

THE DOORKEEPER'S SON

The General's child lived on the first floor, the doorkeeper's son in the basement; there was a great distance between the two families, the whole of the ground floor as well as that of rank and precedence; but they lived under the same roof, with a view of the street and the courtyard; in the latter there was a plot of grass with a blossoming acacia tree, when it blossomed, and under it the smartly dressed child's nurse sometimes sat with the even more smartly dressed child of the General, 'little Emilie'. In front of them danced the doorkeeper's little boy with large brown eyes and dark hair, and the child smiled at him, stretched her small hands out to him, and if the General saw this from his window, he nodded and said: 'Charming!' The General's wife, who was so young that she could almost have been her husband's daughter from an early marriage, never looked out of the window facing the courtyard, but she had given the order that the young boy of the basement family should be allowed to play in front of the child, but never touch him. The nurse strictly obeyed her mistress's orders.

And the sun shone in to those who lived on the first floor, and in to those who lived in the basement, the acacia tree came into bloom, the blooms withered and fell, and new ones came the following year; the tree blossomed and the doorkeeper's young boy blossomed, he looked like a fresh tulip.

The General's little daughter grew fine and pale, like the pink petals on the acacia flower. Now she seldom came down under the tree; she got her fresh air in the General's carriage. She used to ride out with Mama, and she always nodded to the doorkeeper's boy Georg, even blew him a kiss with her fingers, until her mother told her she was too old to do such a thing.

One morning he was to bring the General the letters and newspapers that early that morning had been placed in the doorkeeper's living room. As he went up the stairs, past the door with the cubbyhole for keeping sand, he heard something cheeping inside; he thought it was a chicken that was whimpering, but it was the General's little daughter in her lace and gauze.

'Don't tell Papa and Mama! for then they'll be so angry.'

'What is it, young miss?' Georg asked. 'Everything's on fire!' she said. 'It's all ablaze!'

Georg opened the door to the small nursery; the window curtains were almost completely burnt!, the curtain rail was alight and in flames. Georg leapt up, pulled down, shouted for people to come; without him the whole house might have caught fire. The General and his wife interrogated little Emilie.

'All I took was one match,' she said, 'and it caught light at once, and the curtains caught light at once. I spat on them to put them out, I spat as much as I could, but I didn't have enough spit, and so I ran and hid, for Papa and Mama would be angry with me.'

'Spat!' the General said, 'what sort of a word is that? When have you ever heard Papa and Mama say spat? You must have got that from downstairs!'

But little Georg was given fourpence. He didn't go to the baker's with it, he put it in his piggy bank, and soon there were so many pennies that he could buy himself a paint box and colour his own drawings, and he had a great many of those; they seemed to come out of the pencil and his fingers. He gave the first coloured pictures to little Emilie as a present.

'Charming!' the General said; his wife readily admitted that one could clearly see what the boy had tried to represent. 'He has a flair for it!' These were words that were taken down to the basement by the doorkeeper's wife.

The General and his wife were from distinguished families; they had two coats of arms on their carriage; one for each of them; his wife also had her arms on every article of clothing, on the outside and the inside, on her nightgown and her night sashet; one of the coats of arms was precious, bought by her father for shining thalers, for he was not born with a coat of arms, nor was she, she

had been born too early for that, seven years before the coat of arms; most people could remember that, but not the family. The General's coat of arms was old and impressive; it could be something of a liability to bear one let alone two coats of arms, and the General's wife felt this liability, when she rode off to a court ball, erect and in all her finery.

The General was old and grey, but was a fine horseman, he was well aware of this and used to ride out every day with a groom at a suitable distance behind him, and should he meet anyone, it was as if he came riding in on his high horse, and he wore his orders, so many that it was beyond comprehension, but that was no fault of his. As a very young man he had been in the army, taken part in the major autumn manoeuvres that the troops had to carry out in peacetime. From that period he had an anecdote, the only one he ever told: his NCO cut off and took prisoner one of the princes, and the latter, with his small troop of captured soldiers, himself a prisoner, now had to ride into the town, behind the General. It was an unforgettable event, which, throughout all the years that it was retold by the General, and always with precisely the same memorable words he had spoken as he once more handed the sword back to the prince: 'Only my NCO could take your highness prisoner, I could never have done so!' and the prince replied: 'You are incomparable!' The General had never been in a real war; when such a war passed through the land, he chose the path of diplomacy, passing through three courts abroad. He spoke the French language so that he almost forgot his own; he danced well, he rode well, orders accumulated on his coat to a degree that defied comprehension, sentries presented arms to him; one of the loveliest young girls was introduced to him, became his wife and they had a delightful little child that almost seemed to have fallen from heaven, it was so delightful, and the doorkeeper's son danced for her out in the courtyard as soon as she could take notice of such things, and he presented her with all his drawn, coloured pictures, and she looked at them, took pleasure in them and tore them to pieces. She was so fine and so pretty.

