middle-class families. He danced his few duty dances with amiable sufferance and then, feeling his obligations as a father finished, he rounded up his cronies (whom he had had the foresight to invite) and headed for the library, his cigars, and several bottles of good Hungarian brandy. There he prepared to enjoy himself in a flow of rhetoric. There was much to be discussed: politics, land reform (he would have been horrified if his views had ever been translated into practice but it was very pleasant to shock his friends with liberal ideas), the relationship between Prussia—Germany, as she must now be called—and the invincible empire of Austria-Hungary, the position of the Jews in Hungary (this was a delicate subject for Alfred's friends as they had to remember that Alfred's wife, although now a Christian, was Jewish by birth), and a whole range of important social and economic questions that became more and more easy to cope with as the intake of brandy progressed. A Magyar servant moved silently round the room filling glasses and sliding logs into the stove whenever he could manage to get past Alfred who was conducting his forum from just in front of the source of heat.

"Consider the minorities," he declaimed, waving his glass in the air. "Consider what would happen if a war were to come. Just consider, I beg you, consider."

The company considered. They were mostly of their host's age or older. There was the judge, the editor of the local newspaper, one or two middle-ranking officers from the garrison, the owner of the local ironworks, and, on the far side of the room, standing stiff and uncomfortable, a young officer in the dress uniform of the hussars. The oldest of the men was General Matthias, who had been pensioned from the army and found time lay heavy. He enjoyed the air of masculine camaraderie found at Alfred's house, even though he was frequently shocked and irritated by Alfred's views. Now he held his glass up to be refilled and said, in answer to Alfred's dramatic question, "Well, my dear Alfred, and what would happen?"

"What would happen, General, is that the minorities—the Slovaks, the Serbs, the Romanians—would rise up like serpents within our frontiers and destroy us!"

"Nonsense."

Secretly Alfred thought it was nonsense too, but it was great fun to hold a differ-

opinion from everyone else.

“I tell you,” he went on, “if war comes—as well it could if Serbia decides to test her strength again and Russia backs her—when it comes, what guarantee have we that we can control the minorities? What would happen if they united and rose within our sacred frontiers to take arms against us?”

General Matthias, who was over seventy and remembered the Prussian wars, roused himself. “What would happen, my dear Alfred, is that the King and Emperor would crush the peasants,” he said firmly. “We’ve seen revolts before and may do so again, though I doubt it. The Serbs and Bosnians and Romanians—pah!—they are like unruly children. They should be kept disciplined; then they will be happy and we shall be safe. What would you have us do? Give the minorities equal rights as citizens of the Empire? Allow them to govern themselves? Nonsense!”

The judge had been gently dozing but General Matthias’s voice woke him and he mumbled an enthusiastic, “I agree, General, I quite agree!” and drank another glass of brandy.

“But if there *was* a war,” insisted Alfred rather tediously. “Let us suppose we were fighting the Russians to the east and the Italians to the west. Have you thought, has anyone thought what a life blow it could be if the minorities rose against us?”

“There won’t be a war,” replied the old gentleman testily. “Trouble with you, Alfred, is that you’ve been influenced by Vazsonyi, or even Karolyi and all that bunch of hotheads. You see trouble where no trouble is. The Empire is at peace, and the King and Emperor controls the peace. While he lives nothing can happen to us.”

There was a slow, complacent rumbling throughout the library. It came from warmth, good brandy, and the knowledge that the dual monarchy was safe and omnipotent. Everyone, even the revolutionary Alfred, suddenly felt happy because God was in his heaven and Franz Josef was on the throne. The Empire was safe. The friends in the library—all old friends—were bonded in one of those swift moments of intimacy that comes with familiarity and affection. The air in the room was somnolent and everyone was ready to drift into a pleasant coma-like doze.

“But Franz Josef is an old, old man! Very soon he will die, and then what will happen to the Empire?”

It was as though someone had opened a window and let in a cold draught. The voice was loud, aggressive, and young, and it caused offense. If Alfred had made the same remark it would have been dramatic, argumentative, and meaningless, but the young hussar officer, who had hitherto remained silent on the far side of the room, spoke with the contemptuous authority of the very young for the old and unimaginative. Every man in the room turned to stare at him—cold, disapproving stares. Until now the conversation had been a friendly, animated discussion between gentlemen, not a bellowing of rude and unpleasant facts.

He came forward into the circle of warmth round the stove, flushing a little and trying to lower his voice. “The King and Emperor is an old man... and he is running an old-fashioned army. And Cousin Alfred is quite right. There could be a war very soon.”

It was all very well for Alfred to talk about an impending war. Everyone knew Alfred; he talked nonsense and they all enjoyed it. What they did not enjoy was this brash, strong, healthy young man with his blunt voice jarring the comfortable atmosphere of the library.

