

The Third One

by Henryk Sienkiewicz

Warsaw - 1889

I

The rent on the studio in which Swiatecki and I lived and painted was unpaid. First, because between the two of us we had exactly five rubles; and second, we had a true revulsion toward the paying of rent.

We painters are often called squanderers, but I would be the first to buy vodka rather than to waste the money by giving it to the landlord.

As for the landlord, he was not a bad man at heart, and we soon found a “cure” for him. When, usually in the morning, he came to collect, Swiatecki, who slept on a straw mattress spread on the floor and used, as a coverlet, a Turkish curtain, which doubled as a background for portraits, would sit up and cry out in an eerie voice.

“Good to see you sir, for I dreamed that you were dead!”

The landlord, who was superstitious and obviously afraid of death, would become extraordinarily confused. Swiatecki would then stretch out on the mattress, fold his hands across his chest and continue.

“I saw you just like this. You were wearing oversized gloves and patent leather shoes. In reality you were not unlike yourself.”

I would then add, “Sometimes these dreams don’t come true...”

I think it was the “sometimes” that threw the landlord into a state of panic. Finally, enraged, he would exit slamming the door. We would hear him going down the steps — four at a time. All the while he cursed all that the world holds sacred. Fortunately he was kind enough not to send for the sheriff.

True, we could not be dispossessed of much. He probably figured that the studio would be rented by artists anyway and he would get the same or worse.

Unfortunately, the keen edge of our “method” dulled with time. The landlord gradually became accustomed to the idea of death. Therefore, Swiatecki decided to do a series of three paintings: *Expiration*, *Interment*, and *Awaking from a Stupor*. In all three the central figure was to be our landlord.

Such grave subjects are Swiatecki’s specialty. He, according to his own admission, paints “stiffs.” Perhaps that is why no one wants to buy his paintings, even though he has talent. He sent two of his “stiffs” to the Paris Salon Exhibition. I sent my *Jews by the Vistula*, which was promptly rechristened *Jews by the Rivers of Babylon* in the official catalogue. We anxiously awaited the decision of the contest jury.

Swiatecki, of course, predicted that all would go in the worst possible way. He maintained that the jury was composed of idiots, and if they were not idiots, then I am an idiot, our paintings are idiotic, and awarding us any kind of prize would be the height of idiocy.

I cannot begin to describe how much of my blood that ape has fouled during the two years we had lived together.

Swiatecki’s entire ambition is to pass for a moral stiff. He also pretends to be a drunkard, something he isn’t. He downs two or three shots of vodka while looking about to check if we are watching him. If he is not sure he will elbow someone and looking him askew in the face ask, “Look how low I’ve fallen... eh?”

We tell him that he is a moron, and this upsets him greatly. Nothing puts him in a worse mood than disbelief in his moral downfall. By and by though, he is a stout fellow, ready to come through in a pinch.

Once we were lost in the mountains somewhere near Zell-am-See. Night had caught us and it was easy to break one’s neck in the dark.

He said to me, “Listen Wladek, you have more talent — it would be a shame to lose you. I’ll go first and if I fall, wait it out until dawn, then go and find your way.”

"You will not," I said. "I'll go first, my eyes are better!"

To this Swiatecki replied, "If I don't finish here, I'll wind up in the gutter... it's all the same."

We began to argue.

Meanwhile, it got darker than inside a cow's belly. At last we agreed to go and meet our fate together. Swiatecki picked up his bundle and went first.

We were walking along a ridge. At first it was fairly wide but then it started to narrow. As far as we could tell there were bottomless depths on either side. The path got narrower, fragments of rock began to slide out from under our feet...

"On all fours," said Swiatecki, "no other way."

In truth, there was no other way, so we proceeded forward like two primates.

Soon, however, even this was inadequate, as the width of the ridge got to be no greater than that of a horse's back. Swiatecki mounted it, and I after him. We moved by pushing hand over hand along the ridge all the while inflicting the most extraordinary damage to our clothes.

After a time I heard Swiatecki's voice.

"Wladek!"

"What?"

"This is it — the end!"

"Well?"

"Nothing, this must be the edge of a cliff!"

"Take a rock and throw it, we may be able to judge the depth!"

In the darkness I could hear him groping for a chunk of weathered rock. Then he spoke.

"Here goes! Listen."

We were all ears.

Silence.

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"A fine fix, it must be a couple hundred feet!"

"Throw again."

He found a larger fragment and heaved it.

No sound.

"What the devil, no bottom, or what?" cursed Swiatecki.

"We will have to wait until dawn, there is nothing else we can do."

So we sat. Swiatecki threw more rocks with no luck. An hour passed, then another. Then I heard Swiatecki's voice.

"Wladek, don't fall asleep... have you got a cigarette?"

It was discovered that while I did have cigarettes, we were both out of matches. Despair! By then it was probably one in the morning, if that.

A light drizzle began to come down. All around the darkness was impenetrable. I came to the conclusion that living in cities, among people, we have no real idea what silence is. The silence about us was so intense that my ears were ringing. I could almost hear the blood pounding in my veins — my heartbeat was like a drumbeat. At first I found the situation interesting.

Sitting at the edge of a cliff in the dead of night is not an adventure for common sots. Unfortunately, the cold started to get to me and, worse luck, Swiatecki started to philosophize.

"What is life? Life is filth! They say 'art', 'art.' To hell with it and me, It's all an aping of nature, and ugly too. Twice, I saw the Paris Salon. There were so many paintings the canvasses would suffice to make mattresses for all the Jews in the world. And for what? The worst kowtowing to the tastes of merchants and bourgeois. All calculated for quick sale and filling the belly. The very lack of art — nothing less. If there was such a thing as a muse of painting she probably would get struck with paralysis at such a sight."

Fortunately, art does not exist, only nature. But nature is filth anyway, better to end it all, once and for all. I'd do it if I had some vodka, but as I don't I'll live. I swore that I would not die sober."

I was used to Swiatecki's babbling, but under the circumstances it put me in a somber mood. Finally, he emptied himself and shut up. He threw a few more rocks, repeated "No sound" and then silence descended for three hours.

Hearing cawing and the flutter of wings, I thought that dawn would break soon. It was still dark, yet I was certain that hawks and eagles were beginning to circle above the chasm. The sounds tore the darkness above us. The voices were so numerous that I imagined entire legions of eagles flying above us. I was glad for it, as they signalled the coming day.

After a while, I saw my own hands leaning on the rock, then a silhouette of Swiatecki's shoulders against a lighter background. This background grew lighter by the minute. A pleasing silver-gray light began to reflect off the rock, then off Swiatecki's shoulders and fill the darkness just as if someone had poured a sliver fluid into the blackness. This fluid, in mixing became gray, then pearl. There was a certain rawness and dampness not only on the rock, but even the air felt moist.

Dawn broke moment by moment.

I observed the changes in coloration and tried to remember them, painting a little in my soul. Just then I was interrupted by Swiatecki's screams.

"Phooey! Idiots!"

Then his back disappeared from sight!

"Swiatecki," I hollered, "what are you doing?"

"Don't scream! Look!"

I looked over and what did I see? Here we were on a rock outcrop that descended into a pasture which was just two feet below. The thick moss covering the pasture deadened the sound of the rocks we threw. Across the level ground, in the distance, I could see a road. Above were crows which I mistook for eagles. All we had to do was to let our legs down and walk peacefully to our lodge.

Instead we sat on that outcrop, teeth chattering, the whole blessed night.

I do not know why now, while we were both awaiting the landlord's monthly visit, I had thought of this adventure which took place over a year and a half ago. It was so clear in my mind that it might have happened yesterday.

All this gave me a strange new hope. "Remember, Tony, when we thought we were sitting at the edge of a precipice, but it turned out to be a smooth road? It could be like that now. Here we are, poorer than a couple church mice, the landlord would like to throw us into the street, but this could change. Suddenly a door to fame and fortune could swing open and..."

Swiatecki was just then sitting on the edge of his mattress pulling on his boots. All the while he muttered how life is composed of putting shoes on in the morning and taking them off at night, and that only he has brains who has courage to hang himself. He, Swiatecki, has not done so yet only because he is a total idiot and a craven coward besides.

My outburst of optimism interrupted his ruminations. He lifted up his fish-like eyes and said, "You have a lot to be happy about. A few days ago Slusowski booted you out of his house and his daughter's heart. Today the landlord will kick you out of the studio."

Unfortunately, that was the truth.

Three days ago, I was the fiance of Kathy Slusowski. On Tuesday, yes just last Tuesday, I received the following letter from her father.

Dear Sir!

Our daughter, acceding to the persuasions of her parents has agreed to end a relationship which would mean nothing but unhappiness for her. She could always find shelter in her mother's arms and under her father's roof, but it was up to us, the parents to prevent such a finality. Not only your material position but your thoughtless character, which even with careful effort, you were not able to conceal, force our daughter to break off her relations with you. This, however, will not affect our kindly regard toward you.

With respect,

Heliodor Slusowski, Undersecretary of the Treasury

Thus sounded the letter.

I would more or less agree that my “financial position” could not provide a dog with shoes, but as to what that pathetic gorilla would want from my character, I truly can’t comprehend.

Kathy’s head recalls a silhouette from the romantic period, and it would be nice if she wore her hair that way. I even went as far as to ask her to change to that fashion, but it was all for naught, as she does not understand these things.

The coloration of her face is so warm and pleasant, as if painted on by Fortuni.

I loved her honestly and from the day I received Slusowski’s letter I behaved as if I had been poisoned. Finally, on the second day I did feel better. At last I decided — “If it’s not meant to be, it’s not.”

The thing that helped to ease the blow was thinking about the Salon exhibition and my *Jews*. I was sure that the painting was good. Swiatecki, of course, prophesied that it wouldn’t be permitted even in the foyer of the Salon.

I started painting it a year ago. This is the way it came about.