'My rose petal!' the General's wife said. 'You are born for a prince!'

The prince was already standing outside the door; but they did not know this. People cannot see far beyond their own doorstep.

'The other day our boy even shared a sandwich with her!' the doorkeeper's wife said; 'there was neither cheese nor meat on it, but she found it as tasty as if it had been a joint of roast beef. There would have been the devil to pay if the General's folk had seen that meal being shared, but they didn't see it.'

George had share his sandwich with little Emilie, he would gladly have shared his heart with her if that would have pleased her. He was a good boy, he was bright and intelligent, he now attended evening classes at the academy in order to learn how to draw properly. Little Emilie was also acquiring knowledge; she spoke French with her 'Bonne' and had a dancing instructor.

'Georg is to be confirmed at Easter!' the doorkeeper's wife said; he had reached that stage.

'It would be a sensible idea for him to become an apprentice!' his father said. 'A decent profession is what's called for! and then we would also have him out of the house!'

'But he'd come home to sleep at night!' his mother said; 'it isn't easy to find a master who has a spare room! And we must also give him clothes! the small amount of food he eats is affordable! he's happy with just a couple of boiled potatoes! his apprentice costs nothing. Just let him go the way *he* wants to, you'll see, he will do us proud, and that's what the professor said too!'

His confirmation clothes were ready. His mother had sewn them herself, although they had been measured and cut by the repairing tailor, and he was good at cutting; if he had had a different start in life and been able to have a workshop with journeymen,' the doorkeeper's wife said, 'that man could well have become a court tailor.'

The clothes were ready and so was Georg. On the day of his confirmation, he received a large tombac watch from his godfather, the Chandler's old journeyman, the richest of Georg's godparents. The watch was old and well-tried, it always gained time, but that is better than losing time. It was

an expensive gift; and from the General's family he received a hymn book bound in morocco leather, sent from the young miss to whom Georg had given pictures as presents. At the front of the book stood his name and her name and 'favourably disposed patroness'; it has been written as dictated by the General's wife, and the General had read it through and said 'Charming!'

'It is really a great mark of attention from such a distinguished family,' the doorkeeper's wife said; and Georg had to put on his confirmation suit and, with the hymn book, go up and present himself and express his thanks. The General's wife was wrapped up in lots of shawls and suffering from one of the bad headaches that she always had when she was bored. The General was in his dressing gown, was wearing a tasselled cap and red-shafted Russian boots; he walked three times back and forth in his own thoughts and memories, stopped up and said:

'Young Georg is now a Christian! Let him now also be a worthy man and honour those in authority! That maxim you will one day, as an old man, be able to say was taught you by the General!'

This was a longer speech than the General usually made; and he then returned once more to his introspection and stood there looking distinguished. Although of all that Georg heard and saw upstairs, what he retained most clearly in his mind was Miss Emilie; how lovely she was, how gentle she was, how ethereal she was – how fine she was! were she to be drawn, it would have to be in a soap bubble. There was a certain scent about her clothes, about her curly, blond hair, as if she was a rose bush that had just come into bloom; and with her he had once shared an open sandwich; she had eaten it with a gluttonous appetite, and nodded to him at every other mouthful. Did she still remember this? he wondered. Yes, surely she did: hadn't she given him the beautiful hymn book 'in remembrance'; and the first time after that when the new year's moon was visible, he went outside with bread and a small coin and opened the book to see what hymn it landed at. It was a hymn of praise and thanksgiving; and he opened it again to see what Emilie was to be vouchsafed; he took good care not to open up the book where the funeral hymns stood, and despite this he opened the book between death and the grave; it was quite unbelievable! although he was scared when the lovely young girl was soon lying ill in bed; and every afternoon the doctor's carriage stood outside the door.