The general stirred irritably in his chair. “So! There is to be a war?”

The young man bowed. “Yes, General. I’ve been to Berlin and I’ve seen the Kaiser’s armies

I know what they can do and how eager they are to do it. It isn't only the Serbs and the Russians; the Prussians are ready for a war too."

"You've been to Berlin—huh!—and now you know everything. You know everything, and don't even know your name. I don't like young officers speaking with familiarity when they haven't even bothered to introduce themselves."

Everyone laughed a little. The young man flushed, then snapped his heels together and bowed. "Lieutenant Vilaghy, Karoly Vilaghy," he said, standing stiffly to attention.

The general stared so hard that finally Alfred said apologetically, "A distant cousin, General. On my mother's side."

"Ha!" The old man moved his legs. They ached a little, and he was suddenly resentful because he could no longer ride or dance or even stand for any length of time without the old lance wound in his thigh causing considerable pain. Lieutenant Karoly Vilaghy was large and upright, and his legs, in smooth, tight-fitting dress trousers, looked strong and tireless.

"Well, Vilaghy, when I was a young officer we didn't speak to senior staff in that way until we had been given permission—not even when the senior officer was retired and in the house of a friend—*especially* if he was retired and in the house of a friend!"

The lieutenant, standing stiffly to attention, was white-faced. Alfred, through his embarrassment at the scene that had fermented out of nothing, felt faintly sorry for him.

"Your pardon, sir," Vilaghy said, staring straight ahead. "I had not intended to offend."

The other occupants of the room suddenly found it quite amusing. Their annoyance vanished. Old Matthias was only baiting the boy, teaching him his manners and not meaning any harm.

"What were you doing in Berlin?" asked the general, sensing the audience with him and feeling a little better. "Spending your pay on baccarat and ballet girls?" He glanced round to see if everyone appreciated his wit.

"I was viewing the modernization of the German army, sir."

"Ah, yes. And what great conclusions did you come to as a result of this... scientific survey?" He stretched his legs out and relaxed as he heard the titters around him. It was years since he had given a junior officer a good dressing-down—not that this gentle goading was really a dressing-down; my God, they should have heard him in the old days!

The young man opened and shut his mouth several times like a gold-fish, and the drunken giggles and guffaws grew louder. Suddenly the young hussar's temper snapped. Furious and uncontrolled, his voice cut across the laughter of the room.

"I came to many conclusions, sir. One, that the monarchy's army is hopelessly outdated and ill-equipped. Two, that it is run by old men whose minds have calcified beyond any hope of adaptation. I saw that horse regiments are going to be obliterated in a few moments by machine-guns and barbed wire." His voice was rising, and he seemed unaware of the shocked silence in the room. "You are quite right, sir, in thinking that most of my comrades spend their time playing baccarat and chasing ballet girls—pastimes that scarcely prepare an officer for highly mechanized warfare. We need men with brains, officers with keen minds, mechanical training, scientific ability. The King's army has little to lead it but useless old men and irresponsible rakes!"

The general's mouth had dropped open. There was a quick, frightened hiss of indrawn breath from someone and a nervous giggle from Alfred. Then the general's glass shattered against the porcelain stove.

“Why, you—you impertinent clown! I’ll have you court-martialled!” he spluttered, fighting through the brandy for words. “I’m not without influence still. You think I’m old and useless. You’ll learn. You’ll learn what an old general—like the old Emperor and his old armies—can do with a subordinate officer. My God! When I think what I’d do to you if you were one of my lieutenants! You’ll hear of this again, young man, don’t think you won’t! Causing dissension and rebellion in what used to be an honourable regiment! My God!” He tried to rise, red-faced and apoplectic, but his stick slipped on the rug and he lurched uselessly back into the chair.

Alfred was frantically pushing the young man towards the door. He was mortified at the way his mildly provocative criticism had accelerated into a scene. “I think you had better go,” he whispered noisily. “Return later and apologize. Remember you are a guest in my house. I am trying to remember that you are a kinsman of mine. I have made allowances for your youth. The general has not.”

Karoly Vilaghy clicked his heels again, but before he could bow he found himself pushed unceremoniously outside the door. He stood stiffly to attention, fighting his own rage and frustration. He would have liked to have gone straight back to barracks, cursing them all, but a tiny cautionary voice warned him it would be highly impolitic to leave without apologizing to the pompous old man, who was living testimony to the uselessness of the Imperial army—a typical example of those who had brought the Empire to where it teetered at the moment—top-heavy structure of tradition, courage (he did not dispute that), formality, and an absolute and abysmal ignorance of what modern war would entail.

He was also miserably aware of the fact that he had abused the hospitality of Cousin Alfred and his wife.

