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BOOK I.

Just then there was commotion outside, and throwing open the double doors, the guard announced: "Her Majesty, the Empress!"

"I've come," she said gently, "because the Emperor writes to me from the seat of war how useful and acceptable is your work." She examined the rolls of linen. "How beautifully done it is," she exclaimed. "It is a fine patriotic undertaking, and the poor soldiers—"

"I lost the rest of the remark as she passed into another room, so visibly content with what she was seeing. "Poor soldiers!" These words sounded strangely pathetic in my ears. Yes, poor indeed, and the more comforts we sent them the better. But the suggestion that ran through my head was: "Why not keep them at home altogether? Why send these poor men into all this misery?"

But no, I must shut out the thought, for is war not a necessary thing? I found the only excuse for all this cruelty in that little word: "Must."

I went on my way and passed a book-store. Remembering that my map of the war region was worn to shreds, I stopped in to order one. A number of buyers were there, and when my turn came the proprietor asked: "A map of Italy, madam?"

"How did you guess it?" "No one asks for anything else, nowadays." While wrapping up my purchase, he said to a gentleman standing by: "It goes hard nowadays with writers and publishers of books. So long as war lasts no one is interested in intellectual matters. These are hard times for authors and booksellers."

"Yes, this is a great drain on the nation, and war is always followed by a decline in intellectual standard."

For the third time I thought: "And father, for the good of the country, would have the war last thirty years."

"So your business suffers?" I asked. "Not mine alone, madam. Except for the army providers, all tradesmen are suffering untold losses. Everything stands still in the factory, on the farm, everywhere men are without work, and without bread. Our securities are falling and gold rises in value, while all enterprise is blocked, and business is being bankrupted. In short, everywhere is misery, misery!"

"And there is my own father wishing—"

"I found myself thinking as I left the store.

My friend was at home. The Countess Lori Griesbach in more than one respect shared the same lot with me.

Her father was a general, and like me she had married an officer. Her husband as well as two brothers were in the service. But Lori's nature was very light-hearted. She had fully convinced herself that her dear ones were under the special protection of her patron saint, and she was confident that they would return. She received me with open arms.

"So glad to see you, dear; it is good of you to come. But you look worried. Any bad news?" "No, thank God, but the whole thing is so terrible to me."

"You mean the defeat? Oh, do not think about that, for the next news must be victory."

"Defeat or victory, war is horrible," I said. "How much better if there never were a war."

"Oh dear, what then would become of our glorious military profession?" "Then we should not need any."

"What a silly way for you to talk!" she said. "How stale life would be with nothing but civilians. I almost shudder at the thought, but fortunately, that would be impossible."

"Impossible?" I said. "But perhaps you are right, or it would have long ago been changed."

"What do you mean?" "I mean that armies would have long ago been disbanded. But no, one might as well expect to prevent earthquakes."

"I cannot understand how you can talk so. For I am rejoiced that my Louis has this splendid chance to distinguish himself. And for my brothers, too, it is a good thing, for promotions are so very slow in times of peace. Now they have all opportunities."

"Have you received any news recently?" I interrupted.

"Not for some time, but you know how very uncertain the post is. After an engagement they are too tired to write. But my mind is easy, for both Louis and my brothers wear the blessed amulets. Mamma put them round their necks herself!"

"Can you imagine two armies meeting, when every man wears an amulet? Tell me; if the bullets are flying here and there, can they all be deflected into the clouds?"

"I do not understand what you mean, dear Martha, and your faith is so lukewarm. Even your aunt complains about you."

"But why can't you answer me?" "Because you are jesting at what is sacred to me."

"Jesting? Not at all. I was simply suggesting a reasonable argument in things that are above us."

"You well know that it is a sin to argue and trust your own reason in things that are above you."

"Yes, my dear, I will be quiet. You are right. Logic and reason are dangerous. Reflection and research are of no use. All sorts of doubts torment me and I try to answer them, but find only pain. Were I to disbelieve in the necessity of war I could never forgive those who—"

"You mean Louis Napoleon? Oh, what an intriguer he is!"