'She won't be allowed to keep her for long!' the doorkeeper's wife said, 'the Good Lord knows for sure those he will have!'

But they were allowed to keep her; and Georg drew pictures and sent her; he drew the Czar's palace, the old Kremlin in Moscow exactly as it stood there, with its towers and cupolas, they looked like huge, green and gilded cucumbers, in Georg's drawing at least. This pleased little Emilie so much, and so in the course of a week Georg sent a couple more pictures, all of them buildings, for with them he could think his only many thoughts inside the door and the windows.

He drew a Chinese house with tubular bells on all of the sixteen floors; he drew two Greek temples with slender marble columns and a staircase round the outside; he drew a church from Norway; one could see it was completely made of staves, hewn and strangely positioned, each storey looked as if it had cradle rockers; though loveliest of all was a sheet of paper on which he had drawn the palace which he called 'Little Emilie's'. That was how she should live; Georg had completely designed it himself, compiling it out of everything he found most delightful in all of the other buildings. It had carved beams like the Norwegian church, marble columns like the Greek temple, tubular bells on every floor, and right at the top it had green and gilded cupolas, as in the Czar's Kremlin. It was a real child's palace! and under each window he had written what that hall or room was to be used for: 'here Emilie sleeps', here Emilie dances' and here she pretends that 'visitors arrive'. It was lovely to look at, and it was looked at a great deal.

'Charming!' the General said.

But the old Count, for there was an old Count who was even more distinguished than the General, and who himself had a castle and a manor house, said nothing; he heard that it had been conceived and drawn by the doorkeeper's young son. Well, he was not all that young, he had been confirmed. The old Count looked at the pictures and thought a great deal to himself about them.

One day when the weather was dull and grey, wet, horrible, was the brightest and best day of all for young Georg. The professor at the art academy summoned him.

'Listen, my friend,' he said, 'let us have a little chat, you and I! The Lord God has been very good towards you as regards talent, and he has also been good to you when it comes to good people. The old Count on the corner has spoken to me about you; I have also seen your pictures, we will not talk about them at all, there is a great deal that needs correcting! You can now come to my drawing school twice a week, and that will enable you to improve your drawing. I believe there is more of a master builder in you than an artist; you can give yourself time to think about that yourself! but go to the Count's house on the corner straight away, and thank the Lord God for that man's existence!'

It was a large town residence on the corner; around the windows both elephants and camels had been carved, all from ancient times; but the old Count was most fond of the new age and the good things that it brought with it, no matter whether it came from the first floor, the basement or the attic.

'My belief is,' the doorkeeper's wife said, 'that the more distinguished people really are, the less show of things they make. How delightful and straightforward the old Count is! And he speaks precisely as you and I do; that the General is unable to do! How dazed with delight Georg was yesterday about his good fortune with the Count; and today it is my turn, after having spoken with the influential man. Wasn't it a good thing that we didn't make Georg a craftsman's apprentice! The boy's got talent.'

'But talent also needed some outside help!' his father said.

'It's got that now,' his mother said; 'the Count has spelt things out quite clearly and distinctly!'

'But it originally came from the General and his wife!' his father said. 'We must also thank them.'

'We could certainly do that!' his mother said, 'but I don't think there's all that much to thank for; I want to thank the Good Lord, and also thank him for letting little Emilie start to recover!'

Things were getting better for her, and they were getting better for Georg; in the course of a year he gained the small silver medal and later the larger one.

'It would have been better if he had been a craftsman's apprentice!' the doorkeeper's wife said and wept; 'then we could have kept him here. What does he want to go to Rome for? I'll never get to see him again, even if he comes home again, but he won't do that, the sweet child!'

'But it will mean his good fortune and his glory!' his father said.

'Well, many thanks, my friend!' his mother said, 'you're saying what you don't really mean; you're just as sad about it as I am.'

And that was true enough, both the sadness and the departure. It was a great stroke of luck for the young man, everybody said.