I was taking an evening stroll by the Vistula. I look, an apple vendor’s cart had turned over. The street urchins are fishing apples out of the water, while on the bank sits a Jewish family. They are in such despair that they are not even crying. Their hands are folded in an expression of grief. Their eyes are staring into the water as if transfixed. There is an old Jew, a beggar patriarch; an old Jewish woman; a young man, a colossal Maccabaen type; a young girl, freckled somewhat but with tremendous character of nose and lips; and two Jewish kids.

The sun is setting. The woods on the river have taken on a glow. Further down where the river has overflowed the banks there are red, ultramarine, steel, purple and violet tones playing on the water. The perspective is infinite — paradise! The blending of colors is so superb that the soul wants to scream with joy. All about is quiet, light, peaceful. Melancholy hangs over it all — one could just cry — and there in the midst is the group portraying such sorrow as if they had posed in studios from infancy.

Then and there it hit me. That is my painting.

Fortunately, I had my inseparable pad and charcoal with me, so I started to sketch. To the Jews I yelled, “Stay right there, don’t move. A ruble to each of you — until dusk.”

My Jews quickly caught on and froze into the ground. I kept sketching. The urchins came up from the water and started to shout vulgar insults at me — about painters in general. But I answered in their own tongue and immediately befriended them. They even stopped chucking wood chips at the Jews, as not to spoil my work.

After that the group’s humor improved remarkably. “Jews,” I shout, “be sad!” To which the old woman answered, “Kind sir, but why should we be sad if you promised us a ruble each? Let him be sad who has no income!”

I had to threaten not to pay them.

For two evenings I sketched the group. Later they posed in the studio. Let Swiatecki say what he will, the painting is good. It portrays the honest truth and a lot of nature. The faces might have been prettier, but they could not have been more real or had more character.

Remembering all this helped to soften the loss of Kathy. When Swiatecki recalled my broken engagement it seemed ages ago. By that time he was working on the other boot, so I lighted the samovar.

Old Mrs. Antoniowa dropped in with our morning rolls. Swiatecki has been trying to talk her into hanging herself for some time now. Finally we sat down to breakfast.

“What the hell are you so happy about?” asks Swiatecki.

“Oh, I don’t really know. Just wait, something unusual will happen to us!”

In the same moment we hear the sound of feet on the steps leading up to the studio.

“The landlord! Some surprise!” says Swiatecki.

In the same instant he gulps down his tea, which is so hot that it makes tears pop into his eyes. He then leaps out of the kitchen and attempts to hide behind a rack of costumes in the studio.

From his hiding place he gasps, "You talk to him, he likes you!"

"He's absolutely wild about you!" I answer dashing for the rack. "You talk to him."

Then the door opens and in comes... not the landlord, but the concierge of the house inhabited by the Slusowski family.

We fall out from among the costumes.

"I have a letter for you," he says.

I take it. Holy Moses! It's from Kathy! I tear into the envelope and read the contents.

I am quite sure of my parents' forgiveness. Come at once without regard for the early hour. We have just returned from taking the waters in the park. K.

I am not quite sure what the parents are going to forgive me for, exactly. Unfortunately, I have no time to think as my head is swimming from sheer amazement.

After a while, I hand the letter to Swiatecki and turn to the messenger.

"Friend, tell the lady I'm coming. Wait! I don't have change, but here is a three ruble note. Get change, keep one, and bring back the rest."

Speaking aside, I never saw him again. He knew, the little vermin, that I would not cause trouble in the Slusowski household and used his position shamelessly. Unfortunately, at the time I did not take notice of it.

"Well?" I ask Swiatecki.

"Nothing, every calf will find a butcher."

The hurry in which I dressed did not permit me to think of a fitting insult to hurl at Swiatecki.

II

A quarter of an hour later I ring the bell at the Slusowskis'.

Kathy opens the door herself. She is beautiful. With her is the warmth of dreams and in the folds of her blue dress, the freshness of the morning right from the park. Her hat, which she has removed, has ruffled her hair. Her face is smiling, her eyes are smiling, her moist lips are smiling. She is like the morning itself. I take her hand and kiss it.

She leans over and asks, "Who loves better?"

Then, taking my hand, she leads me before the parents. Old Slusowski bears the expression of a Roman who is sacrificing his only child *pro patria*. The mother is crying into her coffee, as they are seated at the breakfast table. At our appearance they rise.

Papa Slusowski decrees, "Reason and duty would have me say 'No!' but a parent's heart has laws of its own. If this is weakness, may God try me for it."

Here he lifts his gaze as if to answer should the heavenly tribunal decide to open the case. I have never seen anything so Roman except perhaps the salami and macaroni sold in the Italian quarter. The moment is so weighty that a hippopotamus would burst from emotion. This is further heightened when Mrs. Slusowski, with outstretched arms and tears in her eyes, proclaims, "My children! If the world is ever cruel to you, you may always find shelter here!... here!"

I'm no dummy! I'm not ever taking shelter there... there! If Kathy made me the same offer, that would be another thing. Even with all the theatrics I am impressed with their kindness, and my heart brims with gratitude.

I am so shaken that I begin consuming alarming quantities of coffee, so much so that old Slusowski begins to eye the supplies. Kathy just keeps on pouring, while I try to give her little knee a squeeze under the table. She just backs off, shaking her head and smiling so impishly that I nearly jump out of my skin.

I spend an hour and a half there, but must run as a pupil awaits me at the studio. I give lessons and collect some notes with the government seal on them; these I often lose.

Kathy and her mother lead me to the door, which only infuriates me for I wanted Kathy alone to show me out. The lips on that girl...

My walk back takes me through the park. Many people are returning from taking the waters. While enroute I notice that people are stopping to look at me. I hear my name being whispered. Young ladies dressed in all shades of percale are giving looks, as if to say "Welcome, stranger!" What the devil, am I famous or what?

I walk on, more of the same. At the door I collide with the landlord, just like a ship on a rock. Oh! The rent!

But he approaches me and says, "Good Sir! I know I am a bother sometimes, but believe me, I have so much... oh, allow me please!"

So saying he embraces me. Oh, I see, Swiatecki must have told him that I will be getting married. He must think that now the rent will be paid on a regular basis. Let him think that.

I thunder upstairs. On the way I hear noise issuing from our quarters. The interior is dim from cigarette smoke. There's Jules Rzysinski, Frank Cepkowski, old Sludecki and others. All are having a wonderful time passing my pupil around in the smoke above their heads. Seeing me, they release him, barely alive, in the center of the studio.

Then they produce an inhuman tumult, "Congratulations, congratulations!"

"Up with him!"

In a flash I'm up in the air, and for a while they amuse themselves by tossing me up and down all the while howling like a pack of wild wolves. When, finally, I get to the ground I announce that they are all invited to the wedding, especially Swiatecki whom I am reserving for best man.

At this Swiatecki raises his hands and speaks.

"This dimwit thinks that we are congratulating him on his upcoming marriage!"

"Well, what else would you be congratulating me on?"

"What, don't you know?" I hear from all directions.

"I don't know what in the blazes you are talking about!"

"Give him a copy of the morning *Flyer*, the morning *Flyer*!" yells Wach Protekiewicz.

A copy of the *Flyer* is thrust into my hands as they continue shouting, "Look in the correspondence!"

I look at the correspondence section and read the following:

From the Flyer's own correspondent in Paris. Magorski's painting "Jews by the Rivers of Babylon" received the great gold medal in this year's Salon. The critics cannot find words enough to describe the artist's genius. Albert Wolff calls the painting "a revelation." Baron Hirsh offers 15,000 franks.

I feel weak! Help! I'm so stupefied that I cannot utter a word. I knew the painting turned out well, but I had no inkling of such a success.

The copy of the *Flyer* falls from my hands. My friends pick it up and continue to read.

Item one - We hear from the artist's own lips that he intends to exhibit the painting in our fair city.

Item two - To the question posed by the president of the Art Institute as to whether the work would be shown in Warsaw the artist replied, "I would rather not sell it in Paris than not show it in Warsaw." We trust that the above will be read by our progeny (as far in the future as God will allow) on the artist's tombstone.

Item three - After reading the announcement of his success, the artist's mother suffered a severe emotional shock.

Item four - At the time of this printing we are informed that the artist's mother is feeling better.

Item five - The artist has received invitations to exhibit his work in all the capitals of Europe.

I recover under the force of these boldfaced lies. Ostrzynski, the editor of the *Flyer* and ex-rival for Kathy's hand, must have gone berserk. This surpasses all measure. Of course I will exhibit the painting in Warsaw, but for one — I spoke to no one about the matter, two — the president of the Art Institute did not speak to me, three — I told the president of the Art Institute nothing, four — my mother has been dead for nine years, and five — no one invited me to do anything.

What if, I begin to think, the correspondence is a genuine as the news items. Good grief!

Over six months ago Ostrzynski, my rival for Kathy's hand, got his walking papers even though the parents favored him. He could be trying to make a fool of me. If that is the case he will "pay with his head or some such thing" as goes the libretto of a currently fashionable operetta.

My friends, however, try to convince me that even though the news items are phoney, the correspondence must be real.

At that time Stach Kosowicz arrives with a copy of the *Pole*. The correspondence is in it as well. I relax and begin breathing again.

The congratulations begin in earnest.

Old Sludecki, false through and through, but sweet as syrup shakes my hand and says, "Good God! I always knew you had talent! I always stood up for you (he called me an ass)... but perhaps you would not wish that such a *fa-presto* would call you 'friend', but then forgive an old habit, good God..."

Deep in my heart I hope he hangs, but I can't give him an answer for in that moment Karminski pulls me aside. He whispers as if not to be overheard.

"Perhaps you need some money, my friend, if so just give the word."

Karminski is well known among us for his selflessness. Now and again he will say to one of us, "If you need money my friend..." and then just try to find him. In reality he has money. I answer that if I can't find it elsewhere I will go to him.