"Whether he or another, but I must try to believe that men do not cause wars, that they break out of themselves like nervous fevers, and the flames of Vesuvius."

"What a state your mind is in! Let us be sensible. Listen to me. Soon both our husbands will come back captains. I shall have a jolly six weeks at a watering-place with mine. It will do us both good after this suspense. You need not think that I have not suffered at all. And it may yet be God's will that one of our dear ones shall meet a soldier's death—but what is more noble, more honorable, than death in battle for emperor and fatherland?"

"You are talking like the next best army proclamation."

"Yet it would be dreadful—poor mamma—should Karl or Gustav be lost. But let us not think of it. Yes, I shall go and refresh myself at some watering-place. I think I would prefer Carlsbad. I was there as a girl and had a glorious season."

"I, too, went to Marienbad, and there I made the acquaintance of my husband. But don't let us be sitting here idly. If you have linen at hand we can be making bandages. I just came from the Relief Corps."

We were interrupted, for the footman brought in a letter.

"From Gustav," cried Lori, joyfully. She read a few lines and, shrieking, fell about my neck.

"Lori, my poor dear, what is it? Your husband?"

"Oh God, oh God!" she exclaimed. "Read for yourself."

I took the letter up. I can recall the contents perfectly, for I afterwards copied it in my diary.

"Read aloud, for I could not finish." I read:—

"Dear Sister—Yesterday we had a severe encounter. There was a long list of dead and wounded. Prepare poor mother, tell her Karl is severely wounded, but I tell you the truth—the brave fellow died for his country."

I stopped to embrace dear Lori, and continued reading, choked with my tears.

"Your husband is safe, as well as I. Had the enemy's bullet only hit me instead! I envy Karl his heroic death. He fell at the beginning and never knew we were defeated. Oh, how bitter it all is, I saw his fall, for we were riding together. I sprang to lift him up, but one look told me he was dead. The ball must have hit the lungs or heart. His death was surely instant and quite painless. Many others suffered hours of agony and lay long in the heat of battle till death came. It was a bloody day. More than a thousand, friend and foe, were left on the field. Among the dead I found many dear faces, and with the rest, there is poor—here I had to turn the page—'poor Arno Dotzky.'"

I fell insensible to the floor.

CHAPTER VI

"It is all over now, Martha! Solferino is decisive. We have been beaten." With these words my father hurried to me one morning, as I was sitting under the linden trees in the garden.

I was back in the home of my childhood with my little Rudolf. Eight days after the great battle which left me a widow, I returned to live with my family in Gramitz, our country place in Lower Austria. Just as it had been before my marriage, I was surrounded by the loved ones—father, aunt, two growing sisters, and my little brother. Their kindness and sympathy touched my grief-stricken heart. My sorrow seemed to have consecrated me in their eyes and raised me above the ordinary level.

Next to the blood poured out by the soldiers on the altar of their country, the tears of the bereft mothers, wives, and children are considered the holiest libations poured on the same altar. What was almost a feeling of pride and heroic dignity took possession of me, for to have sacrificed a beloved husband in battle conferred upon me the equivalent of military merit which grew to be quite a comforting thought, and helped me to bear my sorrow. But then I was but one of many whose loved ones slept beneath the Italian sod.

No particulars were brought me of Arno's death, other than that he had been found dead, recognized, and buried. No doubt the baby and I were his last thought and consolation, and with his last breath he had groaned, "I have done my duty, more than my duty."

"Yes, we are beaten," sadly repeated my father as he sank on to the bench.

"So the victims were a needless sacrifice," I sighed.

"Indeed they are to be envied, for they know nothing of the disgrace which has come upon us. But we shall gather ourselves together soon, though they say that peace must now be concluded."

"May God grant it!" I interrupted. "Though it is too late for my poor Arno, yet thousands of others will be spared."

"You seem to think only of your own sorrow, and that of private individuals. This is Austria's affair."

"But is not Austria made up of individuals?"

"But, my dear child, a state and empire has a longer and more important existence than an individual. Men disappear, from generation to generation, but the state goes on and on; it grows in power, fame, and greatness, or it crumbles, sinks, and is lost. If it allows itself to be surpassed or swallowed by other states. Therefore, it is the highest duty of every individual to sacrifice, suffer, and even die, that the existence, the power, and welfare of the state be perpetuated and increased."