And he took his farewell, also from the General, though his wife did not put in an appearance, she had one of her bad headaches. At this leave-taking the General told his one and only anecdote, what he had said to the prince, and what the prince had said to him: 'You are incomparable!' and then he gave Georg his hand, a limp hand.

Emilie also gave Georg her hand, and looked almost melancholy, but George was the more melancholy even so.

Time passes when one is busy doing something, it also passes when one is not doing anything. The time is equally long, but not equally useful. For Georg it was useful and not at all long, except when he thought of them back home. How were things upstairs and downstairs? Well something was written about it; and one can put so much into a letter, bright sunshine and the dark, heavy days. The latter lay in the letter, which told him that his father was dead, that only his mother was left; Emilie had been like an angel of consolation, she had come down to her, yes, his mother wrote that, and added about herself that she had been allowed to retain the post of doorkeeper.

The General's wife kept a diary; in it every party, every ball she had attended was listed, as well as all visits paid her by strangers. The diary was illustrated by the visiting cards of diplomats and all those of extremely noble birth, she was proud of her diary; it grew over drawn-out time, heavy times, during many bad headaches, but also during many bright nights – court balls, in other words. Emilie had been to a court ball for the first time; her mother was in pink with black lace: Spanish; her daughter in white, so bright, so fine; green silk ribbons fluttered like reeds among her curly blond locks, which wore a garland of white water lilies; her eyes were so blue and clear, her mouth so fine and red, she resembled a little mermaid, the most delightful imaginable. Three princes danced with her, first one, then the other of course; the General's wife didn't have a headache for a whole week.

But the first ball was not the last one, that Emilie would not put up with; so it was a good thing that summer came, with rest and fresh air out of doors. The family had been invited to the old Count's castle.

It was a castle with a garden, well worth seeing. Part of it was just as in the old days, with stiff, green hedges, as if one was walking between green screens that had peepholes in them. Box trees and yew trees stood trimmed into stars and pyramids, water gushed from large grottoes studded with mussel shells; around the grounds stood stone figures made of the heaviest stone, this one could see from both from their attire and their faces; every flower bed had its own shape, as fish, coat or arms or monogram, that was the French part of the garden; from it one entered, as it were, an untamed, fresh wood where the trees were allowed to grow as they wished, and they were therefore so tall and so magnificent; the grass was green and could be walked on, it was also rolled, mown, cared for and tended; this was the English part of the garden.

'An old age and a new one!' the Count said; 'here they mesh so well together! in two year's time the castle itself will gain its proper appearance, it will be a total transformation into something beautiful and better; I'll show you the drawings, and I'll show you the builder, he is coming to dinner today!'

'Charming!' the General said.

'It's just like Paradise!' the General's wife said; 'and there you have a knightly castle!'

'That is my henhouse!' the Count said; 'Pigeons live in the tower, turkeys on the first floor, but on the ground floor old Else reigns supreme. She has guest rooms on all sides: the broody hens separately, the hens with chickens separately, and the ducks have their own exit down to the water!'

'Charming!' the General repeated.

And all of them went to take a look at this splendid structure.

Old Else stood in the middle of the living room and beside her stood Georg, the builder; he and little Emilie met after several years, met in the henhouse.

Yes, here he stood, and he was handsome enough to look at: his face was open and firm, his hair a glossy black, and a smile played around his lips as if saying: there's a rascal behind my ear, he knows you inside out. Old Else had taken off her clogs and stood there in her stockinged feet, in honour of the distinguished guests. And the hens clucked and the cock crowed, the ducks waddled off 'quack! quack!'. But the fine, pale girl, his childhood friend, the General's daughter, stood with a rosy blush on her otherwise so pale cheeks, her eyes were as large as if her mouth expressed it, although her mouth itself said not a word, and the greeting he received was the finest greeting any young person could wish for from a young lady, unless they were related or had often danced together – and she and the builder had never danced together. The Count shook hands with him and presented him: 'He is not a complete stranger, our young friend, Mr Georg!'

The General's wife curtsied, her daughter was about to give him her hand, but she did not do so. 'Our young Mr Georg!' the General said. 'Old house friends. Charming!'

'You have become quite an Italian!' the General's wife said, 'and I take it you speak the language like a native?'

The General's wife sang the language, but did not speak it, the General said.

