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'Rapport and Subversion: Mesmer's Treatment of Paradis and Its Influence

On the Fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann'

and

The Cost of Light (a novel)

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Abstract

This is a thesis in two parts, a novel and a critical project. Both are about Maria-Theresa von Paradis, a blind and possibly 'hysterical' pianist and composer, and Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer, the founder of Mesmerism, who temporarily managed to cure her with this controversial treatment.

In the novel, *The Cost of Light*, Paradis's confessions to Mesmer allow me to show that her possible hysterical blindness arises from a complex cluster of motives, for example, a refusal to see, and too great a desire to witness, forbidden sights. In this way, the novel demonstrates the malleable nature of eighteenth-century hysteria, which, for Paradis, transforms itself constantly in relation to her psychosocial conditions and familial constraints. Her sudden blindness, her miraculous recovery of sight at Doctor Mesmer's hands and then its subsequent loss could therefore *all* be considered hysterical symptoms.

The related critical project, 'Rapport and Subversion: Mesmer's Treatment of Paradis and Its Influence on the Fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann' is divided into three chapters. 'Chapter 1: The Blind Musician' explores the nature of Paradis's possibly hysterical blindness and suggests that, for her, blindness may well have had subversive and creative compensations. Her experiences are compared to those of the blind harpist, Charlotta Seuerling, and to those of Beethoven.

'Chapter 2: The Miracle Doctor' argues that the relationship between Mesmer and his famous patient and between other mesmerists and their subjects is one of power and control, reinforcing normative eighteenth-century gender roles. It

examines the effectiveness of Mesmerism in treating Paradis's blindness, and argues that her possible hysteria, and other factors, were potent subversive forces in undermining Mesmer's treatment.

'Chapter 3: The Mesmerised Writer' establishes how E.T.A. Hoffmann's characters in 'The Sandman', 'Councillor Krespel' and 'New Year's Eve Adventure' operate as paradigms for the Paradis/Mesmer relationship. This chapter also shows how Hoffmann's awareness of Mesmerism influenced his short stories, 'Automata', 'The Magnetiser' and 'The Golden Pot.'

Rapport and Subversion: Mesmer's Treatment of Paradis and Its Influence on the Fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann

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Introduction

In January 2010, for the first time in my life, I travelled to Vienna. The city was laden with snow and the Christmas markets were closing down with the end of the festive season. I was there on a research trip to discover more about the subject of my novel, *The Cost of Light*. Its main narrator, Maria-Theresa von Paradis, is a young Viennese girl from the eighteenth century, who apparently suffers from hysterical blindness. She is also the dutiful daughter of the Imperial Secretary to the Empress Maria-Theresa, who becomes her patron, funding music tuition for the young girl. Maria-Theresa herself becomes a celebrated pianist and composer, undertaking her own European tour, although her fame never eclipses that of her childhood friend, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. As I travelled through Vienna, I was to find Mozart everywhere, but signs of Maria-Theresa seemed to have vanished along with the melting snow.

Perhaps even more surprisingly, Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer, who briefly treated Maria-Theresa for blindness, is similarly neglected, even in the Landstraße district where his magnificent mansion once stood. In Vienna, he too is chiefly famous for his association with Mozart, since he allowed the twelve-year-old Prodigy to perform the opera *Bastien et Bastienne* in his garden.

In my novel, Mesmer adopts an early version of the Freudian 'talking cure.' As Maria-Theresa's secrets are revealed with her confessions, I show that, for her, hysterical blindness arises from a complex cluster of motives, for example, a refusal to see and too great a desire to witness, forbidden sights. My novel allows me to

reflect on the malleable nature of eighteenth-century hysteria, which transforms itself constantly in relation to her psychosocial conditions and familial constraints. Her sudden blindness and equally sudden and miraculous recovery of sight at Doctor Mesmer's hands, and then its subsequent loss, could *all* be considered hysterical symptoms.

German Romantic novelist and short story-writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) has himself often been heralded as a psychiatric theorist; after all, Freud used Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' as his primary example on which to build his theory of 'The Uncanny' in 1919. However, since Freud writes a century after Hoffmann, and psychoanalysis as such did not exist in Hoffmann's time, one of the main focuses of my critical project is Hoffmann's own contemporary preoccupation with Mesmerism.

In my critical project, 'Rapport and Subversion: Mesmer's Treatment of Paradis and Its Influence on the Fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann', I examine the implications of Paradis's possibly hysterical blindness and her Mesmeric treatment and relationship with Doctor Mesmer, as well as the influence of these upon Hoffmann's fiction.

'Chapter 1: The Blind Musician' explores the nature of Paradis's blindness and suggests that, for her, it may well have had subversive and creative compensations. Her experiences are compared to those of the blind eighteenth-century singer and harpist, Charlotta Seuerling, as well as to those of Beethoven, who also endured the loss of a crucial sense.

'Chapter 2: The Miracle Doctor' argues that the relationship between Mesmer and his famous patient, and between other mesmerists and their subjects, is often one

of power and control, reinforcing normative eighteenth-century gender roles. It also examines the effectiveness of Mesmerism in treating Paradis's blindness, and argues that her possible hysteria, and other factors, were subversive forces in undermining Mesmer's attempts at cure.

'Chapter 3: The "Mesmerised" Writer' demonstrates the influence that Mesmerism, and more specifically, the Paradis case-study, had upon the fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann. It shows how Hoffmann's female characters are, like Paradis, torn between their own (musical) desires and the controlling impulses of Coppélius, Doctor Miracle and Dapertutto, all of whom operate as paradigms for the Paradis/Mesmer relationship. This chapter also reveals that Hoffmann's awareness of Mesmer influenced his short stories, 'Automata', 'The Magnetiser' and 'The Golden Pot'. The choice of these stories as central to my study becomes obvious since they either feature a mesmeric enchanter or distinct and differing aspects, both positive and malign, of mesmeric treatment. This chapter reveals then that for Hoffmann, Mesmerism is a double-edged sword, as indeed it proved to be for Maria-Theresa von Paradis.

Jane Madell

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Chapter 1: The Blind Musician

1.1 Maria- Theresa von Paradis, patient and musician

One of the first places I visited in Vienna was the Museum of Vienna. Here, among other exhibits, I saw Ignaz Unterberger's painting of Mozart's Masonic Lodge from 1784, entitled the 'Initiation Ceremony in A Viennese Masonic Lodge during the Reign of Joseph II'. Mozart was seated on the far right of the painting. At its centre, there was the 'searcher' with bound eyes.



1) Original in Colour

This striking image serves as an illustration to this chapter's consideration of Maria-Theresa von Paradis, a musician whose blindness may or may not have been hysterical. It was nevertheless a blindness that granted her certain compensations: a generous pension from the Empress Maria-Theresa, access to the best tutors at court and perhaps even enhanced musical ability. For, like the searcher in the painting, it

was possible that Maria-Theresa knew more, and experienced more, in her own creative darkness than in the light which her doctors wished to bestow on her. Her experiences are compared to those of the blind eighteenth-century harpist, Charlotta Seuerling, as well as to those of Beethoven, who also endured the loss of a crucial sense.

Maria-Theresa von Paradis was born in Vienna on May 15, 1759. Her father, Joseph Anton von Paradis, was Imperial Secretary of Commerce to the Empress Maria-Theresa, after whom, with a courtier's obsequiousness, he named his daughter. However, at the age of three, Maria-Theresa lost her eyesight in mysterious circumstances.

The young blind girl showed considerable aptitude as a musician. For both her talent and her disability, the Empress awarded her a pension of two hundred gold ducats. This pension would have met most of her personal needs: her music tutor Antonio Salieri's annual court salary was three hundred ducats, and his own correspondence shows that seven hundred ducats was enough to keep a married couple.¹

¹ The guardian of Salieri's intended bride asked about his income, to which Salieri replied: 'I earned three hundred ducats as Kapellmeister of the Italian opera, one hundred ducats as imperial chamber composer, and hope of becoming Hofkapellmeister one day; that, moreover, my compositions and music lessons brought me in another three hundred ducats annually, so that I could estimate my total income at seven hundred ducats.' The guardian answered: 'That would be more than sufficient if it were certain; but, of all this, you can count with certainty only on the one hundred ducats you receive from the court; and I must therefore ask you to wait until your position improves in some reliable way before I, as guardian, can give my consent to this marriage.' John A. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and*

The Empress granted Maria-Theresa further expert music tuition at the Imperial Court. Salieri composed an organ concerto for her in 1773, and her other tutors included Leopold Kozeluch and Karl Friberth. The Empress's own physician, Anton von Störck, took Maria-Theresa on as his patient. However, despite courses of electrotherapy administered with a Leyden jar, Maria-Theresa's blindness did not improve. Since her optic nerve appeared undamaged, von Störck and the many other doctors who treated her, assumed, perhaps wrongly, that her blindness was hysterical. At one point, Doctor Jan Ingenhousz, who had inoculated the Empress's family against smallpox, encased Maria-Theresa's head in a plaster-helmet, intended to stop her eyes twitching. As a treatment for blindness, hysterical or otherwise, it was a spectacular failure.

In 1777, Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer began to treat Maria-Theresa as his patient at his clinic in Landstraße. For a short while, he offered hope that her vision might be restored. However, again under controversial circumstances, his treatment regime of Mesmerism failed. But since the recovery of her sight had seemed to threaten her playing, this was perhaps not such a disaster. Maria-Theresa relinquished her emotional dependency on Mesmer, resigned herself to a life of total blindness and further established her career.

For, by this time, Maria-Theresa was already an accomplished pianist and singer in Viennese concert halls and salons. Moreover, she had gained respect from the most prominent composers and musicians of the day, including Mozart. It is

Viennese Opera (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1998), p.40.

possible that Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 18 (K.456) was written for her. In 1783-84, Maria-Theresa toured Paris, London and various German cities. In 1785 she helped found, with Valentin Haüy, a school for the blind. Then, too, in the 1780s, she turned to composition. The first work that can be accurately attributed to her is the *Zwölf Lieder auf ihrer Reise in Musik gesetzt*, dating to the years 1784-1786. The process of composition for her was not simple, but Maria-Theresa made use of a composition board developed by Johann Riedinger. He served as a librettist for several of her stage-works, including the 1791 melodrama *Ariadne und Bacchus*, and the 1792 *Der Schulkandidat*. However, as Marion Fürst reveals in her biography, *Maria Theresia Paradis - Mozarts berühmte Zeitgenossin*, much of this music, although documented, is now lost:

Bühnenwerke (Stage works and operas)

Ariadne und Bacchus, melodrama in one act, 20 June 1791 (lost)

Der Schulkandidat, Singspiel in three acts, 5 Dec. 1792, part of Act 2 and all of Act 3 (lost)

Rinaldo und Alcina, comic opera, 30 June 1797 (lost)

Große militärische Oper, 1805 (lost)

Zwei ländliche Opern (lost)

Kantaten (Cantatas)

Trauerkantate auf den Tod Leopolds II, 1792 (lost)

Kantate auf die Wiedergenesung meines Vaters (lost)

Deutsches Monument Ludwigs des Unglücklichen, 1793 (lost)

Instrumentalmusik (Instrumental Works)

Pianoforte Concerto in G, performed 1817 (lost)

Pianoforte Concerto in C, performed 1817 (lost)

12 Piano Sonatas, performed 1792 (lost)

Fantasie in G, performed 1807

Fantasie in C, performed 1811

Eighteen songs including the *Zwölf Lieder auf ihrer Reise in Musik gesetzt*. Of

these songs, two are lost.²

By the late 1780s, Maria-Theresa was devoting less time to performance and more to composition. She wrote five operas between 1789 and 1797, as well as numerous other works. Her most famous work, the Sicilienne in E flat Major for piano quartet, is spurious. As Fürst reveals, it derives from a Carl Maria von Weber violin sonata (Op. 10, No.1) and was composed by its purported discoverer, Samuel Dushkin.³ In 1808, Maria-Theresa founded a music-school for girls in Vienna. For the last fifteen years of her life, she taught there and continued to produce an occasional composition, like the 1811 Fantasie in C for Piano.

Following my initial visit to the Museum of Vienna, I began my search for Maria-Theresa in earnest at Schönbrunn Palace. The Mirrors Room, resplendent with crystal mirrors, was where she played regularly for the Empress.⁴ In this room, Maria-Theresa would not have been able to see her own forlorn face or her nimble fingers reflected in the glass. Two years later, Doctor Mesmer would treat her in a similar room in his clinic in Landstraße, believing that mirrors represent the opposite of blindness: sight without touch.

However, I found nothing to commemorate Maria-Theresa's presence at the

² Marion Fürst, *Maria Theresia Paradis – Mozarts berühmte Zeitgenossin* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), pp.358-62.

³ Ibid., pp.283-6.

⁴ Here, for a game, the young Archdukes and Archduchess arranged all the mirrors so they created corridors reflecting to infinity Perhaps this was where the Archduchess Maria Elisabeth would have liked to have seen her face reflected over-and-over. Until, that is, the smallpox epidemic of 1769, which left her face pitted and pocked. Poor *kropferte Liesl* eventually ended her days in a convent.

Palace. Perhaps this was not surprising given that there were hardly even any mementoes of the more famous Marie-Antoinette, except for a few portraits and a Louis Seize secretaire. But in contrast to Maria-Theresa's absence, Mozart's first concert in the Mirrors Room was well-documented. According to his father Leopold's memoirs, six-year-old Wolfgangerl performed for the Empress here and then 'leapt into Her Majesty's lap, threw his arms around her neck and planted kisses on her face.'⁵

In fact, at Schönbrunn, Mozart was everywhere. At the Palace, I saw that four-year-old Wolfgangerl had even been painted into a picture of the Wedding Supper of Isabella of Parma and Emperor Joseph II, that is, the *Souper In the Reduite Halls* by Martin van Meytens (1760). However, in reality, Mozart could not have appeared in Van Meyten's painting since he was living in Salzburg at the time. He was only a figment of the artist's imagination, a retrospective ghost at the feast. And so it seemed at Schönbrunn, I could only find Maria-Theresa through a process of associating her with other, more famous historical people.

⁵ Jane Glover, *Mozart's Women: His Family, His Friends, His Music* (London: Pan Books, 2006), p.18.



2) and 3) Originals in colour

A day or so after my disappointing visit to Schönbrunn Palace, I entered the graveyard of Sankt Marx Friedhof. This was where the real Maria-Theresa von Paradis was supposed to be buried. Like Dickens's Pip, I wanted to try and read her character from the shape and style of the letters carved on her headstone.

But once again, I could not find her.

I returned to the notice-board at the front gate and scanned it twice, but she wasn't listed, either with the composers or with the pianists. And so I began to search

blindly, hoping for some affinity that would lead me to her grave.

Then a woman emerged out of the snow. In German, she started to explain:

'Ich suche Mozarts Grab.'

'Sie benötigen die Nummer, die Nummer,' I replied. You need the number from the notice-board.

'Die Nummer ist falsch,' she replied. The number is useless. The number doesn't relate to anything.

I nodded, the easiest way to agree, then said, *'Ich suche das Grab von Maria-Theresa von Paradis, einer Freundin von Mozart.'*

The woman nodded, but walked away.

Then, a few moments later, *'Aieeeee, Aieeeeee.'* The woman was calling me back. I walked towards her, hoping, hoping, but it was Mozart's grave that she'd found.

Of course, there is an argument to be made that Mozart in some ways functions as a shadow double for Maria-Theresa, for Mesmer, and for Hoffmann, and he is certainly linked to the three of them. He was Maria-Theresa's and Mesmer's friend, and one of Hoffmann's idols. However, in my critical project, Mozart does not appear as the celebrated legend immortalised in Shaffer's *Amadeus*, but rather as a tangential, elusive figure. Instead, in the ensuing chapters, a clearer image of Maria-Theresa von Paradis, and of Mesmer and Hoffmann and the connections between them, will emerge.

1.2 The Origins and Nature of Paradis's 'Hysterical' Blindness

This section explores the nature of Paradis's possibly hysterical blindness. In her own time, there was considerable debate about the causes, and best treatments for this type of blindness. These debates have persisted in later historical and critical accounts, and in fictional versions of her life, although the consensus seems to be that Maria-Theresa's blindness *was* hysterical, which is why Mesmer was able to treat her. In fact, Fürst's historical account is the only text I have seen which suggests medical alternatives to, or in combination with, hysteria as the cause of her blindness.

Furthermore, whilst there has been extensive academic and creative interest in hysteria, little seems to have been written about hysterical or psychogenic blindness. Yet hysterical blindness, arising from a complex and paradoxical cluster of motives, is an ideal subject for an introspective, first- person narrator in a novelistic interpretation of Maria-Theresa's life, since this form effectively conveys the hysterical narrative voice, its pressures, dislocations and contradictions.

Fürst's research is certainly worth examining for the light it sheds on Maria-Theresa's blindness. Fürst draws on Mesmer's 1781 *Memoirs*, which are partly a written account of his conversations with the von Paradis parents. They claim that their three-year-old daughter was already suffering from a heavy cold when she heard a loud noise and climbed out of her warm bed into a damp, cold, dark room. Therefore, the von Paradis parents appear to believe that this combination of factors triggered their daughter's blindness. Their account seems quite convincing precisely

because it does offer a number of contributing factors. I myself vividly recall sitting in my GP's waiting-room some ten years ago when a teenage girl came stumbling in, claiming that she had suddenly gone blind due to a viral infection. This anecdote certainly supports the von Paradis parents' prior-illness hypothesis. Furthermore, as Fürst suggests, the parents' own account 'should have quite a heavy weighting.'⁶ However, in Mesmer's *Memoirs*, he argues that the parents' version is exaggerated and embellished. Mesmer obviously met them, so he was in a good position to judge how far he believed them. Yet it is also worth remembering that he would have favoured a belief in the hysterical origin of her blindness, since this type of blindness was responsive to his own treatment methods. And Mesmer himself was not without his own prejudices, his own bias towards animal magnetism: his own kind of blindness, in fact.

Fürst draws on another fascinating contemporary account for the possible origins of Maria-Theresa's blindness. Caroline Pilcher, née Greiner, who was a close friend of Maria-Theresa, wrote in her own *Memoirs* that the little girl lost her eyesight following the treatment of a skin condition. This account should be taken seriously, both because Pilcher was a close friend and because a toxic or allergic reaction to an ointment does not seem unlikely. A journalist, Ludwig Frankl, shared that opinion and wrote in his newspaper, *Der Sammler*, that Maria-Theresa lost her sight due to the application of a mercury ointment.⁷ This again seems credible.

⁶ Fürst, p.15.

⁷ Fürst citing *Der Sammler*, 1810, p.60.

Modern research suggests that even low doses of mercury contain compounds that can have serious adverse effects on the developing nervous system. It can affect the central nervous system, kidneys and liver, and disturb immune processes, cause tremors, impaired vision and hearing, paralysis, insomnia and instability.⁸ Maria-Theresa's medical case-history, according to Mesmer, suggests that she suffered from all these symptoms: 'A complete amaurosis attended by spasms in the eyes. As a consequence, she suffered from deep depression and obstructions of the spleen and liver, which caused her to go into transports of delirium bad enough to make one fear she was losing her mind.'⁹ In fact, if we consider mercury as a possible causative agent, Maria-Theresa's physical and psychological symptoms are accounted for, and it is an interpretation which seems less reductive than the binary opposition of *either* hysterical *or* organic blindness.

Another possibility worth considering is that put forward by Johann Wilhelm Klein, a Paradis family friend who founded the Blind Institute and wrote a book, *Live Description of Several Blind People*. His theory, described by Fürst, is that the three-year-old Maria-Theresa experienced a 'nerve shock' or 'brain stroke' which came on very suddenly.¹⁰ However, Fürst suggests that the von Paradis parents themselves were uncertain about this theory, and indeed, given the range of options emerging, they might well have been.

⁸ 'How Does Mercury Affect Our Health?' www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/mercury-chapter1.pdf (Online: Internet) [accessed 8 December 2014]

⁹ Mesmer in Fürst, 'Diese Jungfer hatte einen vollkommenen Staar und Gichter in den Augen, war melancholisch, und litte an Verstopfungen der Milz und Leber, die Ihr öfters solche Anfälle von Wahnsinn und Wuth zuzogen, daß man sie beynahe für gänzlich toll halten mußte.' p.43.

¹⁰ Fürst, p.60.

Fürst's final account of possible causes for Maria- Theresa's blindness draws on that of Schmidt (1824) and Schindel (1825) and is, by far, the most colourful. Schmidt and Schindel claim that in the von Paradis household, in the dead of night, there came sudden and terrible screams of 'Fire! Thief! Murder!' causing the father to reach for rapiers and pistols. As in the account from Mesmer's *Memoirs*, the three-year-old Maria-Theresa was already suffering from an unspecified illness, and this, combined with the great shock of the screams, confusion and sudden need for weapons, triggered her blindness. Fürst, however, suggests there is no evidence for this dramatic version of events. Nevertheless, one corroborating piece of evidence I can draw upon again comes from Mesmer's own *Memoirs*. When Joseph Anton von Paradis became suspicious of, and then hostile towards, Mesmer's treatment methods, he 'came storming into my house, waving his sword. Another servant barred the door to the room where we were and struggled to push him away.'¹¹ This action of 'waving his sword' suggests that the volatile von Paradis might well draw weapons should he become startled by real or imagined intruders in the night.

My own preferences are for the viral and mercury hypotheses; however, it does seem that there are a number of likely causes for Maria-Theresa's blindness, instead of, or in addition to, the well-worn notion of hysteria put forward by other writers. Whilst Elisabeth Bronfen's historical and psychoanalytic account in *The Knotted Subject* fully considers the hysterical diagnosis, she does at least allude to other possible factors. For example, according to Bronfen, Maria-Theresa's physicians

¹¹ Mesmer in Fürst, p.44.

'speculated that the disorder was either the result of an apoplectic fit resulting from gout' or 'caused by nocturnal anxiety.'¹² Eventually, however, these physicians 'could neither determine the origin of the symptom nor designate a cure.'¹³ Then too, the barbaric treatments which Maria-Theresa endured seem likely to have caused or perpetuated hysterical reactions rather than curing them.

For example, Doctor Ingenhousz encased her head in a plaster-helmet for two months. This was intended to stop her eyes jerking around, but it actually gave her eczema, which oozed pus. Another therapy employed was called Fontanelle (or *Haarseil*, literally hair-rope), in which a piece of hair was inserted into the skin of the neck. Pus then built up over a few days so that toxic fluids could be drawn out. Other doctors tried applying poultices of valerian and pulsatilla, which they thought would open up the pores of the skin. There were also electric shocks applied to her eyeballs, thousands at a time, from a Leyden jar. However, this treatment only made her muscle spasms more pronounced, requiring, they thought, further blood-letting and leeches. By the time she was eighteen, Maria-Theresa had endured ten years of these treatments and the impact on both her physical and mental state must have been significant. As Michèle Halberstadt's fictional Maria-Theresa complains in *The Pianist In The Dark*:

They've assaulted my brain and left me a bundle of nerves. Incessant migraines; burning eyelids, as if the salt's been thrown on them; eczema gnawing at my scalp, making me lash out like a pony shaking off flies - the doctors have brought illness upon illness on me but have never treated the one

¹² Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p.131.

¹³ Ibid.

they were originally called in for.¹⁴

However, in his *The Wizard from Vienna*, Vincent Buranelli disregards these treatments and possible causes for Maria-Theresa's blindness. He maintains that hysteria was the sole cause. In his account, she was a healthy child for three years who woke up one morning blind. He cites the doctor in charge of the case, the Head of Vienna's Medical Faculty, Anton von Störck, who believed that since Maria-Theresa's optic nerve remained undamaged, hysteria was the reason why her eyes refused to function. However, von Störck himself could not devise the correct way to treat her, and so he declared her incurable. Buranelli's own opinion is that Maria-Theresa's blindness was the result of mistreatment by her parents: 'A young, sensitive, artistic child could hardly have escaped psychological scars at the hands of such a pair.'¹⁵ He reiterates that Maria-Theresa's bodily symptoms 'were the result of a functional problem, more a problem of the nerves than of the eyes.'¹⁶ His self-justifying argument is that otherwise, 'Mesmer would never have entertained the possibility of a cure through animal magnetism.'¹⁷

Buranelli's thesis seems to be a somewhat partial and prejudiced reading of Mesmer's *Memoirs*. Mesmer's own diagnosis of 'a complete amaurosis attended by spasms in the eye' does not in itself indicate hysterical blindness.¹⁸ The medical term 'amaurosis' (Greek meaning, darkening, dark or obscure) is a vision loss or weakness

¹⁴ Michèle Halberstadt, *The Pianist In The Dark* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2011), p.18.

¹⁵ Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard from Vienna* (London: The Scientific Book Club, 1975), p.83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.76-7.