Others come up, fellows good as gold, and hug me until my poor sides ache. Finally Swiatecki comes up, I can see he is touched but is trying to conceal it.

"I see you will turn Jew," he says brusquely, "but congratulations anyway."

"I see you will turn idiot, but thanks anyway," I answer. We embrace.

Wach Protokiewicz mentions something about his throat being dry. I'm broke, but Swiatecki has two rubles, other have some money too. After the collection — punch!

They drink my health, toss me into the air again and when I tell them that the matter with Kathy is all fixed up they drink to her health.

Then Swiatecki corrals me and says, "Don't you think, you gullible moron, that they did not read the paper before the young lady wrote to you?"

Damnation! I have the sensation of being clubbed repeatedly. One side of the horizon gets lighter, while on the other it is devilishly dark. I'm not surprised at the Slusowskis' but that Kathy should be capable of such cold blooded calculation!

It is quite probable that they saw the story while in the park taking the waters. After that they called me.

At first, I want to run to the Slusowski house and have it out. Unfortunately, I cannot leave my guests.

In addition Ostrzynski arrives on the scene. He is elegant, cold, self-assured, gloved — as always. Cleverness surrounds him like an aura, for here is a wit shod on all fours.

From the door he begins to wave his cane protagonistically. "Congratulations, *maestro*, my congratulations!"

He stresses the "my" as if his congratulations were worth more than anyone else's.

It just may be so.

"Where on earth did you find such lies!" I shout. "As you see me here, I have just learned everything from your paper!"

"Why should I worry about that?" answers Ostrzynski flatly.

"But I spoke to no one about exhibiting the painting!"

"Well, now you are doing it," he adds phlegmatically.

"But he's got no mother and she didn't go weak!" adds Wojtek Michalak.

"I am not concerned with these details," answers Ostrzynski as he removes his other glove.

"Is the correspondence real?"

"Yes."

This assurance calms me. From sheer gratitude I pour him a glass of punch. He puts the glass to his lips and says, "Here's to your health, and a second toast to... double congratulations!" Then he shrugs his shoulders.

"How did you know?"

"Old Slusowski was at my office before eight this morning."

Swiatecki begins to mutter something about people being rotten in general. I just can't take it anymore, and grab for my hat. Ostrzynski exits with me, but I quickly outdistance him. In a few minutes I ring the bell at the Slusowskis'.

Kathy answers, the parents are not at home.

"Kathy," I address her harshly, "did you know about the correspondence?"

"Yes, I knew." She is quite calm.

"Oh, Kathy!"

"What else could I do, dear. Don't be surprised at my parents, they had to have some sensible reason to give consent."

"But you, Kathy?"

"I just took advantage of the opportunity. Can you fault me for that, Wladek?"

Suddenly, everything seems clear and I admit that Kathy makes sense. Strictly speaking, why did I run over like a madman?

Meanwhile, Kathy puts her head on my shoulder, I take her about the waist. She then leans her head back, closes her eyes and presents her little red mouth whispering, "No, no, Wladek, not now, after the wedding, please."

In spite of her plea, I press my lips against hers and we remain in this position as long as the process of respiration allows. Kathy's eyes are swimming. She covers them to utter, "And I asked you not to..."

That phrase and the look she gives me move me to kiss her again. When you love a girl, you naturally have a greater desire to kiss, rather than, for example, to beat her.

And I love Kathy without measure or reason. In life, until death, after death! Her or none — that is it!

In a tired voice Kathy expresses the fear that I will lose respect for her. Dearest creature, where on earth does she get such ideas! I calm her down and we begin to talk sensibly.

We strike a bargain that if the Slusowskis' pretend that they saw the paper later, I will not let on that I know how things really stand.

I then bid Kathy good bye, promising to come by in the evening.

Then I run to the Art Institute. Through their good offices I will best be able to communicate with the management of the Salon Exhibition.

III

I send a telegram stating that I accept Baron Hirsh's terms, but first the painting is to be exhibited in Warsaw and so on.

Money for the telegram and other expenses is advanced to me from the Institute's treasury. They hand it over without hesitation. All is going swimmingly.

The *Flyer* and the *Pole* both publish my biography, which, by the way, contains not one word of truth. But as Ostrzynski says, "Why should I worry about details!"

I also receive offers from two illustrated magazines. They wish to publish my portrait and a reproduction of my painting.

Good, there will be money aplenty!

IV

A week later I pick up the deposit from Baron Hirsh. The remainder is to be paid when he takes possession of the canvas.

Meanwhile, the Commercial bank pays out five thousand francs in solid gold. I return home loaded down like a mule.

There is a meeting in the studio. I dump my booty on the floor, and as I have never rolled in gold before, commence to do so.

After me, Swiatecki takes a turn at it.

The landlord enters and becomes convinced that we have lost our minds. Our amusement borders on the barbaric!

V

Ostrzynski tells me one day that he feels happy that Kathy had rejected him. He says that before him are possibilities about which I cannot even dream.

I am glad, but really it makes no difference, as I am convinced that Ostrzynski will be able to cope with life under most circumstances.

When he was courting Kathy the parents were on his side, especially old Slusowski. Ostrzynski held complete sway over him, even to such extent that Slusowski lost his Roman stature. Kathy, on the other hand, could not stand him from their first meeting. I was an unconscious dislike, and I am quite sure that she was not annoyed by the same facets of his personality that annoy me and those who know him better.

He is a strange person, and even a stranger literary figure.

Every literary and artistic circle has people in it about whom all wonder, "Whence their prestige?"

My friend, the editor of the *Flyer*, is one of these. Who would suspect that the secret of Ostrzynski's position and literary sway is the fact that he has no respect for talent — especially literary — and lives ignoring such. For them, he has the contempt of a man for whom a certain standard of living, an inbred cleverness, and a great amount of wit assure unfought for victories in the social arena.

One should see him at literary meetings and dinners, how with jesting irony he treats people whose talents surpass his own tenfold. He presses them to the wall, confuses them with his logic, and then overwhelms them with his literary might.

Swiatecki, whenever I mention this, calls for a blunt instrument with which to smash Ostrzynski's head. But his prestige does not surprise me. Truly talented people are often timid, uncertain, and retiring. Yet, when the true talent finds itself alone, it soars. Under similar circumstances, Ostrzynski probably falls asleep, for there is nothing for him to ponder.

The future will right things, however, merit will assign rank. Ostrzynski has the intelligence to know this, but in his soul he mocks it. It is enough for him that, for the moment, he is reckoned with more than his betters.

We painters are in his way. For writers, he sometimes will make allowances, as long as it fits in with the *Flyer's* competition with the *Pole*.

But he is a pleasant companion and a fine human being. I could say that I like him but...

May the devil take Ostrzynski — enough of him.

VI

I am so disgusted that, one day soon, I shall slam the door.

What a farce! From the time I have acquired fame and money, Slusowski, counter to my expectations, treats me with positive disdain. He, his wife, and all the relatives turn a cold shoulder in my direction.

The very first evening Slusowski proclaimed that if I thought that my new position will influence their actions toward me, or if I thought, as he could see from my expression, that I am doing him a favor, then, though they are willing to sacrifice much for the good of their child, their only child cannot ask them to sacrifice their dignity. The mother added that the child knows full well where to find shelter.

Kathy attempts to defend me, sometimes very aggressively, but they wait upon my every word.

As soon as I open my mouth Slusowski bites his lower lip as if to say, "I knew it would end this way!" The farce goes on from morning till night.

And to think that all of this is hypocrisy, and that this is what is supposed to hold me in the trap, but in reality they are crowing to my fifteen thousand and are as anxious as I am, but for a different reason.

It is time to end it.

They are beginning to make me feel as if getting a gold medal and fifteen thousand francs was a heinous crime.

VII

The day of our formal engagement arrives.

I had purchased a fine Louis XV style ring which immediately fell into disfavor with the Slusowskis'. Even Kathy was not totally pleased. It seems that no one in the house has any idea what art is.

I must work on Kathy to eradicate some of there bourgeois notions and implant artistic ones. I am of good cheer, for, after all, she loves me.

To the engagement ceremony I decided to bring Swiatecki only. I had wanted to bring him to the Slusowskis' for a visit earlier, but he had decided that as a moral and physical bankrupt he had not yet fallen so low as to "go calling." There was no solution.

I tried to prepare my future parents-in-law by explaining that my friend was a true original, a genius of a painter, and the most kindhearted man on earth.

Slusowski, learning that my friend paints "stiffs," raised his eyebrows and informed me that up to this time he had dealt with proper people only, that his career as a civil servant was unblemished, and that he hoped that Mr. Swiatecki would honor the customs that reign in an honest and humble household.

Inwardly, I am not altogether free from apprehension, therefore from dawn's break I am at war with Swiatecki. He stubbornly insists on wearing his trouser legs inside his boots. I persuade, plead, beg.

Finally he agrees by telling me that there is no reason why he should not play the fool. Too bad, for his shoes resemble those of Central African explorers. Bootblack has not touched them since they were bought, on credit, at the shoemaker's. What can I do!

Worse yet, Swiatecki's head resembles a mountain top covered by a forest recently devastated by a tornado. I must reconcile myself, for the rake to straighten out that rat's nest has yet to be forged.

Instead I manage to force him into wearing a frock coat in place of his coarse peasant shirt. He puts on the frock but his face resembles that of one of his models. His disposition is morbid as well.

On the street people stare at his large knotty walking stick and his huge tattered hat but I am already used to that.

The bell rings, we enter.

The voice of cousin Jaczkowicz reaches us in the hall. He is preaching about overpopulation. Cousin Jaczkowicz is always talking about overpopulation. It is his one wisdom.

Kathy resembles a cloud in her satin dress. She is beautiful. Slusowski is dressed formally in a tail coat, as are all the male relatives. The aunts are in silk.