At table Georg sat to the right of Emilie, the General had her as dinner partner, the Count the General's wife.

Mr Georg talked and relating thing and he was good at this, he was the life and soul of the dinner party, despite the fact that the old Count could also be so. Emilie sat there silent, all ears, with gleaming eyes.

But she said nothing.

She and Georg stood on the verandah among the flowers, the rose bush concealed them. Georg was once more the one who spoke, spoke first.

'Thank you for your kindness towards my old mother!' he said; 'I know that the night my father died, you came down to her and stayed with her until he his eyes were closed, thank you!' he grasped Emilie's hand and kissed it, that was in order on such an occasion; she went bright red, but returned the pressure of his hand and looked at him with her blue, wonderful eyes.

'Your mother was a dear soul! How fond of you she was! And all your letters she allowed me to read, I almost feel that I know you! how friendly you were towards me when I was small, you gave me pictures -!'

'Which you tore to pieces!' Georg said.

'No! I still have my palace, the drawing.'

'Now I am to build a real one!' Georg said, and his words made him feel quite warm.

The General and his wife were talking in their own rooms about the doorkeeper's son, he knew how to move with knowledge, assurance. 'He could easily be a private teacher!' the General said.

'A good mind!' the General's wife said, and that was all she said.

Mr Georg came to the Count's castle quite often during the lovely summer months. He was missed when he did not come.

'How much the Good Lord has given you compared to the rest of us poor mortals!' Emilie said to him. 'Do you appreciate the fact?'

It flattered Georg that the beautiful young girl looked up to him, he found her exceptionally talented.

And the General felt increasingly convinced that Mr Georg could not possibly be a basement child. 'His mother was an very honest woman, at any rate!' he said, 'That ought to be her epitaph!'

The summer passed, the winter came, the subject of conversation was once more Mr Georg; he was highly regarded and accepted even in the highest circles, the General had met him at a court ball. Now the house was to hold its own ball for little Emilie – could Mr Georg be invited?

'Anyone the king invites, the General can too!' the General said, and lifted his heels a whole inch from the floor.

Mr Georg was invited, and he came; and princes and Counts came, and each one danced better than the previous one; but Emilie only danced the first dance; while dancing she had sprained her ankle, not seriously, but painfully, and so she had to be careful, refrain from dancing, watch the others, and she sat and watched, and the builder stood beside her.

'You'd probably give her all of St Peter's Church!' the General said as he passed by, smiling with sheer goodwill.

With the same goodwill he received Georg a few days later. The young man surely came to thank them for the ball, but for what else? Well, he came with something utterly surprising, utterly amazing: he came with insane words, the General couldn't believe his own ears; 'a pyramidal declamation', a request that was unthinkable: Mr Georg asked for little Emilie's hand in marriage.

'My good man!' the General said, his face turning bright red. 'I completely fail to understand you! What is it you are saying? What is it you are asking? I do not know you, sir! Are you considering taking over my house! am I to be here, or am I not to be here?' and he backed into his bedroom, turned the key and let Mr Georg standing there on his own, he stood there a few minutes, then turned round. In the passage stood Emilie.

'What did my father answer?' she asked and her voice quavered.

'George squeezed her hand: 'he ran off! – there will be a better occasion!'

There were tears in Emilie's eyes; there was determination and courage in the young man's eyes, and the sun shone in on the two of them and gave them its blessing.

In his own room the General sat as red as a boiled lobster; he was still boiling, it spilt over into words and exclamations: 'Lunacy! Doorkeeper madness!'

In less than an hour the General's wife had the news from his own mouth, and she summoned Emilie and sat alone with her.

'You poor child! To insult you in such a way! insult us! You also have tears in your eyes, but it becomes you! You are so lovely when you cry! You look like me on my wedding day. Just you cry, little Emilie!'

'Yes, that I must!' Emilie say, 'since neither you nor father will give your consent!'

'Child!' the General's wife exclaimed; 'you are ill! you are delirious, and I feel one of my terrible headaches coming on! all the ill fortune that befalls our house! Do not let your mother die, Emilie, for then you will have no mother!'

And her mother's eyes grew moist, she could not stand thinking about her own death.

In the newspaper one could read among the appointments: Mr Georg made a professor, fifth class, number eight.