His frustration and fury was the result of humiliation upon humiliation. In Vienna he was not taken seriously because he was Hungarian and because his family only just scraped into the class known as gentry. In Berlin he had not been taken seriously either because, in the war-conscious juggernaut land, it was known that Franz Josef would have to follow where the Kaiser led. He had returned from Berlin aware of what must be done to the army, keen to put forward suggestions—why had he been sent if not to put forward suggestions?—and again he had been laughed at. “God! Listen to Vilaghy! What impertinence from a fellow who dares not even gamble in case he loses!”

When he had received a new posting to the town where Alfred lived he had eagerly accepted his kinsman’s hospitality. But even here he was aware of his position as poor relation. It was known full well in the family that his father had mortgaged the estate in order to buy his commission. And it was also known that the Vilaghy family—at home—lived approximately the same standard as landed peasants. His mother had only one servant, and his sister hadn’t had a new gown for three years. They ate meat only once a week, and there were rats in the dining-hall. With resentment he had seen how Cousin Alfred lived. Alfred, with a good pedigree and aristocratic connections (he claimed an obscure kinship with the Pulszkys which could or could not be true), had lowered his standards and married Gizek Ferenc, Jewish, beautiful, rich, and clever—so clever that under her guidance Alfred had trebled his fortune, enlarged his estates, and made some brilliant international investments. Karoly, while grateful for the invitations to his cousin’s house, was also aware that they were given in a spirit of pity and compassion for his poverty.

He stood, his back against the door, and listened to the music coming from the drawing

room. He tried to estimate how much Kati's party had cost: enough to keep his mother, father, and sister in comfort for a year. He noted how all the lights—electric! Alfred had been the first man in the county to have his house wired with electricity—were left burning. That alone would have given his sister a small dowry. He tried hard to swallow his resentment and bitterness. He was intelligent enough to know that such emotions could cause unhappiness only to himself. When one has neither money nor position, he reflected wryly, one's only hope of success is to be a jolly fellow with a good spirit.

He wondered how long he should wait before returning and apologizing. It would have to be done, and done well. It had been a mistake to join the party in the library but he had considered it the lesser of two evils, feeling he would be even more out of place in the ballroom.

In a spirit of self-punishment he moved towards the music. He had not yet invited Kati to dance. Perhaps he should. Even at her own party it was doubtful if she would be overwhelmed with partners. He didn't dance very well but he imagined Kati would be grateful for anything. He had met her only a few times but her diffidence, ugliness, and lack of confidence had given him a strong fellow feeling towards her. He straightened his jacket and walked—hating himself—into the drawing-room.

She was dancing. Kati's mother, determined that her daughter's party should be her daughter's party, had indefatigably rounded up a team of young men who had filled Kati's card before the dancing had even begun. There was no other girl in the room he would have dared to ask to dance. There was no other girl he even knew. He hunched miserably just inside the door. No one appeared to notice he was there. Am I so insignificant? he thought bitterly. In a group of provincial girls and garrison officers, am I still a nonentity?

He folded his arms and leaned against the wall, hoping to give the impression that he was loftily comparing the charms of the various girls, but the pose was wasted as still no one looked at him. Gradually his loneliness began to make him dislike everyone in the room. He stared straight ahead, seeing nothing, seeing everything, and finally through his misery he became aware of a girl who was not dancing, a tall, quiet girl in a pink dress, and it wasn't her appearance or style that made him notice her, or even that she was one of the Ferenc sisters for he did not know of the Ferenc sisters. He noticed her because she was hiding pastries in her table-napkin. It arrested his attention at once. It was the kind of thing he had often thought of doing himself: filling a hamper with the venison and pike and salmon that were left from the party and sending it home to his mother.

Fascinated he watched her careful selection: cherry strudel, chocolate-covered *rigo jansok*, caviar with egg, rolled ham, mocha cake, paprika salad... paprika salad? His stomach turned suddenly. She looked such a tranquil and fastidious girl it was hard to believe that she, or someone at home, needed the food that badly. She looked up, and when she saw his gaze a flush crept from the creamy skin of her shoulders and suffused her face, and then, completely without embarrassment, she smiled at him, a warm, friendly smile that hit him somewhere in the small of the back and spread round his chest with a suffocating sensation.

The smile faded, then returned. He thought he had never seen such gentleness, such compassion in a woman's face before. He noted much else about her, that she was tall and gracefully built, that her hair was brown, her eyes hazel, but the only thing that really mattered was the smile.

He heard someone behind him, felt a touch on his arm, and at the same time he saw the

smile disappear and the girl turn away, hiding the table-napkin with her fan. Cousin Alfred's voice penetrated his senses. "The general intends leaving very soon, Karoly. I think you had best come and make your apologies now."

He followed Alfred from the ballroom. At the door he turned back and saw the rose-coloured dress disappearing at the other end of the room—presumably going to hide the table-napkin.