Swiatecki's entrance creates an impression. They eye him with a certain uneasiness. He casts his eye about in a sinister manner then declares that he would not bother Mr. Slusowski with his presence were it not for the fact that Wladek was getting engaged or some such thing.

The "some such thing" goes over very badly. Slusowski straightens up with great dignity and asks what precisely Mr. Swiatecki means by that. "Mr." Swiatecki answers that it does not matter to him, but for Wladek he would even allow himself to be castrated, especially if he knew that it mattered to Mr. Slusowski.

My future father-in-law looks at his wife, at Kathy, and then at me while surprise and shock battle on his face.

Fortunately, he has the presence of mind to propose that I be introduced to the members of the family who have not yet made my acquaintance.

After the presentation, we sit.

Kathy is by my side, her hand in mine. The room is filled with people, but all are stiff and silent. The atmosphere weighs heavy.

Cousin Jaczkowicz returns to his lecture on overpopulation. My Swiatecki begins looking under the table. In the silence the voice of cousin Jaczkowicz drones louder and louder. One of his front teeth is missing, so that every time he pronounces an "s" a drawn out hiss is heard.

"The worst type of disaster could, with time, envelop Europe," says Jaczkowicz.

"Emigration..." someone butts in.

"Statistics show that emigration does not limit population growth."

Suddenly Swiatecki turns his fish-like eyes onto the speaker.

"Then we should institute Chinese customs," he tones in seriously.

"Begging your pardon, which Chinese customs?"

"Well, in China parents have the right to strangle incorrigible children, here then, children should have the right to strangle incorrigible parents!"

The boom has fallen! The couch groaned under the aunts. I am lost. Slusowski closes his eyes and remains speechless.

Silence.

Finally the shaky voice of my father-in-law-to-be breaks the tension.

"Surely sir, as a Christian..."

"And why should I be a Christian..." interrupts Swiatecki, shaking his head angrily.

A second thunderclap. The couch with the aunts starts to convulse and plunges into a bottomless pit. I feel the earth part under my feet.

All hope is lost.

Then the air is shattered by the sound of Kathy's crystal clear, bell-like laughter. After her, not knowing why, Jaczkowicz explodes with mirth, after him, also not knowing why... laugh I.

"Daddy..." calls out Kathy. "Wladek warned us that Mr. Swiatecki was original. Mr. Swiatecki is joking, and I know that he has a mother and is a good son to her!"

Devil that girl! Not only can she fib, but guess as well. Indeed, Swiatecki has a mother and is a good son to her.

The laughter and the above explanation create a diversion. A greater one is provided by the entrance of a servant carrying wine and cakes. It is the same concierge, now dressed in tails and masquerading as a butler, who stole my last three rubles. His gaze is fixed on the tray, the glass is tinkling, and he moves as if he were carrying a tumbler brimming with water.

I begin to fear that he will drop the load. Fortunately, my fears prove futile...

In a moment the glasses are filled and we proceed with the formal ceremony of engagement.

A juvenile cousin holds a porcelain tray with the two rings on it. Her eyes are bulging with curiosity. The ceremony gives her so much pleasure that she is literally jumping up and down. Slusowski rises, the remainder of the clan rises. I hear chairs scraping the floor.

Silence descends again. I overhear one of the matrons whispering that she had hoped that I would provide a "better" ring. Even with this cutting remark, the mood is so festive that the flies are dropping off the walls.

Slusowski begins to speak.

"My children, receive the blessings of your parents."

Kathy kneels. I kneel.

Oh, the expression that Swiatecki must be wearing on his face now. What an expression!

I dare not look at him. Instead, I concentrate on Kathy's dress which is creating a colorful spot on the faded red rug. The hands of Mr. and Mrs. Slusowski rest on our heads, after which my future father-in-law continues.

"My daughter, you have had the best example at home of what a wife should be, therefore, I do not have to tell you your duties. These, (I hope!) your husband will acquaint you with. But I turn to you, Mr. Magorski..."

Here follows a speech during which I count to one hundred and having reached that number I begin again. Slusowski the civil servant, Slusowski the father, Slusowski the Roman, takes the opportunity to empty his soul. The words: child, parents, duty, future, blessings, thorns, clean conscience— buzz about my ears like a swarm of hornets. They light on my head, sting the above mentioned ears, the neck and shoulders.

My tie must be tight for I feel I am being stifled. I hear the sobbing of Mrs. Slusowski which saddens me for basically she is a good woman. I hear the rattle of the rings on the tray held by the fidgeting cousin. God Almighty, what an expression Swiatecki must have on his face now!

Finally we rise. The little cousin shoves the tray right up to my nose. The rings are exchanged.

Wow! I am engaged! I had imagined that this would be the end but Slusowski invites us to solicit the blessings of the maiden aunts.

We go. I kiss five sets of hands that resemble heron paws. The aunts hope that I will not disappoint their faith in me.

What kind of faith, in God's name, should they have in me? Cousin Jaczkowicz embraces me. Definitely, my tie must be too tight.

The worst is over. Dusk descends. Tea is brought in.

I sit by Kathy and try to pretend that Swiatecki does not exist. That ape fills me with apprehension once again when asked if he would like some brandy in his tea. He answers that he drinks brandy "only by the bottle."

Finally, the evening winds up successfully. We exit. I take a lungful of air. Indeed, my tie was too tight.

We walk in silence, a silence that begins to bother me. I feel that I should say something to Swiatecki, to tell him about my happiness, about how well it all went, how much I love Kathy. I try but it just won't go. Finally, near our lodgings, I blurt out, "You must admit that life can be beautiful sometimes."

Swiatecki stops, gives me one of his underhanded looks, and says..."Poodle!"

We spoke no more that evening.

VIII

A week after my engagement, my *Jews* arrived and were placed on exhibit.

The painting was placed in a separate room, with additional admission charged by the management. One half of the clear profit goes to me. Reportedly the exhibition hall is filled from dawn to dusk.

I went there once, but got stared at more than the painting. I will not go again. There is no use annoying myself unnecessarily.

Even if the painting were a masterpiece heretofore unseen on earth, the public would still wish to satisfy its curiosity in the same manner which they would use to inspect "Krao" — the Hottentot who swallows live doves.

Right now I am such a Hottentot. I would be more comfortable if I were a poodle. But I am too much of a painter to endure the degradation of art in the presence of a famous personality.

IX

Three weeks ago hardly anyone knew I existed, now I receive dozens of letters, of the "romantic" type for most part. Four out of five start with "Perhaps after reading this letter you will scorn a woman who..." I'll scorn no woman, as long as she leaves my soul alone.

If it weren't for Kathy, I would not be so indifferent to this outpouring of emotion.

The thing that annoys me most is how these women expect a reply from a man who has never seen them. Pull back the curtain, oh, lovely one, when I see you I'll tell you. Oh! I'll say nothing, for after all, there's Kathy.

I have also received a letter from a gray haired advisoress in which she calls me "the master," and Kathy "a goose."

"Master, is that a wife fit for you?" she writes. "Is that the choice of one upon whom the eyes of the nation are turned? You are the victim of intrigue, etc." *ad nauseam*.

A strange idea, and even stranger the demand that I marry to please public opinion rather than follow the promptings of my heart. Poor Kathy seems to be in everyone's way.

There are probably greater crimes than the writing of anonymous letters, but there is no greater... How to put it nicely? Oh well, never mind.

The date of our wedding is not yet set, but it will happen soon.

Let them see us together.

Swiatecki's "stiffs" have also arrived from Paris. The title of the painting is *Final Rendezvous*. It shows a boy and girl lying side by side on an autopsy table. The theme is self-evident at first sight. It is clear that these two have loved each other in life, were separated by poverty, and reunited in death.

The students leaning over the corpses look a bit harsh. The perspective of the operating theater has some flaws, but the "stiffs" are perfect. So cold are they that an icy breeze seems to rise from the canvas. At the competition it took no prizes, probably due to the sad topic, but it got more than its share of critical praise.

In our own artistic circle there is, no doubt, a lot of talent. Right beside Swiatecki's painting Frank Cepkowski exhibited his *Death of a Polish Nobleman*. What power and individualism!

Swiatecki calls Frank an idiot because Cepkowski dresses fashionably, wears a goatee, long hair, is well brought up and courteous, and often alludes to his upper crust relations.

But Swiatecki is wrong.

Talent is a creature that resides wherever it likes, be it in an impenetrable jungle or a well groomed garden. In Munich and Paris I saw artists who resembled brewery hands or just the opposite — barbers and dandies.

I'd not give a wooden coin for the lot, yet there was some kind of exaltation in their souls combined with a feeling for color and the ability to get it out on canvas.

Ostrzynski, who has a ready expression for any situation would no doubt write in his *Flyer: Spiritus flat, ubi vult!* [The spirit dwells where it will].

In Swiatecki's opinion, historical painting is a "heinous barbarism." He does not paint historical subjects and while I don't care if he does or not, I hear that this point of view is "progressive." Someone already made a saw of it and it is beginning to bore me.

Our Polish painters have one major fault, they marry a doctrine and live under its heel. They survey all that they see through it, align their art to it, and are better apostles than painters.

I have met artists whose lips were frayed from deep philosophical discussions about the nature of art, what it should be and so on, but when it came to wielding a brush, they failed miserably.

Often I think that theories should be left to the philosophers — and should they make the theory stupid — let them answer for it.

Painters, however, should paint what they feel and should know how, for that is basic.

To me, the smallest talent is worth more than the greatest doctrine, and the greatest doctrine is not fit to shine freedom's shoes.

X

I took Kathy and the Slusowskis' to the exhibit. There is always a crowd gathered around my painting.

Whispers started the minute we entered. But this time attention was diverted from me and the painting to Kathy. The women, especially, could not take their eyes off her. She was absolutely enthralled by all this, and I could not hold it against her.

Worse that she called Swiatecki's "stiffs" an "indecent" painting. Slusowski swore that she snatched the words from his lips. This only enraged me. Oh that Kathy could have such an outlook on art!