¹⁸ Mesmer's *Memoirs*, cited by Buranelli, p.76.

that occurs without an apparent lesion affecting the eye or from excess acceleration. Moreover, the 'deep depression' which Mesmer alludes to seems to be a consequence rather than a cause of the sight loss. Likewise, Maria-Theresa's 'delirium', which perhaps had a physical component, 'the obstructions in her spleen and liver.'¹⁹

In *Mental Healers: Mesmer, Eddy, Freud*, Stefan Zweig's account of Maria-Theresa's blindness differs slightly from that of Buranelli. He describes how at the age of four (not three), she suffered from a sudden 'paralysis of the optic nerve' which made her 'incurably blind'.²⁰ Certain symptoms noted by Mesmer such as the 'convulsive twitching of the eyes, which, at times bulge out of their sockets' and 'disorders of the liver and spleen, which, when acute, brought on attacks closely resembling mental alienation' lead Zweig to suppose that Fräulein Paradis's blindness was not caused by 'atrophy of the optic nerve but by a psychical disturbance.'²¹ Nevertheless, to me, these symptoms do not definitely suggest hysterical blindness. And yet, according to Zweig's analysis, 'Mesmer was not slow to perceive that she must have suffered from some shock to the nervous system, and consequently, that hers was a case which *might* advantageously respond to his method of treatment.'²² (italics mine.) However, this is Zweig's own supposition which he seems to give credence to by establishing it as Mesmer's.

Yet Zweig also makes the interesting point that other doctors should not have

¹⁹ Ibid., p.76.

²⁰ Stefan Zweig, *Mental Healers, Mesmer, Eddy, Freud*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Viking Press, 1932), p.36.

²¹ Zweig, pp.36-7.

²² Ibid., p.37.

objected to Mesmer's treatment since 'if the worst came to the worst, suggestive treatment could not make a dead optic nerve more dead than it was already, could not make a totally blind person more blind than before.'²³ This point seems to contradict Zweig's earlier assertion that Maria-Theresa's blindness 'was not caused by atrophy of the optic nerve,' thereby casting further doubt on Zweig's diagnosis of 'hysterical blindness'.²⁴

In her fictional account of the encounter between Maria-Theresa and Mesmer, Halberstadt raises other disquieting possibilities. She lists the doctors that Maria-Theresa consulted: Anton von Störck (the Empress's private physician), Professor Gustav Barth (a cataract specialist) and even the Baron de Wenzl (a famous Paris optometrist living in Vienna). These doctors, who, historically, were involved in Maria-Theresa's care, all concluded that 'Mademoiselle von Paradis was incurably blind'.²⁵ Their diagnosis is the same as we have already seen from Mesmer's case-study, 'amaurosis', which Halberstadt defines as 'a form of blindness that appears suddenly without any malfunctioning of the optical system. Its onset is either toxic, congenital or nervous'.²⁶ Whilst Halberstadt does suggest the other possibilities of 'toxic' or 'congenital,' she, like the physicians in her novel, 'zero in on the third possibility'.²⁷ Given that Fürst's research has revealed a toxic possibility, it is interesting that both Halberstadt and her doctors prefer the 'nervous' option.

²³ Ibid., p.41.

²⁴ Ibid., p.36.

²⁵ Ibid., p.9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

However, doctors tend to see what they have been trained to see and in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were quick to diagnose their female patients with hysterical disorders. Besides, as Halberstadt's own novel suggests, hysterical blindness makes for a more dramatic and compelling story: 'The search was on and each of them wanted to find the answer before the others. Thus, what happened the evening before Maria-Theresa woke up blind? What had she seen or heard that affected her so violently as to make her lose her sight?'²⁸

Those, of course, are the questions which the historical and fictional accounts seek to answer. In Halberstadt's novel, the Paradis household is depicted as one from which 'love had disappeared' due to 'her father's anger, his violence as well' and her mother's 'rampant hysteria that made her nervous, unpredictable, sometimes scary.'²⁹ She further implies that Maria-Theresa's hysterical blindness is due to child abuse:

Everything about those early sighted days may have been erased from her memory, but her sense of smell clung to one thing still. Whenever she thought about that night when her gaze had been banished to the realm of darkness, the smell of amber and tobacco sprang to her mind. Her room bore the scent of her father.³⁰

Brian O'Doherty's re-telling of the encounter between Mesmer and Maria-Theresa, *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.*, (1992) also implies, if not child abuse, then the father's 'jealous and over-fond' love of his daughter.³¹ When his fictional Mesmer thinks about Herr von Paradis, he wonders if 'some monstrous thoughts in

²⁸ Ibid., pp.9-10.

²⁹ Ibid., p.10.

³⁰ Ibid., p.33.

³¹ Brian O'Doherty, *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p.197.

his own mind had been ascribed to me?¹³² He suggests that this is likely: 'I have seen this before. People sometimes attribute their own unacceptable desires to others, whom they then attack. It is a way of getting rid of such embarrassments.'¹³³ Extreme paternal affection, which, however, stops short of child abuse, is further conveyed by Herr von Paradis's great delight at the return of his daughter: 'Return! Return! [...] What joy! What joy! My daughter, my daughter! I shall have my daughter!'¹³⁴ However, O'Doherty does not claim that the father's great love for his daughter is a factor in her blindness, although it presumably contributed to the tensions in the volatile Paradis household.

Many of the other accounts of Maria-Theresa's case-history explores the power of the hysteric, with an abusive upbringing compounded by possible sexual abuse as a favourite suggested motive. Bronfen likewise develops this disturbing possibility (for which there is no real historical evidence). She notes that since Joseph Anton von Paradis was quick to 'support Viennese society's gossip about sexual abuse' she feels 'compelled to wonder whether the rigour with which he did so might not also indicate paternal denial.'¹³⁵ Then too, she cites Mesmer's *Memoirs* in support of this theory, in which Mesmer explicitly accuses the father, claiming that in 'seeking to cover his excesses, he spread the most atrocious imputations about me amongst the public.'¹³⁶

³² Ibid., p.197.

³³ Ibid., pp.197-8.

³⁴ Ibid., p.141.

³⁵ Bronfen, p.135.

³⁶ Ibid.

The disturbing possibility of sexual abuse is given full-blown treatment in Roger Spottiswoode's film *Mesmer* (from a script by Dennis Potter). In this florid version, Maria-Theresa, 'blind as a bat since she was three' is sexually abused by her father half-an-hour into the film. She begins to whimper, 'No, father, no.' However, this scene is poorly played: more unnerving is the later close-up of Maria-Theresa's fearful face as she lies in bed, listening to the sound of her father's footsteps on the stairs. Later, when Mesmer, played by Alan Rickman, makes magnetic passes over Maria-Theresa's body, she cries out, 'No, father,' thereby revealing her secret. Mesmer responds, 'Don't be ashamed.'

In Spottiswoode's film, sexual abuse is not put forward as the only possible cause for Maria-Theresa's blindness. After she has returned from Mesmer's mansion to her parents' home and loses her sight for the second time, she later tells Mesmer, 'I would rather not see. When I could see the notes on the piano, I made mistakes. I could not bear to lose my music.'³⁷ However, this is the only time in the film that the musician's fear of the loss of her music is suggested as a possible motive for her blindness. The psychological turmoil that this might engender, as well as fears that she might lose her pension, are not, however, developed any further.

In his novel, O'Doherty's Herr von Paradis suggests another surprising possible cause for Maria-Theresa's blindness:

I took Maria-Theresa to the Royal Bestiary that afternoon, the 8th [the afternoon before the onset of her blindness] and she was enchanted with the monkey, beguiled by the cockatoos and parakeets. She showed little fascination

³⁷ Roger Spottiswoode, dir. *Mesmer*; screenplay by Dennis Potter (Canada: First Look Studios, 1994) [on DVD]

with the lion as he paced up and down until his food arrived. Then he began a roaring and moaning, which turned into horrible snarling and gluttony as he was thrown hunks of raw meat. For some reason, this display made my daughter hysterical, until I thought I was holding a miniature of my wife. Nothing I could say or do hushed her, and to my embarrassment, we became as much a sight for the onlookers as the lion. None of this did I share with the great Doctor M., for if his miracles are true they can proceed without prying into privacies.³⁸

Several intriguing elements operate in this fictional account. Firstly, there is the father's desire to keep his secrets, which may indeed be prompted by his jealousy of Mesmer. Certainly, in O'Doherty's novel, unlike in my own, Mesmer never learns Maria-Theresa's secret, leaving him to surmise: 'the darkness [...] was in her mind and not her eyes.'³⁹ However, by withholding valuable information in this way, Herr von Paradis is actually jeopardising Maria-Theresa's treatment. Secondly, his account of a lion tearing apart hunks of raw meat creates a dramatic visual image, which, to a small child, could have been a terrifying sight. To her, it might have suggested something fragile and vulnerable being torn apart by something monstrous: the visual embodiment, perhaps, of a small child's sensations when she witnesses, or is even made to be part of, her parents' quarrels. As O'Doherty implies, this visual embodiment could be what rendered Maria-Theresa hysterical, and even, ultimately, blind.

Nevertheless, it is also possible that the hysteric's situation is at least partly willed, that is, nourished by the feelings and inclinations of the hysteric. There is then a great potential power in hysterical behaviour. Similarly, in her novel,

³⁸ O'Doherty, p.92.

³⁹ Ibid., p.222.

Halberstadt indicates that blindness grants the girl a kind of power over her parents: 'She felt that being blind was the only power she had over them. She was the object of their obsession, the subject of their confrontations, but without her, her blindness, they would have nothing to discuss. Her handicap freed her from her parents and at the same time enabled the three of them to remain a family.'⁴⁰

In Julian Barnes's short story, 'Harmony', he initially seems to accord with the von Paradis's parents' theory, already described by Mesmer in his *Memoirs*: 'those summoned to examine her attributed the cause to fluid with repercussions, or else to some fright the girl has received during the night.'⁴¹ However, Barnes quickly reveals the mother's hysteria when she declares: 'I would tear out my own eyes if I thought it would give Maria- Theresia back her sight.'⁴² Eventually, however, Barnes's Mesmer proceeds with a diagnosis of hysterical blindness which seems to echo that of Buranelli: '[Her] blindness had certainly been a hysterical reaction to the equally hysterical behaviour of one or both of her parents. That a sensitive, artistic child, in the face of such an emotional assault, might instinctively close herself off from the world seemed reasonable, even inevitable.'⁴³

Another possible argument is that Maria-Theresa's blindness is actually an attempt at self-cure since it allows her to express her emotional pain through a medium other than words. Her consequent physical suffering allows her to feel

⁴⁰ Halberstadt, p.11.

⁴¹ Julian Barnes, 'Harmony', in *Pulse* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p.160.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.181.

protected, since it defines her bodily boundaries. Moreover, communicating her distress in this way gives her access to care-giving people, particularly Mesmer, in whom she develops a strong erotic interest. In turn, Mesmer hopes to transform the mute and mysterious messages contained within psychosomatic processes into spoken, comprehensible and analysable communications.

In *The Knotted Subject*, Bronfen raises the disquieting possibility that for Maria-Theresa, being blind and then, suddenly, miraculously, being able to see, are both hysterical, uncanny symptoms performed in response to the conflicting demands of her 'fathers', that is, Herr von Paradis and Doctor Mesmer. Bronfen also argues that since for Maria-Theresa, being able to see is unfamiliar, the return of her sight may represent for her, 'the uncanny return of a psychic state her blindness had allowed her to contain.'⁴⁴ Bronfen's arguments parallel those of Freud about hysterical blindness, namely that 'hysterically blind people are only blind as far as their consciousness is concerned. In their unconscious, they see.'⁴⁵

It may be impossible to diagnose, retrospectively, the exact cause and nature of Maria-Theresa's blindness. Nevertheless, since the majority of the historical and fictional accounts argue that it was hysterical blindness, Freud's essay, 'The Psychoanalytic View of Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision' (1910) is worth considering for the light it sheds on this perplexing condition. For Freud, 'the hysterical patient is blind as the result of a disassociation between unconscious and

⁴⁴ Bronfen, p.133.

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychoanalytic View of Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision' (1910) *Standard Edition* Volume 11, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p.212.

conscious processes in the act of seeing.⁴⁶ He argues that 'the closer the relation into which an organ with a dual function enters with one of the major instincts, the more it withholds itself from the other.'⁴⁷ Furthermore, 'the principle is bound to lead to pathological consequences if the two fundamental instincts are disunited and if the ego maintains a repression of the sexual component instinct concerned.'⁴⁸ In the case of the eye, 'the excitability and innervation of the organ undergoing changes [...] will manifest themselves as hysterical blindness in the service of the ego.'⁴⁹ For Freud then, hysterical blindness is the result of both a refusal to see, and too great a desire to witness, forbidden sights.

In fact, as Freud nicely describes it, the eye has 'a punishing voice' and is saying, 'Because you have sought to misuse your organ of sight for evil sensual pleasures, it is fitting that you should not see anything at all anymore.'⁵⁰ Freud himself calls this 'talion punishment' and uses the example of Peeping Tom, who was struck blind when he peeped at Lady Godiva, who rode naked through the streets in broad daylight.⁵¹ Whilst it is problematic to apply Freud's insights to Maria-Theresa's earlier case-study, it is interesting to hypothesise that if she were the victim of sexual abuse, she, like Peeping Tom, might have suffered conflicting impulses of shame and desire, 'the repression of the erotic scopophilia' ultimately causing hysterical

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.212.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.216.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.216.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.217-8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.217.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.207.

blindness.⁵² Freud, however, indicates that just because 'an organ normally serving the purpose of sense perception begins to behave like an actual genital when its erotogenic role is increased,' it is still possible that 'toxic changes are also occurring.'⁵³ In other words, other factors, not just hysteria, may well contribute to this kind of blindness.

Then too, it is also possible that Maria-Theresa wills herself to be blind, thereby repressing the power of her eyes. In the context of a romantic mythology that endows sight with the sinister properties of destruction (the evil eye), she achieves a kind of willed innocence through a continuous, child-like perception of the world which is repeatedly evoked throughout my own novel. In this way, she privileges touch and hearing, the primary senses of a musician, suggesting that for her, blindness has its own creative compensations. These creative compensations are considered more fully in the following section.

⁵² Ibid., p.218.

⁵³ Ibid., p.215.

1.3 Creative Compensations: Paradis, Seuerling, Beethoven

The idea that blindness may have its compensations is a familiar one. In Denis Diderot's *A Letter On Blindness, For the Use of Those Who Have Their Sight* (1749), he argues that the feeling a blind person would have when he touched a statue would be even more powerful than the feelings sighted people have when they look at one: 'How sweet it would be for a man who has been a very tender lover to run his hands over the charms he could recognise, and experience the illusion, which must work more powerfully on the blind than on the sighted, of them being brought back to life.'⁵⁴ In his essay, 'Of A Man Born Blind' (1653), François de la Mothe le Vayer likewise argues that there are advantages to closing our eyes, 'the better to taste the pleasures of the other senses and make our soul more receptive, as it always is when it is less distracted.'⁵⁵ He describes how when the poet wished to represent Dido in her greatest moment of happiness, he deprived her of light, and placed her deep inside a dark cave:

Speluncam Dido, dux et Trojanus eandem/Deveniunt.
(Dido and the Trojan both came to this cave.)⁵⁶

In lyrical vein, he urges the creative compensations of blindness: 'To judge a tune or really appreciate the taste of fine wine, nature herself leads us to close our eyes.'⁵⁷ He also refers to 'remarkable blind men' such as Appius Claudius, 'who saw important

⁵⁴ Kate E. Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment: An essay with a new translation of Diderot's A Letter on Blindness, For the Use of Those Who Have Their Sight* and La Mothe Le Vayer's *Of A Man Born Blind* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p.144.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

matters more clearly than the most clear-sighted of his time' and Democritus who 'deliberately deprived himself of his physical eyes so as to improve his spiritual ones.'⁵⁸ Furthermore, Homer's blindness 'did not stop him from making us see things that were so beautiful that more than two thousand years later, everyone still admires them.'⁵⁹

André Gide's tragic novella, *La Symphonie Pastorale* (translated by Dorothy Bussy), similarly presents a convincing argument that, for some, blindness is preferable to sight – as long as the blind person receives an education, for then the darkness that is alleviated is not that of blindness, but of ignorance. In Gide's novella, he cites the example of Laura Bridgeman, who once she becomes able to learn is eventually 'the head of an institution for the blind.'⁶⁰ He argues that with education, 'all these [blind] walled-up prisoners were happy, and as soon as they were able to express anything, it was their *happiness* they spoke of.'⁶¹ In the same way, his novella's Pastor finds that once his blind protégée Gertrude has begun receiving lessons from him, 'the wall of darkness [grew] less thick.'⁶² He also believes that Gertrude possesses greater powers of concentration due to her blindness, and remarks of his own daughter, Charlotte, 'Dear me! How much better she would listen, if only she could not see!'⁶³ Nevertheless, paradoxically perhaps, the Pastor

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ André Gide, *La Symphonie Pastorale and Isabelle*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p.21.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p.25.

⁶³ Ibid., p.35.

equates the lack of worldly wisdom stemming from blindness with what he calls Gertrude's 'perfect happiness.'⁶⁴ This is because, whilst reading the Bible, he discovers these words of Christ's, 'If ye were blind, ye should have no sin.'⁶⁵

In Gide's novella, Gertrude herself believes that her blindness gives her distinct advantages over sighted people, and that it is rooted in her musical ability, so that she says, 'I know the happiness of hearing.'⁶⁶ In fact, there is a rich tradition of the creative compensations of blindness, of which the history of Maria-Theresa von Paradis is an example. Brian O'Doherty's version of Mesmer thinks, '(for music sometimes makes us desire a kind of blindness, a place to rest the eyes while the spirit is ravished.)'⁶⁷ Then too, when Maria-Theresa is blind, far from being 'castrated' or limited in any way, she is actually *more* creative.

Furthermore, in Halberstadt's novel, Maria-Theresa chooses blindness and its creative compensations over sight by deliberately destroying her own partially recovered vision. For it is when Maria-Theresa's sight is restored that her suffering intensifies and she is deprived of her musical gifts. As Halberstadt describes, her playing begins to deteriorate because the presence of an audience, perhaps even the presence of her own hands, makes her nervous as a musician: 'When I sit at the keyboard, I see my hands and I freeze. My fingers have stopped obeying me. I

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.53.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.30.

⁶⁷ O'Doherty, p.15.

stumble over notes. I'm off-key and imprecise! My playing is shoddy! I've lost my rhythm and my skill. Seeing has given me lead fingers!⁶⁸

Maria-Theresa's experiences of sight and blindness recall those of the eighteenth-century Swedish harpist Charlotta Seuerling, 'The Blind Song-Maiden,' who, at least in British libraries, is a marginal figure. I have consulted the library catalogues at UEA, the British Library, Senate House, and the Royal College of Music and drawn a blank. Therefore, regretfully, I have had to limit myself to internet resources, including the few Swedish documents and contemporary newspaper accounts about her and her teacher, Per Aron Borg, that are available online.

According to Axel Nelson's website page, 'Charlotta Seuerling, den blinda harpospelerskan,' Charlotta was born in 1782 (or 1784) and she was the daughter of Carl Gottfried Seuerling and Margareta Seuerling, actors and directors of a travelling company.⁶⁹ There are a number of striking parallels between her life and that of Maria- Theresa. For example, Nelson describes how at a very young age (four), Charlotta lost her sight. However, unlike Maria-Theresa's case, the cause of her blindness was easier to discover, a poorly conducted smallpox vaccination. Despite this disastrous vaccination, she then contracted smallpox at the age of eight. According to Nelson, Charlotta's subsequent scarring made her 'shy and rather

⁶⁸ Halberstadt, p.65.

⁶⁹ Axel Nelson, 'Charlotta Seuerling, den blinda harposopelerskan', <<http://axelnelson.com/Pjusk/Seuerling.htm>> pp.1-2 [accessed 15 July 2015]

ugly.⁷⁰ Her plight is reminiscent of Maria-Theresa's disfigurement due to incompetent medical treatment. Then too, like Maria-Theresa, the young Charlotta contributed to her family's income by singing songs she had composed herself, as Nelson reveals, to the 'accompaniment' of her own harp playing.⁷¹ These performances often took place in her parents' theatre. This became her reputation: like Maria-Theresa, she was the miraculous, musical, blind child. Charlotta tried to help her parents in this way because, as I similarly show in my novel about Maria-Theresa, the family often experienced considerable financial pressure. Therefore, Charlotta often performed in her parents' theatre.

After the death of her father in 1795, Nelson reveals that Charlotta's mother took charge of the theatre company, which she moved to Finland. Her mother had also, as Nelson explains, saved some money, 'so she could send her daughter to Stockholm.'⁷² Though her financial resources were meagre, she nevertheless wished for her daughter to have an eye operation performed by the famous doctors, Rislachi and af Bjerkén. However, as with Maria-Theresa's many different medical treatments, 'the operation failed.'⁷³ Furthermore, according to Nelson, Charlotta could not then afford to travel home to her mother in Finland. She was forced to stay in a boarding-house for poor women.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Nelson then relates how Charlotta's musical talent was subsequently discovered by Per Aron Borg, the piano teacher who visited the boarding-house. In 1807, he accepted Charlotta as a private student in musical theory. In fact, just as Doctor Mesmer did with Maria-Theresa, Borg went so far as to take Charlotta to live with his family in his 'hospitable home.'⁷⁵ Like Maria-Theresa, and like Gertrude in Gide's *Pastoral Symphony*, Borg found that Charlotta had a lively intelligence and an immense learning capability. He was so impressed that he added more subjects to her curriculum: natural sciences and languages. Kjell Dellert's webpage 'Synskadades Museum' about the Visually Impaired Museum in Enskede outside Stockholm also reveals that 'People were amazed that this woman was so intelligent and passed [Borg's] exam so splendidly, even though she could not see.'⁷⁶

Nelson suggests that it was at this time that Charlotta wrote her song for harp music, 'Sång i en melankolisk stund' ('Song In A Moment of Melancholy').⁷⁷ The song portrays a sense of melancholy and betrayal, leading to a desire for suicide. However, it also reveals the happiness of friendship (not romantic love) and the hope it brings. Her song begins, 'No ray of light shines from above, the night was terrifying and darkness surrounded me.'⁷⁸ It ends, 'then as the first ray of dawn, light broke through the mist and friendship came, and with its radiance, calm and joy filled my heart.'⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.2.

⁷⁶ Kjell Dellert, 'Synskadades Museum', <web.comhem.se/akademin/artikelbiblioteket/artiklar/synskada.htm> pp.1-2 [accessed 4 October, 2015] p.1.

⁷⁷ Nelson, p.2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Nelson interprets this as being about Charlotta's own feelings in relation both to her blindness and to her tuition by Per Aron Borg. Similarly, the webpage 'Den blinda sångmön, Charlotta Seuerling' reveals that the Royal Library houses two lines written by Charlotta in the same vein: '[Borg] came, and the silence of the night and the dusk were broken, and the joy and light captured its place.'⁸⁰ Drawing on these examples then, Charlotta's relationship with Borg recalls not that of Maria-Theresa and Mesmer, but rather that of Gertrude and the Pastor in Gide's *La Symphonie Pastorale*, since it was tuition rather than the miraculous restoration of sight which transformed her life. Like von Kempelen did for Maria-Theresa in my own novel, Borg even invented a special kind of writing-machine for Charlotta.⁸¹

However, as with Maria-Theresa, it is possible to argue that blindness brought Charlotta some of the same compensations. For example, it granted her the attention of intellectual and care-giving people such as Borg. It is also possible that as with Gide's Gertrude, her blindness actually heightened her powers of concentration. Certainly, as Nelson shows, in 1808 Charlotta displayed her talent for reading and writing, playing the harp and clavichord, reading music and speaking French and German, as well as weaving, sewing and knitting at a demonstration organised by Borg. This demonstration proved to the public that it was entirely possible to educate blind people and attracted attention and support for Borg's newly founded Institute

⁸⁰ 'Den blinda sångmön, Charlotta Seuerling',

<http://www.dagensvisa.com/minata/teb_charlotte.html> [accessed 2 October 2015] p.1.

⁸¹ Nelson, p.2. In fact, among her posthumous writings, there is a writing test which is the oldest example of blind text in Sweden, written for the blind before the invention of Braille. It is now kept in the National Library of Sweden.

for the Deaf and Blind, the first of its kind in Sweden. In fact, Nelson reveals that Borg found Charlotta's intelligence so impressive that he published a pamphlet in which he argued that women were capable of learning subjects that were not at that time being taught to them, for example, medicine.⁸² She was so successful in this subject that Borg argued that women might make better medical doctors than men. Here then, her education diverged from that of Maria-Theresa, since Charlotta was resisting patriarchy's power-play by potentially taking on the role of doctor herself.