"Karoly, my boy," Cousin Alfred was saying, "I know things are difficult for you and I know the general can be old-fashioned and irritating. We would all like to see changes in the country, none more so than I!" Now that the general had been restored to good humour with the help of several glasses of brandy, Alfred felt he could resume his stance of a liberal reformer. "But I know your circumstances. Without some influence in the right quarters it will be practically impossible for you to make any advancement. The general is old and retired, but it would be most unwise to upset him. So now"—he patted Karoly's arm in a not unkind gesture—"go and make your peace. He is an old man and not impervious to flattery."

The constriction in Karoly's chest had given way to swelling excitement. She was beautiful! The girl was beautiful, and she had smiled at him the way a woman smiles when she wants to attract a man. It was a smile that said, *You are the only man in the room as far as I am concerned*. How soon could he find out who she was? Cousin Alfred. He would know.

"Cousin Alfred—"

"Hurry now, my boy. Don't keep the general waiting."

The general... yes. He knocked on the door of the library and entered. The old man was sitting, legs sprawling, with his back to the stove.

"Sir! I wish to apologize for my behavior. My remarks were impertinent and unwarranted. I can only excuse myself by pleading too much devotion to the Monarchy. My opinions were possibly misguided, but my loyalty was never for one moment in doubt!"

He was amazed at himself. The honeyed words slid from his tongue with a practiced ease he had no idea he possessed. And the general seemed suddenly pathetic; he was old and infirm and it was unlikely that any girl would ever smile at him except in pity. He noticed the decorations on the uniform, the stick resting by the chair, and the leg stuck out at an awkward angle as though in pain. He was aware of shame that he had injured the pride of a sad old man whom even the army couldn't use any more.

"I'm sure, sir, that as a young officer you often led your fellows in enthusiastic and erroneous schemes. If you had not been a high-spirited young man with intelligence and new ideas, you would hardly have risen in the service of Franz Josef."

"Fool!" said the general, but without rancour.

He screwed up his eyes and stared hard at the straight young figure before him. The lieutenant made his heart twist; he was tall, and he had strong, aristocratic features beneath thick blond hair.

"I had some spirit when I was young," he said slowly. "It was good in those days. No one could touch us. We fought well, like men, not engineers. A man on a horse could be a hero in those days..." His voice trailed away and he stared at Karoly. "Not everyone would stand up to an old warhorse like me. They're either too afraid—the spineless ones are afraid—or they have already discarded me; they count me as dead and don't bother to talk to me at all."

"That is their loss, sir." He said it to charm and found it was true. The general reached for his stick and the gesture reminded Karoly of the way the old men, the peasants, moved on the

estate at home. It makes no difference in the end, he thought. Whether you are a general or a carter, the day comes when you are just an old man.

“There’s no harm in him, Alfred,” the general said suddenly. “He’s young, that’s all. We’ve all suffered from youth, haven’t we?” He chuckled slightly and then grimaced as he tried to stand. “Come now, Vilaghy. Help me out of this chair and into my coach. I’ll pay my respects to the ladies, and then I’ll go home and sleep Alfred’s brandy away.”

Karoly suppressed the surge of impatience rising in him. He knew how long it would take to get the old boy into his cape, make his farewells, and see him in his coach. It was late and he wanted to hurry back to the drawing-room and find the girl in the pink dress. But he was a soldier and knew what was expected of him. He swallowed and held his arm towards the general.

“A privilege, sir.”

As the evening progressed, Eva completely forgot that it was Cousin Kati’s party. It became *her* party: the lights in the trees, the gypsy in the courtyard, the guests, the supper, the dancing, all were in honour of her, Eva Ferenc, and she was the first lady of the evening, the dazzling pivot around which everything and everyone was revolving.

There had been the quarrel with Aunt Gizi—well, not quarrel, exactly, but slight tussle of personalities. Eva didn’t like her Aunt Gizi very much; she felt that her father’s sister was too clever and she also had the uncomfortable feeling on occasions that Gizi could tell exactly what Eva was plotting. Eva knew how to handle her papa, but when Gizi was there she couldn’t do it at all. There had been the time when she was trying to persuade Papa to take them to Budapest on his next business trip. Eva had coaxed and caressed and wheedled, and Papa had been on the point of giving in when Aunt Gizi had said, “Really, Zsigmond! You don’t allow that child to do exactly what she likes with you. I don’t wonder the Bogozys laugh at you behind your back. This entire household is governed by the whim of a girl not out of the schoolroom.” And Papa had stood up, pushing Eva from his lap and saying angrily, “I’ve told you, Eva. You’re not going to Budapest, and I wish to hear no more of it.”