Concealing my anger, I bid them good bye under the pretext that I had a luncheon engagement with Ostrzynski. Then I went to his office and dragged him out to a restaurant.

XI

I saw a miracle!

Now finally I know why men have eyes.

"Corpo di Baccho!" What a beauty!

I am walking along with Ostrzynski. Suddenly, on the corner, a woman passes us. I freeze. I am stupefied and petrified. With my eyes open I lose consciousness, grab Ostrzynski's tie and unknowingly undo it — for, help — I am lost!

What if her features are excellent, features — next to none. She is nothing else than an artistic idea! A masterpiece as a sketch, a masterpiece as an oil, a masterpiece as a sentiment. Greuze would probably be resurrected by the sight of her and then promptly hang himself for painting such hags.

I look and look. She walks alone, yet not alone. With her walks poetry, music, spring, love, and delight! I do not know if I should paint her portrait immediately or throw myself at her feet and kiss them for being born so. But then, do I really know what I want.

She passes us, peaceful as a summer day. Ostrzynski bows to her, but she does not seem to notice him. I wake from my daze and begin to shout. "Let's follow her!"

"No," answers Ostrzynski, "are you crazy? I must re-tie my tie. Give me some peace. She is a friend."

"Your friend? Introduce me!"

"I would not think of it. Take care of your own fiancée."

I put a pox on Ostrzynski and his progeny to the ninth generation, then I want to chase after the lovely stranger. Unfortunately, she boards a carriage.

In the distance I see her straw hat and parasol.

"Do you really know her?" I query Ostrzynski.

"I know everyone."

"Who is she?"

"She is Madame Helen Kolczanowski, from the family of Turno, also known as the 'Maiden Widow'."

"Why 'Maiden Widow'?"

"Because her husband died at the wedding banquet. If you have recovered sufficiently I'll tell you the story.

"There was an old, but very wealthy bachelor, Kolczanowski de Kolczano, a Ukrainian noble. He had an extremely large family, which expected to inherit, and an extremely short neck which gave great hopes to the inheritors. I knew them, quite decent people really, but human nature is what it is. Even the best, the least interested, could not resist staring at Kolczanowski's short neck. This annoyed him so much that, to spite the family he proposed to the neighbor's daughter, changed his will making her sole heir, and then got married. A dinner followed the wedding. Right after the dessert an apoplectic fit finished him off. Thus, Madame Helen became the 'Maiden Widow'."

"When was this?"

"Three years ago. She was twenty-two then. Since then she could have been married twenty-two times. Some thought she was waiting for a prince. This assumption proved wrong, as she rejected one just recently. I know well that there are no pretensions, the best proof of this is her friendship with our talented, well-known actress, Eve Adami, whom she has known since school."

Hearing this I nearly jumped for joy.

If this is so then Ostrzynski can soak his head. My dear, kind Eve will introduce me to Madame Kolczanowski.

"Listen, will you take me to her?" I ask Ostrzynski.

"In the end, if you want to meet someone in this town — you will," he answers. "but you took Kathy away from me, well, I would not want it said that I was responsible. But, what do I know... Good Day!"

XII

I was supposed to be at the Slusowskis' for dinner, but I wrote that I could not make it.

My teeth have not hurt me a day in my life, but there was no reason for them not to start.

I could not forget Helen. Her face was before me the whole day, for is there an artist that would not ponder over such a face?

In my soul I painted her ten portraits. Then I got an idea for a painting in which Helen's face would create a sensation. All I had to do was to see her just a few more times.

I ran over to Eve's, but did not find her at home. In the evening I received an invitation from Kathy asking that I join them for a morning walk in the park to take the waters, followed by coffee. It's becoming a regular routine with the park, the "waters", and that damned coffee!

I can't go, for if I don't catch Eve in the morning, then I won't see her for the entire day.

Eve Adami (that is a stage name, the real one being Anne Jedlinski), is an exceptional person. We have been friends for a long time and are on a strict first name basis.

It has been five years since she entered the theater and she has remained pure in the full meaning of the word. In the theater there are, no doubt, many women who are physically innocent, but should the corsets choose to reveal the doings of their mistress, I imagine that even the most cocksure lothario would turn red in all the places not covered with fur. The theater ruins souls, especially the feminine.

It is difficult to demand that a woman who each evening portrays love, loyalty, nobility, etc. would not, after a while, begin to feel instinctively that those virtues are mere tinsel, belonging strictly to the stage and having little to do with reality.

The great difference between art and the reality of life can be expressed in this vein — competition and the desire for recognition poison the nobler motives of the heart.

The constant exposure to people as corrupted as actors will start anyone thinking. There is no white angora cat that would not get sullied under similar circumstances. Only a great talent can be victorious over such influence, one that purifies by its own flame, or a nature so thoroughly esthetic that evil cannot penetrate it, just as a swan's feathers repel water. Eve Adami is one such "impermeable."

We have spent many long evenings over pipe and tea discussing the people who belong to the world of art. We would start with the highest category — poets, and finish with actors — the lowest.

What is an artist but a creature more sensitive than others, more intellectual, more spontaneous, one knowing the limits of passion and pleasure, and desiring it all with unlimited strength.

An artist, therefore, should have more character and willpower than others to resist the temptations of life.

Unfortunately, just as there is no reason that a beautiful flower should be more resistant to the elements than a weed, so it is with artists. There is no reason that they should have more character than an ordinary mortal.

Often it is just the reverse, however, for an artist usually has less moral fortitude, as his strength is sapped from battling in the chasm that separates the daily world from the world of art.

An artist is akin to a feverish bird, sometimes soaring among the clouds, sometimes dragging its wings in the dust. Art gives him a distaste for the dust, yet daily life takes away the strength to fly. Such is the separation between the inner and public life of an actor.

The world which asks more of them than of others may be right in castigating them, but Christ will be right as well, when he saves them.

Ostrzynski, on the other hand, holds that actors belong to the artistic world the same way as trombones, clarinets, viols belong to music. But this viewpoint has no merit.

The best proof of this is Eve Adami, who is the personification of an artist through her talent and artistic feeling — which has preserved her from harm like a mother.

In spite of our long friendship I had not seen her in a long while, so seeing me caused her great happiness, even though the expression on her face perplexed me.

"How are you Wladek," she said. "Well here you are!"

I was quite happy to have caught up with her.

She wore a turkish robe, cream colored with red spots, a wide border and slit sleeves. The dark border contrasted especially well with her pale complexion and blue eyes. I told her so, which made her glad, then got down to business.

"My golden one," I continue, "do you know Madame Kolczanowski, the beautiful Ukrainian?"

"I know her, she is an old friend."

"Take me to her..."

She begins to shake her head.

"My golden one, my beautiful one, is that how you love me?"

"No, Wladek, I will not take you to her."

"And you see, you are so cruel, and I nearly fell in love with you."

That Eve is such a mimosa.

Hearing this she changes her countenance and rests her shapely elbows on the table, placing her chin on her palms.

"When was this?"

I am in a hurry to talk about Helen, but, really, once I almost did fall in love with Eve. Now, wanting to put her in a good mood I tell her the story.

"It was like this. After the theater we took a walk in the botanical gardens. Remember, the night was gorgeous! We sat on a bench near the pond, you said you wanted to hear the nightingale. I was a little sad, my hat was off, my head splitting with a headache. You walked over to the pond, dipped your best handkerchief and pressed it to my forehead. At that moment you were an angel to me, and I thought that if I took that little hand and pressed it to my lips I would fall in love forever."

"And?"

"Suddenly you drew back as if you had sensed something."

Eve sat for a while in a quiet study, then recovered and added in a nervous rush, "Let us not speak of this, please."

"Very well, we won't talk about it. You know, Eve, I like you too much to fall in love with you. One precludes the other. From the time I have met you I have felt nothing but a true friendship toward you."

"But," adds Eve as if following another train of thought, "is it not true that you are engaged?"

"True."

"Why did you not tell me about it?"

"For it was off, but has been renewed recently. But if you tell me that as an engaged man I should not try to make the acquaintance of Madame Kolczanowski, then hear this — I was a painter before I was a fiance. Besides, You have nothing to fear from me."

"I would not think of it. To take you to her would make her the object of general gossip. For the last several weeks I have been hearing that half of Warsaw is in love with you. The stories of your conquests are incredible. As late as yesterday, I had heard it said in jest that from God's ten commandments you had made yourself one."

"And what commandment is that?"

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife... in vain."

"Oh, lord, look at my misery! But the joke is good."

"And no doubt to the point."

"Listen Eve, do you want to know the truth? I was always shy and retiring, especially when it came to women. People imagine God knows what, but believe me, you have no idea of how much truth there was in my exclamation, 'Lord, look at my misery!'"

"Povero Maestro!"

"Oh, cut out the Italian. Will you take me to Madame Kolczanowski?"

"I can't, dear Wladek. As long as you pass for a Don Juan it would not be proper for me, an actress, to lead you to an unmarried woman as desirable as Helen."

"Well, why did you receive me then?"

"I am different. As an actress, I can apply Shakespeare's words to my position, 'Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shall not escape calumny!'"

"But, you know, one can lose one's mind. It seems that anyone can meet her, look at her, except me. Why? Because I painted a good picture and gained a certain measure of fame for it."

"You are right on that point," Eve agrees, smiling. "Don't think that I did not know you were coming. Ostrzynski was here telling me that I had 'better' not take you to her."

"Oh, I understand. Then you promised."

"I promised nothing, I even got mad at him. But I think that I had 'better' not take you. Let's talk about your painting."

"Oh forget the painting! Very well! I'm telling you that in three days time I will make the acquaintance of Madame Kolczanowski even if I have to go to her in disguise!"

"Dress as a gardener and take her a bouquet... from Ostrzynski."

At that moment I am struck with an idea, so incredibly delicious that I strike my forehead. I forget the slight resentment I had felt toward Eve. I am hardly able to contain myself.