Like Maria-Theresa however, Charlotta's blindness also made her talents seem more extraordinary, so that royal patronage and pensions were forthcoming. Nelson shows that after Charlotta had performed for Queen Hedwig Elizabeth Charlotte of Holstein-Gottorp at a public examination, the queen became the protector of the institute. Then in 1811, following further financial difficulties, Charlotta and her mother were both placed under the protection of the Russian Empress dowager, Maria Fedorovna (Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg) who had heard of Charlotta's reputation as a harpist. Nelson states that Charlotta and her mother were each granted 'a lifetime pension of 600 rubles annually.'⁸³ Of course, Charlotta's encounters with royalty and her eventual patronage by the Russian Empress recalls the treatment of Maria-Theresa by the Austrian Empress in my own novel.

Nelson then reveals that Charlotta moved to Russia, and was instrumental in the development of Valentin Haüy's Institute for the Blind in Saint Petersburg.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., p.1.

⁸³ Ibid., p.2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Charlotta's interest in educating those who were blind nevertheless parallels that of Maria-Theresa, who likewise devoted the later years of her life to giving music lessons to blind pupils in her own school.

It is possible to argue that both Charlotta's and Maria-Theresa's many achievements would have done credit to a sighted person. However, it is also possible to argue that as someone with chronic health problems and disabilities, I too am aware that these can foster a determination to succeed which might otherwise be lacking. Furthermore, the condition of blindness itself could become a source of creative inspiration, of which Charlotta's song for harp music is an example.



- 4) Original in colour
Self- portrait with a harp by Rose-Adélaïde Ducreux (1791)
The kind of harp Charlotta Seuerling would have played.

Unhappily for Beethoven, however, he was to be granted no similar creative compensations as he likewise endured the loss of his most crucial sense: his hearing.

The day after my fruitless visit to Schönbrunn Palace, I travelled to a museum devoted to music, the House of Music, to learn more about Maria-Theresa. Her music was a form of solace for her, although it may have been a factor in perpetuating her blindness, since she would rather lose her sight than her talent. But even in the darkest days of her blindness, she always had music: her sense of hearing incomparably richer for the loss of her sight.

However, Beethoven, who came of age during the revolutionary 1780s, and who was therefore contemporaneous with Maria-Theresa, had the opposite experience: whilst he claimed to a well-wisher that he heard the notes in his mind, his deafness, unlike her blindness, did threaten his creation of music. Then too, whilst her musical gifts could be interpreted as a form of creative compensation for her blindness, Beethoven was granted no such gift. Physical and mental suffering mounted a sustained assault on his sense of discipline, duty and ambition.

In the House of Music, then, on the third floor, there was an exhibit which would have been charming if it had not been so terrible, the ear trumpets that revealed Beethoven's increasing deafness from 1769 to 1819:

First ear trumpet: in 1796 or 1798, Beethoven was supposed to have noted the first signs of his hearing impairment, but initially he said nothing.

Second ear trumpet: '...Do you know that my noblest faculty, my hearing, has deteriorated greatly...' (Beethoven, in a letter to Karl Amenda, 1st June, 1801)

Third ear trumpet: 'I would be really, really happy, perhaps one of the happiest men on earth, had the demon not decided to take up residence in my ears...' (Beethoven to Franz Wegeler, 2nd May, 1810)

Fourth ear trumpet: 'God have mercy on me, I feel as good as lost...' (Beethoven to Ferdinand Ries, 21st August 1817). It was during this time that he wrote

Sonata No. 29 in B major, the Hammerklaviersonate op.106, 'the sonata has been written in pressing circumstances.'

Fifth ear trumpet: By around 1819, Beethoven had become completely deaf and could only understand the world about him by writing things down and with the aid of the phrase book.⁸⁵

According to Jan Swafford's biography, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*,

Beethoven's deafness began after an attack of typhus, when he was busy composing. He was interrupted by a tenor with whom he had earlier been arguing, which caused him to jump up from his desk in a fit, and fall face-down on the floor. By the time he got up, he was deaf. Although Beethoven therefore claimed that his deafness began 'with a transport of rage' there is no suggestion, that, like Maria-Theresa's blindness, it was in any way hysterical.⁸⁶

In my novel, Maria-Theresa travelled to Doctor Mesmer's mansion in the Viennese suburb of Landstraße in the hope of restoring her sense of sight. Beethoven was similarly ordered by his doctor to take a trip to the countryside in order to recover his most important sense, his hearing. At the age of only thirty, he was already suffering from the ringing and whistling noises which affected his hearing and his spirits. Like Maria- Theresa, he was also prey to an ever-worsening melancholia, and so he followed his doctor's advice. He set off for Heiligenstadt, a small town in Döbling, north of Vienna, in a horse-drawn carriage.

It was here that Beethoven wrote the Ninth Symphony. It was here, in seclusion, that he tried to recover from the hearing loss which, as he wrote in the

⁸⁵ Reinhard Deutsch, ed. *House of Music Guide* (Horn: Berger, 2000), p.33.

⁸⁶ Jan Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), p.223.

Heiligenstadt Testament, so disturbed him: 'For years I have avoided almost all society, because I cannot tell people, "I am deaf." I have had to appear as a misanthrope, I who am so little of one.'⁸⁷

But the Heiligenstadt rest cure was a failure. Beethoven's doctors were never able to restore his hearing. As he wrote in the Heiligenstadt Testament:

How could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be More perfect in me than others [...] what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life.⁸⁸

The loss of a crucial sense is a tragedy for anyone, but the loss of hearing, as Beethoven testifies, must be excruciating for a musician. If Beethoven was to live, he understood that he was to live in misery, and there must be a reason to endure that misery:

It was only my art that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me.⁸⁹

For when he could work at all, Beethoven worked with his characteristic energy, confidence and brilliance. But the noise in his ears, his declining ability to hear soft passages and nuances, eroded his playing. Lacking the solace of music, he nevertheless tried to adopt a patient, philosophical attitude in order to cope with his suffering:

Patience, they say, is what I must choose for my guide, and I have done so. I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it pleases the

⁸⁷ Ludwig van Beethoven, 'The Heiligenstadt Testament' (2012) trans. Gunung Timur <home.swipenet.se/zabonk/cultur/ludwig/beeHeiligenstadt.htm> [accessed 14 June 2012].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

inexorable [...] Forced to become a philosopher already in my twenty-eighth year, oh, it is not easy, and for the artist, much more difficult than for anyone else.⁹⁰

Then too, the decline of his hearing meant that he had to relinquish a long cherished view of himself as a pianist-composer. Since childhood, he had devoted time and energy to making himself the virtuoso that he was. Like Maria-Theresa, much of his reputation in Vienna and elsewhere was due to his playing. In losing his hearing, not only was he losing his most prized sense, but with the end of his performing career, he was going to lose part of his identity and half or more of his income.

However, unlike Maria-Theresa, Beethoven did not hope for a miracle cure because he did not believe in them, though only a miracle could restore his health. In fact, his relationship to God would alter and deepen over the years. But when a protégé wrote on a score, 'finished with the help of God,' Beethoven wrote under it, 'O Man, help yourself!'⁹¹ He knew that to suffer without hope, without believing that the suffering has some larger meaning and purpose, requires great courage. For an artist to continue growing and working at the highest level without hope takes still greater courage. From this moment on, without hope, and, he feared, without joy, he needed to be heroic just to live and work. The Heiligenstadt Testament shows that he understood this with painful clarity.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Swafford, p.306.

Beethoven eventually demonstrated his philosophy in a work which gave full measure to his despair at his hearing loss and the heroism with which he overcame it. This was the Symphony No. 3, the Eroica. When the parts were published in 1806, the title would read *Sinfonia eroica, composta per festeggiare il souvenir di 'un grand' uomo*: 'Heroic symphony, composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.'⁹² But for Beethoven, the heroic image did not apply only to political and military leaders, but to anyone, self-made, self-generated, capable and courageous, rising above the crowd and therefore a natural leader: 'a free man.'⁹³ Napoleon was that kind of free man, and Beethoven perceived himself to be the same. Swafford argues that the Eroica would stand as 'one of the defining statements of the German Aufklärung and of the power of the heroic leader, the benevolent despot, to change himself and the world.'⁹⁴ She believes too that its exaltation of such an individual is 'a prophecy of the Romantic century' whose cult of genius would declare Beethoven the true hero of the Eroica.⁹⁵

As Swafford has demonstrated, Beethoven must also have seen himself as the hero of the Eroica. Despite the fact that in Austria, society and social mobility were frozen in place, and freedom of thought was under relentless attack, for Beethoven, a free society was one that allowed a Napoleon and a Beethoven to rise as far as their natural gifts could take them. The Eroica reveals the story of a hero's victory and the

⁹² Ibid., p.384.

⁹³ Ibid., p.114.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.823.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.363.

blessings he brings the world. However, the Eroica demonstrates not only Beethoven's social ambition but also his passionate individualism, as well as his engagement with his time and his determination to serve humanity. These qualities recall not his contemporary Napoleon, but Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer, an individualist who wanted both to advance his own cause and to cure his patients.

In contrast, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony tells a story of personal victory and inner heroism. That journey from despair to victory was Beethoven's own. As his mother, also called Maria, had taught him: 'without suffering, there is no struggle, without struggle no victory, without victory, no crown.'⁹⁶ The Fifth Symphony proclaims every person's capacity for heroism under the buffeting of life, a victory open to all humanity as individuals. As Beethoven himself described it: 'joy through suffering.'⁹⁷

Then too, over the passing years, Mesmer, like Beethoven at the time of composing the Fifth Symphony, was to learn that ultimately, there are no heroes to exalt us but only ourselves, reaching towards one another, and, in that, towards heaven and God, to make a world whose order reflects the harmony of the celestial spheres. Beethoven's song, 'Abendlied unter'm gestirnten Himmel,' a vision of the soul looking up at the starry night sky, where 'no fear can torture it any more, no power can give it orders; with transfigured countenance it flies up to the heavenly light' reveals a similar philosophy.⁹⁸ Perhaps Maria-Theresa recalled this song when

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.504.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.686.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.737.

Mesmer, the Miracle Doctor of my next chapter, restored her sight to the point where she was able to see the stars in the night-sky. For Maria-Theresa experienced the miracle of a sense restored which was never granted to Beethoven.

Chapter 2: The Miracle Doctor

2.1 Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer, miracle-worker

Another day in Vienna and I visited the local history museum in Landstraße. I had previously spoken to its curator, Professor Karl Hauer, on the telephone. He had told me that he knew the exact location of Doctor Mesmer's house and that he possessed pictures of it.

Professor Hauer proved to be unfailingly courteous. He revealed the location of Doctor Mesmer's mansion, Rasumovskygasse 29, in Landstraße, behind the post office, near the church. (The street was named after Razumovsky, who was a patron of Beethoven's.) Professor Hauer also showed me an old engraving of it from the 1770s, its high turrets and towers just visible behind the trees, more like a palace than a mansion.

Of course, given the difficulties I was having trying to track down any trace of Paradis and Mesmer, it was entirely to be expected that the mansion had disappeared. And when I asked Professor Hauer whether there would be a plaque on the site of Doctor Mesmer's house, he said no.

'In Vienna, in Landstraße,' he said, 'Mesmer had a very bad reputation. You will not find anyone wanting to talk to you about Mesmer in Vienna.'

'Why is that?'

'There was some kind of scandal with a young, blind, pianist. Some kind of treatment...'

Was it Professor Hauer's broken English or his reticence which made it hard

for him to say exactly *why* no-one was proud of Doctor Mesmer or wished to commemorate his existence? For his well-intentioned Mesmeric treatment of Maria-Theresa ultimately became a scandal that ruined his reputation. Thereafter, Doctor Mesmer was forced to leave Vienna. Forced to leave his wife and mansion with its beautiful rococo gardens, its folly, theatre and maze, his clinic with its mirror-lined rooms, his fountain that Maria-Theresa used to call the 'Soup Tureen' where he healed assembled beggars and cripples.

These were my thoughts as I began to make my way towards Rasumovskygasse 29...

...which was now a shop doorway.

This chapter, then, attempts to answer some of the questions which my visit to Professor Hauer raised. It will introduce Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer and his controversial treatment of animal magnetism, known pejoratively as Mesmerism. It demonstrates the reasons that Mesmer's contemporaries found his treatment so scandalous, namely that the relationship or rapport between the mesmeriser and his subject was often one of power and control. This reputation persisted well into the nineteenth century and traces of it remain even today, judging by Professor Hauer's faintly scandalised response to the topic. This chapter also shows the ways in which Mesmerism reinforced normative eighteenth-century gender roles. Finally, it examines how effective or otherwise Mesmerism was at curing Paradis's blindness, and argues that her possible hysteria, combined with other factors, became a potent

method of subverting her own possible cure.

Franz Anton Mesmer was born on 23 May, 1734, at Iznang on the shore of Lake Constance in Swabia. He was the son of a gamekeeper and went on to study divinity at the Jesuit universities of Dillingen and Ingolstadt, and then medicine at the University of Vienna in 1759.

His marriage to Anna Maria von Posch in 1759 made him, in Zweig's words, 'a man of independent means.'⁹⁹ Thereafter, he lived in a splendid mansion and developed a rich cultural and musical life. In fact, he arranged a performance of twelve-year old Mozart's *Bastien et Bastienne* in his garden. As Zweig reveals, when, in 1781, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart took up his permanent residence in Vienna, his first act was to engage a postchaise and drive over to Mesmer's house. 'I am writing this in Mesmer's garden' is the opening sentence in a letter telling of his safe arrival in the capital. Zweig also describes how Mozart later immortalized his former patron by including a comedic reference to Mesmer in his opera, *Così fan tutte* (here translated by Eden and Cedar Paul):

This magnetic stone
Should give the traveller pause.
Once it was used by Mesmer,
Who was born
In Germany's green fields
And who won great fame
In France.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Zweig, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.11.

This opera also includes a depiction of a mesmerist as a fraud, and his technique as a means of seduction, claims which were to haunt Mesmerism from its inception.¹⁰¹

Zweig reveals that Mesmer was acquainted with the astronomer Maximilian Hell, who was called upon to make a magnet to apply to a sick lady, 'for in those days it was an accepted fact that the magnet possessed special curative powers.'¹⁰² Mesmer kept track of Hell's patient, and learning of her cure, he himself ordered magnets and began to achieve remarkable cures through their application. As Zweig explains, Mesmer linked these magnetic cures with his earlier thesis, *De planetarum influxu*, in which he argued that the planets and the moon had an influence on the human body and on disease.¹⁰³ In this thesis, as Buranelli shows, Mesmer employed the term 'animal gravitation' but afterwards he began to refer to 'animal magnetism', by which he meant that what he termed 'universal fluid' entered 'the nervous system by way of the magnets and repaired physiological damage.'¹⁰⁴

However, once Mesmer discovered that he could achieve magnetic effects through the laying-on of hands, he stopped using magnets. Nevertheless, he continued to call his healing methods 'animal magnetism' because, as Buranelli reveals, Mesmer believed that he himself 'was an *animal* magnet capable of

¹⁰¹ Buranelli also describes how, as Act One moves towards the finale, 'Despina, disguised as a doctor draws a huge magnet from under her robe and makes mysterious passes at Ferrando and Guglielmo, who are supposed to have swallowed poison out of unrequited love for Dorabella and Fiordiligi. This scene is the clue to the passage in which the woodwinds sound their vibratory theme, which signifies the flow of animal magnetism from a magnet along the patients' nerves to the stricken areas of their anatomy'. p.57.

¹⁰² Zweig, p.15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.19.

¹⁰⁴ Buranelli, p.63.

magnetizing things and people with *animal* magnetism in a manner analogous to a *mineral* magnet magnetizing metals with *mineral* magnetism.¹⁰⁵ (The practice of animal magnetism, which also came to be known as Mesmerism, is further considered in Chapter 2.2). As Mesmer became a famous healer, more and more people flocked to him.

Eventually he was hired by Maria-Theresa von Paradis's parents to treat her blindness. The sad and scandalous outcome of this treatment is considered more fully later in this chapter. However, after her parents withdrew her from Mesmer's care, the Viennese Faculty of Medicine were appointed to investigate his procedures. They demanded that he put an end to his fraudulent practice, causing him to move to Paris in 1778.

As Zweig shows, in Paris, Mesmer was regarded either with admiration or deep suspicion. Since he believed himself to be 'a properly qualified medical practitioner, proud of his theory' he attempted to obtain official approval from the Royal Society of Medicine.¹⁰⁶ In fact, only one physician, Charles d'Eslon, supported him. Then King Louis XVI appointed four members of the Faculty of Medicine who conducted a series of experiments. However, they were not trying to discover whether Mesmer's treatments worked, but if he had discovered a new physical fluid. The commission in their wisdom decided that this fluid did not exist. The beneficial effects of Mesmer's treatments were, they stated, entirely due to the patient's imagination. Furthermore,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Zweig, p.46.

a belief arose that is more fully considered in Chapter 2.2, that magnetic treatment was positively dangerous for women since it might destroy their inhibitions.

However, Mesmer left Paris in 1802, Buranelli suggests, not due to the ensuing damage to his reputation but merely to retire to Switzerland, where he would spend the last thirteen years of his life.¹⁰⁷ Although he died there in obscurity in 1815, his theory of animal magnetism became increasingly famous due to the work of his followers. They transformed animal magnetism according to their own beliefs, so that Mesmer, the father, would no longer have recognised his own beloved child.

¹⁰⁷ Buranelli, p.199.

2.2 The Mesmeric Relationship

In O'Doherty's novel, *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.*, his Mesmer believes 'magnetic fluid is the medium of all healing.'¹⁰⁸ However, Mesmerism could not cure every bodily failing: as Zweig reveals, it was most successful in cases of 'gout, spasms, ear- troubles, stomach-ache, menstrual disturbances, insomnia, liver disorders' and even paralysis.¹⁰⁹ But it could not aid a sceptical or disbelieving patient, nor one who was so melancholic that their unhappiness undermined the possibility of their return to health.

As Natasha L. Rebry has demonstrated, Mesmer sought an improvement in health for his patients through the use of an iron wand, by the use of a baquet (an oaken tub used to store and transmit magnetic fluid) or by making passes with his hands over the magnetised subject.¹¹⁰ Mesmer himself also believed that he was a kind of human magnet, and in his writings, he recounts:

One day, while in proximity to a person who was bleeding, I noticed that in approaching me and going away from me, the circulation of this person's blood varied in a remarkable way; and having repeated this manoeuvre in other circumstances with the same results, I concluded that I possessed a magnetic quality.¹¹¹

Mesmer claimed that the passes he made were 'a therapeutic application of Newtonian philosophy, using the body's own magnetic forces' which he conceived of

¹⁰⁸ O'Doherty, p.190.

¹⁰⁹ Zweig, p.25.

¹¹⁰ Natasha L. Rebry, 'Disintegrated Subjects: Gothic Fiction, Mental Science and the Fin- de- siècle Discourse of Dissociation' unpublished PhD dissertation, (Okanagan: The University of British Columbia, March 2013), p.83.

¹¹¹ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Scientific and Medical Writings of F.A. Mesmer*, trans. George Bloch (California: William Kaufmann Inc.,1980), p.33.

as an invisible magnetic fluid.¹¹² According to Matthew Bell, 'The concept of animal magnetism thus contains a physical theory about magnetic force, a medical theory about the cause of illness, and a theory of medical practice.'¹¹³

As Rebry reveals, the room where Mesmer held his treatments was deliberately darkened, and apart from the specially selected music (usually played on wind instruments, a pianoforte or the glass harmonica), the treatment was silent. Mesmer, wearing a lilac-lined robe, used to touch his patient with his hand or iron wand. Everything in his clinic was designed to produce a strong physical reaction in the patient, that is, the 'crisis.' The establishment of a magnetic current generated this crisis, which Mesmer believed was vital to the healing process. After the agitation of the crisis, the subject would enter into a state of deep sleep. The magnetiser was then able to convey his will to the subject. In fact, as Rebry has shown in his *Mémoires* about animal magnetism, the Marquise de Puységur (1751- 1825) writes:

The ill person in this state [of magnetic somnambulism] enters into a very intimate rapport with his magnetiser, so that one could say he becomes a part of him. So when [the magnetiser] wants to move a magnetic being [a somnambulist] by a simple act of the will, nothing more astonishing takes place than what happens in our ordinary actions. I will pick up a piece of paper on the table; I order my arm and my hand to take hold of it. Since the rapport between my principal driving force – my will – and my hand is very intimate, the effect of my will is manifested so quickly that I have no need to reflect on the operation.¹¹⁴

Drawing on Puységur's description, Rebry argues that in the same way that the

¹¹² Mesmer, cited by Rebry, p.130.

¹¹³ Matthew Bell, 'Romanticism and Animal Magnetism', *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.173.

¹¹⁴ Marquis de Puységur, *Suite des mémoires*, p.17 in Rebry, p.156.

magnetist can 'will' his hand to pick up a piece of paper, he can 'will' the magnetised to perform the action. For, according to Puységur, the magnetic rapport makes the somnambulist part of the magnetiser. In fact, it was a commonly-held eighteenth and early nineteenth-century belief that the magnetist deliberately, and perhaps exploitatively, exerted his will over his subject. Rebry demonstrates that Mesmer's critics who refuted the existence of any physical agency termed animal magnetism, 'Mesmerism', a pejorative name that, for them, emphasised the dangerously intimate relationship between the initiator of the trance and the entranced subject.¹¹⁵ Then too, in Mesmer's own time, these critics perceived Mesmerism and its associated practises as dreadful, for they demonstrated the power that one individual could possess over another's body or mind, posing a threat to the maintenance of individual boundaries. In the mesmeric state, the subject therefore seemed to lack volition and autonomy, to be unable to act independently of the mesmerist. As Rebry also argues, these critics further feared that the mesmerist was able to transform an autonomous individual into a living marionette.

Moreover, as Rebry shows, from the first reports of Mesmer's treatments, it was the danger to women at the hands of male charlatans that was the main concern. The first official report on Mesmerism in 1784 contained a private postscript in which the commissioners discuss the intimacy involved in the magnetic procedure and express their concern about the abuse that might occur.¹¹⁶ In fact, the precise nature of the

¹¹⁵ Rebry, p.130.

¹¹⁶ Crabtree in Rebry, p.140.

relationship between mesmerist and mesmerised was widely debated. Experiments with Mesmerism became opportunities for competing claims about the nature of power and control over others. Often, there were pronounced class and gender differences between mesmerist and subject, and Winter claims that for the mesmerist, the ideal mesmeric subject was both lower-class and female because the 'best kind of experimental subject [...] would be the most animal- or machine-like.'¹¹⁷

As the magnetiser was most often male and his subject most often female, the roles of the mesmerist and somnambulist had certain gender associations that seemed to confirm traditional normative male and female stereotypes. The mesmerist's apparently dominating mind and powers of psychic penetration seemed to conform to conventional images of masculinity. In contrast, the person being magnetised assumed a role deemed passive and submissive, therefore feminine. In her thesis, Rebry describes how, typically, the male mesmerist would stand over a female subject who would either be sitting or lying on a bed. This posture 'satisfied the demands of sexual propriety, and expressed the power relations that justified the trajectory of influence between the male mesmerist and his woman patient.'¹¹⁸

Rebry also reveals that the intimacy of the magnetising process as well as the direct visual parallels between the 'crisis' and orgasm left many of Mesmer's contemporaries concerned about the potentially erotic nature of mesmeric treatments.¹¹⁹ Patients often collapsed, writhing on the floor, and were then carried

¹¹⁷ Winter in Rebry, p.144.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.175.

¹¹⁹ Rebry, p.178.

off to the 'crisis room.' This state was followed by 'languor, a weakness, and a sort of sleep of the senses which is the rest needed after a strong agitation.'¹²⁰ The link between the crisis and sexual intimacy was furthered by Mesmer's belief in the all-penetrating magnetic fluid, which, for him, was the principle and cause of life. Rebry argues that a magnetiser's power derived from possessing an abundance of this fluid, which was exchanged with the magnetised during the crisis. For her, this focus on magnetic fluid links mesmeric potency with masculine power in the discourse of Mesmerism.¹²¹ Then too, Rebry has shown that for Puységur, the fear of the abusive magnetiser, who might persuade the somnambulist in a trance state to rob, murder or rape, was always present: 'rapport causes the somnambulist to respond to and obey only the magnetiser.'¹²²

Whilst, for its contemporaries, Mesmerism prompted fears about the loss of self-expression and self-control, and about the permeable nature of individual identity and desires, the mesmeric relationship could also be interpreted in more positive ways. The rapport that occurred between magnetist and subject often dissolved the boundaries between two people. Rebry argues that Puységur likewise thought of the rapport as a literal fusion of the nervous systems of the two individuals, making them act as one.¹²³ Having entered this state of trance-like rapport in which a kind of moral and physical sympathy was established, the subject

¹²⁰ Crabtree in Rebry, p.178.

¹²¹ Rebry, p.85.

¹²² Puységur in Rebry, p.142.