‘It’s a pity that his parents are in the grave and unable to read it!’ the new doorkeeper couple said, who now lived in the basement beneath the General’s family: they knew that the professor had been born and grown up within their four walls.

‘Now he’ll be joining the ranks of the top taxpayers!’ the man said.

‘Yes, that’s costly for a poor child,’ his wife said. ‘Eighteen thalers a year,’ the man said; ‘yes, that’s a lot of money!’

‘No, his rank I mean!’ his wife said. ‘Do you really think he’s worried about the money, he can earn that many times over! and he’ll probably get a rich wife as well. If we had children, husband, then our child ought also to be a builder and a professor!’

Georg was certainly talked about in the basement, as he was on the first floor; the old Count allowed himself to do so.

It was the drawn pictures from his childhood that brought the subject up. But why were they mentioned? The talk was of Russia, of Moscow, and there was of course the Kremlin, which young Georg had once drawn for Miss Emilie; he had drawn so many pictures, one in particular the Count recalled: ‘Little Emilie’s Palace’, where she slept, where she danced and pretended to ‘receive visitors’; the professor was extremely capable, he would probably die as an old cabinet member, it was not impossible, before to have really built a palace for the now so young lady; why not?

‘He was in a strangely cheerful mood,’ the General’s wife remarked, when the Count had left. The General shook his head thoughtfully, rode off with his groom at a suitable distance and sat more proudly than ever on his high horse.

It was little Emilie’s birthday: flowers and books, letters and visiting cards were brought; the General’s wife kissed her on the lips, the General on the forehead; they were loving parents, and both she and they received distinguished visitors, two from princes. The talk was of balls and theatre visits, of diplomatic missions, nations and the government of the country. The talk was of capability, the capability of one’s own country, and this brought the young professor into the conversation, Mr Master Builder.

‘He builds for his own immortality!’ it was said, ‘he is certainly also building a way into one of the first families of the realm!’

‘One of the first families!’ the General later repeated to his wife. ‘Who is one of our first families?’

‘I know who was being referred to!’ the General’s wife said, ‘but I will not say the name! not even think it! God reigns supreme! but it would surprise me’

‘Let me be surprised too!’ the General said, ‘I haven’t the foggiest idea!’ and he sank into thoughtful expectation.

There is a power, an unnameable power in the fount of mercy from above, the court’s favour, God’s favour; and all that fount of mercy little Georg possessed. But we are forgetting the birthday.’

Emilie’s room was full of fragrance from the flowers friends had sent her; on the table lay lovely gifts as greetings and mementos, but not a single thing from Georg, that was impossible, but was also unnecessary, the whole house reminded her of him. Even from the cubbyhole for sand under the stairs the flower of memory peeped out; there Emilie had cheeped when the curtains caught fire and Georg came as the first shoot. A look out of the window, and the acacia tree reminded her of her childhood. Flowers and leaves had fallen from it, but the tree stood there coated in hoar frost as if it was some immense branch of coral; and the moon shone large and bright between its branches, unchanged in all its changeability, as when Georg share his sandwich with little Emilie.

From the drawer she took out the drawings of the Czar’s palace, of her own palace; mementos from Georg; there were looked at and pondered over, and many thoughts were aired; she recalled the day when she, unnoticed by her father and mother, went down to the doorkeeper’s wife who was lying on her deathbed; she sat with her, held her hand, heard her last words: ‘Blessing! –

Georg!’ The mother had thought of her son. – Now Emilie made her own interpretation of this. Oh yes, Georg was there as well on her birthday, there without a doubt!

It so happened the following day that there was once more a birthday in the house: the General’s birthday; he was born the day after his daughter, earlier than her of course, many years earlier. Now there were presents once more, including a saddle, excellent in appearance, comfortable and costly – only one of the princes had one like it. Who was it from? The General was in raptures. There was a small note with it; if ‘Thank you for yesterday!’ had stood on it, the rest of us could probably have guessed who it came from, but what was written on the note was: ‘From one the honourable General does not know.’

‘Who in the world do I not know?!’ the General said. ‘I know everybody!’ and he went through his large number of acquaintances in his mind; he knew every one of them. ‘It is from my wife!’ he said finally. ‘She is having her little joke with me! charming!’