"Give me your word that you will not betray me."

"Given," answers Eve, becoming interested.

"Listen, I will dress myself as a Ukrainian lyrist, a *lirnik*, I have the costume and a lyre. I have been to Ukraine and can sing the songs. Madame Kolczanowski cannot but receive me. Understand..."

"What an original idea!"

She is too much of an artist not to like the idea, and she gave me her word. She cannot object.

"What an original idea," she repeats. "Helen loves her Ukraine so that she will probably cry when she sees a lyrist here in Warsaw. But how will you explain how you got here?"

My enthusiasm infects Eve. After a while we sit and plot in earnest.

We reach an agreement. I will disguise myself, and Eve will pick me up in a carriage, as not to attract too much attention from gapers. Madame Helen will not know anything until Eve decides to reveal our secret.

We enjoy our game enormously. Finally, I kiss her hand to leave, but she insists on my staying for lunch.

The evening I spend at the Slusowskis'.

Kathy is a little annoyed that I did not come in the morning, but I take her moods like an angel, thinking all the while about tomorrow's expedition... and Helen.

XIII

It is eleven in the morning.

Eve should be here soon.

I am dressed in a coarse peasant shirt, open across the chest. The remainder of my outfit is a bit worn but proper — belt, boots, all that is necessary.

The hair of a silver gray wig falls over my forehead, and he would be wise who could tell that it was a wig. My beard is a tribute to patience. As of eight in the morning, I had been adding, with the help of a stiff paste, white hairs in between my own. As a result I aged so naturally that time could not have done better.

Some thinned sepias gave me a swarthy complexion, while Swiatecki executed the wrinkles in an absolutely brilliant way. I look at least seventy.

Swiatecki proposed that instead of painting, I should earn my bread as a model, which would be an even greater contribution to art.

At eleven-thirty Eve arrives.

I send down a bundle which contains my regular street clothes. I don't know if I'll have need of them. Then I grab my lyre and descend. I greet her at the door with "Slawa Bohu!"

Adami is surprised and thrilled.

"Beautiful belt, beautiful *lirnik*!" she repeats laughing. "Only an artist could dream up such a thing!"

Speaking aside, she resembles a summer morning. I can't take my eyes off her raw silk dress, and the straw hat decorated with poppies. She arrived in an open carriage, a crowd of onlookers starts to gather. This does not bother her in the least.

Finally, the carriage departs. My heart beats faster and faster — only a quarter of an hour to seeing Helen.

We did not go one hundred yards before I noticed Ostrzynski coming down the street.

This one must be everywhere!

Seeing Eve, he stops and bows. Then he begins to appraise us both with a firm stare, especially me. I do not think that he recognized me, but after we pass, he continues to stand and stare. Fortunately, we turn a corner and lose him. The carriage moves swiftly, yet the trip seems to last centuries. At last we pull up at the head of Belvedere Avenue.

We are in front of Helen's house. I run to the door like a madman. Eve chases me shouting, "Oh, what a naughty old man!"

A fancily dressed servant opens the door. His eyes bulge at the sight of me. Eve calms him by explaining that I am her charge. We proceed upstairs.

A maid appears for a moment and announces that Madame is dressing in an adjoining room. Then she vanishes.

"Good day!" Eve calls out.

"Good day, Eve!" answers an incredibly fresh voice. "Just one minute, I will be ready in a moment."

"Helen! You have no idea who I've got here to see you — as genuine a *lirnik* as has ever walked the Ukrainian steppes!"

I hear a joyful shriek from the next room, and then Helen dashes in sans dress, just corset and unfurled hair.

"A *lirnik*, a blind *lirnik* here in Warsaw?"

"Not blind, he can see!" shouts Eve, not wishing to take the thing too far.

But it is too late, for in that moment I throw myself at Helen's feet with a shout.

"Cherubim of God!" I embrace her feet paying strict attention to the ankles. Nations kneel, peoples bring tribute, she is absolutely incomparable!

"Cherubim!," I repeat my greeting with genuine emotion.

My enthusiasm can be explained by the fact that after my long wanderings I have finally come upon another Ukrainian soul. For a brief instant, I see her bare shoulders and neck, reminiscent of Psyche from the Neapolitan museum. Then she disappears leaving me in a prone position in the center of the floor.

Eve shakes her parasol at me and simultaneously hides her laughter by putting her nose into a bouquet of violets.

Meanwhile, a conversation begins through the door. It is carried on in the most beautiful Ukrainian dialect that I have ever heard.

I had prepared myself for all and any questions, so I lie like a saint. I am a serf from Czeheryn. My daughter married a hussar from the Warsaw regiment. Loneliness got the better of me, so I followed. Good people gave me coins for my songs. And now? I'll see the little ones, bless them and return for I miss

mother Ukraine. There I will die, in the orchards among the beehives. All must die and it is past time for old Fylyp.

What a nature actors have. Eve knows full well what is going on, yet she is so taken by my story that she begins to nod her head sadly and give me sympathetic looks. Helen's voice acquires an emotional tone as well.

The door opens a crack, a beautiful arm appears, then suddenly I find myself the possessor of a three ruble note which I am forced to accept, for I cannot do otherwise. In return, I call upon all the saints to send a veritable torrent of blessings upon Helen's head.

I am interrupted by the same maid whom we saw earlier. She announces that Mr. Ostrzynski is at the door.

"Don't let him in, dear!" cautions Eve, a bit frightened.

Helen declares that she will not see him. Moreover, she expresses surprise at such an early visit. I, also, am puzzled as to how Ostrzynski, who prides himself on his knowledge of etiquette, could call so early.

"There is something to this," says Eve.

But there is no time for explanations, for Helen is ready and brunch is announced.

Helen wants me to sit at the table, but I am stubborn and sit, together with my lyre, in the doorway. In a moment I am given a bowl filled with food sufficient to give six Ukrainian peasants indigestion. Being hungry, I eat and cast occasional long glances at Helen.

Truly, there is no head like hers in any gallery. In my life I have never seen such translucent eyes. One can almost see the thoughts of the owner, right down to the conscience. Those eyes have the additional property of smiling before the lips do, and brighten the face like a ray of sunlight. There is an incredible sweetness in the lines of her lips — she seems to be a composition by the finest masters.

Finally, I finish eating and just stare — I could continue to my dying day.

"You did not visit me yesterday," says Helen to Eve, "I thought you were going to drop in."

"I had a rehearsal in the morning, and in the afternoon I wanted to see Magorski's painting."

"Did you see it?"

"Not well... there was such a crush. How about you?"

"I went in the morning. What a poet! I wanted to cry with those Jews."

Eve looks at me. My soul is glowing.

"I'll go again, as often as I can," Helen continues. "Why don't we go together? Maybe even today. It was a great pleasure to see that painting, and to think that there is such a talent among us."

How can one not worship such a woman?

Then I hear more — "It is unfortunate that such strange things are being said about him. I must admit that I am dying to meet him."

"Ach!" says Eve carelessly.

"You know him, don't you?"

"I can assure you that his personality loses much at close range. He is arrogant and vain, oh, so vain!"

I get the urge to stick my tongue out at Eve, I can hardly hold back.

She turns her roughish eyes to me and says, "Lose your appetite, grandpa?"

I'll stick my tongue out, I just can't stand it!

Then to Helen, "It is better to admire him than to meet him in person. Ostrzynski describes him as a genius in the body of an oaf."

I would tear Ostrzynski's ears off if he dared to say such a thing. I knew that Eve had mischief lurking behind her collar, but this surpasses all measure.

Finally, we finish.

We walk into the garden where I am to perform.

I am getting a little bored with the whole thing. I would rather be here as a painter than a *lirnik*. Unfortunately, there is no solution to the situation.

I sit by a wall in the shade of chestnut trees. The sun is breaking through the leaves and forms a jumble of bright spots on the ground. These spots vibrate, glitter, disappear and reappear as the breeze rustles the leaves. The garden gives the impression of a depth where normal city noises do not penetrate. What noise does pass through is masked by the gurgling of a small fountain. The heat is great. Somewhere in the branches, sparrows chirp, but they sound weak and sleepy. The rest is silence.

I can see how all this forms a beautiful composition. The garden, the trees, the fountain, two women, their faces uncommonly beautiful, and I with my lyre against the wall. All this has a charm, which I, as a painter, can sense.

I partly forget about the playacting and begin to sing.

*They say that I am blessed,
Free of worries and fears.
They fail to see how often,
I weep a sea of tears.*

*Unfortunate I was born,
Unfortunate I'll die.
Why, mother, did you birth me?
Why? – each dark night I cry. **

Eve is moved by it because she is an artist, Helen because she is Ukrainian, I because they are beautiful. The very sight is a pleasure to behold.

Helen listens without any pretense, there are no feigned emotions, yet in her translucent eyes I can see the intense pleasure she draws from it.

What a difference there is between her and Ukrainian girls who come to Warsaw to take part in the festivals. While dancing they bore their partners with tales of their longing for Ukraine. In truth, wild horses would not suffice to drag them back to their "beloved" homeland.

Helen listens, keeping time with her elegant head. Sometimes she whispers to Eve, "I know that," and then sings along with me. I seem to surpass myself in the performance. My memory unearths a vast store of material. I cover the range from Hetmans, Uhlans, and Cossacks to Sonias, Marysias and God knows what else. I have absolutely no idea where I got it all from.

Time passes like a dream.

I return home tired but intoxicated.

XIV

In the studio, to my amazement, I find Kathy and her parents.

They wanted to surprise me!

Why on earth did Swiatecki tell them that I would be back soon?

Kathy and her parents do not recognize me. Proof to the quality of my disguise. I approach Kathy and take her hand. Frightened, she pulls it back.

"Kathy, don't you recognize me?" I ask.

I can't help but laugh at their surprise.

"Why, it's Wladek!" shouts Swiatecki.