¹²³ Ibid., p.215.

would then awaken refreshed and hopefully cured. Jean-Martin Charcot, Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud were to have recourse to this practice when they began to use hypnosis to treat hysteria, roughly one century later.

This more positive interpretation of the mesmeric rapport, in which there is a moral sympathy or close, symbiotic relationship between the mesmeriser and his subject, finds its counterpart in the relationship between the Pastor and Gertrude in Gide's *La Symphonie Pastorale*. Whilst the Pastor is not attempting to cure Gertrude's blindness, but, rather, instil in her an education, nevertheless, the mystical language of Bussy's translation is as reminiscent of the mesmeric as of the Christian tradition: 'But this darkened body is surely tenanted; an immured soul is waiting there for a ray of Thy grace, O Lord, to touch it. Wilt Thou perhaps allow my love to dispel this dreadful darkness?'¹²⁴ The language of this translation recalls the positive, elevating qualities of Mesmerism, in which a transcendent experience releases the soul from the prison of the ailing body. Such language comprises an antithesis to the darker and more malign aspects of Mesmerism, although both its positive and negative qualities are considered more fully in the final chapter.

¹²⁴ Gide, p.13.

2.3 An interrupted 'cure' for blindness?

The case-history of Maria-Theresa von Paradis, that is, the story of blindness cured, culminating in a moving recognition scene, recalls a genre with a long history. As Tunstall demonstrates, in 1709, the London magazine *Tatler* published an account of a cataract operation performed by the itinerant oculist, Roger Grant, on a young man called William Jones from Newington Butts in Surrey:

When the Patient first receiv'd the Dawn of Light, there appear'd such an Ecstasy in his Action that he seem'd ready to swoon away in the Surprise of Joy and Wonder [...] When he continued in this Amazement some Time, his Mother could no longer bear the Agitations of so many Passions as throng'd upon her; but fell upon his Neck, crying out, 'My Son! My Son!' The Youth knew her Voice, and could speak no more than, 'Oh me! Are You my Mother?' and fainted.¹²⁵

According to Tunstall, more than seventy years later, in 1782, a similar story would be told about the French oculist, Jacques Daviel:

The patient was seated; now the cataract is removed, and Daviel places his hands over the eyes that were just re-opened to the light. An elderly woman standing next to him was showing the liveliest of interest in the success of the operation; she was shaking all over at the surgeon's every move. He gestures to her to come close and makes her kneel in front of the patient; he removes his hands and the patient opens his eyes; he can see and cries out: 'Ah! You're my mother.' [...] I have never heard such a pathetic cry; it's as though I can still hear it! The old lady passes out, tears flow from the eyes of all those present, and alms from their purses.¹²⁶

These narratives present the recovery of sight as a coming-back-to-life. They do not explore the possibility that the patient might feel any pain, which was unavoidable in the eighteenth century. As Tunstall has shown, these narratives also describe a joyful

¹²⁵ Tunstall, p.2.

¹²⁶ Tunstall, p.2.

experience of rebirth in which sons recognise their mothers. To see, these stories suggest, is not only to be alive, but also to know oneself to be so. Then too, as Tunstall suggests, whilst sight might be literal, its metaphorical aspects of truth, reason, knowledge and faith are never far away. These metaphors derive, in part, from the various stories of Christ healing the blind man, the most famous of miracles recounted in the New Testament. The Gospel of St. Mark, for example, relates:

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put *his* hands again upon his eyes and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.¹²⁷

This story and others like it from the Christian tradition resonate in the cataract narratives, creating a sense that the surgeon has performed something akin to a miracle. Gide's *La Symphonie Pastorale*, which also uses traditional Christian imagery, nevertheless subverts the expectations of the sight-restored scenario. His heroine Gertrude only partially experiences the conventional rapture of the newly-sighted: 'When you gave me back my sight [...] my eyes opened on a world more beautiful than I had ever dreamt it could be.'¹²⁸ However, she soon reveals, 'I had never imagined men's faces so full of care either [and] what I saw first of all was our fault, our sin.'¹²⁹ By this enigmatic comment, she means that when she first saw the Pastor's wife, she realised that the unhappiness on the woman's 'poor face' was due to

¹²⁷ Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds, *The Bible: Authorised King James Version*, Mark 8: 22-25 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.55.

¹²⁸ Gide, p.69.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

the Pastor's love for Gertrude.¹³⁰ Therefore, the scene of sight restored, intended to bring such joy, resembles Eve eating the apple and realising that with her new knowledge comes shame and sin. Gertrude's unhappiness at the recovery of her sight forms a parallel to that of Maria-Theresa.

I allude to these narratives of sight restored to demonstrate the cultural and historical expectations underlying Mesmer's proposed treatment of Maria-Theresa. According to Fürst's account, Mesmer did not initially promise to restore Maria-Theresa's sight, rather he only promised to restore her eyes' alignment, and to control her pain and nerve spasms: "wieder die natürliche Lage verschaffen, die Gichter stillen und die Schmerzen lindern" zu können.¹³¹ Nevertheless, it seems that he was already convinced at the start of the treatment that he could restore her sight, although he did not tell her that: "Trotzdem soll er schon zu Beginn der Behandlung überzeugt gewesen sein, "ihr wieder zum Gesicht zu verhelfen".¹³² Perhaps he kept quiet about his eventual hopes for her because, regardless of how successful or otherwise his treatment methods proved to be, he was already under pressure to perform a miracle, to be, not just a magician, but a second Christ. These were expectations that it was impossible for him to fulfill: in fact, whilst Mesmer came to believe that Maria-Theresa's eyesight was almost completely restored, no-one else agreed with him.

Furthermore, considerable debate persists about how effective or otherwise

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Fürst, p.43.

¹³² Mesmer in Fürst, Ibid.

Mesmerism was at curing Maria-Theresa's blindness. According to Zweig, 'Mesmer's report of the case differs fundamentally from that of his colleagues.'¹³³ Mesmer's colleagues insisted that the apparent improvement was nothing other than a trick and 'a figment of the imagination.'¹³⁴ Then too, the fact that Maria-Theresa von Paradis was never able to 'see' again after she left Mesmer's care possibly supports the verdict of his colleagues.

However, both Zweig and Buranelli quote at length from a report written by Herr von Paradis at the time of his daughter's treatment by Mesmer. This report documents the first part of the treatment testifying to the efficacy of the Mesmerian method. Both Zweig and Buranelli cite this report because they believe it shows that Mesmer did achieve a partial cure of Maria-Theresa. I wish to examine this report in some detail because I believe it not only confirms Mesmer's partial cure, but also reveals Maria-Theresa's own possible motives to subvert that cure. It is worth mentioning that fiction writers like Halberstadt have also described Maria-Theresa's psychological imperative to sabotage her own treatment, with the girl's doubt touted as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: 'She has not come here to get better. She doesn't believe that is the case.'¹³⁵

Initially, in his report, Herr von Paradis describes Mesmer's treatment proceeding:

On the first day, Maria-Theresa felt her head tilting backward as if some force were pulling it. The spasms in her eyes occurred more frequently. Her body

¹³³ Zweig, p.37.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Halberstadt, p.39.

shook. Her arms and legs trembled. On the second day, Doctor Mesmer caused an effect very surprising to those who saw it. As he sat beside his patient, he pointed his wand at the reflection of her face in a mirror. Then, as he moved the wand, she moved her head to follow it. She was even able to describe the movements of the wand. The spasms of her eyes increased and decreased notably within and around them, these spasms being followed at times by total quiescence. On the fourth day, she felt real relief and her eyes returned to their normal position. We could see that the left eye was smaller than the right, but the treatment gradually caused them to become the same size.¹³⁶

Herr von Paradis also notes the initial success of the mesmeric treatment: 'After a short magnetic treatment at the hands of Doctor Mesmer, she began to distinguish the contours of certain objects placed before her.'¹³⁷ Buranelli then describes how 'the symptoms of hysteria began to clear up', although in fact the symptoms themselves do not seem to have been particularly hysterical: 'a discharge of green viscous matter relieved an intolerable pressure inside her nose. She felt a pricking along an optic nerve that made her head jerk and suffered recurrent attacks of vertigo.'¹³⁸ Mesmer interpreted the vertigo as a sign of improvement. Maria-Theresa could not adjust to the reports coming in from her eyes, which were sending their nervous impulses to her brain after years during which she had never had to cope with visual perceptions. However, Buranelli interprets this vertigo as a warning sign that Maria-Theresa was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with her treatment. He implies that now something like a cure was approaching, she was disturbed by where it would leave her.

In his report, Herr von Paradis likewise notices some of the drawbacks to

¹³⁶ Buranelli, p.78.

¹³⁷ Zweig, pp.37-8.

¹³⁸ Buranelli, p.79.

Maria-Theresa's treatment: 'The eyes were so sensitive that she could only bear to look at these objects when the room had been darkened by closing the shutters and drawing the curtains. She wore a fivefold bandage, and yet, if a light were moved in front of this, she would fall to the ground as if struck by a thunderbolt.'¹³⁹ Maria-Theresa's behaviour here seems quite extreme, supporting Bronfen's argument, that perhaps her blindness and her dramatic recovery of sight were *both* hysterical symptoms performed in response to the demands of her 'fathers': Doctor Mesmer and Herr von Paradis.

The father's report continues with, as Zweig emphasises, fairly subtle observations about Maria-Theresa's psychological state. It is the subtlety of these observations which leads Zweig to believe the report is genuine, and certainly there is no reason to doubt its veracity. Herr von Paradis describes his daughter's reaction to seeing another human-being for the first time:

She looked at [Dr. Mesmer] for some time attentively, following the movements he made in order to test her eyes. She was somewhat put out by these movements, and said: 'That is horrid. Can that be the figure of a man?' A house-dog she had become attached to was brought in at her request. Again, very attentively, she contemplated this new apparition. 'The dog,' she said, 'pleases me better than the man. His looks are far more agreeable to me.'¹⁴⁰

His report is supported by Fürst's citation from Mesmer's *Treatise on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism*: "diß Thier gefiel ihr besser als der Mensch," 'the animal pleased her more than the human.'¹⁴¹ If Maria-Theresa experienced such an aversion

¹³⁹ Zweig, p.38.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.38.

¹⁴¹ Fürst, p.45.

to the sight of other humans, then her later return to blindness might indeed represent a willed retreat from a commonplace, but for her, horrifying sight. Then too, her reaction to people's noses, which her father initially describes as one of amusement, later seems to be one of horror: 'They seemed to be threatening me, and as if they wanted to pluck my eyes out.'¹⁴²

In fact, as Herr von Paradis proceeds with his report, Maria-Theresa's behaviour seems increasingly disturbed and unhappy: 'When confronted with black, she declared it to be the picture of her former blindness. This colour invariably provoked a somewhat melancholy mood [...] when she would suddenly burst into tears for no apparent cause.'¹⁴³ Here, the father demonstrates his inability to empathise with, or even understand, his daughter's emotions. He continues with his account of her reactions to her treatment: 'Once she had such a bad attack, that, tearing the bandages from her eyes, she threw herself upon the sofa, wringing her hands, groaning and sobbing in the utmost despair, so that even Madame Sacco or any other famous tragedienne could not have given a better display of extreme anguish.'¹⁴⁴ Again, Herr von Paradis's lack of compassion, due to a lack of comprehension, is evident. He is suggesting that he does not regard her emotions as entirely sincere: they are a 'display' of 'extreme anguish.'¹⁴⁵ In this way, Herr von Paradis alludes to a definition of hysteria which not only denotes excessive or

¹⁴² Zweig, p.38.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

uncontrollable emotionality, but as Mark S. Micale defines it: 'A highly corporealized pathology in which psychological anxieties are played out on the stage of the human body. Self-dramatisation is an inherent part of it.'¹⁴⁶

Hysteria seems first to have been discussed in ancient medical writing. The ancient Egyptians treated it as a disease of the womb, which the Greek physician Hippocrates (460- 337 BC) named after that organ (*Hysteros*) believing that it could cause pain, convulsions and emotional disorders until it was manipulated back into its proper place. Explanations of hysteria throughout the ages worked on metaphorical variations of this theme of 'the wandering womb' as a presence in the body, contained within the body's boundaries and yet mobile. An early interpretation of hysteria might have considered it a form of demonic possession, the occupation of the body by an evil external presence.

Nevertheless, it is worth indicating that despite the mildly condemnatory tone of Herr von Paradis's account of his daughter's emotional state, hysteria in the eighteenth century would not have been so problematic a diagnosis as it was in the nineteenth century when Freud and Breuer were beginning to treat it. Hysteria in the eighteenth century, particularly in a musician, might well have been regarded as the too-sensitive outpourings of a passionate soul, and indeed a sign of that passion and sensitivity, to be commended rather than condemned. Therefore, Maria-Theresa's extreme emotionalism in which, for example, 'this pitiful condition passed

¹⁴⁶ Mark S. Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.45.

away in a few minutes, and she speedily recovered her good spirits' but only until the 'bad fit overwhelmed her again shortly after' denotes her extreme sensibility.¹⁴⁷ In the late eighteenth century then, the term 'hysteria' would have been largely divested of its negative connotations, since female musicians regarded as hysterical would actually have been considered the (too) exquisite epitome of the sensations of the soul.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, by Maria-Theresa's era, hysterical symptoms were, according to Heather Hadlock, 'interpreted as the result of a surplus, deficiency or congestion of animal magnetism,' requiring mesmerist therapies.¹⁴⁹ In my novel, I regard Mesmer as a precursor to Freud, who uses hypnosis and Mesmerism to reveal the mental and emotional blockages that are causing physical symptoms. Like Freud, Mesmer begins to conceive of hysteria as the result of traumatic but repressed memories and experiences that have not been resolved and so return in physical symptoms and dream images. In fact, Freud's own description of his treatment of his patient, Emmy von N., seems very similar and apposite to Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa:

[Emmy von N.] saw these [remembered] scenes with all the vividness of reality [...] many other hysterical patients have reported to us that they have memories of this kind in vivid visual pictures and that this applied especially to their pathogenic memories. My therapy consists in wiping away these pictures, so that she is no longer able to see them before her. To give support to my suggestion, I stroked her several times over the eyes.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Zweig, p.39.

¹⁴⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Duncan Large for his suggestion prompted by the German translation of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, that this was the age of *Empfindsamkeit* or sentimentality.

¹⁴⁹ Heather Hadlock, *Mad Loves Women and Music in Offenbach's Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp.67-8.

¹⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, 'Frau Emmy von N.', *Studies on Hysteria, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume II (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), pp.48-106.

Nevertheless, I wish to develop an argument in which Maria-Theresa's own emotional state threatens Mesmer's attempts at cure. Confronted by a bright day in the garden, Herr von Paradis reports, 'she was not able to bear the glare [...] for long. She herself begged that her eyes might be bandaged again, because they ached and she felt a trifle giddy.'¹⁵¹ Not only does Maria-Theresa feel afraid but she also seems unprepared, mentally and emotionally, for the physical symptoms induced by the return of her sight. Then, with the replacement of her bandages, her will and her physical motor skills are impaired: 'When the bandage had been replaced, she was afraid to take a single step on her own account, although in the days of her sightlessness, she moved freely in places that were familiar to her.'¹⁵² Here, her behaviour recalls that of the hysteric: the inertia, the excessive role-playing and the motoric function disorders. These symptoms can be interpreted as a recourse to body language that mimics the stifling domestic and familial situation that women found themselves in during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They evoke the hysteric's conflicting desires to rebel against, and conform to, the constraints upon her through an extreme attempt to re-stage exactly what is expected of her.

Herr von Paradis's report states that his daughter said to him: 'Why am I less happy than I used to be? Every fresh thing I see causes me an unpleasant sensation. I was far more peaceful in my mind when I was sightless.'¹⁵³ This historical report

¹⁵¹ Zweig, p.40.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.39.

conveys Maria-Theresa's emotional fluctuations and shows her associating a sense of tranquility with sightlessness. According to her father, she even said, 'if every fresh object were to continue to put me into such a state, I would infinitely rather return to my former blindness.'¹⁵⁴ This is precisely the kind of remark that would alarm her over-protective and over-anxious parents. At this stage of her cure, and despite Mesmer's reassurances, they might well have begun to feel that their daughter was happier when she was blind; certainly, in O'Doherty's version of the story, Herr von Paradis complains that his daughter, 'had entered Dr. Franz's care as a mature young woman of high skills and accomplishments and was now so unsure and uncertain of [her]self that [she] was no more than a baby, and that what [she] needed were the familiarities of [her] own home.'¹⁵⁵ Thus Maria-Theresa's emotional response to the recovery of her sight may have been one of the factors involved in her parents forcibly removing her from Mesmer's care. It is therefore possible to argue that her emotionalism partly sabotages his attempts to cure her.

Other factors also subverted Mesmer's desire to cure her. According to Herr von Paradis, as Maria-Theresa recovered her sight, 'she had to spend more time in thought before starting to play pieces which she had in former times performed with absolute precision at her recitals. Now that her eyes were opened, she found it very difficult to play anything at all. She sat observing her fingers as they scampered over the keys, but smudged most of the passages she played.'¹⁵⁶ It is possible to speculate

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ O'Doherty, p.22.

¹⁵⁶ Zweig, p.40.

that the fear induced by her recovery of sight would have been eased by her music, but that lacking her music, she felt doubly bereft. As Barnes's Maria-Theresa observes, 'In my darkness, music was my entire consolation. To be brought into the light and then lose the ability to play would be cruel justice.'¹⁵⁷ It is little wonder then that she might long, not for her cure to proceed, but for her blindness to return.

And yet, as Zweig nicely describes it, Maria-Theresa 'was loyal to her saviour.'¹⁵⁸ According to Zweig, it was Mesmer's opponents who interrupted his attempts at cure. Professor Joseph Barth, the ophthalmologist at the university, seems to have put forward the argument that if she was curable, he, Barth, should have cured her. Since he had failed, his argument was that Mesmer had also failed.

According to Mesmer's *Memoirs*, Mesmer says Barth based his denial on the patient's confusion in naming objects, a flawed manner of reasoning, since any patient blind since early childhood naturally has to go through the process of identifying all things as if they were new and so falls into the mistakes the process creates. Upon regaining her sight, Maria-Theresa would have to build up a new repertoire of visual engrams and then she would have to establish connections between these new imprints and the tactile engrams she already possessed. She would then have to find the words to describe them.

In O'Doherty's *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.*, Mesmer recognises that Maria-Theresa can see, but that she lacks the necessary language to describe her

¹⁵⁷ Barnes, p.179.

¹⁵⁸ Zweig, p.41.

perceptions: 'Dr. Barth declared me blind because I could not name the simplest things. Dr. Franz [Mesmer] responded that as one who had never seen them before, how could I name them?'¹⁵⁹ However, O'Doherty does not examine the implications of this scenario in the way that Diderot does. Diderot suggests that a blind person who has newly recovered her sight suffers from a 'multitude of confused sensations' which can only resolve themselves with 'time and habitual reflection.'¹⁶⁰ Diderot alludes to a related difficulty, which Maria-Theresa also experiences, namely that 'the comparison between those ideas received through touch and those through sight' are not clear enough in her own mind to convince her of the soundness of her judgement.¹⁶¹ Yet O'Doherty does not pursue this fascinating connection between sight and judgement, the philosophical and scientific implications of which were developed in what came to be known as the Molyneux Problem.

Tunstall gives a clear account of the Molyneux Problem.¹⁶² She reveals how in 1688, John Locke observed that a man blind from birth could have no idea of colour, but wondered whether he could have an idea of shape. William Molyneux, the Irish philosopher, then asked Locke whether a blind person would have the same idea of shape as a sighted person in the form of the following thought experiment:

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t'other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ O'Doherty, *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.*, p.57.

¹⁶⁰ Diderot in Tunstall, p.29.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.62.

¹⁶² Tunstall, pp.3-4.

¹⁶³ William Molyneux in Tunstall, p.4.

As Tunstall reveals, Locke took up the problem in his second edition of the essay (1694), claiming that the 'Blind Man, at first sight, would not be able with certainty to say which was the Globe, which the Cube, whilst he only saw them; though he could unerringly name them by his touch, and certainly distinguish them by the difference of their Figures felt.'¹⁶⁴

Mark Paterson also shows that this question caused debate between leading philosophers such as Berkeley, Condillac, Diderot and Voltaire, as well as Leibniz, La Mettrie, Maupertuis, Turgot, Mérian and Reid.¹⁶⁵ Paterson further points out that Molyneux's Problem 'concerned the hypothetical case of a man born blind who could now see, at a time before cataract operations could answer this definitively.'¹⁶⁶ However, Tunstall argues that in 1727, a real-life cataract case occurred which was believed to solve the problem.¹⁶⁷ She describes how a boy who had been born blind had his cataracts successfully removed by the surgeon and Fellow of the Royal Society, William Cheselden. According to Cheselden's report in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, the boy initially, and then for some time following the operation, could not recognise shapes. Cheselden's report contains a scene of misrecognition in which the boy fails to recognise not his mother, but his household pets:

When he first saw [...] he knew not the Shape of any Thing, nor any one Thing from another, however different in Shape, or Magnitude; but upon being told what Things were, whose Form he before knew from feeling, he would

¹⁶⁴ Locke in Tunstall, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch, Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p.38.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.39.

¹⁶⁷ Tunstall, p.4.

carefully observe, that he might know them again; but having too many Objects to learn at once, he forgot many of them; and (as he said) at first learn'd to know, and again forgot a thousand Things in a Day. One Particular only (though it may appear trifling) I will relate; Having often forgot which was the Cat and which the Dog, he was asham'd to ask, but catching the Cat (which he knew by feeling) he was observ'd to look at her stedfastly, and then setting her down, said, So Puss! I shall know you another Time!¹⁶⁸

According to Tunstall, the boy's failure to recognise 'which was the Cat and which the Dog' answered, for Cheselden, 'which is the Globe, which the Cube.'¹⁶⁹ However, whilst Tunstall declares that 'knowledge about the human mind could be gained by observing an ex-blind man nonetheless failing to see,' for Paterson, the Molyneux Problem cannot be resolved so unequivocally.¹⁷⁰ He believes it is not possible to gauge truly 'the sensory contents of another person's consciousness.'¹⁷¹ Secondly, as Maria-Theresa's case-study also shows, it is difficult to decide exactly what constitutes blindness or sight, particularly since, in historical accounts, 'these have not been systematized or standardized.'¹⁷² And thirdly, Paterson indicates, patients experience considerable variation both in the post-operative experience and in learning how to see. Factors here include not only the amount of previous damage to the eyes but also the patient's own resources and adaptability.¹⁷³

In fact, practical rather than philosophical considerations served to undermine Mesmer's attempts to cure Maria-Theresa. Other medical colleagues called on the von Paradis parents and alarmed them by suggesting that the Empress would

¹⁶⁸ William Cheselden in Tunstall, p.5.

¹⁶⁹ Tunstall, p.5.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Paterson, p.43.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

withdraw the yearly pension if their daughter's sight were restored. Furthermore, these opponents believed that the young pianist would lose half her attraction on the concert platform if she possessed normal vision. Given this information, it is easy to ascribe mercenary motives to the von Paradis parents' decision to remove their daughter from his care. However, from their perspective, the cure was proceeding fitfully, causing their daughter deep depression and now threatening her one consolation, her music, as well as her livelihood, her musical reputation and her support from the Empress.¹⁷⁴ In fact, Mesmer implies, and indeed, it was entirely possible, that Herr von Paradis acted from contradictory motives. On the one hand, Maria-Theresa would not really be saved from blindness by her doctor, so the treatment had no point. On the other hand, she was on the point of having her sight restored by him, so the treatment would deprive her of the favours of the public and the Empress. Either way, she should be removed from his care.

These possible motives for Herr von Paradis's attempt to interrupt Maria-Theresa's treatment do not make him a reprehensible man, but rather, as Buranelli emphasises, 'one who indulges in self-sophistication when confronted by unpleasant possibilities.'¹⁷⁵ Where the von Paradis parents are worthy of criticism is in the violent way they sought to remove Maria-Theresa from Mesmer's house. Maria-

¹⁷⁴ Barnes effectively portrays these dilemmas in his short story, 'Harmony': 'Before, they had been in charge of a blind virtuoso; now, sight had rendered her mediocre. If she continued playing like that, her career would be over. But even assuming that she rediscovered all her former skill, she would lack the originality of being blind. She would be merely one pianist among many others. And there would be no reason for the Empress to continue her pension. Two hundred gold ducats had made a difference to their lives. And how, without it, would they commission works from leading composers?' Barnes, p.181.

¹⁷⁵ Buranelli, p.82.