But she was not having a little joke, that time was over and done with.

And now there was a festive occasion, yet another one, but not at the General’s house, a costume ball one of the princes was holding; masks were also permitted.

The General turned up as Rubens, in Spanish attire with a small ruff, dagger and erect posture, his wife was Madame Rubens, in black velvet, with a high neck, terribly hot, with a millstone round her neck, a large ruff in other words, exactly like a Dutch painting the General owned; and one where the hands in particular were much admired! they looked just like those of the General’s wife.

Emilie was Psyche, in gauze and lace. She was like floating swan down, she did not need any wings, she only wore them as an indication she was Psyche.

There was glitter, splendour, light and flowers, abundance and good taste; there was so much to see that nobody noticed the beautiful hands of Madame Rubens.

A black Domino, with an acacia flower on his hood, danced with Psyche.

‘Who is that?’ the General’s wife asked.

‘His royal highness!’ the General said, ‘I’m quite sure of it, I knew him at once from his handshake.’

The General’s wife had her doubts.

General Rubens had no doubts at all, approached the black Domino and wrote the royal letters in his hand, these were denied, but a clue was given:

‘The motto of the saddle. One the General does not know.’

‘But I do know you!’ the General said. ‘*You* have sent me the saddle!’

The Domino raised his hand, and disappeared among the others.

‘Who was the black Domino, Emilie, you were dancing with?’ the General’s wife asked.

‘I didn’t ask his name!’ she answered.

‘Because you knew it! It’s the professor!’

‘Your protégé is here, your excellency!’ she went on, turning to the Count, who was standing close by. ‘Black Domino with acacia flower!’

‘Highly possible, my lady!’ he replied. ‘But one of the princes also happens to be wearing the same costume!’

‘I know the handshake!’ the General said. ‘I have received the saddle from the prince! I am so certain I am right that I am prepared to invite him to our table!’

‘Do that! If it is the prince, he is sure to come –!’ the Count said.

And if it’s the other one, he won’t!’ the General said and approached the black Domino, who at that moment was talking with the king. The General submitted a particularly respectful invitation

for them to get to know each other; the General smiled, absolutely convinced as he was of whom he was inviting; he spoke loudly and clearly.

The Domino lifted his mask: it was Georg.

‘Would the honourable General care to repeat the invitation?’ he asked

The General definitely became an inch taller, stood even more erect, took two steps backwards and one forwards, as if to a minuet, and there was seriousness and clear expression, so much could be read from the General’s fine face.

‘I never retract what I have said! The professor is invited!’ and he bowed with a look at the king, who had certainly heard every word.

And so there was dinner at the General’s house, and the only ones invited were the old Count and his protégé.

‘Foot under the table,’ Georg thought, ‘and the foundation stone’s laid!’ and the foundation stone was truly laid with great ceremony at the house of the General and his wife.

The man had come and, as the General knew and was very well aware, he had spoken quite as a man of high society, had been most interesting; many times the General had to utter his ‘Charming’. The General’s wife spoke of her dinner, even spoke of it to one of the ladies of the court, and she, one of the most witty and intelligent, asked for an invitation the next time the professor came. So he had to be invited again, and he was invited and he came, and once again he was charming, could even play chess.

‘He can’t be from the basement!’ the General said, ‘he must definitely be a distinguished son! there are many such sons of distinction, and this is no fault at all of the young man himself!’

The professor, who came to the king’s house, was welcome to come to the General’s, but be a regular feature there was not spoken of, although it was all over town.

He grew in stature. The dew of mercy fell from above!

So it came as no surprise at all that when the professor was made a titular councillor of state, Emilie became his wife.

‘Life is either tragedy or comedy,’ the General said, ‘in tragedy people die, in comedy they get each other.’

They got each other. And got three healthy boys, although not all at once.

The sweet children rode through the rooms and halls on their hobbyhorses when they visited grandfather and grandmother. And the General also rode on a hobbyhorse right behind them: ‘As a jockey for the small councillors of state!’

The General’s wife sat on the sofa and smiled, even though she had one of her bad headaches.

Georg advanced that far, and a lot further as well, otherwise it would not have been worth the trouble to tell of the doorkeeper’s son.