Kathy inspects me closely, and begins to laugh, "Foo, what an ugly old man!"

So I'm an ugly old man. I'd like to know where she saw a prettier one. But to Kathy, brought up on the esthetic principles of papa Slusowski, all old men are no doubt ugly.

I duck into the kitchen and a moment later emerge in my usual form.

Kathy and her parents begin to question me about the "masquerade."

"What was the masquerade about? Well... it's a perfectly simple thing... You see... well... painters do favors for each other by posing as models for paintings. See... for example, Swiatecki posed as the old Jew in my painting. Didn't you recognize him Kathy? Now I'm posing for Cepkowski. It is a custom among painters, especially with the shortage of models in Warsaw."

"We came to surprise you," says Kathy, "and I have never seen a studio before. Oh, what disorder. Is it like this with all painters?"

"More or less, more or less."

Mr. Slusowski proclaims that he expects to see a change in the future. I get the desire to crack my lyre against his skull. Kathy, however, gets into a coquettish mood and says, "There's one mister painter whose ways will change. When I start working all will be dusted, straightened, put away."

So saying she points her nose upward where festooned cobwebs decorate the corners of the studio.

Then she adds, "Even a junk dealer would not stand such disorder. Take this armor, oh! how rusty. All I have to do is call the scullery maid, have her break up some brick and it will shine like a new samovar."

Jesus H. Christ! She talks about junkmen and wants to clean my precious armor plate which I have just lately snatched from the graveyard. Oh, Kathy, Kathy!

Her father, joyfully relieved, kisses her forehead while Swiatecki is giving out warlike grunts reminiscent of a charging boar.

Kathy waves her little finger in front of my nose and continues, "Remember, all must change." Then she finishes with, "There's one mister painter whom we won't love if he doesn't come in the evening." So saying, she bats her eyelids.

I can't say I detect anything pleasant in these frills. I promise that I'll come and lead the family downstairs.

On my return I find Swiatecki eyeing a bundle of banknotes in distrust.

"What is this?"

"Do you know what happened?"

"No."

"I robbed a man, just like a common thief."

"How so?"

"I sold my painting."

"And that's the money."

"Yes, and I am a stinking cheat!"

I embrace him, congratulating him with all my heart. Then he tells me how it happened.

"I was sitting here after you departed, when in comes a gentleman and asks if I am Swiatecki. I answer 'I'd be interested in knowing why I should not be Swiatecki!' So he says, 'I saw your painting and I would like to buy it.' So I say, 'One would have to be an idiot to buy such a vile painting.' And he to that, 'An idiot I am not, but I do fancy paintings done by idiots.' 'If so, then, very well,' I said. He asks for a price but I tell him not to worry about it too much. He names a price. I agree. If he wants to toss his money into the gutter, it's fine by me. He left the money and went. Here is his card, Dr. W. Bialkowski, M.D. I'm just a foul cheat!"

"Long live the 'stiffs,' Swiatecki, get married..."

"I'd rather hang myself," he broods, "I'm nothing but a the vilest of cheats!"

XV

I spend the evening at the Slusowskis'.

Kathy and I have found a place in the foyer where a love seat stands in an alcove.

Mrs. Slusowski is sewing by the light of a lamp, something for Kathy's trousseau, no doubt. Mr. Slusowski is reading the evening issue of the *Flyer* by the light of the same lamp.

I feel strange somehow and try to overcome this feeling by moving closer to Kathy. The foyer is quiet, only Kathy's whisper, as I try to embrace her, disturbs the peace.

"Papa will see."

At that point "papa" takes to voice and begins to read loudly. "The painting, *Last Rendezvous* by the well known artist, Anthony Swiatecki, was purchased today by Dr. Bialkowski, M.D. for 5,000 rubles."

"Yes," I add, "he sold it this morning."

At that point I once again try to embrace Kathy. Again she protests. "Papa will see."

Reflexively my eyes turn to Mr. Slusowski. Suddenly, I see that his expression is changing. He shields his eyes as he leans closer to the printed page.

What in God's name could he have found so interesting.

"Father, what is it?" asks his wife.

He rises, walks two steps toward me, stops, cuts me in two with a glaring stare, and wringing his hands he begins to nod his head.

"What is the matter?"

"This is how lies and deception come to light!" he answers pathetically. "Here, my dear sir, read this if your shame permits you to finish!"

So saying, with a motion that resembles the wrapping of a toga, he hands me the paper. I take it. My eyes behold an article entitled *The Ukrainian Lyrist*. I am incredibly confounded, but go on to read the following:

As of several days ago our fair city has been graced by an extraordinary guest in the person of an elderly lyrist who has been touring the houses of Ukrainian families begging alms and giving song in return. It is said that the old bard's patroness is none other than E.A., our well known and kindhearted actress in whose carriage he has been seen just this morning. Since the first days of his appearance a rumor has spread that under that coarse and simple tunic was none other than one of our finest painters, who in this manner, without arousing the suspicions of husbands or guardians, found an easy access to the boudoirs. We are sure, however, that there is no basis to this rumor for the very reason that our "diva" would never sanction such behavior. The oldster, according to reliable sources, marched here straight from Ukraine. His reason is somewhat dim, but his memory is excellent...

Hell!

Slusowski is so beside himself with rage that he cannot utter a word. Finally, he throws out a scrap of his fury.

"What new lie, what new deception will you fabricate to justify this behavior? Was it not you whom we saw in that shameful costume? Who on earth is that man?"

"I am that man," I answer, "but I do not understand why you call the costume shameful."

In that moment, Kathy snatches the *Flyer* from my hands and starts to read hungrily. Slusowski wraps himself more securely in his toga of indignation and continues.

"Well, even when you first crossed the threshold of a decent house, you brought degradation with you. Even without being the husband of this unhappy child, already you have betrayed her in the company of women of easy virtue. Already you tread on our trust, break your word — for whom — a theatrical harlot!"

Uncontrollable anger grips me in a steely hold.

"My dear sir," I spout, "enough of these speeches! That... harlot is worth a dozen pharisees like you! In addition, know sir that you are a bore! I have had enough of your preaching, enough of your..."

I run out of words. Really, I do not want to say anything else. Slusowski opens his vest as if to say, "Strike, here I am."

I have no intention of striking. I just want to leave after making it clear that I am doing so as not to have to tell Mr. Slusowski anything more about himself.

I exit without as much as a good bye.

The night breeze cools my burning forehead.

It is nine in the evening and the night is very calm. I need to unwind so I decide to take a walk. I head in the direction of Belvedere Avenue.

The windows of Helen's house are dark. Obviously, she is not at home. I don't know why but this makes me tremendously sad.

If I had seen her shadow in a window, I would have felt better. As it is a new wave of anger hits me.

I don't know what I'll do to Ostrzynski the next time I see him.

Fortunately, he is not a man who shirks responsibility.

Only, to make a point, what will I pick on? The article is written with devilish cleverness. Ostrzynski disavows that the lyricist was a painter in disguise. He seems to defend Eve, but at the same time reveals the secret to Helen. Obviously he is trying to compromise Eve before Helen. He takes revenge on me for Kathy, and makes me out to be a ridiculous fool.

Oh, if he only had not written that my reason was dim! Oh well, I must seem funny to Helen now. She, of course, reads the *Flyer*.

Oh, what a mess, and what an insult to Eve! How triumphant Ostrzynski must be now. Something must be done, and if I could have my way I think I would become a reporter for the *Flyer*.

I get the idea that this might be a good time to confer with Eve. She is giving a performance tonight. I'll dash over to the theater and catch her after the play.

There is still time.

Half an hour later I am in her dressing room.

Eve will be done shortly. Meanwhile, I pause to have a look around.

Our theaters are not known for their luxurious furnishings. The room is a cubicle with four whitewashed walls. Two gas jets sway in the draft, a mirror, a washstand, several chairs, and a couch, probably the personal property of the actress, comprise the furnishings. In front of the mirror is an assortment of makeup articles, a partly consumed cup of coffee, boxes of face powder, eyebrow pencils, several pairs of gloves — still retaining the shape of a woman's hand — a set of braids, such is her dressing room. On the wall hangs a number of gowns — white, pink, dark, light, heavy. Two baskets on the floor brim full of womanly accessories. The air is permeated with the aroma of powder and rouge. What a clash of color everywhere. How all this is spread about in a frantic hurry! The colors, reflections and shadows play in the motion of the gas jets.

It is a work of art in its own right. There is character here. Really, there is nothing more here than in any woman's dressing room, except for a certain magical charm. Over the disorder, between the scarred walls, hovers the spirit of art.

I hear the thunder of applause. Well, it's over. Through the wall I hear shouts "Adami! Adami!" A quarter of an hour passes and still they scream.

Finally, Eve bursts in as *Queen Theodora*. A crooked tiara adorns her head. Her eyes are heavily shaded, a rouge blush covers her cheeks.

Her unbraided hair falls about her bare neck and shoulders. She is excited and exhausted to such a point that she can speak only in a faint whisper.

"How are you Wladek?"

Then taking off the tiara, she throws herself on the couch in her majestic gown. She cannot utter a word, she only looks at me in silence — just like a tired bird. I sit by her, put my hand on her forehead and think of nothing but her.

I can see that in those made-up eyes the fires of emotion have not died out yet. I can almost see the stigma on her forehead. I can see how this girl brings to the altar of the theatrical Moloch health, blood, and life until there is barely a breath left in her body. I am seized by such pity, such sympathy, such understanding, that I really don't know what to do.

We sit in silence for a while. Finally, Eve points to a copy of the *Flyer* on the floor.

"What a pity, what a shame," she gasps.

Then she bursts out in tears, shaking like a leaf.

I know that this was brought on by exhaustion, not by anything printed in the *Flyer*. The article is a mere trifle to be forgotten tomorrow. Ostrzynski is not worth one of Eve's tears, but still my heart grieves. I take her hands and after kissing them, hold them close to me. My heart starts beating faster and then a strange thing happens. I kneel at her feet, a haze seems to cover my sight, Then suddenly and recklessly, not knowing what I am doing I take her in my arms.