Theresa refused to leave Mesmer, perhaps, as Zweig speculates, due to 'erotic attachment to the man who was treating her' or 'mediumistic attraction' or even a combination of both.¹⁷⁶ This in turn enraged her mother, who 'reproached the girl for preferring to stay with a stranger rather than her own family.'¹⁷⁷ She went into a frenzy of stamping and shouting, seized her daughter furiously, berated her stridently and, according to Mesmer, 'hurled her head-long against the wall.'¹⁷⁸ The mother in fact mishandled Maria-Theresa to such an extent that the girl fell into convulsions, whilst, as we have seen, Herr von Paradis drew a sword on the good doctor. At this point, Mesmer stepped in and rescued his patient. However, after all the turmoil and alarm, Maria-Theresa's sight, which he had taken such pains to restore, was once again lost. The whole course of treatment would have to be started again.

Since Maria-Theresa had lost her sight a second time, seemingly due to traumatic events, it is possible to conjecture that similar traumatic events might have made her lose her sight the first time. Then too, as Mesmer slowly and painfully worked on Maria-Theresa for a second time, stopping her convulsions and coaxing her to see again, her father put an end to her treatment by means of a trick. He persuaded Mesmer to send her home by promising that she could return for further treatment when she needed it. However, once home, she was never permitted to return to the clinic. She lapsed back into her blindness and never came out of it,

¹⁷⁶ Zweig, p.42.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Buranelli, p.82.

whilst the von Paradis parents now denounced Mesmer for his outrageous treatment of their daughter.

With the restoration of her blindness came the return of Maria-Theresa's music, another important factor, and possible subconscious force at play, in undermining Mesmer's attempts to cure her. Halberstadt pushes this theory to hysterical extremes when her version of Maria-Theresa deliberately shuts herself away and destroys her own eyesight in order to restore her musical ability: 'Maria Theresia's eyes were purple and swollen, the lids burnt by the sun, the skin parched. Her face was beet red [...] "Are you frightened the sun will harm my eyes? It is too late. The damage is done. I put saltwater compresses on my eyes. I did everything I was told not to do for the past six months."¹⁷⁹

Without her sight, Maria-Theresa was able to resume her piano concerts and went on tours to Paris and London, conquering both capitals in her role of the 'blind pianist.' In her keyboard technique, she displayed the high virtuosity of the true artist. She was so accomplished that Mozart wrote a composition especially for her, the Concerto in B- Flat Major. Then too, Maria-Theresa introduced the Paradis Concerto with aplomb in Paris in 1784, at the Tuileries before Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, who were charmed by the composition and the performer. She went on to compose sufficient music to compile a respectable list of songs, pieces for the keyboard and operas. She also opened a music school in Vienna. When she died at the age of sixty-five, in 1824, she had lived in the dark since 1777 and her experience

¹⁷⁹ Halberstadt, p.121.

with Doctor Mesmer. Nevertheless, perhaps her blindness was more empowering than its cure, since she was then able to live a worthy life which made full use of her musical talents and abilities. Therefore, Maria-Theresa's expulsion from Doctor Mesmer's house was perhaps not the catastrophe it seemed, not an expulsion from Paradise but rather, for her, a return to it.

Chapter 3: The 'Mesmerised' Writer

3.1 E.T.A. Hoffmann, under the influence

Ernest Theodor Amadeus (originally Wilhelm) Hoffmann was born in Königsberg in 1776, the son of Christoph Ludwig Hoffmann, a barrister, and Luise Albertine Dorffer. After the separation of his parents, he was raised in the house of his maternal grandmother. In his youth, he became interested in sciences and the arts, such as music, drawing and painting, and found that learning came easily to him.

However, music was Hoffmann's first and truest love. He tried to make a living as a composer, but was forced to take up literature as a livelihood. Yet even in his later life, when his income was assured from fiction, he invoked music in his stories. He delighted in writing about the lives of musicians, in comparing the music of his day with that of the past, and in analysing the dynamics of musical creation and performance. In honour of Mozart, he changed his middle name from Wilhelm to Amadeus.

Later, he entered the University of Königsberg where he studied law and then had an unsettled career. In 1802, he married Maria Thekla Michaelina Rorer-Tracinska (Mischa), the daughter of a town councillor. Their daughter, Cäcilia, was born in 1805 but died two years later. Hoffmann worked as a Prussian law officer and then held several positions as conductor, critic and theatrical musical director in Bamberg and Dresden until 1814. Believing that he would never be a great composer, he turned to writing.

In 1816, Hoffmann attained a high position in the Supreme Court in Berlin. Prior to this, he had suffered from poverty in Leipzig. An additional problem was the Napoleonic Wars, which shook Europe from 1792 until 1815, occasionally forcing him to move from town to town. His struggle between two roles, as a bureaucrat and as an artist, underlined many of his works, which attacked the bourgeois world.

There was also a divide between Hoffmann's private life and his public life. He had a satisfactory marriage but also experienced an unconsummated love for a former music student, Julia Marc. She was only thirteen when Hoffmann began giving her voice lessons in Bamberg. At the age of sixteen, she was married to a rich merchant from Bamberg and Hoffmann never saw her again.

He died in Berlin from progressive paralysis on June 25, 1822.

In his study of animal magnetism in Romantic discourse, Jürgen Barkhoff regards Mesmerism as the central motif of Hoffmann's work:

Der Mesmerismus ist bei Hoffmann wie ein Fokus, von dem aus sich der ganze Kosmos Hoffmannscher Themen in seinen Filiationen und Brechungen organisieren ließe.¹⁸⁰

In fact, Hoffmann had a long-standing interest in Mesmer's therapy by the time the *Serapions-Brüder* novellas were published in 1820/21. As Liane Bryson reveals, 'Hoffmann's knowledge of Mesmerism stemmed from medical writings, from observing somnambulistic sessions during his years in Bamberg, and through ongoing

¹⁸⁰ 'Mesmerism is, for Hoffmann, like a focus from which the whole cosmos of Hoffmann's themes, in its filiations and refractions, might be organised.' Jürgen Barkhoff, *Magnetische Fiktionen: Literarisierung des Mesmerismus in der Romantik* (Stuttgart/ Weimar: Metzler, 1995), p.196.

acquaintances with practitioners of the magnetic therapy such as Friedrich Speyer, Friedrich Adalbert Marcus and Doctor Ferdinand Koreff.¹⁸¹ Dr. Marcus (1754- 1816) in Bamberg experimented with Mesmerism, and Hoffmann reported attending a mesmeric therapy session at his clinic. Professor Tymms likewise argues that Hoffmann possessed a knowledge of mesmeric trance states through medical friends.¹⁸²

However, it is worth indicating that the version of animal magnetism (with its emphasis on mental influence and rapport) which was so popular in Germany during Hoffmann's time derived less from Mesmer's theories of animal magnetic fluids and more from the instances of somnambulism which occurred in Mesmer's practice. In fact, it was the Marquis de Puységur, a former student of Mesmer's, who was the first to suggest that it was the psychic connection between the magnetist and his patient, rather than the influence of magnetic fluids, which prompted the healing properties of animal magnetism.

There was also, as Hoffmann discovered, a more sinister aspect to Mesmerism. As Maria M. Tatar reveals, it was Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert (1780- 1860), the German physician and naturalist who gave celebrated lectures on dreams, psychic ability and animal magnetism, who introduced Hoffmann to the 'dark side of natural science' in his *View of the Night Side of the Natural Sciences* (1808).¹⁸³ According to

¹⁸¹ Liane Bryson, 'Romantic Science: Hoffmann's Use of the Natural Sciences in "Der goldne Topf"' *Monatshefte*, 91/2 (Summer 1999), pp.241-2.

¹⁸² Professor Tymms, cited by Joan Wyn Reeves in *Thinking About Thinking: Studies In The Background of Some Psychological Approaches* (London: Methuen, 1965), p.75.

¹⁸³ Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.122.

Tatar, this text shaped Hoffmann's views on the various implications of mesmeric control and hypnotic trances, which became such a prominent feature of his fiction.¹⁸⁴ Tatar also shows that notations in Hoffmann's diary reflect his initial doubts about magnetism, whilst his stories show him alternating between feelings of admiration and a sense of uncanniness.¹⁸⁵

Hoffmann's fiction certainly demonstrates his belief in the double-edged nature of Mesmerism. On the one hand, Hoffmann believed that Mesmerism had positive, beneficial, healing qualities, and on the other, that it was a dangerous and destructive means of manipulation. As Maria M. Tatar shows, in Hoffmann's fiction, 'those who unwittingly yield to mesmerist and electrical powers generally exercise a salutary influence over their mediums; those who deliberately seek to cast a spell on others and to use them as mediums of knowledge exert a power that is fatal to their subjects.'¹⁸⁶

This double-edged awareness of Mesmerism is evident in many of Hoffmann's short stories, including those which inspired Offenbach (1819- 1880) to compose his opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Offenbach portrays the author as the dreamy central character. In the prologue, the character of Hoffmann enters the tavern and tells the stories of his three great loves, Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta, who are discussed extensively in the following sections of this chapter. I examine their stories, 'The Sandman', 'Councillor Krespel' and 'New Year's Eve Adventure' as well as

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.130.

'Automata', 'The Magnetiser' and 'The Golden Pot' through the lens of the case-study of Maria-Theresa von Paradis. I show how Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta, are, like Maria-Theresa, torn between their own (musical) desires and the controlling impulses of Coppélius, Doctor Miracle and Dapertutto, who, I believe, operate as paradigms for the Paradis/Mesmer relationship. I also show that in these stories, aspects of Mesmerism and of hysteria are closely linked, so that Mesmerism is not necessarily a 'cure' but rather, a parallel state to hysteria and perhaps even provokes what it is intended to heal.

The close links between hysteria and Mesmerism emerged in my earlier discussion of Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa. I fully believe that Hoffmann was aware of the Paradis/Mesmer relationship. Hadlock has likewise argued that *Les Contes d'Hoffmann's* representation of Dr. Miracle's relationship with Antonia and of his behaviour in the Crespel home follows a template established by the notorious episode involving Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer and his failed cure of the blind pianist, Maria Theresa von Paradis in Vienna.¹⁸⁷ For her, Mesmerism facilitates a 'gendered paradigm' which includes Hoffmann's 'two mesmeric couples, Dr. Miracle and Antonia, and Dapertutto and Giulietta.'¹⁸⁸ I concur with these arguments, despite the fact that although I have consulted the Hoffmann collections at Senate House and UEA, I have not been able to unearth conclusive proof that Hoffmann had read Mesmer's *Memoirs*. However, Hoffmann's documented long- standing fascination

¹⁸⁷ Hadlock, p.50.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.52.

with Mesmerism, and the textual evidence of his short stories themselves make for a compelling argument that he knew of Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa.

3.2 Hoffmann's mesmeric couples

1. Olympia and Coppelius

In Hoffmann's 'The Sandman', Nathanael, the protagonist, first encounters the eponymous Sandman in the form of a grotesque lawyer, Coppelius, who performs alchemical experiments with Nathanael's father after the children have gone to bed. One night, Nathanael hides to observe what they do. However, he is discovered and nearly has his eyes burned out with coals. The boy escapes, but subsequently, his father is found dead. Later, when Nathanael is an adult, and has moved to another town, he encounters a barometer salesman whom he takes to be a *Doppelgänger* of Coppelius. Now he is called Coppola (an Italian word that can mean 'bowl' or 'eye-socket') and he lays out a vast selection of eyeglasses from his pockets. Nathanael eventually settles on buying a small telescope from which he can spy on the beautiful Olympia, the inventor Spalanzani's daughter, who sits strangely motionless at her table in the room across the street. Nathanael then falls in love with Olympia only to discover towards the end of the story that she is a mechanical doll, a puppet.

I believe the character of Olympia derives from Hoffmann's awareness of Maria-Theresa von Paradis's case-history. Hoffmann describes Olympia's vision so that, like Maria-Theresa's, it seems selective. When Nathanael first looks at Olympia's face, he notes that 'there was a strangely fixed look about her eyes as if [...] they had no

power of vision. I thought she was sleeping with her eyes open.'¹⁸⁹ Later, Nathanael describes Olympia's eyes as having 'a singular look of fixity and lifelessness.'¹⁹⁰ However, Nathanael begins to believe that the 'power of vision was now being enkindled.'¹⁹¹ He perceives that Olympia's glances 'shone with ever-increasing vivacity' until 'her glance was beaming upon him with love and longing [...] the glance of love which penetrates in its glowing career, his inmost soul.'¹⁹² He later believes her eye is 'beaming full of love and desire' 'beaming through mind and soul.'¹⁹³

Hoffmann's description of Olympia's apparent blindness and her subsequent recovery of sight due to the dubious power of love parallels Maria-Theresa's case-history. As previously discussed, Maria-Theresa suffers from a kind of blindness that the doctors call 'hysterical.' As previous chapters have demonstrated, it is only Doctor Mesmer's esoteric treatments, his hypnosis, his Mesmerism, the sounds of his glass harmonica, that are able to help Maria-Theresa. Due to this treatment regime and perhaps due to the love she feels for him, she briefly recovers her sight. At the same time, her vision and body, like Olympia's, become the site on which her 'fathers' re-enact their battles. As Bronfen has shown, by compelling Maria-Theresa to perform, her father, Joseph Anton von Paradis, seeks to 'enhance his authority as

¹⁸⁹ E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'The Sandman' in *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, edited, with an introduction by E.F. Bleiler, trans. J. T. Bealby (New York: Dover, 1967), p.194.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.203.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.206.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.208.

impresario.¹⁹⁴ Mesmer, in turn, seeks to 'cement his authority as psychic healer.'¹⁹⁵

And then Maria-Theresa, like Olympia, is torn between these two men's conflicting desires.

The symbolic process of being torn in two has its literal re-enactment in Hoffmann's short story. With Olympia, Spalanzani argues that her body is his creation, 'the clockwork' whilst Coppola tries to reclaim her eyes.¹⁹⁶ The violent jumble of their words could equally be those of Mesmer, the giver of sight, arguing with Josef von Paradis, the giver of life:

Laß los – Laß los – Infamer – Verruchter! – Darum Leib und Leben daran gesetzt? – ha ha ha ha! – so haben wir nicht gewettet – ich, ich hab die Augen gemacht – ich das Räderwerk – dummer Teufel mit deinem Räderwerk – verfluchter Hund von einfältigem Uhrmacher – fort mit dir – Satan – halt – Peipendreher – teuflische Bestie! – halt – fort – laß los!¹⁹⁷

Leave hold – leave hold – you monster – you rascal – put your life's work into it? – Ha! ha! ha! ha! – That was not our wager – I, I made the eyes – I the clockwork. – Go to the devil with your clockwork – you damned dog of a watchmaker – be off – Satan – stop – you paltry turner – you infernal beast – stop – begone – let me go.¹⁹⁸

In Hoffmann's original German text, as well as in the English translation, there is a blending of violent voices and short, brutal, monosyllabic words, 'Laß los, laß los,' as well as a savage punctuation of dashes and exclamation marks which suggest the similarity of each 'father's' authoritative mandate.

¹⁹⁴ Bronfen, p.134.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.134.

¹⁹⁶ Spalanzani is also referred to in Hoffmann's short story 'Das öde Haus' ('The Deserted House') as a biologist who discovers a sixth sense in bats.

¹⁹⁷ E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'Der Sandmann', in *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke* (Munich: Winkler, 1964), p.358.

¹⁹⁸ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.210.

In order to demonstrate the likely influence that Maria-Theresa's case-study had upon the fiction of Hoffmann, it is worth comparing Olympia's brutal treatment with Mesmer's account of the very similar violence enacted against Maria-Theresa.

Nathanael bursts into Professor Spalanzani's house to find:

The professor held a female figure fast by the shoulders, the Italian Coppola grasped it by the feet, and thus they were tugging and pulling, this way and that, contending for the possession of it, with the utmost fury [...] Coppola, turning himself with the force of a giant, wrenched the figure from the Professor's hand, and then, with the figure itself, gave him a tremendous blow, which made him reel and fall backwards over the table. [...] Now Coppola flung the figure across his shoulders, and, with frightful, yelling laughter, dashed down the stairs so that the feet of the figure, which dangled in the ugliest manner, rattled with a wooden sound on every step [...] Nathanael stood paralysed, he had seen but too plainly that Olympia's waxen, deadly pale countenance had no eyes, had black holes instead – she was indeed a lifeless doll [...] And now Nathanael saw how a pair of eyes which lay upon the ground were staring at him.¹⁹⁹

Likewise, in his *Memoirs*, Mesmer recounts how, when Maria-Theresa refused to return to the family home, her parents mistreated her in his clinic. He suggests that if this behaviour duplicated similar violence enacted within the confines of their home, it may have been the root cause of Maria-Theresa's own hysteria. He further describes how Frau von Paradis suddenly arrived at his clinic on 29 April 1778 and demanded that her daughter be released. When this request was denied, she fell into a frenzy, stamping and shouting until Maria-Theresa began one of her old, convulsive attacks. Like the Professor in 'The Sandman' fighting for his daughter by using violence against her, Frau von Paradis then 'pulled her daughter away from the attendant holding her, saying, "Unhappy creature, you are part of the intrigue of this

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.210.

house," and flung her with rage headlong against the wall.²⁰⁰ Trying to help the traumatised daughter, Mesmer found the mother attacking him.

The resemblance of this scene to the scene of violence in 'The Sandman' continues with the entrance of Maria-Theresa's father, who, having been ordered away by one of the servants, 'came storming into my house, waving his sword. Another servant barred the door to the room where we were and struggled to push him away. They finally succeeded in disarming the madman and he rushed from the room calling down maledictions on me.'²⁰¹

Whereas previously the all-singing, all-dancing marionette had functioned as a symbol of the malleable nature of hysteria, now both Olympia and Maria-Theresa are 'lifeless' restored to the dutiful, passive, inert state which the Paradis parents demanded of their daughter. This recalls the hysteric, who exaggerates the very modes of passivity projected onto her. In fact, like Maria-Theresa, Olympia suggests both a mesmerised subject and a hysteric in the grip of a traumatic experience, compelled to repeat its self-destructive symptoms.

The parallels between Hoffmann's story and Mesmer's *Memoirs* continue, again suggesting that Hoffmann was aware of Maria-Theresa's case-study. In Hoffmann's story, the violence against Olympia results in a 'waxen, deadly pale countenance [that] had no eyes but black holes instead.'²⁰² Mesmer writes in his *Memoirs* that Maria-Theresa likewise 'had fallen back into her prior blindness by

²⁰⁰ Bronfen, p.135.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., p.17.

virtue of the blow her parents had given her.²⁰³ However, whilst Olympia is now more helpless than she was before, Maria-Theresa, despite her renewed blindness and hysteria, paradoxically regains her sense of autonomy through her music. Once she is blind again, she recovers her musical talent and no longer desires to have her sight restored. She also recovers from her dependence on Mesmer.

It is at this point in the story that Maria-Theresa's renewed blindness and her compensatory musical ability become truly uncanny according to a definition of the well-worked critical term that I wish to develop here, since Freud has been one of the most influential critics of Hoffmann's 'The Sandman.' In his classic 1919 essay, 'The Uncanny', Freud stresses the frequent unconscious equivalence between the eyes and the genital organs, and between blindness and castration. Blinding oneself, like Oedipus, is an attenuated form of self-castration. Freud also discusses Hoffmann's tale 'The Sandman' in which Nathanael fears that Doctor Coppelius plucks out children's eyes to graft them onto automatons. This story, Freud believed, supported his view that the feeling of uncanniness is directly related to the sight of female genitals, particularly those of the mother. So Maria-Theresa is castrated by virtue of being female and symbolically castrated by her hysterical blindness. However, for Freud, Hoffmann's character, Olympia, despite being female and sightless (like Maria-Theresa herself) is not uncanny. Freud rejects 'the motif of the apparently animate doll' as an example of the uncanny because

²⁰³ Ibid., p.135.

'children are not afraid of their dolls coming to life – they may even want them to.'²⁰⁴

He even declares that Olympia is 'quite irrelevant in the case of this more potent example of the uncanny', that is, the sublimated castration complex that Freud associates with Nathanael's anxiety about the loss of sight.²⁰⁵ It is as if Freud displaces Olympia's actual blindness onto Nathanael. He argues that Nathanael is the hysteric playing out the Oedipus complex. Not only does Nathanael make the eye into the special object of the desire to see, but, according to Freud, he also makes the eye stand for the castrated sexual organ and the desired sexual organs of the mother.

Freud's refusal of Olympia as an example of the uncanny is undoubtedly because he assumes the uncanny to be a male phenomenon, as Theodor Reik does in *The Haunting Melody* when he argues that the three loves of Hoffmann in Offenbach's opera are only there 'to tell and sing the role of women in a man's life: that is to say, in every man's life.'²⁰⁶ Yet in his essay, Freud notes that Ernst Jentsch pays particular attention to undecidable borderline phenomena, that is, 'whether something is animate or inanimate, and whether the lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living.'²⁰⁷ According to Jentsch's formulation, Olympia *is* uncanny then because she blurs the boundaries between animate and inanimate, life and death. However, it is only Olympia's borderline status rather than her gender which renders her uncanny for Jentsch. His theories regarding

²⁰⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny,' Translated by David McLintock, with an introduction by Hugh Haughton (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p.141.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.139.

²⁰⁶ Theodor Reik, *The Haunting Melody: Psychoanalytic Experiences in Life and Music* (London: Farrar, Strauss & Cuhady, 1960), p.193.

²⁰⁷ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.141.

Olympia's uncanniness cannot therefore be applied to Maria-Theresa. This raises the key question: what would constitute Maria-Theresa's uncanniness from a non-Freudian perspective?

In *Loving With A Vengeance, Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, Tania Modleski employs the term 'female uncanny'.²⁰⁸ She argues that the uncanny can be found both in the fear of repetition and the fear of castration, and that, for women, these are 'two aspects of the more primal fear of being lost in the mother': the fear of repeating the mother's life *and* the fear of failing to separate from the mother, that is, not only of being *like* the mother but of actually *being* the mother.²⁰⁹ Since, she argues (following Nancy Chodorow), women have more difficulty separating from the mother, their sense of the uncanny may actually be stronger than men's.²¹⁰

Modleski's definition of the 'female uncanny' cannot apply to Olympia in Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' because she does not have a mother but rather two fathers, the inventor Spalanzani and his demonic colleague Coppelius. Yet in Richard Jones's January 2012 ENO production of Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Cochineal, who is half-man, half-puppet in other productions, is here a woman, Spalanzani's wife and Olympia's mother, thereby recreating the bourgeois family. In this production, Spalanzani orders Cochineal to fetch and carry, as much the puppet-master for her as he is for Olympia. Olympia fulfils Modleski's definition

²⁰⁸ Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance, Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (London: Routledge, 1982), p.59.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

of the 'female uncanny,' re-enacting her mother's situation and taking her as a model for female behaviour. Likewise, in my own novel, Maria-Theresa's mother teaches her to sing, moulding her daughter so that she becomes like herself. However, Maria-Theresa and Olympia are also subject to a disorderly female principle that resists containment and refuses to be exorcised as they sing in defiance of paternal authority.

Freud's analysis of 'The Sandman' is further relevant to my discussion of the influence that Mesmerism and the Paradis case-study had upon Hoffmann's fiction. This is because Freud's essay about 'The Sandman' brings to the fore the power of vision, which is itself central to the mesmeric trance and the healing power of the mesmeriser. In fact, as we have seen, 'The Sandman' registers the importance of the eyes in mesmeric practice and links active vision with human life. This is because Olympia's fixity of vision signifying her lack of humanity was a notion already common in the debates surrounding the techniques of Mesmerism. Then too, as Val Scullion argues, both Coppelius and Spalanzani 'have mesmeric powers' since Coppelius's 'greenish cat's eyes' and Spalanzani's 'small, piercing eyes' have 'life-changing effects on those around them.'²¹¹

In contrast to these artist figures, Nathanael's eyesight is dull, which he puts down to juvenile terror stemming from witnessing Coppelius and his father engaged in experimentation. He says, 'it must not be ascribed to the weakness of my eyesight

²¹¹ Val Scullion, 'Kinaesthetic, Spastic and Spatial Motifs as Expressions of Romantic Irony in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" and Other Writings', *Journal of Literature and Science*, Volume 2, 1 (2009), p.49.

if all that I see is colourless, but to the fact that a mysterious destiny has hung a dark veil of clouds about my life, which I shall perhaps only break through when I die.'²¹² Both the language and the sentiment are lugubrious; however, as in Maria-Theresa's case, it is also potentially the discourse of hysterical blindness which may have its roots in some mysterious cause. Furthermore, just as Maria-Theresa's blindness appears to possess an emotional component, so too does Nathanael link his emotional state with a kind of darkness: 'Dark forebodings, of some awful fate threatening me are spreading themselves out over my head like black clouds, impenetrable to every friendly ray of sunlight.'²¹³

Hoffmann was fully aware of the controversy surrounding the mesmeric treatment and much of its discourse, both negative and positive, permeates 'The Sandman'. For example, when Nathanael describes his encounter with Coppola to his good friend Lothair, he claims it exercised 'such a hostile and disturbing influence upon my life.'²¹⁴ This phrase articulates precisely the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century fear that Mesmerism was a malign influence that at best ensnared, and at worst, enslaved, its naive followers. Similarly, Nathanael describes how, as a child hiding from and spying on Coppelius, he was 'spellbound on the spot' (in the original German, 'Ich war festgezaubert' suggesting both 'fixed' and 'conjured').²¹⁵ The definition of 'spellbound' is to hold the complete attention of

²¹² Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.171.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.183.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.187.

Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.335.

someone as though by magic, and one of its synonyms is, of course, 'mesmerised'.

Therefore, the verb 'spellbound' draws attention to the fact that Coppelius, like the mesmeriser, is compelling, compulsive but also disturbing.

Nathanael's terrifying childhood encounter with Coppelius evokes the state of mesmeric crisis and its aftermath:

Thus lisped and hissed Coppelius; but all around me grew black and dark; a sudden, convulsive pain shot through all my nerves and bones; I knew nothing more. I felt a soft, warm breath fanning my cheek: I awakened as if out of the sleep of death.²¹⁶

If, in this scenario, Coppelius is the demonic mesmeriser inducing a state of crisis in his hapless victims, he appears to have an impact not only upon Nathanael, but also upon the female family members: 'my sisters weeping and moaning around him, and my mother lying near them in a swoon.'²¹⁷ This word, translated as 'swoon' in Bealby's English translation, which is 'ohnmächtig' in Hoffmann's original German, evokes contemporary descriptions of the trance or mesmeric crisis state.

Of course, there were those who criticised Mesmerism not because of any perceived malign influence it might exert upon its followers, but because it was regarded as having (what we would now call) a placebo effect resulting from auto-suggestion. The negative or beneficial results it might yield were then not due to Mesmerism, but purely to the imagination. This belief recalls Clara's practical advice to Nathanael:

I will frankly confess, it seems to me that all the horrors of which you speak existed only in your own self, and that the real, true, outer world had little to

²¹⁶ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.188.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.189.

do with it.²¹⁸

This is a belief which Clara and her brother Lothair reiterate throughout the story and which causes conflict with Nathanael, who has his own more esoteric belief system, 'of some Higher Principle existing without and beyond ourselves.'²¹⁹ For her, and for Lothair, the 'dark and hostile power' which 'possessed him' is in fact 'the phantom of our own self whose intimate relationship with, and whose powerful influence upon our own soul either plunges us into hell or elevates us into heaven.'²²⁰ For these practical siblings, then, there is no external power or force such as Mesmerism but only a form of self-generated higher or lower intelligence which can result in heaven or hell. Similarly, for Karin Preuß, Nathanael has 'grown self-centred, making a god not merely in, but of [his] own image; [he is] obsessed by [his] own reflection [...] in the dark pool of his own personality.'²²¹

However, if the melancholic Nathanael has mainly experienced the hell of his own mind's creation, 'phantoms of my own self,' he has also, in happier states of mind, experienced 'everything clearly and distinctly, in bright and living pictures.'²²² Following this line of reasoning then, an external force such as Mesmerism is proved to be non-existent and everything that Nathanael experiences, both positive and negative, becomes his own creation, a kind of hysteria in fact. One reading of 'The Sandman' could therefore be that the effects of Mesmerism, the crisis state and its

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.192.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.198.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.192.

²²¹ Karin Preuß, *The Question of Madness in the Works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Mary Shelley* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p.17.

²²² Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.193, p.184.

healing influence, intended to cure hysteria and hysterical illness are, themselves, another form of hysteria. This is in line with critics who imply that Mesmerism works primarily on the naive, the gullible, and the hysterical. Maria M. Tatar seems to subscribe to this opinion when she reveals that 'Charcot [...] demonstrated that [hysteria's] symptoms could be replicated when suggestions were given to hypnotised patients and, conversely, that the symptoms could be removed through suggestion.'²²³

Hoffmann's patterning of language in 'The Sandman' also reveals his awareness of the more positive aspects of Mesmerism. For example, when Nathanael sits enraptured with Olympia, his topics of conversation are 'sympathy enkindled into life' and 'psychic elective affinity.'²²⁴ 'Sympathy' here would indicate a special understanding or fellow feeling between two people, so that, as Thomas Buckland argues of Mesmerism, 'When this sympathy is well-established between two individuals, we say they are in communication.'²²⁵ This is why Nathanael declares to Olympia, 'only you – you alone, understand me' and believes in their 'wondrous

²²³ Tatar, *Spellbound*, pp.34- 5. Likewise, Mark S. Micale describes how 'a second strand in the history of hysteria during the nineteenth century derived from mesmerism and so-called animal magnetism. The sensationalistic demonstrations of Franz Anton Mesmer on well-to-do Viennese and Parisian salon ladies during the 1780s are celebrated in the popular historical imagination. Rejected repeatedly as charlatanism by medical academicians, Mesmer's controversial teachings nonetheless initiated a century-long tradition of hypnotic research into unconscious mental processes. The work of the Marquis de Puységur, the Abbé Faria, F.J.Noizet, J.P.F.Deleuze, Alexander Bertrand and Antoine Despine in France, James Elliotson, James Braid, and James Esdaile in Scotland extended the Mesmeric heritage. The writings of these figures explored probingly, if unsystematically, a dual model of the mind, the psychogenesis of physical and mental symptoms, the nature of hysterical anesthetics, and the psychotherapeutic relationship between doctors and hysterical patients.' Micale, pp.23-24.

²²⁴ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.209.

²²⁵ Thomas Buckland in Reby, p.216.

harmony.²²⁶ His concept of 'a psychic elective affinity' (in Hoffmann's original German, 'psychische Wahlverwandtschaft') suggests an attraction or feeling of kinship that is partly the result of choice and partly denoting faculties or phenomena that are inexplicable by natural laws and relate to the soul or mind.²²⁷ In fact, a synonym for both 'sympathy' and 'affinity' is 'rapport' which returns us to the relationship between the mesmerist and his subject: as Puységur describes, 'a very intimate rapport [...] so that one could say he becomes a part of him.'²²⁸ Likewise, Bell describes this same relationship: "When two people are in sympathy, as a magnetiser and magnetisee are, one becomes subject to the other's 'sphere of influence' and takes on their 'form of life.'²²⁹

However, by the time Nathanael meets Olympia, Clara and Lothair have already tried to reveal the illusory, possibly hysterical nature of Nathanael's beliefs about Coppola, and, by implication, of Mesmerism. Since Olympia proves to be an automaton rather than a real girl, Nathanael's notions of affinity with her prove to be equally illusory. Nathanael's sense of love and affinity cannot be real if Olympia is not a real girl. This in turn casts doubt not only upon the beneficial effects of Mesmerism but on the entire concept of the mesmeric rapport.

²²⁶ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.209.

²²⁷ Ibid., and also Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.357.

I am indebted to Dr. Duncan Large for his note that Hoffmann's 'psychische Wahlverwandtschaft' is also an allusion to Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, which had popularised the term.

²²⁸ Puységur, *Suite des mémoires*, p.17 in Reby, p.148.

²²⁹ Bell, pp.176- 7.

Hoffmann's ambivalence towards Mesmerism at this point in his writing career is also shown when Nathanael awakens after his experiences with Coppola,

Spalanzani and Olympia:

When Nathanael awoke, he felt as if he had been oppressed by a terrible nightmare; he opened his eyes and experienced an indescribable sensation of mental comfort, while a soft and most beautiful sensation of warmth pervaded his body [...] 'At last, at last, O my darling Nathanael, now we have you again; now you are cured of your grievous illness, now you are mine again.'²³⁰

This is because the oppressive 'terrible nightmare' ('fürchterlichem Traum') could refer to the torments, whether real or illusory, inflicted by Coppola and which I have shown parallel Mesmerism.²³¹ Equally, however, the 'indescribable sensation of mental comfort' and the 'soft and most beautiful sensations of warmth [which] pervaded his body' could refer to the sense of refreshment and well-being which the mesmeric subject experienced upon waking from the mesmeric crisis. Clara's exclamation, 'now you are cured of your grievous illness' (emphasis mine) prompts further considerations. Has Nathanael been cured of his hysterical response to Coppola; was this response itself a kind of mesmeric compulsion from which he has awakened; or is it, as Clara's own language suggests, a kind of Mesmerism which has cured Nathanael, albeit temporarily?²³²

That Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' betrays an ambivalent attitude towards Mesmerism, at times positive, at other times, deeply negative, is perhaps because it

²³⁰ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.212.

²³¹ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.360.

²³² According to Maria M. Tatar, 'the dream, the mesmerist trance, intoxication and madness' are all linked since they 'exemplify states in which the activity of the cerebral system is inhibited and the sensations of "Wonne" and "Schmerz" are especially intensified.' Tatar, *Spellbound*, p.370.

represents an early stage of his thinking on the subject. This negative presentation of Mesmerism is further revealed at the end of the story, when, as Bell indicates, 'Coppelius knows that Nathanael's madness will end in his death' because Coppelius is aware of 'the magnetic powers of the telescope he had sold Nathanael and through which he controls his will.'²³³ Hoffmann's short story 'Councillor Krespel' is similarly ambivalent about magnetic powers, and also suggests an awareness of the Paradis case-study.

²³³ Bell, p.207.

2. Antonia and Doctor Miracle

The story of 'Councillor Krespel' begins with the violin-maker Krespel's construction of his eccentric house. Gradually, hints are given of Krespel's unusual relationship with Antonia, who nobody realises is his daughter. Then her funeral is described from the perspective of the narrator. Only at the end of the story are the details of her life, illness and death revealed.

Krespel describes his marriage to a famous Italian opera singer, Angela. Angry with her because she has broken his violin during a temper tantrum, he pushes her out of a window. After fleeing to Germany, he learns that she has given birth to their daughter, Antonia. Antonia, also a gifted singer, comes to live with Krespel after her mother's sudden death. However, Krespel forbids her to sing after discovering that she also risks death if she over-exerts herself whilst practising her art. He goes so far as to break off her engagement with a promising young composer, for he is convinced that the youth will incite her to sing in spite of the danger it presents. Antonia and her father then spend their time taking apart old violins, trying to discover the secrets that lie within them. One day, Krespel buys a violin from Cremona, and, as he plays it for Antonia, she has the impression that it sings in her place. Antonia is willing to accept this surrogate, and from then on, she is happy with her life. But, one night, Krespel dreams that he hears her singing again, accompanied on the piano by the young composer. In the morning, he goes to her bedroom and finds her lying on the sofa. She is dead.

In Hoffmann's 'Councillor Krespel', the Professor's description of Krespel's distressed behaviour could be seen as analogous to that of someone undergoing the mesmeric process: 'Everything that stays on the level of mental process in us becomes action in Krespel. That bitter scorn [...] Krespel gives vent to in outrageous gestures and agile caprioles.'²³⁴ Krespel's description of Angela also employs mesmeric imagery, of the negative kind which fears the invasion of bodily boundaries and the transgression of selfhood: 'Why there's not a shadow of doubt,' he murmured to himself, 'that as soon as Angela sets eyes upon me again, the evil spirit will recover his power and once more take possession of her.'²³⁵ Not only does he fear Angela's demonic possession (which seems to be the antithesis of the mesmeric rapport) but even for himself, he acknowledges that Angela has been an 'antipathetic, disturbing influence' on his life.²³⁶

It is also fear that motivates Councillor Krespel's treatment of his daughter. The way that Councillor Krespel treats his violins functions as a metaphor for his treatment of Antonia, whom he keeps locked up in his music-box house, not allowing her to sing for fear it will cause her death. Pinel, the French psychiatrist, claims that the eighteenth-century hysteric was a product of the conditions of the bourgeois family, a young woman residing within 'a domestic situation that imposed

²³⁴ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.227.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.230.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.231.

severe restraint and a secluded life', precisely the situation of Krespel's Antonia and (before she broke away from her restrictive family) Maria-Theresa.²³⁷

In fact, there is a marked resemblance between Maria-Theresa's and Antonia's situation. By sequestering Antonia away, ostensibly out of concern for her health, her father manages to preserve her from other men, and so, like Maria-Theresa's father, he seems jealous and over-fond. In fact, Krespel's construction of marvellous violins that he plays only once then hangs in a cabinet to be forever silent betrays his wish to possess exclusively his virginal daughter and her music. In Hoffmann's story, Councillor Krespel alludes to the relationship between himself and his violin, and by implication, between himself and Antonia, with a metaphor which also evokes the relationship between Mesmer and Maria-Theresa:

the lifeless thing, which I myself inspire with life and language, often speaks to me, out of itself, in an extraordinary manner; and when I first played upon it, I felt as if I were merely the magnetiser - the mesmerist - who acts upon his subject in such sort that she relates in words what she is seeing with her inward vision.²³⁸

This description recalls Puységur's view, that the magnetic rapport makes the somnambulist a functional part of the magnetiser, 'much as his hand is part of him' so that 'by a mere act of will the magnetiser can direct the actions of the somnambulist as he chooses.'²³⁹ Hoffmann's adverb 'merely' ('als wär ich nur der Magnetiseur' in German) seeks to downplay the paternalistic mesmerist's power over his subject

²³⁷ Pinel in Bronfen, pp.111 - 2.

²³⁸ E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'als wär ich nur der Magnetiseur, der die Somnambule zu erregen vermag, daß sie selbsttätig ihre innere Anschauung in Worten verkündet' in 'Rat Krespel' in *Erzählungen* (Zurich: Atlantis, 1946) p.55, Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.222.

²³⁹ Puységur in Reby, p.149.

and emphasises the triumphant supremacy of her own 'inward vision' ('ihre innere Anschauung').²⁴⁰ However, whilst this is an interesting role-reversal of normative gender relations, it is not borne out by the rest of the story, and seems in fact to be an exercise in self-justification by a man who is elsewhere described as a 'tyrannous sorcerer' who makes the violin speak and keeps his daughter silent.²⁴¹ However, by employing the analogy of the mesmerist's power over the female patient, Hoffman suggests that he was aware of the fears concerning Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa, and also emphasises the transgressive, occult and sexualised nature of the relationship between Krespel and Antonia.

In Offenbach's operetta, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the representation of Councillor Krespel's and Doctor Miracle's relationships with Antonia follow the template established by the power-play between Joseph Anton von Paradis, Doctor Mesmer and Maria-Theresa. There are of course significant differences: Doctor Mesmer restores Maria-Theresa's sight and takes away her music, whilst Doctor Miracle (a malign yet magical doctor who does not appear in Hoffmann's original story) wants to restore Antonia's musical gifts but in doing so, deprives her of life. In fact, controlling male authorities offer Antonia equally terrible situations: song, at the cost of her own life, or silent, bourgeois life for all the rest of her life.

When Hoffmann presents Antonia's plight in 'Councillor Krespel', it is possible that he is recalling Maria-Theresa's situation. Maria-Theresa has to choose between

²⁴⁰ Hoffmann, 'Rat Krespel' in *Erzählungen*, p.55.

²⁴¹ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.221.

Mesmer's wishes and desires and those of her own family. Such choices, which offer no real choice at all, are, in some senses, the eighteenth-century hysterical daughter's dilemma. Antonia and Maria-Theresa are archetypes of the daughter on the brink of womanhood, unconsciously, violently, even self-destructively acting out her conflicts over desires that male authorities have declared off-limits. This scenario is outlined in Bronfen's treatment of the real, historical Paradis's case-study in *The Knotted Subject*. Bronfen describes how as Mesmer took the place of Joseph Anton von Paradis, whose paternal desire the daughter had come to sustain so well by virtue of her blindness, being able to see again was the way she could assure herself of Mesmer's interest and attention in her. For Bronfen, the hysterical daughter in this historical account is 'for both male figures, merely a stake in their own symbolic projects.'²⁴²

Another, less pessimistic, interpretation of Antonia's fatal choice, in which she is not the victim but a wilful, desiring subject, is possible. In Offenbach's operetta, when Antonia sings the song that causes her death, she is perhaps not after all succumbing to Doctor Miracle's magnetic machinations, but rather rebelling against the domestic and paternal order that would silence her. Her mother Angela's siren song and the music of Doctor Miracle's violin might be manifestations of the rebellious and imperfectly repressed elements in Antonia's fictional psyche. 'The Tale of Antonia' then becomes the tale not of a victim, but rather a story in which a strong-willed performer finally gains access to her forbidden and beloved music.

²⁴² Bronfen, p.100.

Therefore, in Offenbach's operetta, it is possible that Antonia, the caged nightingale, finally gives voice to her recognition that the cage, the bars, and the potential to escape lie within herself.

'Most musical, most melancholy!' writes Milton of the nightingale in *Il Penseroso*.²⁴³ As Maxwell shows, the bird, acknowledged to be Nature's supreme musician, is famous for the virtuosity of her night songs, which Milton here associates with Orpheus.²⁴⁴ According to Maxwell, Milton, the blind poet, identifies himself with the nightingale. Milton himself had a great and life-time appreciation of music that he inherited from his father, who was noted for his skill as a musical composer. As Maxwell shows, Milton's poetic language identifies blindness, castration and feminisation as a necessary loss for the true compensatory vision that inspires song.²⁴⁵ In accordance with this thinking, Hoffmann's Antonia, and particularly Maria-Theresa, the hysterically blind female composer and pianist, experience the perfect conditions of suffering necessary to develop their music.

The extent and quality of suffering which both Antonia and Maria-Theresa experience further suggests that Hoffmann was aware of Paradis's case-study when he wrote his story. Hoffmann's Antonia 'labours under an organic failure in the chest' which, whilst it may prove fatal, gives her voice 'its wonderful power and its singular timbre' so that it almost 'transcend[s] the limits of human capabilities of

²⁴³ John Milton, *Il Penseroso* (London: Nabu Press, 2010)

²⁴⁴ Catherine Maxwell, *The Female Sublime From Milton To Swinburne: Bearing Blindness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p.23.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.24.

song.¹²⁴⁶ This recalls Maria-Theresa's situation, that in both her music and her experience of animal magnetism, she experiences Romantic transcendence. However, as with Antonia, Maria-Theresa's music has a damaging effect upon her since it destroys her capacity to regain her sight, whilst her experience of magnetism heals her sight but destroys her musical ability. For Maria-Theresa and for Antonia then, and for Hoffmann himself, animal magnetism and its related state of musical creativity are double-edged swords. In fact, as Jeanne Riou has shown, animal magnetism combines the motif of Romantic transcendence with psychological insight into the destructive capacity of both the creative process, and, paradoxically, its therapeutic foundation in Romantic medicine.²⁴⁷

However, the quality of transcendence, that is, of supreme merit existing apart from, or not subject to, the limitations of the material universe, evokes the ecstasy of the mesmeric trances. Krespel's violin-playing likewise possesses this transcendent quality: 'And in truth, there was something remarkably striking about the clear, silvery, bell-like tones of the violin.'²⁴⁸ Then too, the transcendent, even erotic nature of the mesmeric treatment and trance seems to find its counterpart in Krespel's final vision of Antonia:

Terrible anguish was mingled with a delight he had never experienced before. All at once he was surrounded by a dazzling brightness, in which he beheld B- and Antonia locked in a close embrace, and gazing at each other in a rapture of ecstasy. The music of the song and of the pianoforte accompanying it went on without any visible signs that Antonia was singing or that B- touched the

²⁴⁶ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.232.

²⁴⁷ Jeanne Riou, *Imagination In German Romanticism: Re-Thinking The Self and its Environment*, (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2004), pp.207-11.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

instrument.²⁴⁹

Here, Krespel and Antonia, as well as Antonia and B- seem to have attained mesmeric dualities which have erased the boundaries between them. Antonia and B-, in particular, seem fused together, so that, in accordance with the mesmeric rapport, they function as one. The music also seems reminiscent of the music played during mesmeric trances. In fact, as in Hoffmann's later, more esoteric treatment of mesmerist themes, 'The Golden Pot', Mesmerism is here largely divested of its earlier negative associations. In the conclusion to this story, it seems to be functioning at a more elevated level of consciousness. Like Anselmus in 'The Golden Pot', B- and Antonia appear to have attained knowledge of a higher purpose through a mesmeric union of twin souls, and as the enchanted music suggests, a knowledge of the sacred harmony of things.

Hoffmann draws on the same mesmeric trope in his short story, 'Automata' when, to the sounds of 'exquisite, swelling music', Ferdinand recognises, 'with unspeakable rapture, that [the beautiful lady] was the beloved of my soul, whose image had been enshrined in my heart since childhood.'²⁵⁰ However, Ferdinand's encounter with this lady is later described as 'a somnambulistic love affair' which is an apt term with which to reappraise many of the love relationships in Hoffmann's fiction.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p.235.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p.85.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.102.

3. Giulietta and Dapertutto

The immediate source of Offenbach's opera's Venetian Act, 'The Tale of Giulietta' is 'Le Reflet Perdu,' the fourth act of Barbier's and Carré's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. In the play and in the operetta, it is the third of Hoffmann's tales. After the disastrous endings of his infatuation with Olympia and his love affair with Antonia, the narrator protagonist travels to Italy to forget his sorrows in loveless revelry.

Hoffmann, having renounced love, gambles at the Venetian palazzo of Giulietta, a courtesan. On the instructions of her master, Dapertutto, she has already acquired the shadow of her lover, Schlemihl, and now she seduces Hoffmann into giving up his reflection. Hoffmann then succumbs to Giulietta, but is told he must kill Schlemihl to get the key to her room. The other guests mock Hoffmann's terror at the murder and the loss of his reflection. Giulietta then mistakenly drinks poison intended for Hoffmann's guide and muse, Nicklausse.

In Hoffmann's short story, 'New Year's Eve Adventure' ('Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht') and the Final Act of Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, that is, 'The Tale of Giulietta', Dapertutto and Giulietta are the third of Hoffmann's mesmeric couples. The power struggles earlier described between the father and doctor figures, Spalanzani and Doctor Coppelius over Olympia, Councillor Krespel and Doctor Miracle over Antonia and Joseph Anton von Paradis and Doctor Mesmer over Maria-Theresa, find their counterpart in Hoffmann's Doctor Dapertutto claiming complete power over the family of Erasmus Spikher in his original story. Perhaps it is

significant too that many of Hoffmann's sinister male characters bear the title of Doctor, as if Hoffmann is recalling their source of inspiration, Doctor Mesmer. For example, Dapertutto is also called 'The Miracle Doctor' and Friedrich refers to him as 'this charlatan.'²⁵² As we have seen, these are both names which have been used to refer to Doctor Mesmer.

Hoffmann's awareness of Mesmerism permeates 'New Year's Eve Adventure'. For example, one of the suggested perils, and pleasures, of the mesmeric rapport is its transgression of bodily boundaries. The close connection between the magnetiser and the magnetised is analogous to the Travelling Enthusiast's narrative method. He apparently cannot separate 'the events of his inner life from those of the outside world' which creates a 'strange magical realm' reminiscent of the mesmeric trance state.²⁵³

Furthermore, in the first part of Hoffmann's 'New Year's Eve Adventure', the language the Travelling Enthusiast uses to describe his interrupted movements also evokes the motor function of someone in a state of somnambulist trance: 'I must have stood there as if halted magically in mid-motion [...] I started to walk again, mechanically.'²⁵⁴ Both the magical standstill and the mechanical perambulation are performed as a result of the Travelling Enthusiast having glimpsed his lost love, Julia, which, in this reading, renders Julia the magnetiser, and the Travelling Enthusiast,

²⁵² Ibid., p.119.

²⁵³ Ibid., p.104.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p.106.

the hapless magnetised. This is an interesting gender role reversal of the usual mesmeric relationship outlined in Chapter 2.2.

There is another significant gender role reversal at work in this story. In 'The Sandman', Olympia's fixity of vision signifies her lack of humanity, her mesmerised automaton status. However, in 'New Year's Eve Adventure' it is Spikher who, in Giulietta's presence, experiences 'a strange force' which deprives him of breath and causes his eyes to become 'fixed in a rigid stare at her'.²⁵⁵ It is then Giulietta who is operating as the mesmerist, inducing a mesmeric trance state and a lack of humanity in Spikher, who as his friend notes, ceases to think of his wife and family at this time: 'I can see from you that she can exercise an irresistible power over men when she wants to. You have changed completely and are totally under her spell. You don't think of your wife and family anymore.'²⁵⁶

Similarly, the Travelling Enthusiast describes his encounter with Julia in terms of fascination and attraction for which Mesmerism could be a metaphor: 'As I took the glass, my fingers brushed against hers and electric sensations ran through me.'²⁵⁷ Then too, the Travelling Enthusiast's momentarily rekindled love for Julia is described in language which is also appropriate to the more exalted level of consciousness experienced within the mesmeric state: 'Your love is the spark that glows in me, kindling a higher life in art and poetry.'²⁵⁸ Furthermore, he describes his

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p.117.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.119.