This evening Aunt Gizi had looked at Eva’s dress and her lips had tightened into a thin, angry line. She had known something like this would happen. All the efforts required to make Kati’s party something out of the ordinary, something different and special so that everyone who came would feel that Kati too was different and special—all the planning and thought—were brought to nothing by her brother’s wretched younger daughter. She wished—oh, how she wished!—that she didn’t have to ask her two nieces to every function. But family protocol set down firm rules about who came and who did not. And even without family duty there was always Kati, who insisted that her cousins were present at everything to which she was invited. Eva, standing defiant before her aunt in the drawing-room, her small, exquisite, apple-shaped breasts rising exposed from the folds of tulle, was quite obviously going to steal the evening. Gizi could have screamed.

“Go and borrow a scarf from your mama at once, child,” she snapped. “I can only believe she hasn’t seen that dress without a wrap. I think even Marta Bogozy will insist that you cover yourself.”

“Mama isn’t here,” Eva said defiantly, twisting slightly on one toe in time to the music.

“What do you mean, isn’t here?”

“She’s playing cards. She sent her love and said she is sorry she confused the dates.”

“You mean you and Malie have come here, unchaperoned, like—like a couple of show girls?”

Eva tilted her head back and glared at her aunt. “We’re Bogozys,” she said haughtily. “The Bogozys can do all kinds of things the bourgeoisie can’t do.”

She thought for a moment she had gone too far. She saw Aunt Gizi open her hand and she had the horrifying notion that she was about to be slapped in public like a disobedient child. Then Gizi had clenched her fist and walked away.

“I’ve beaten Aunt Gizi!” she sang to herself. “For the first time in my whole life I’ve beaten Aunt Gizi. I can do anything I want tonight, anything at all!”

As Aunt Gizi walked away, Eva was instantly surrounded by all the young men who were not already performing their duty dances. There were pleas and cries for the csardas, the quadrille, the cotillion, and above all for the supper dance. Eva prinked and smiled, tilted her head, gazed demurely but provocatively from under her long lashes, and all the time noted that Felix Kaldy was dancing with a girl in a blue dress. The girl wasn’t very pretty and Felix looked bored: bored, but oh, how handsome! He was slim, wide-shouldered, and his soft dark hair fell in neatly groomed waves around his well-shaped head. Even his hands (for Eva noticed every tiny detail about Felix Kaldy) were beautiful, with long tapering fingers and immaculately groomed nails. As he passed her she lifted her hand in languid salutation and at the same time laughed vivaciously at one of the young men near her. Felix smiled and bowed his head, and the smile made her throw caution and good manners to the winds. Brimming with the confidence that the quarrel with Aunt Gizi had given her and encouraged by her adoring circle of suitors, she tilted back her head and winked—naughtily, vulgarly—straight at Felix.

He was so startled he missed a step. His partner frowned, and as they passed on Eva had the satisfaction of seeing the back of his neck turn pink. She didn’t feel one bit ashamed of the wink. She knew she had made an impression and as soon as the dance was over Felix, having delivered the plain girl in blue back to her seat, came directly over to Eva, looking surprised but gratified.

She suddenly lost her confidence. Close up, Felix was even more breathtakingly beautiful—slim and graceful with silky hair, silky moustache, and the profile of a poet. She was outraged with herself for winking at this exquisite, spiritual young man. Colour rushed up from the low neck of her dress. Good heavens, Malie was quite right! The dress *was* far too low. It was vulgar and immodest and she wished, oh, how she wished, that she had done what Aunt Gizi had told her to do and draped a scarf over herself. She gazed at Felix in unconcealed admiration. Felix raised a silken eyebrow, smoothed his immaculate shirt-front, and smiled again.

“Oh, Felix! You look so elegant!”

He was pleased. He looked at Eva, at the young men clustering about her, at the room in general.

“I should like to take one of your dances,” he said pleasantly, and was slightly disconcerted to find Eva’s card thrust into his hand before he had even finished speaking.

“I still have the supper dance,” she said hopefully. “I saved it.”

Felix waved his hand in the air. “I’m sorry, Eva. The supper dance is already taken.”

He was flattered to see Eva’s small face crumple with disappointment. He was by no means unaware of the effect he was creating; after all, this was one of the Ferenc girls. The

wasn't a young man in the room who wouldn't have relinquished every dance for the rest of the evening in return for taking Eva in to supper, and he, Felix Kaldy, had to refuse.

"Kati," he said, in answer to Eva's unspoken query. "Your Aunt Gizi suggested I should take Kati as it is her birthday."

Eva smiled her relief. "Oh!" she said. "That's all right then, if it's only poor Kati!"

It wasn't quite the reaction he had hoped for, but he was rewarded when he filled in three dances on her card and saw her face light up. It was all very, very gratifying.

"Adam will take you in to supper," he said graciously. "He will be delighted."