These impressive words remained in my thought, and I noted them in my diary. They were curiously like the sentences in my old school books, whose strong, clear convictions had been quite driven from my mind of late, especially since Arno's death, by the confusion, fear, and pity I had experienced. I once more hugged them to my heart, and found consolation and encouragement in the thought that my darling had been sacrificed in a great cause, and that, in giving up my husband, I had done my share in the service of my country.

Aunt Marie had a different source of consolation ready, however. "Stop your crying, my dear," she would say when she found me crushed anew with my grief. "Is it not selfish to mourn for him who is now so happy? From up among the saints he is even now looking down and blessing you. The years will pass quickly when you will join him there. For the heroes of battle heaven prepares a special place of rest. Happy are those who are called from this earth while performing a sacred duty. Next in glory to the Christian martyr comes the dying soldier."

"Then I am to rejoice that Arno—"

"No, not rejoice, that would be asking too much. You must bear your lot and resign yourself. Heaven sends this trial to purify and strengthen your faith."

"And in order that my heart be purified and my faith strengthened my poor Arno had to—"

"No, no, but how dare you question the hidden ways of Providence?"

The consolations which my aunt offered were rather confusing and distracting, but I allowed myself to accept the mystical tangle, and believe that my dear victim was now enjoying heaven as a reward for his agony of sacrifice, and that his memory would be glorified on earth with the halo of heroic martyrdom.

Just before our departure from Vienna the great mourning ceremony had been celebrated in the cathedral of St. Stefan, and I attended. The "De Profundis" was sung for all our warriors fallen and buried on foreign soil. A catafalque had been erected in the centre of the church, lighted with a hundred candles and hung with flags, arms, and military emblems. The grand pathetic requiem came from the choir and flooded the congregation mostly women clothed in black and weeping aloud. And not for her own alone, but for the same sad fate of all each woman wept—for all these poor brave brothers who had given up their sweet young lives for us, for their country, the honor of their nation!

And there in the background stood several regiments of living soldiers, listening to the ceremony—all waiting and ready to follow their fallen comrades without a murmur or fear. These clouds of incense, the swelling voice of the organ, the fervent petitions, the common woe poured out in tears and groans must surely have risen to a well-pleased heavenly ear, and the God of armies and battles must certainly shower down His blessing on those to whom this catafalque was raised.

These were the thoughts that came to me, and which I wrote in my journal when I described the mourning celebration.

Two weeks after the defeat of Solferino came the news of the peace of Villa Franca. My father gave himself no end of pains to explain to me how necessary for political reasons this peace had become. I assured him that it was very joyful news to me to know that there was an end to all this fighting and dying. But he continued at length to explain.

"You must not for one instant think," he said, "that even though in this peace we have made concessions, we have thereby sacrificed our dignity. We Austrians know perfectly what we are about. It is not the little check we got at Solferino which makes us give up the game. Far from it. We could easily have routed them with another army corps, and forced the enemy from Milan, but dear Mar ha, there are other things involved—great principles and objects. We do not cease to push the war further, lest these Sardinian robbers and their French hangman ally should push into other portions of Italy—Modena and Tuscany—where dynasties are in power which are related to our imperial family; nay, they might advance even against Rome itself, and endanger the Holy Father—the Venetians! By giving up Lombardy we rep Venetia, and can assure the Holy See and the southern Italian states of our support. Thus, my dear, you see, it is only for political reasons and for the sake of the balance of power in Europe—"

"Oh, yes, father, I see it." I broke in. "It is a pity that they could not have planned it all before Magenta!" I sighed bitterly, and, to change the subject, I pointed to a package of books which had just arrived from Vienna.

"See, father, the bookseller has sent us several things on approval. Among the rest is the English naturalist Darwin's 'The Origin of Species.' He recommends it as an epoch-making book in modern thought."

"He need not bother me with it," replied my father. "In such stirring times, who can be interested in such rubbish? How can a stupid book about plants and animals and their origin make an epoch of any impor-

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