²⁵⁷ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.108. Later, Spikher has an identical encounter with Giulietta, so that 'he seized the goblet, touching her soft fingers, and as he drank, fire seemed to stream through his veins.' Ibid., p.118.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.108.

strange affinity with Spikher, which also evokes that of Maria-Theresa and Mesmer: 'I kept having the feeling more and more strongly that I knew him – perhaps not "physically" but "mentally."²⁵⁹ This is because, as the story unfolds, the Travelling Enthusiast realises that there are parallels between his own relationship with Julia and that of Spikher and Giulietta – or as the Travelling Enthusiast himself declares: 'we [...] strange beings in a beer cellar looked at one another and knew what we were.'²⁶⁰

Spikher's own confession that 'a mad spirit seizes control of me and makes me lose all concept of what is right and proper' and the 'shudders that pass through him, from his inmost being' when Giulietta 'regarded him with an enigmatic stare' evokes late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century descriptions of somnambulists in thrall to their mesmeric enchanters.²⁶¹ It is not immediately clear whether Giulietta's influence over Spikher is beneficial or malign, although later Spikher declares to his friend: 'Yes, Friedrich [...] you are right. I don't know why I am suddenly overcome by such dark horrible foreboding.'²⁶²

In fact, the Travelling Enthusiast often seems confused as to whether Julia and Giulietta correspond to the sinister or the sublime forms of Mesmerism, so that, in a series of oxymorons, he reflects, 'Julia, Giulietta – divine image, demon from Hell; delights and torments, longing and despair.'²⁶³ In the same paragraph, however, he

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p.110.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.111.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p.119.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, pp.128-9.

realises that 'a strange dark power manifests itself in my life all too often, steals the best dreams away from sleep, pushing strange forms into my life.'²⁶⁴ This realisation indicates his awareness that his encounters with Julia, and Erasmus Spikher's with Giulietta, have had a devastating influence on them, psychically erasing their sense of self.

Julia's hypnotic power over the Travelling Enthusiast, and Giulietta's over Erasmus Spikher, finds its counterpart in the level of mesmeric control that Doctor Dapertutto exerts, first over Giulietta and then over Spikher, and potentially over Spikher's family, rendering the Doctor the true mesmerist of the story. Initially, Doctor Dapertutto tries to compel Spikher to kill his family with what appears to be prussic acid. On finding that Spikher does not want 'the happy collapse of [his] worthy family', Giulietta suggests that Spikher sign a 'little slip of paper' which dissolves all ties with them: 'I give to my good friend Dr. Dapertutto power over my wife and over my child, so that he can govern and dispose of them according to his will, and dissolve the bond which ties me...'²⁶⁵ (in Hoffmann's original German, 'daß er mit ihnen schalte und walte'.²⁶⁶) What is disturbing here is Doctor Dapertutto's desire for complete control over Spikher's family, as if he were the puppet master and they were his living marionettes.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p.129.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.127.

²⁶⁶ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.281.

Dapertutto's desire for control also extends to Giulietta in Barbier's and Carré's play. As Hadlock shows, Dapertutto summons Giulietta by holding aloft a diamond with which he can capture her soul:

Oh diamond, from whence stream forth
Burning sparks!
From whence shoots forth like lightning
A bright and lively fire;
To your numberless stars
Draw into the shadow
The soul of Giulietta
Who covets you.²⁶⁷

His incantation evokes eighteenth and nineteenth-century images of visual fascination. Hadlock reveals that, following Mesmer's example, magnetisers of the late eighteenth and nineteenth-century relied on magnetically 'charged' objects such as iron magnets, tubs of water, iron rods and pieces of polished glass to focus and direct their power. However, as Hadlock shows, these substances were fairly ordinary, and for the purposes of literature and theatre, had to be changed into something more impressive. Therefore, according to Hadlock, handbooks on Mesmerism in the 1820s replaced iron bars and magnets with precious metals. According to Hadlock, an *Instruction Pratique Sur Le Magnetisme* recommends that

²⁶⁷ Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Act IV, scene 4 (Paris, 1851) p.64. Translated and cited by Hadlock. Below is the original French version:

O diamant, d'où ruisselle
L'ardente étincelle!
D'où jaillit comme l'éclair
Un feu vif et clair;
Vers tes étoiles sans nombre,
Attire dans l'ombre,
L'âme de la Giulietta,
Qui te couvoita!

Hadlock, p.46.

a gold coin or medallion will fix the subject's attention. She also describes how in mesmerist fiction and theatre, sparks emanated from precious stones, which, for her, are descendants of Mesmer's glass prisms and iron magnets. Thus Dapertutto's diamond, which holds Giulietta in thrall.

The diamond then, is a symbol of controlling Mesmerism. In 'New Year's Eve Adventure', additional malign Mesmerism is indicated through snake imagery, so that, for example, in Spikher's final encounter with Giulietta, her face becomes 'horribly distorted' and her body 'seemed to glow with rage'.²⁶⁸ This causes Spikher to cry out, 'Snake-Hell glows through you'.²⁶⁹ Similarly, in 'The Golden Pot,' the evil Applewoman, Frau Rauerin, torments Anselmus by transforming a bell-rope into a 'gigantic, transparent white serpent' which 'girded him straiter and straiter in its coils till his brittle paralysed limbs went crashing in pieces'.²⁷⁰ This alarming snake imagery is particularly malicious since it seems both to re-cast and mock the gentle and beguiling charms of Anselmus's beloved snake-maiden, Serpentina.

Preuß offers a less favourable reading of Serpentina when she suggests that Serpentina is the serpent who seduces her 'Adam', Anselmus, and that Hoffmann in fact, 'collapses both Eve and the serpent into one character which may be an indication of Serpentina's highly seductive nature'.²⁷¹ However, Serpentina exerts only a benign rather than a demonic seductive influence on Anselmus, to lead him to

²⁶⁸ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.127.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.12. Similarly, Tatar also refers to 'the cold gleam of the basilisks in Maria's daydreams [from 'The Magnetiser'] and the chilling effect of the snakes in Lindhorst's chambers.' Tatar, *Spellbound*, p.136.

²⁷¹ Preuß, p.63.

his highest levels of mesmeric somnambulism and clairvoyance. Likewise, Tatar refers to 'the radiant warmth emitted by Serpentina, the enchanting green snake of *Der goldne Topf*. Far from exercising a restraining influence on Anselmus's imagination, Serpentina's eyes open new vistas for the budding poet of that story.'²⁷²

In Hoffmann's stories, there appears to be a dual approach towards Mesmerism which is more fully resolved in 'The Golden Pot'. Hoffmann's fiction demonstrates an awareness of malign magnetic influences and magnetic crises which can be abrupt, painful and overwhelming – for example, those which Coppelius, Doctor Miracle and Dapertutto induce. However, in contrast to this dark Mesmerism, in which magnetic powers are abused for personal gain, by the time of 'The Golden Pot', Anselmus achieves an exalted kind of Mesmerism and a higher level of consciousness.

²⁷² Tatar, *Spellbound*, p.136.

3.3 Mesmerism in 'Automata', 'The Magnetiser' and 'The Golden Pot'

Automata

Hoffmann's 'Automata' ('Die Automate') first appeared as a whole in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* in 1814, although it was written between parts of 'The Golden Pot'. It falls into two parts: firstly, the Ghost Story ('Eine Spukgeschichte') and secondly, the experiences of Ferdinand with an automaton called the Talking Turk. The first part, the Ghost Story, in which the unfortunate Adelgunda is haunted by a phantom that no-one else can see, certainly contains elements which appear to derive from Hoffmann's knowledge of Maria-Theresa, Mesmer and Mesmerism. Then, in the second part of 'Automata', Hoffmann considers the phenomena of the automaton or robot which is able to answer questions about the future, not because of mechanical skill but because of Professor X's powerful mesmeric influence upon it. Ferdinand also falls under this influence, whilst Hoffmann's creation of Professor X invites direct comparison with Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer.²⁷³

Hoffmann's initial description of Adelgunda recalls the case-study of Maria-Theresa von Paradis. However, whilst it might be argued that a mental or hysterical illness has robbed Maria-Theresa of her vision, Adelgunda's state, although evoking that of Maria-Theresa, also seems its obverse: 'Her melancholy smile and her glance, heavy as if with tears, seemed to speak of some morbid bodily condition producing a

²⁷³ For an early nineteenth-century audience, it would have been entirely appropriate that Hoffmann weaves Mesmerism into the narrative since 'Automata' appeared early in 1815, only a few months after Mesmer's death when there had been a surge of interest in his techniques.

hostile influence on her mental state.¹²⁷⁴ Then too, the way in which Adelgunda's family treat her after her encounter with the ghost again recalls Maria-Theresa's own plight:

Poor Adelgunda was thought to be out of her mind; and in a strange perversion of feeling, the family were ashamed of this condition of hers. [...] There was, of course, no lack of doctors, or of plans of treatment for ridding the poor soul of the *idée fixe* [...] But nothing had any effect, and she implored, with tears, to be left in peace, inasmuch as the form which in its vague, uncertain traits had nothing terrible or alarming about it no longer caused her any fear; although for a time after seeing it she felt as if her inner being and all her thoughts and ideas were turned out from her, and were hovering, bodiless, outside of her. At last the colonel [Adelgunda's father] made the acquaintance of a celebrated doctor who had the reputation of being specially clever in the treatment of the mentally afflicted. When this doctor heard Adelgunda's story he laughed aloud, and said nothing could be easier than to cure a condition of the kind, which resulted solely from an over-excited imagination.²⁷⁵

Like Maria-Theresa, Adelgunda is bombarded with doctors to treat a condition for which there is no straightforward solution. Furthermore, whilst Maria-Theresa's blindness could be interpreted as a projection of her mental state, so too does Adelgunda's perception of the phantom seem to be an externalisation of her own state of mind, 'hovering, bodiless, outside of her.'²⁷⁶ Patriarchy's power-play, in which the father hands his daughter over to a celebrated doctor, who specialises 'in the treatment of the mentally afflicted' is again a significant feature of both Maria-Theresa's and Adelgunda's case-histories. The close resemblance between these case-

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.73.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.75.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

histories again suggests that Hoffmann was strongly aware of Paradis's situation when he came to write his story.²⁷⁷

Adelgunda's experience with the ghost, which induces psychological and physical changes in her, also evokes descriptions of mesmeric trances:

'Oh God!' cried Adelgunda, 'they think I am out of my mind! See! It is stretching out its long arm, it is making signs to me!' And as though she were acting under the influence of another, without exercise of her own will, with eyes fixed and staring, she put her head back behind her, took up a plate which chanced to be on the table, held it out before her into vacancy and let it go.

The plate did not drop but floated about among the persons present, and then settled gingerly on the table.²⁷⁸

Here, Adelgunda appears to be under a foreign influence that has denied her the power of her own autonomy. This influence, as Martin Willis suggests, is closely linked to an alteration in her vision: Adelgunda's eyes are 'fixed and staring'.²⁷⁹

However, as Willis argues, there is no obvious mesmeriser present, unless it is Adelgunda herself. It is therefore possible, as Willis suggests, that it is Adelgunda's own latent mesmeric abilities that have awakened.²⁸⁰

Willis also demonstrates that in Professor X of 'Automata', there is a scientist 'highly skilled' in the mechanical arts, whose appearance and mannerisms suggest an inclination towards Mesmerism.²⁸¹ For example, details of his bearing and dress invite comparison with Mesmer. He appears dressed 'in an old-fashioned French

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p.76

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Martin Willis, 'E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Magic of Mesmerism' in *Mesmerists, Monsters and Machines: Science-Fiction and the Culture of Science* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press: 2006), p.41.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p.45.

style', perhaps, as Willis notes, evoking Mesmer's lengthy and controversial stay in Paris in the 1780s.²⁸² Willis also notes that Professor X demonstrates a keen interest in music, since Ferdinand hears a sound that, 'as it swelled and became more distinguishable, seemed to resemble the tone of a glass harmonica.'²⁸³ As Buranelli reveals, Mesmer's public reputation was that of a fashionable Viennese physician with a taste for science and music, and 'the audience usually included acquaintances knowledgeable enough about their host's vanity to ask him for a solo on the glass harmonica.'²⁸⁴ Then too, as Willis argues, considering Hoffmann's own musical background and the importance he attaches to music in many of his fictions, 'it is difficult not to accept that the connection is a pointed one designed to reinforce Professor X's mesmeric credentials.'²⁸⁵ After all, similar musical imagery is a feature of 'The Sandman' so that in Coppola's workshop, there are 'bottles and glass cylinders' which evoke not only the paraphernalia of the Inventor but also, perhaps, Mesmer's glass harmonica.²⁸⁶

With Professor X established as a fictional version of Mesmer, the story introduces Mesmerism to the central protagonist. When Ferdinand realises that Professor X is responsible for the Talking Turk's unusually perceptive answers, the narrative turns from an investigation of mechanical skill to the discovery of Mesmerism. Upon hearing of the Turk's transformation into a seer, 'like some

²⁸² Ibid., p.49.

²⁸³ Ibid., p.99.

²⁸⁴ Buranelli, p.50.

²⁸⁵ Willis, p.49.

²⁸⁶ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p. 210.

necromantic goblin', Ferdinand feels 'strongly and vividly impressed by the [...] influence which [Professor X] had brought to bear on that strange automaton.'²⁸⁷ As we have already seen, influence is a vital component of mesmeric practice. Then too, as Willis demonstrates, when Mesmer treated a patient, he 'had to alter the polar magnetic forces that were affecting the health of the physical body, or alternatively, influence the mind of the patient and gain control of these magnetic forces more directly.'²⁸⁸ However, as Willis shows, 'those critical of Mesmer's practice were quick to object: allowing the self to be influenced and controlled by another, they argued, is to submit to the position of victim and give control to the mesmeriser.'²⁸⁹

Ferdinand then visits Professor X at his home in the hope of learning more about these strange forces. As Willis demonstrates, the professor's vision, 'exceedingly keen and lively, with small grey eyes which had an unpleasant way of fitting themselves on one' initially suggests a parallel with Adelgunda's 'fixed and staring' eyes; however, whilst Adelgunda's was a passive 'staring', Professor X's gaze is active and menacing.²⁹⁰ Then too, as Willis argues, 'Ferdinand's reading of the gaze of Professor X as "unpleasant" reflects the master/slave dialectic that the mesmeric trance embodies; it also hints at the mesmeric power that Professor X may already hold over Ferdinand.'²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p.90.

²⁸⁸ Willis, p.47.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p.48.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

Hoffmann's 'Automata' certainly draws not only on mesmeric themes but also on its terminology: 'den psychischen Rapport,' 'einen psychischen Einfluß,' 'einen solchen geistigen Rapport.'²⁹² Similarly, as Willis shows, although Ferdinand remains ignorant of the mesmeric method that allows Professor X to gain control of his life, his series of questions could be interpreted as an interrogation of Mesmerism: 'Does this being which answers our questions acquire, by some process unknown to us, a psychic influence over us, and does it place itself in spiritual rapport with us? How can it comprehend and read our minds and thoughts, and more than that, know our whole inner being?'²⁹³ Ferdinand's articulation of his suspicions also reveals the discourse of Mesmerism: 'I feel, too clearly, some hostile foreign influence at work upon my whole existence, smiting upon all its hidden strings and making them resound at its pleasure [...] Can that diabolical, sneering irony with which Professor X received us at his house have been anything other than the expression of this hostile principle?'²⁹⁴

As Willis shows, Ferdinand's alarmed series of questions provides a powerful indication of sinister mesmeric forces at work. In fact, the diabolic methods of the malign mesmeriser and the invisible influences upon Ferdinand's existence clearly reveal his entirely negative experience of Mesmerism. Furthermore, in his reading of 'Automata' and 'The Sandman', Willis, drawing parallels between Professors X and

²⁹² E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'Die Automate', in *Die Serapionsbrüder* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013) pp.241-260.

²⁹³ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.92.

²⁹⁴ Willis, p.51.

Spalanzani, denounces them both as 'scientist-seers whose power resides in their manipulative Mesmerism.'²⁹⁵ However, this form of malign and manipulative Mesmerism finds its culmination in Hoffmann's thorough treatment of the subject in 'The Magnetiser'.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p.38.

The Magnetiser

Hoffmann's 'The Magnetiser' is a dense novella made up of a portmanteau of short stories in which the author seeks to 'unveil [...] a side [of animal magnetism] that has not yet been treated poetically – its night side.'²⁹⁶ The different episodes demonstrate the sinister yet compelling power which mesmerists can wield over their mediums. In the first episode, 'Dreams are Froth' ('Träume sind Schäume'), an aged Baron, the patriarch of the family gathered around the hearth, recalls a terrifying encounter with a Danish Major.²⁹⁷

The Major, a teacher at the boarding-school attended by the Baron, mesmerises his pupils. Despite possessing a violent temper and gruff manner, he manages to enchant them with his deep, resonant voice, the gaze of his eyes, and the irresistible power of his hand. In fact, rumours circulate in both the school and the village that the Major can cure illnesses by a touch of his hand or the gaze of his eyes. The old Baron's fear of exploring and practising principles of animal magnetism is the result of his experience with the Danish Major. His youthful trauma clearly shapes his expressed conviction that dreams are agonising experiences.

His son Ottmar, however, takes quite a different view. He in turn relates a story designed to persuade his family that dreams, as well as magnetic trances, exert only a beneficial influence. In his story, Theobald is a disciple of the Marquis de

²⁹⁶ This comment alludes to the title of Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert's *Views of the Night Side of the Natural Sciences* (1808). Stefan Andriopoulos, *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel and Optical Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2013), p.37.

²⁹⁷ E.T.A. Hoffmann, 'Der Magnetiseur' in *Fantasie- und Nachstücke*, p.141.

Puységur. He uses his mesmeric powers to cure his fiancée Auguste of a passionate attachment to an Italian officer.

However, the Baron's relationship with the Major is paralleled in his daughter's rapport with Alban, the 'magnetiser' of the title. Alban's eyes bear a striking similarity to those of the Danish Major, and he has a forceful influence on Maria due to the penetrating gaze that he fixes on her. She submits to his bidding in all matters, and faithfully follows the mesmerist regime prescribed for her. Although she occasionally suspects that Alban is exercising a sinister influence over her, she dismisses these fears as the product of an overactive imagination. Nevertheless, the secret enslavement that she fears emerges as a key theme for the three mesmeric relationships portrayed in 'The Magnetiser.'

Hoffmann's admiration for, and fear of, the enslaving mesmerist enchanter is initially evident in his description of the old Baron's encounter with the Danish Major. As a youth, the Baron was captivated by the Major's voice and penetrating looks. Andrew J. Webber has also pointed out that in their rapport, 'the baron plays the role of apprentice and somnambulist to the major as magnetizer.'²⁹⁸ Then too, the Major seems able to induce a mesmeric trance which, as several critics have noted, has erotic elements. With the touch of his hands, he can create a wonderful mood or a state of extreme exhaustion ('bis zur höchsten Erschöpfung treiben') which causes

²⁹⁸ Webber, p.165.

the Baron to swoon and fall to the ground.²⁹⁹ In this way then, as Sara Luly has indicated, the 'act of magnetism mirror[s] that of intercourse.'³⁰⁰

Then too, as Luly also reveals, the Major's eyes figure prominently in the Baron's description of him. This indicates not only the Major's magnetic abilities, but also an attraction between the two men. As we have already seen, Mesmer's contemporary critics found this potentially erotic attraction between the magnetiser and his subject very disturbing, particularly in the case of Maria-Theresa von Paradis. However, whilst blindness and the recovery of sight comprise her case-history, in 'The Magnetiser', it is the Major's eyes which reveal *him* to be a magnetist. Tatar describes the 'penetrating gaze and basilisk eyes' as the 'most salient characteristics of the magnetic personalities in Hoffmann's tales.'³⁰¹ In this way, Hoffmann draws on animal magnetism theory, the tradition of the 'evil eye' and the belief in the supernatural hypnotic powers of reptile eyes.

Despite the attraction between the Baron and the Danish Major, the Major is ultimately characterised as an evil magnetist due to his violent temper. He treats his students harshly, disciplining them with intentional cruelty, and his students obey him as though under his control. Even a young student, whose injuries were investigated by school officials, came to the defence of the Major, claiming his injuries were his own fault. Therefore, as Luly has shown, the Major's abuse of this

²⁹⁹ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, pp.145- 6.

³⁰⁰ Sara Luly, 'Magnetism and Masculinity in E.T.A. Hoffman's "Der Magnetiseur",' *The Germanic Review*, 88/4 (2013) 418- 9.

³⁰¹ Tatar, p.131.

student can be explained as an abuse of magnetic power, 'and the student's loyalty as the loyalty of a somnambulist to his magnetist.'³⁰² Similarly, the magic power ('Zauberkraft') that emanates from the Major's hands binds the Baron to the Major, so that he falls under his power.³⁰³ The Major describes this bond as one of domination, which suppresses him, as a slave is suppressed by his or her master.

The Baron's antipathy towards Alban, the chief magnetiser of the story, clearly has its roots in his traumatic encounter with the Danish Major. This is why he loathes Alban's practice and his mysticism. As many contemporary critics termed Mesmer, the Baron denounces Alban as 'a charlatan' and dislikes his habit of laying his hands on trees, as if to magnetise them. (It is worth noting that Alban, like Mesmer, is later referred to as the Wonder Doctor or Miracle Doctor, 'Da haben wir den Wunder-Doktor!' ³⁰⁴) Certainly, this practice seems to be a corrupted version of the mesmeric treatment methods of the Marquis de Puységur who made peasants grasp ropes from the branches of magnetised trees. Then too, the Baron's loathing of Alban even though Alban has healed his beloved daughter Maria casts him in the disapproving parental role of Herr von Paradis. As we have seen, Herr von Paradis developed a strong dislike for Mesmer, even though his report acknowledges the partial success of Mesmer's methods. The similarity of paternal attitudes again suggests that Hoffmann was aware of Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa when he came to write 'The Magnetiser'.

³⁰² Luly, p.425.

³⁰³ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.144.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.161.

In fact, Hoffmann's depiction of the relationship between Alban and Maria seems to contain some of the positive and negative aspects of Mesmerism found within the von Paradis case-study. Initially, Maria believes that her own magnetic relationship with Alban has predominantly positive mental and spiritual effects. The ability of a male magnetist to enter the mind of a young woman and shape it to his will is commended in the text (particularly in the episode of Theobald and Auguste), providing the magnetiser's motives are pure. In my own novel, *The Cost of Light*, I raise the possibility that rather than actually restore Maria-Theresa's sight, Mesmer is merely employing animal magnetism in order to insert images into her mind. Likewise, in a letter to her friend Adelgunda, Hoffmann's Maria asserts that in her dreams she developed an 'entirely new faculty' that allows her to identify colours, distinguish between various types of metal, and read the printed page with her eyes shut.³⁰⁵

In describing the mesmeric relationship between Maria and Alban, Hoffmann also seems to draw on an awareness of the bond of dependency which developed between Maria-Theresa and Mesmer. He presents Maria's belief that the magnetic rapport between herself and Alban is so strong and so compelling that she cannot live life without him: 'I realise that Alban is thinking those divine ideas into me, for he himself is in my mind, like a superior stimulating spark [...] Only with Him and in Him can I truly live [...] Indeed, in writing this, I feel only too clearly that only

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.165.

He lends me the words to allude to my existence in him.³⁰⁶ It is not surprising then, that Maria refers to Alban as her 'Master and Lord' which is the same phrase used by the Danish Major before he inserted a glowing instrument into the Baron's brain.³⁰⁷

Unfortunately, as Maria begins to suspect, Alban (rather than the practice of animal magnetism itself) possesses immoral motives, so that for her, he develops a double image which Webber has stated is 'symptomatic of the magnetizer's ambivalent character.'³⁰⁸ When she listens to the Baron and Bickert criticise magnetism, Maria remarks, 'All my doubts about the master reawakened in my heart with redoubled intensity - suppose he did use secret, diabolical means to make me his slave?'³⁰⁹ In her letter to Adelgunda, she fears that 'the miraculous cure' that Alban claims to be pursuing may be a veil for his immoral desires.³¹⁰ Again, as we have seen, this was one of the primary fears regarding Mesmer's treatment of vulnerable young women, suggesting that Hoffmann was well aware of the Paradis case-study.

Hoffmann's Maria ultimately silences her own concerns about the magnetist; however, Alban's letter reveals his abuse both of Maria and of animal magnetism in order to gain complete and absolute control over her. He confides in Theobald that he has been seeking to 'draw Maria into myself, weave her whole existence, her very being, so completely into mine that to separate herself from me would necessarily

³⁰⁶ 'Nur in diesem *mit Ihm* und *in Ihm* Sein kann ich wahrhaftig leben...' Ibid., p.166.

³⁰⁷ 'Alban mein Herr und Meister ist...' Ibid., p.166.

³⁰⁸ Webber, p.163.