She didn't know what to do. If she couldn't have Felix, she would sooner pick one of the other gay young men clustering about her. Adam was solid and rather taciturn, not a bit like his handsome brother.

"Well," she began, but before she could formulate an excuse Adam was standing before her, affirming his wish to eat strudel and birthday cake with her. Felix handed him her card and she said a bleak "Thank you" and smiled thinly.

But it wasn't an evening when one could remain bleak for long. The early duty dances were always dull, but somehow this evening even those obligatory rounds were pleasurable. She was swept into a csardas, and then a mazurka, and then she waltzed with Felix, round and round, his arms holding her with great respect, his elegant form the envy of every girl in the room. She was incredibly happy. She could never remember being this happy before, not even when the fencing master in Vienna had presented her with a box of confectioneries in Mariahilferstrasse one day (she had had to eat the sweetmeats quickly between Mariahilferstrasse and the *Akademie* because she didn't want Malie to know). Now the passion for the fencing master seemed adolescent and callow, and she could not even remember what he looked like. Gazing up at Felix she reflected that she had *never* known a man as beautiful as he was. And Felix, seeing the glow and sparkle of her face, catching glimpses of her tulle skirt billowing out behind her, and noting the way the new electric light made her black hair gleam, was suddenly sorry when the dance was over. He went to find Kati to do his duty in the matter of the supper dance, and after Eva's dainty flattery, Kati seemed awkward and clumsy and, incidentally, not at all pleased to see him.

"Oh," she mumbled nervously. "Yes, of course. It's time, isn't it." He pulled her arm through his and was embarrassed when she stumbled and caught her heel in the hem of her dress. He had to wait for her to free it. Across the room he could see Eva talking to her brother. Adam was just staring back at her. Vaguely, Felix thought that Kati and Adam would make a good pair, two uncommunicative, charmless lumps.

Eva didn't see much of Malie, only glimpses of her whirling round. They waved and laughed at each other several times, but they were both so busy dancing, charming the young men, smiling, swaying, flirting, that it was enough to know the other was happy too.

She accepted several invitations for future engagements—coffee at the *patisserie* on the following morning, a theatre party, tea at the Franz-Josef—and all the time her heart was singing because Felix Kaldy, even when he was dancing with someone else, kept looking across the room at her, smiling, giving little nods of recognition and shared grimaces, although they were party to private jokes about the rest of the guests. When at last he came to claim her for the lancers she pouted prettily and put her right hand up for him to hold.

They swung, chasséd, formed squares, jigged up and down. The music swept them along out into the room with all the colours of the girls' skirts mingling, brushing against each

other like flower bells, the young men tall and straight in slim black evening suits or colourful dress uniforms, standing like pivots for the girls to swing round, strong arms holding waists, and the music swelling into a gaiety that filled the whole room. As it finished Felix picked her up by the waist and swung her round while applause—some for the musicians but some surely also for her and Felix—filled the air. She laughed and for one brief, breathless second leaned against Felix's shoulder.

"You dance so beautifully, Felix!"

He smiled. "It was most pleasant, Eva. Thank you." He began to escort her from the floor through an avenue of admiring young men—"Oh, Eva! You must dance with me!" and "Luck old Felix!"—and then as she reached her seat she saw Malie waiting, her wrap already round her shoulders and her purse clutched in her hand.

"Uncle Sandor's come," she said sadly.

"Oh, no!"

"We must go. He's sent a message in—twice."

"But the dancing hasn't finished!"

"I know. But we'll have to go. If Mama had come I suppose it would have been all right. We could have stayed as long as we liked. But as she isn't here we will have to go now."

They stared at one another. All the audacity of being *moderne* meant nothing now. If only Mama had come they could have stayed to the end. Eva trailed miserably after Amalia. At the door of the drawing-room she felt a touch on her arm and turned, hoping to see Felix.

"You dropped these, Eva," said Adam Kaldy, holding out a spray of artificial pink roses. "They fell from your dress when you were dancing."

Eva remembered who she was, a Ferenc girl. Even to dull old Adam Kaldy she was still a Ferenc girl. She smiled and dimpled. "Keep them," she said airily. "Keep them close to your heart!"

To her surprise Adam grinned, then bowed and clasped the crumpled cloth roses to his heart in a gesture of dramatic agony. She was astonished. She could never remember Adam being anything but wooden and humourless and she found his clowning slightly disconcerting.

"We have to leave now," she said.

Suddenly she realized that she had no idea when she and Felix would meet again. Unlike all the other young men he hadn't once suggested coffee or the theatre or a spring picnic (they were all the rage this season). Her heart plummeted. It had taken so long to arrive at this point and now she would have to wait until they chanced to meet again at some social function. She decided she couldn't possibly wait for an accidental meeting in the near future.