"Wladek, have mercy," whispers Eve.

But I press her to my body without thought, madly. I kiss her face, her forehead, her lips. On my own lips is but one phrase, "I love you, I love you!"

Then Eve's head tilts back, her arms encircle my neck and I hear her whisper, "I have loved you for such a long time."

XVI

If there is a creature in this world that is dearer to me than Eve than I'm a marinated herring.

It is said that we, artists, do everything on impulse, but it is not so. It appears that I have loved Eve for a long time, but was too much of a jackass to know it.

God knows what happened to me when I walked her home that evening. We went hand in hand without saying a word. I held her hand tightly to my body, and she held mine to hers. Finally, when she lifted her hand to her face, did I awake.

"Eve, is it true you are mine?"

"Yes, yes!"

She was beautiful, her eyes sleepy, yet shiny, and such a sweet disposition that I could hardly break away.

In truth she did not want to part from me either, as if to make up for the long silence and repressed feelings.

I returned home late. Swiatecki was not in bed. He was sketching on wood by the light of a lamp.

"There's a letter here for you," he said without lifting his eyes from his work.

In picking up the envelope I could feel the ring inside. Good! I'll need it tomorrow. I open the envelope and read.

I know that the return of this ring will cause you some pleasure for, obviously, that is what you desired. As for me, I would not think to rival an actress. K.

Well, at least it was short.

The letter communicates anger, nothing more.

If there ever was an aura surrounding Kathy, it fades irrecoverably. Strange thing, everyone thought that Eve was the cause of my disguising myself and all the deceptions. Instead, she is the cause of what will happen next.

I dispose of the letter, pocket the ring and go to bed.

Swiatecki looks up from his work expecting a statement. I offer none.

"That lousy Ostrzynski was here this evening, right after the theater," he said.

XVII

The next morning I want to run over to see Eve, but I can't as I have visitors.

Baron Kartoffler drops in and orders a copy of my painting. He wants to give me fifteen hundred rubles. I hold out for two-thousand. An agreement is struck.

After his departure, Tanzenberg orders two portraits. Swiatecki, a confirmed anti-Semite, begins to mouth off about Jewish painters. But I'd be interested to know who would buy works of art if not "financiers." If they are afraid of Swiatecki's "stiffs," it is not my fault.

I make it over to Eve's at one. I present her with the ring and announce that after the wedding we leave for Rome.

Eve agrees happily. Yesterday we were silent, today we out-talk each other.

I tell her of the orders I have received and share my joy. The portraits must be ready before departure, the copy of the *Jews* I will paint in Rome. On our return to Warsaw, I'll set up a studio and life will be heaven.

In planning these events I promise Eve that the anniversary of yesterday will always be a holiday. But she leans her head on my shoulder and asks me not to speak of it. Then she throws her arms around my neck and calls me her great man. She is paler than usual, her eyes are bluer, but she is simply radiant.

Oh, what an ass I had been having such a woman near, to go looking for happiness somewhere else, in a sphere where I was a stranger and which was foreign to me.

What an artistic nature Eve has. Now that we are engaged, she takes the role seriously and begins to play the part of the happy young fiancée. I cannot hold it against the dear creature who has spent so many years in the theater.

After lunch, we go to visit Helen Kolczanowski.

From the time I am introduced as Eve's fiancé, the prank with the lyrist becomes innocent and causes no disagreement between the ladies. On hearing about the engagement Helen receives me with open arms and rejoices over Eve's good fortune. We laugh like a trio of madmen over what the *lirnik* had to hear about Magorski the painter. Yesterday, I would have stilletoeed Ostrzynski, today I admire his wit.

Helen laughs so hard that tears fall from her translucent eyes. Speaking aside, she is beautiful. When at the end of the visit she turns her head, both Eve and I are captivated. Eve is so impressed by this mannerism that she unconsciously imitates it, and the look, during the day.

We agree that after our return from abroad I will paint Helen's portrait, but before that I will paint one of my darling Eve. I hope that I can capture those features, so delicate that they are almost ephemeral, and that expressive face in which every emotion is reflected like a cloud on calm water.

Sure I can do it, and why not?

The evening *Flyer* carries impossible stories of the commissions I have received. My future income is tallied in the hundreds of thousands.

Perhaps this contributes to the fact that on the following day I receive a letter from Kathy. She grievously regrets her rash act of returning the ring in a fit of passion. She says that if I would come over and we would both throw ourselves at the mercy of the parents we would, no doubt, receive forgiveness.

I've had enough of this pleading and throwing at the mercy of. I refuse to answer. Let him who wants to go through all that nonsense. Let Kathy take Ostrzynski, I've got my Eve.

My silence throws the Slusowski camp into a panic.

A few days later a messenger arrives with a letter from Kathy, this time for Swiatecki.

He shows me the letter. Kathy begs that he drop by for a discussion of a matter on which her entire future depends. She says that she is counting on his kind heart and fair disposition which she had noticed at the very first introduction. She pleads for him not to disappoint an unhappy woman. Swiatecki curses, mutters about defenestration and the necessity of hanging parent and progeny at the nearest opportunity, but he goes.

I guess that they will try to influence me through him.

XVIII

Swiatecki, whose heart is soft, has been won over.

He has been at the Slusowskis' every night for a week. At home, for the last three days, he has been looking at me in the manner of a wolf surveying his prey.

At the end of the day, just after tea, he spoke to me overtly, "Well, what do you intend to do with that girl?"

"What girl?"

"That... what's her face... Slusowski."

"I'm not going to do anything with her."

A moment of silence follows, then he speaks again, "She cries day after day, I can't stand it anymore."

Oh, what a kind soul.

His voice shakes with emotion, but he clears his throat and adds, "A decent person would not act this way."

"Swiatecki, you begin to remind me of papa Slusowski!"

"It may be, but I'd rather remind you of papa Slusowski than hurt his daughter!"

"Get off my back, will you!"

"Good, I don't even want to know you!"

The conversation ends there and from that moment I am no longer talking to Swiatecki.

We pretend that we don't know each other. What makes it ridiculous is that we continue to live together, have breakfast and tea together, and neither one of us has any intention of moving out.

The date of my wedding approaches.

Through the *Flyer* all Warsaw knows of it. Everyone looks at us, everyone admires Eve. When we visited the exhibit, the throng closed in around us, we had to squeeze our way out.

My anonymous advisoress again sends me letters. She warns me that Eve is not a wife for a man like me.

"I cannot believe what is said about relations between Miss Adami and Mr. Ostrzynski," she writes, "but you, Master, need a wife who would devote everything to your fame and greatness. Miss Adami is an artist herself, she will always want to have thing her way."

Swiatecki is still making trips to the Slusowskis'. By now he must have assumed the role of consoler, for by now they surely must be aware of my plans.

For Eve I have obtained unlimited leave of absence from the theater. She has begun to comb her hair in a peasant fashion. She wears plain dresses, buttoned to the collar. I must admit that she looks good that way. The scene in the dressing room has not repeated itself. Eve won't let it. At present, I am allowed to kiss her hand. This makes me most anxious, but I consider it a compliment that, after all, I am the one.

She loves me absolutely. We spend entire days together. I have begun to give her drawing lessons.

She is wild about these lessons and painting in general.

XIX

Oh mighty Jove, look down from the dizzy heights of Olympus, things are happening of which philosophers have never dreamed about.

On the eve of my wedding Swiatecki comes to see me. He elbows me and shaking his tousled mop of hair, says gloomily, "Wladek, I have committed a crime."

"Well, now that you have spoken, out with it."

He stares at the floor and speaks as if to himself, "For a drunkard like me, a moral and physical bankrupt to marry a wonderful girl like Kathy is an absolute crime!"

I can't believe my ears. I hug Swiatecki wildly, his protests notwithstanding.

The wedding will take place in a few days.

XX

After several months in Rome we receive a sumptuous invitation to the wedding of Mr. Ostrzynski and Helen Turno *primo voto* Kolczanowski.

We cannot go as Eve's health will not permit it.

Eve paints continuously and is making tremendous strides. I received a medal in Pest. A Croatian bourgeois bought the canvas. I have made friends among the painters here.

XXI

My son is born in Verona.
Even Eve admits that she has never seen such a child.
Exceptional!

XXII

We have been in Warsaw for a few months now. I have set up the ideal studio.
We visit the Ostrzynski's often. He has sold the *Flyer* and become the president of a charitable institution which distributes food to unemployed workers. One cannot say anything against his unselfishness or the recognition it brings. He pats my back and calls me generous. He also sponsors literary talents and receives on Wednesdays.
They have no children.

XXIII

Help! I'm dying of laughter.
The Swiateckis' have returned from Paris. She poses as the wife of an artist from "Golden Bohemia." He wears silk shirts, longish hair and a Van Dyke beard. I see how she managed to cope with his habits and his character, but how she tamed the jungle on his head will remain a mystery forever.
Swiatecki has not given up "making stiffs," but has branched out into pastoral landscapes. He has had much success. He also does portraits, but is less successful as the flesh tones are reminiscent of his prior works.
I asked him in friendship if he was happy. He answered that he had never dreamed such happiness was possible. I must admit, Kathy far surpassed even my expectations.
And I too would be happy were it not for Eve's failing health. Furthermore the poor dear is constantly unnerved. I heard her sobbing in the night. I know the cause — she misses the theater. She misses it, but is keeping it welled up.
I started the portrait of Mrs. Helen Ostrzynski. She is an absolutely incomparable woman. Ostrzynski could not stop me from... if it were not for the fact that I love Eve absolutely. If not for this I don't know what would happen.
But I love Eve eternally... eternally...!

Note:

* The song was translated from Ukrainian by Dr. Leo Rudnycky and his son Nicholas.

Version: 07-31-2010