"Adam, we are having our friends for a supper party in ten days." She prayed that in ten days she could gain written permission from Papa in Budapest for a small formal party and give Mama enough time to organize it. "We will write, of course, but if you—and Felix—could come...."

Adam appeared to be genuinely disappointed. "We're going to the country on Sunday," he said.

"Surely not! You, yes; I know you stay up in the country all the year round. But not Felix! Felix wouldn't go to the country in March. Nobody goes to the country in March!"

Adam stared, startled by her vehemence. "It's the beet," he said feebly.

"Beet!"

He flushed at her contempt. "I'm trying a new crop, sugar beet. I've—we've invested quite a lot of money in it, and Mother says she wants Felix at home. He is supposed to know what is happening on his land, she says."

She couldn't speak, she was so plunged into despair again. Blindly she nodded good-bye to Adam and then turned away from him. Outside the drawing-room Kati, flushed, and Aunt Gizi, disapproving, were waiting to say good night. Uncle Alfred was prized from his friend and came out smelling of brandy and tobacco and looking rather hot. He kissed them and mumbled something that sounded like "pretty little things" before disappearing back into the smoke of the library. And then, suddenly very tired, they stumbled down the stairs to the bristling and bad-tempered Uncle Sandor.

It was bitterly cold outside. Karoly, helping the general into his coach, saw steam rising from the horses' nostrils and a thin frosting of ice on the top of the carriage. The lanterns on the trees were still glowing and colourful but there was a brittle look about them, as though icicles would hang from them if they were left there all night. The spring wind had dropped and now there was only the reminder that it was still possible to have frosts and even a late fall of snow. The general shivered at the change of temperature.

"Alfred keeps his library too hot," he grumbled.

It took a long time to bundle him—respectfully—up into the coach, and all the time Karoly was worrying that the girl in the pink dress might have vanished when he got back to the drawing-room. He was going straight to Cousin Alfred—or perhaps Kati would be better—and ask to be presented. It was too late to dance, but if only he knew her name he could call on her somehow arrange to be at a place where she was also.

"G'night," said the general from the carriage window. Karoly saluted, smiled, turned away—and was just in time to see the girl in pink climbing into a coach that appeared to be in the sole charge of a large and surly sergeant of hussars.

"Damn!" he said and hurried forward, only to have the door closed firmly in his face by the old coachman.

"No," rumbled Uncle Sandor. He glared at Karoly from beneath scowling black brows and then climbed onto the box and took the reins into his hands. The horses fidgeted, bored with waiting and anxious to be home out of the frosty air.

As the coach started to move, Karoly ran to the window and looked in. "Please!" he said, raising a hand as two astonished young faces turned towards him. "Please, your name...."

"Eva," giggled the dark little girl, even though he was staring directly at the other one. "Eva Ferenc."

There was a sudden violent lurch. Uncle Sandor had looked back and seen a young rakehell from the hussars talking to the young ladies who should have been home by now. He struck the horses sharply with the reins and was pleased to see the young officer thrown to one side as the coach jerked forward.

"Karoly Vilaghy!" shouted the lieutenant to the rapidly moving coach. Just as he had given up hope a head appeared out of the window and she smiled and waved at him. He had a brief glimpse of her face wrapped round with a pale gray hood—her face and the smile and a small hand covered in white silk—and then she was gone.

The gypsy violinist was hunched in the doorway, his face pinched and lined and his violin clamped beneath his arm so that he could hold his hands inside the front of his jacket. He was waiting hopefully, in case some of the young gentlemen wished to employ him for the

usual after-party pursuit of following the girls home and playing outside their window. When he saw Karoly, a young officer just ripe for falling in love, he removed his hands from his jacket, blew on his fingers, and hurried forward with a tired smile on his face.

“Perhaps the lieutenant would wish to follow the lady’s coach?” he asked, holding his violin up towards his face. “A gypsy love song for a beautiful young girl?”

Karoly hesitated. He had always scorned the contrived romanticism of his comrades in the regiment: the flowers sent the day following a ball, the hiring of musicians to play beneath windows while the suitor stood by looking gratified and foolish.

“The lady had to leave a little early?” said the gypsy persuasively. “She will be disappointed at leaving so soon. She would like to take the music with her?”

He drew his bow sharply across the strings and with an arpeggio of sound tried to entice the coins from Karoly’s pocket.

Karoly began to make rapid mental calculations. Even the few filler necessary for the gypsy would throw his hairbreadth economy into disruption, but at the moment it seemed far more important to follow her and tell her—in the traditional way—that he was bewitched. “How much—?” he began and then his voice was drowned by the clatter of feet coming down the stairs and turning into the courtyard. Six young men, two of them military, crowded round the gypsy. They were flushed, noisy, and aggressively male. “Can you ride a horse, gypsy? Come now, Adam, get the horses round before the coach has gone. Up you come, fellow. Give him a drink; he looks too cold to play well and, fellow, you must play well when you serenade the Ferenc sisters, the enchanting Ferenc sisters!”

The gypsy knew whose trade would be the more profitable. Six slightly drunken young men were likely to be far more generous than one sober, hesitant lieutenant. He took a long swallow of the brandy offered him and endeavoured to throw himself into the mood of the party.

They were nearly home when they heard the band of horsemen behind them. Eva hurried out of the window, screaming excitedly, trying to see who made up the party. Amalia began to pull her in, then became nearly as excited herself.

“Oh, Malie! The first time it’s happened to us! And they’re going to play. Truly, I can see the gypsy!”

“You shouldn’t, really you shouldn’t! Oh, but Eva, is the young officer there, the one who asked our name?”

Eva held tightly to the window frame. The coach was rocking violently because Uncle Sandor, in a fury, was going faster than he had any right to go. “I can’t see,” she wailed. “Uncle Sandor is lurching so much I can’t see! Malie! What are you doing?”

Malie, in a completely un-Malie-like way, had suddenly pulled Eva from the window and taken her place. She had tried to see from the other window but the curve of the road made it impossible and Eva’s hysterical account of who was there and who was not was suddenly more than she could bear. Screwing her eyes against the tide of cold air rushing along the side of the coach she counted horses, then tried to define faces.

“No, he’s not there,” she said quietly, the excitement draining rapidly away. “The young officer isn’t there. I suppose there’s no reason why he should be.”

Eva was pulling at her arm. “Is Felix there? Please! Tell me if Felix is there.”

“Felix is there.”

“Oh!” Eva fell back against the seat, her hands clasped in the clouds of her skirt.

“Adam too.”

“Oh, him.” Adam was forgotten as quickly as he had been mentioned. There was no other man in the world but Felix.

“And Uncle Sandor looks absolutely murderous,” finished Malie in tones of detached interest.

Uncle Sandor was indeed furious. The coach tilted into the courtyard at a dangerous angle, the door was flung open, the steps put down, and the girls were “assisted” out at a speed which nearly precipitated them onto the ground. As the door of the house opened to reveal an anxious Mama, Uncle Sandor gave a deep belch of relief. The granddaughters of the Bogozys were his responsibility no more.

Eva flung herself onto her mother in a paroxysm of ecstasy.

“Oh, Mama! It’s been wonderful, just wonderful! And Felix Kaldy is following us with a violinist! The first time, Mama! Not just him, five or six of them, but he thought of it I’m sure! And we danced every dance and we were the prettiest girls there and Aunt Gizi was so cross that we went alone but I told her we were Bogozys and—why, Mama, what is it? Why have you been crying?”

It took Eva some time to notice, through her own excitement, the reactions of other people. Mama’s face, through the blur of an evening composed of Felix Kaldy and a fight with Aunt Gizi and a chase through the streets with six young men on horseback, was suddenly observed to be pale and tearstained. Eva was at once stricken with guilty grief.

“Whatever has happened, Mama?”

Mama sniffed. “Papa has returned. He came... specially... so that he could follow us to Kati’s party. He was very angry with me for letting you go alone. Very angry indeed!”

“Oh, dear.” Malie and Eva looked guilty. Mama, who was gay and feckless like all her family, was terrified of Papa when he was angry. This evening he had called her “indolent and irresponsible and completely lacking in family commitment.”

“He said he couldn’t think what his sister would say when she saw you and Amalia arriving without me. He said I was to call on Gizi tomorrow and explain and apologize. And he said he hoped you had both behaved like young ladies, in spite of going without me.”

Amalia patted her mother comfortingly on the shoulder. “Of course we did, Mama. Would we behave any other way?”

Eva stared at the ground. An uneasy recollection of her behaviour was filtering back to her. What would Aunt Gizi tell Papa about the quarrel, and the low neckline on her dress? And then there was the wink. Who knows how many people had seen her wink at Felix Kaldy?

“Was he *very* angry?” she asked nervously.

Mama nodded. “He said you are both to accompany me to Gizi and Alfred’s tomorrow.”

“Oh, dear.” Eva slumped white-faced against the stair-rail and then, as she heard a stirring outside the door and the first scrapings of a bow across strings, she became erect once more, eyes shining, head thrown back, eager to finish out the night’s adventures. She hugged Mama effusively. “Don’t worry, darling Mama. I’m sure Papa won’t be so cross in the morning, and anyway I’ll tell him we’re sorry and we’ll never do it again and I’m *sure* it will be all right and... oh, Malie, we *must* go upstairs at once and see them outside the window.”

She didn’t wait any longer. She gave her mother a final embrace and then held her skirts up and scampered up the stairs. She tried to be quiet—because of Papa—but it was so difficult to be controlled when such marvellous things were happening. In the bedroom she flung her

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