³⁰⁹ 'seiner Sklavin' in Hoffmann, *Fantasie-und Nachtstücke*, p.167.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p.167.

annihilate her.³¹¹ In fact, Alban reveals himself to Theobald as a member of 'an invisible church' who uses his methods of curing diseases as a pretext for hiding his intentions to take absolute control over others: 'ist es denn nicht lächerlich zu glauben, die Natur habe uns den wunderbaren Talisman, der uns zum König der Geister macht, anvertraut, um Zahnweh oder Kopfschmerz oder was weiß ich sonst, zu heilen?'³¹²

In fact, Alban attempts to appropriate the visionary powers of the woman he mesmerises. He uses his suggestive power over Maria to perform an act of mental rape on the helpless, devoted victim: 'Marien ganz in mein Selbst zu ziehen, ihre ganze Existenz.'³¹³ This is a description of patriarchal oppression which Margarete Kohlenbach summarises as 'die Frau soll nur im Manne leben' ('Women should live only through men').³¹⁴ Then too, as Karin Preuß reveals, Alban's supernatural powers are described as demonic, so that, for example, 'Alban! kann der Tote [sic] erwecken' (he can waken the dead).³¹⁵ In her study, she describes how Alban has a mysterious air as 'Der König der Geister' (the spirit king) characterised by 'Ein seltsames furchtbares Lächeln'.³¹⁶ This description of Alban's 'strange, terrible smile'

³¹¹ 'Marien ganz in mein Selbst zu ziehen, ihre ganze Existenz, ihr Sein so in dem meinigen zu verweben, daß die Trennung davon sie vernichten muß...' Ibid., pp.172-3.

³¹² 'Isn't it ridiculous to believe that Nature has granted us this most wonderful talisman, which makes us the King of the Spirits, and then it is merely entrusted to healing the toothache or headache or whatever else?' Ibid., p.170. However, as Preuß wisely suggests, 'the Kantian motto, "Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen" (have the courage of your own understanding) would prevent this uncivilised manipulation of one's own will.' Preuß, p.56.

³¹³ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, pp.172-3.

³¹⁴ Margarete Kohlenbach, cited by Preuß, p.96.

³¹⁵ Preuß, p.96.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

casts him in the role of a demonic mesmeriser, one far more obviously evil than Doctor Mesmer.³¹⁷

The passionate yet sinister rapport between Maria and Alban, resulting in her eventual death, has its counterpart in the extreme infatuation which Auguste develops for the Italian officer. Ottmar's anecdote about Theobald's mesmeric attempts to cure Auguste, his childhood sweetheart and fiancée, of this infatuation is intended as a positive example of the powers of magnetism. However, it again shows a male magnetist exercising dominance and control over a vulnerable woman. It is possible too that Theobald's attempts to render Auguste his mind-slave through the powers of animal magnetism, although well-intentioned, mimic Alban's attempts mentally to possess Maria. Theobald heals his beloved Auguste by getting her to relive, under magnetic influence, a significant experience from their childhood. This is an approach that Doctor Mesmer may well have used in his treatment of Maria-Theresa, and it is certainly one which I portray in my own novel. Then too, like Doctor Mesmer and Maria-Theresa, Theobald is the primary beneficiary of Auguste's love. This raises the possibility that Theobald's methods and motives, although more obviously benign than those of Alban, are also being made to serve his own best interests.

In fact, powerful and disturbing forces of mesmeric seduction recur throughout the entire novella despite the professed good intentions of the magnetiser(s). By the end of 'Der Magnetiser', the family home is covered in images of 'An ugly devil

³¹⁷ Ibid.

figure spying on a sleeping girl' ('eine häßliche Teufelsgestalt, die ein schlafendes Mädchen belauscht').³¹⁸ For Webber, this image 'represents the magnetizer as demonic incubus, embodying the malignant dreams that he is supposed to overcome.'³¹⁹ Whilst the archaic meaning of 'incubus' is 'nightmare', more specifically it refers to a demon or evil spirit supposed to descend upon sleeping persons, especially one fabled to have sexual intercourse with women during their sleep. Webber's theory of the 'magnetizer as demonic incubus' may therefore allude to the fear of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century commentators regarding the potentially disturbing fate of young women after they have entered the state of mesmeric crisis. Historically, as we have seen, this fear of seduction occurring informed many of the criticisms of Mesmer's treatment of Maria-Theresa. Therefore, Hoffmann's incubus imagery again suggests his awareness of the Paradis case-study.

That Hoffmann regarded magnetism as a disturbing force at the time of writing this story is perhaps the reason why it draws to its terrible, inexorable conclusion. For as Victoria Dutchman-Smith argues, 'This is not a story about how interesting animal magnetism and related therapies are, but a tale exploring relations of dominance, the beliefs which support them and ultimately their consequences (and it is hard to think of more extreme consequences than every member of the family circle found at the start of the tale being killed off by the end).'³²⁰

³¹⁸ Hoffmann, 'Der Magnetiseur' in *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.175.

³¹⁹ Andrew J. Webber, 'Hoffmann's Chronic Dualisms' in *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1996) p.165.

³²⁰ Victoria Dutchman-Smith, *E.T.A. Hoffmann and Alcohol: Biography, Reception and Art* (Leeds: Maney, 2010), p.131.

The Golden Pot

Since he did not wish to write another cautionary tale about an evil magician manipulating others for his own malign purposes, like Alban in 'The Magnetiser', Hoffmann made 'The Golden Pot' into a representation of Mesmerism or animal magnetism as a largely positive force, capable of elevating an individual to a higher level of existence. As Liane Bryson reveals, although vulnerable to evil uses, as evidenced in descriptions of the Rauerin's influence, it is magnetism in the service of a higher purpose that prevails in 'Der goldne Topf.'³²¹

'The Golden Pot' concerns the adventures of the hapless, impoverished student Anselmus, who rejects the real world, not only because mesmeric visions offer him escape and greater rewards, but also because he hardly seems to belong there, since for him it is enervating and destructive. Anselmus's mesmeric inductions seem to be the result of his encounters both with Serpentina, and her father, Archivarius Lindhorst. Anselmus consistently describes Serpentina in terms which appear to draw on Mesmer's theory of the magnetic union of souls: 'Anselmus felt as if he were so wholly clasped and encircled by the gentle, lovely form, that only with her could he move and live, and as if it were but the beating of her pulse that throbbed through his nerves and fibres.'³²² Then too, Hoffmann's Archivarius Lindhorst, like so many of his other characters, recalls Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer. Like Professor X in 'Automata', the Archivarius has 'fixed earnest eyes,' once again recalling the gaze of

³²¹ Liane Bryson, 'Romantic Science: Hoffmann's Use of the Natural Sciences in "Der goldne Topf,"' *Monatshefte*, 91/2 (Summer 1999), p.241.

³²² *Ibid.*, p.45.

the mesmeriser and his own mesmeric power.³²³ The importance of the gaze to the mesmeric trance is developed further when Anselmus finds himself succumbing to the 'piercing look of those fiery eyes' so that again he feels 'forcibly seized with the same unearthly feeling.'³²⁴ Then too, as Bell reveals, 'While the others laugh at Lindhorst's preposterous account of his ancestry, Anselmus feels strangely moved by Lindhorst's metallic voice and penetrating eyes. Metal and the power of the gaze are elements in animal magnetism.'³²⁵

Hoffmann then compares Archivarius to 'a genuine necromancer' ('ein wahrhafter Nekromant'), that is, someone who practises sorcery and magic and can communicate with the spirits of the dead in order to predict the future.³²⁶ In fact, the necromancer is a practitioner of black magic, suggesting Anselmus's hostility at this point in the story to his flawed perception of the Archivarius's diabolic Mesmerism. It is only as the story progresses that Anselmus abandons his suspicions of the Archivarius, who, for him, takes on the benign and noble qualities of a mesmerist who is using his power for the highest good: '[his mouth] seemed to be opening for wise and soul-stirring speech. His whole form was higher, statelier.'³²⁷ Even his 'wide nightgown' which 'spread itself like a royal mantle in broad folds' recalls Mesmer's own propensity to dress in theatrical style at the time of his treatment of Maria-

³²³ Ibid., p.15.

³²⁴ Ibid., p.21.

³²⁵ Bell, p.200.

³²⁶ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.202.

³²⁷ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.35.

Theresa, that is, in 'lilac-lined robes' covered in moons and stars, or other mystical symbols.³²⁸

Further accoutrements of mesmeric ritual and practice appear in the text. For example, over time, Mesmer and his disciples developed methods for transmitting the magnetic fluid by magnetising inanimate objects. As Maria M. Tatar describes, 'whenever his elegant Parisian clinic was filled to capacity, Mesmer would regularly magnetise a tree on the village green and, with full support from local officials, sent ailing peasants to absorb its salubrious emanations.'³²⁹ As we have already seen, Mesmer's disciple, the Marquis de Puységur further developed this process, of which Hoffmann demonstrates an awareness in his short stories. In the First Vigil of 'The Golden Pot', the description of Serpentina and her sisters hanging from the branches of the elder tree alludes to this procedure:

But at that moment, there sounded over his head, as it were, a triple harmony of clear crystal bells: he looked up and perceived three little snakes, glittering with green and gold, twisted around the branches, and stretching out their heads to the evening sun.³³⁰

The crystal bells that signal the advent of a trance refer to the practice, begun by Mesmer, of using music, particularly the glass harmonica, as an induction to the

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Maria M. Tatar, 'Mesmerism, Madness and Death in E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 14/4 (Fall 1975), p.368.

³³⁰ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.4. Tatar has indicated the striking similarity between this episode and one in Hoffmann's story, 'Der unheimliche Gast.' In this story, the heroine Angelika is haunted by a recurring precognitive dream in which she feels drawn to a mysterious tree, 'dem Holunder ähnlich.' In its branches she perceives a pair of human eyes gazing intently at her: 'die Augen [standen] dicht vor mir, und eine schneeweiße Hand wurde sichtbar, die Kreise um mich her beschrieb. Und immer enger und enger wurden die Kreise und umspannen mich mit Feuerfaden, daß ich zuletzt in dem dichten Gespinnst mich nicht regen und begewen konnte. Und dabei war es, als erfasse nun der furchtbare Blick der entsetzlichen Augen mein innerstes Wesen und bemächte sich meines ganzen Seins.' Tatar, *Spellbound*, p.133.

process, and which, as my own novel demonstrates, formed part of his treatment of Maria-Theresa.

The same experience occurs again towards evening, and Anselmus finds 'through all his limbs there went a shock like electricity; he quivered in his inmost heart: he kept gazing up [...] and an unknown feeling of highest blessedness and deepest sorrow nearly rent his heart asunder [...] the crystal bells sounded louder in harmonious accord.'³³¹ Already, in this early stage of the story, Hoffmann reveals not only the stage props of Mesmerism, the crystal bells, but its physical effects, 'a shock like electricity' and 'he quivered.'³³²

Furthermore, there is already an indication that Mesmerism is elevating Anselmus to a higher level of existence, even, in fact, to a state of 'highest blessedness.'³³³ By the Fourth Vigil, Anselmus has truly begun to experience an elevated level of mesmeric rapport in which 'an Unknown Something was awakening his inmost soul, and calling forth that rapturous pain, which is even the mood of longing that announces a loftier existence to man.'³³⁴ Eventually he begins to feel that he 'comprehended all the wonders of a higher world, which before had filled him with astonishment, nay, with dread.'³³⁵

As Bryson has shown, Anselmus's experiences with Serpentina and Archivarius Lindhorst are structured as a series of mesmeric inductions, with each instance

³³¹ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.4.

³³² *Ibid.*, p.4.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p.69.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.18.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

representing an advance from initial half-sleep to the highest levels of somnambulism and clairvoyance. Archivarius Lindhorst himself reveals this process of mesmeric initiations when he tells Anselmus: 'While labouring here, you are undergoing a season of instruction: belief and full knowledge will lead you to the near goal, if you but hold fast, what you have begun well.'³³⁶ In the same conversation, the Archivarius also reveals his awareness that other malign magnetic influences, specifically those of the apple woman/Frau Rauerin, interrupt Anselmus's progression through these stages: 'But only from effort and contest can your happiness in the higher life arise; hostile Principles assail you; and only the interior force with which you can withstand these contradictions can save you from disgrace and ruin.'³³⁷ Then too, unlike the gentle, seductive influence of Serpentina, or the enthralling power of the Archivarius, the Rauerin exerts a more disturbing influence: 'At times he felt as if a foreign power, suddenly breaking in on his mind, was drawing him with resistless force to the forgotten Veronica.'³³⁸ For the Rauerin also induces mesmeric crises which are abrupt, terrifying and overwhelming. In fact, as Bryson suggests, 'she can only function to divert Anselmus away from his progress towards the increasingly more exalted levels of consciousness and lure him back to reality.'³³⁹

³³⁶ Ibid., p.35.

³³⁷ Ibid., p.35.

³³⁸ Ibid., p.49.

³³⁹ Bryson, p.248.

Bell also indicates how the different aspects of Mesmerism operate in Anselmus's love relationships. Serpentina represents good Mesmerism so that he 'experiences complete sympathy with her' whilst, on the other hand, when Anselmus is with Veronica, 'he feels as though his will is being subjected to hers.'³⁴⁰ Bell reminds us how 'in *The Serapion Brethren*, Theodor criticises the complete surrender of one's own self, this bleak dependence on an alien spiritual principle.'³⁴¹ Lindhorst later confirms Veronica's influence over Anselmus as that of a 'hostile principle' ('feindliches Prinzip').³⁴² Bell further suggests that 'Veronica also appears to Anselmus in a dream, recalling the common idea that it is possible to implant ideas in the mind of a sleeper; Theobald attempts something similar in "The Magnetiser".'³⁴³

However, although Hoffmann's 'The Golden Pot' does suggest the binary opposition between the forces of good and evil Mesmerism that Bell implies, the author at times blurs the distinction between them. For example, Hoffmann's portrayal of Veronica, who, with Frau Rauerin, instigates witchcraft-induced mesmeric crises, at times conflates her with Serpentina, who is supposedly intended to elevate Anselmus to a higher state of being. Hoffmann's intention to blur the boundaries between good and evil Mesmerism is presumably why both Serpentina and Veronica have beguiling blue eyes and why Anselmus sometimes thinks of

³⁴⁰ Bell, p.202.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p.199.

³⁴² Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.35.

³⁴³ Bell, p.202.

Veronica as if she were Serpentina, reflecting: 'Why do you like now and then to take the form of a little snake?'³⁴⁴

Then too, Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight suggest that 'the story is simply a metaphoric depiction of the development of the artist in which some of the characters represent various projections of the mind, the apple-woman being fear, and so on.'³⁴⁵ Following this line of argument, Kent and Knight further suggest that 'perhaps Anselmus is himself merely a projection of the registrar, a projection which disappears when the registrar marries Veronica and therefore, no longer has a need to exist in a world of fantasy. Or is it that parts of a single character assume individual identities so that Veronica and Serpentina are one, even as Anselmus and the registrar are one?'³⁴⁶

Obviously, Kent's and Knight's reading of the story complicates the binary opposition which my own argument develops. However, Hoffmann's presentation of both Serpentina's and the Archivarius's attempts to introduce Anselmus to their own form of animal magnetism renders this story quite different to Hoffmann's earlier 'Der Magnetiseur'. Where the earlier text had been largely negative, describing the tragic consequences of misusing magnetic powers for personal gain, 'Der goldne Topf' represents the summation of Hoffmann's belief, that animal magnetism or Mesmerism is a valuable tool for achieving a higher level of existence,

³⁴⁴ Hoffmann, *Best Tales*, p.41.

³⁴⁵ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann*, edited and translated by Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight, from their introduction (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.xxix.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

defined in the text as 'a life in poetry,' 'das Leben in der Poesie'.³⁴⁷ Then too, as Bell also argues, the fact that Atlantis, the mythical lost island, is Serpentina's and Anselmus's home, confirms that harmony between the two worlds 'is irretrievably lost to ordinary consciousness and only available to the poetic' or indeed, the mesmerised soul.³⁴⁸ Anselmus therefore achieves the mesmeric paradise which Maria-Theresa von Paradis glimpsed only briefly before rejecting it, perhaps for her own heavenly music. Her music, of course, also granted her the more earthly pleasures of success and prosperity that, in 'The Golden Pot', proved so dear to Hoffmann's blue-eyed Veronica.

³⁴⁷ Hoffmann, *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*, p.255.

³⁴⁸ Bell, p.204.

Conclusion:

Chapter One of this critical project introduced Maria-Theresa von Paradis, the subject of my novel, *The Cost of Light*. Her real-life case-history demonstrates her strength and her vulnerability, both as a patient and as a musician. This chapter also showed that whilst her friend Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was and is ubiquitous throughout Vienna, in comparison, Maria-Theresa remains obscure – and indeed, much of her music, although documented, is lost. It further suggested that there were a number of complex physical and physiological factors implicated in her blindness which obscured its diagnosis as hysterical. My own preference, as I argued, was for the viral and mercury hypotheses, possibly complicated by emotional factors. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that Mesmer himself would have been biased in favour of the hysterical origin of her blindness since this type of blindness was responsive to his treatment methods. Certainly, 'hysterical' blindness makes for a dramatic and compelling story, which is why many of the fictional, as well as, perhaps more surprisingly, the historical accounts seem to favour it. That Maria-Theresa herself may have favoured blindness over sight due to its creative compensations is also an argument I developed at some length, drawing on the writings of Denis Diderot, François de la Mothe le Vayer and André Gide. The experiences of the Swedish harpist Charlotta Seuerling, who became blind at the age of five, were compared to those of Maria-Theresa. So too were those of Beethoven, who also heroically endured the loss of a crucial sense, with even more tragic consequences.

Chapter Two of this project explored the controversial reputation both of Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer and of his healing method, animal magnetism. It revealed the scandalous elements of this treatment, specifically, its dominating and manipulative aspects as well as the way in which it reinforced normative gender roles of eighteenth and nineteenth-century bourgeois society. For many critics, animal magnetism, or Mesmerism, as it pejoratively came to be called, initiated a dangerously intimate, even erotic relationship between the magnetiser and his subject, which compromised both their reputations. However, I also considered the more positive aspects of the mesmeric rapport in which a moral sympathy developed between the two parties.

The trope of blindness cured and sight restored was also discussed, particularly eighteenth-century accounts of cataract operations, biblical cures and Gide's *La Symphonie Pastorale* in which, however, Gertrude, like Maria-Theresa, discovers that the recovery of sight for one who has been so long blind can cause great unhappiness. Herr von Paradis's own report about Maria-Theresa's mesmeric treatment also revealed her unhappiness as her recovery progressed. This report allowed the inference to be made that her blindness and her sudden recovery of sight at Mesmer's hands were both hysterical symptoms. Her inability to describe the newly-discovered world around her was also considered. Furthermore, the different possible reasons for the interruption of Maria-Theresa's treatment, including financial, moral and emotional considerations, were discussed. Finally, my second

chapter argued that Maria-Theresa may have wilfully subverted her own mesmeric cure, since, for her, blindness was more empowering than sight as it led to the restoration of her musical gifts.

For Maria-Theresa then, blindness, sight and indeed Mesmerism itself have paradoxical, double-edged aspects. The positive and negative elements of Mesmerism were more fully examined in the third and final chapter of this project, with its focus on the probable influence of the von Paradis case-study on the fiction of E.T.A. Hoffmann. In this chapter, I showed that Hoffmann had a long-standing interest in Mesmerism, which stemmed from his medical writings, from observing somnambulistic sessions and through friendships with practitioners of animal magnetism. From these different influences, he developed conflicting feelings about magnetism, alternating between admiration and a sense of uncanniness. These conflicting feelings are evident in many of his short stories. For example, I argued that in 'The Sandman', Olympia functions as the Maria-Theresa figure with her strange fixity of vision, whilst Coppola operates as the Mesmer figure since he tries to reclaim her eyes. Furthermore, I showed that the familial violence enacted against Maria-Theresa parallels Spalanzani's and Coppola's fight over the body of Olympia. The extreme hysterical behaviour apparent in the von Paradis case-study, as well as in 'The Sandman' also prompted the argument that the effects of Mesmerism, the crisis state and its healing influence, intended to cure hysteria and hysterical illness, were, themselves, potentially another form of hysteria.

Likewise, in my discussion of 'Councillor Krespel', I argued that the Professor's description of Krespel's distressed behaviour could be seen as analogous to that of someone undergoing the mesmeric process. I showed that Antonia's musicality and her experience of domestic confinement also paralleled that of Maria-Theresa. I demonstrated that her father Krespel's control over his daughter also recalls the mesmeriser's control over his subject, which Hoffmann directly alludes to with metaphorical language. However, I revealed that by the conclusion of the story, Mesmerism is largely divested of its earlier negative associations, so that Antonia and her beloved B- seem to attain knowledge of a higher purpose through the mesmeric union of twin souls.

I further showed that the dominating aspects of Mesmerism find their counterpart in Hoffmann's 'New Year's Eve Adventure' in which Doctor Dapertutto, like Mesmer variously called a 'charlatan' or a 'Miracle Doctor', exerts control over Giulietta and Spikher and his entire family, whilst Giulietta 'with her irresistible power' controls Spikher. I also argued that Giulietta's fascination with Doctor Dapertutto's mesmeric diamond renders her a hysterical subject. In addition, Hoffmann alludes to the Travelling Enthusiast's fascination with and attraction for Julia with a mesmeric metaphor.

In the final chapter of my project, I argued that in Hoffmann's 'Automata', the parallels between Adelgunda and Maria-Theresa von Paradis, and between Doctor Mesmer and Professor X were even more explicit. Patriarchy's power-play between fathers, daughters and doctors is a feature of 'Automata's' opening 'Ghost Story'

whilst Adelgunda's experience with the ghost also evokes the mesmeric trance. Furthermore, Professor X's malign and manipulative Mesmerism reveals sinister forces at work, a subject which finds its culmination in Hoffmann's creation of the evil Alban in 'The Magnetiser' and, to a lesser extent, in Ottmar and Theobald, who seek to magnetise the hapless female victims of this story.

Similarly, in 'The Golden Pot', Hoffmann's Archivarius Lindhorst, like so many of his other characters, recalls Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer. More malign magnetic influences, specifically those of the Apple Woman, Frau Rauerin, interrupt the poet Anselmus's magnetic progress. Overall, however, this story seems to demonstrate a considerable shift in Hoffmann's final thinking about animal magnetism, namely towards the view that it could be a largely positive force, capable of elevating one to a higher state of existence. This then is the summation of Hoffmann's beliefs about Mesmerism, whilst, as I have shown, his stories seem to draw on an awareness of the encounter between Doctor Mesmer and Maria-Theresa von Paradis.

Of course, others of Hoffmann's stories, such as 'The Uncanny Guest' ('Der unheimliche Gast') 'The Pledge' ('Das Gelübde') 'The Deserted House' ('Das öde Haus') and 'The Contest of the Singers' ('Der Kampf der Sänger') also feature mesmerist trances and related mental states but due to word constraints, I could not, sadly, have done justice to them in this critical project.³⁴⁹ However, I would like to conclude with a final point initially raised by Stefan Andriopoulous, that for

³⁴⁹ Webber draws attention to the 'family resemblance' between 'Der unheimliche Gast' and 'Der Magnetiseur.' In both stories, 'the uncanny guest enters into the familiar familial circle; [his] character is profoundly ambivalent – intimate yet strange, curative yet antagonistic.' Webber, p.159.

Hoffmann, animal magnetism may have been a powerful metaphor for the rapport between the writer and the spellbound reader mentally affected by his narrative.³⁵⁰ For if the reader of my own creative and critical projects in any way succumbs to their influence, its writer will be content.

³⁵⁰ Andriopoulos, p.119.

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I am following the MHRA style of presentation.

The critical project is 32,556 words long.

The novel submission is 67,240 words long.

Therefore, the thesis is 99,796 words long.

Jane Madell

The Cost of Light

Marie-Thérèse von Paradis:
A Case-History of Hysterical Blindness

By

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

Landstrasse, 20 January, 1777

So then, the girl...

But these are the only words I can write before I put down my pen. For my attempts to gain a history from the girl's father this morning, when he brought her here, were only partly successful. Herr von Paradis (Imperial Secretary to the Queen-Empress, he insisted on the *von*, emphasising it with a deliberate throat-clearing) told me that her blindness began ten years ago, December 1766, when she was just seven.

'And her condition has been constant?' I asked.

'Her blindness has been constant,' Herr von Paradis replied. 'But there are times when her eyes twitch convulsively and without stopping, as if trying to escape their sockets.'

Of course, I knew something of her history already, from Ingenhousz's letter. She is well thought of at court, and, like her father, is well-known to her Majesty, through whose bounty she receives a pension of two hundred gold ducats, both for her musical talent and her affliction. Her education has been separately accounted for. She learnt the harpsichord and pianoforte with Kozeluch and singing under Righini. At the age of fourteen, she commissioned an organ concerto from Salieri; at fifteen, she undertook a European concert tour; now, at seventeen, she is an adornment of both salons and court music societies.

Just for a moment, the thought flashed through my mind whether the father would rather his daughter could see or play. But before I could put the question to him, he was up on his feet and out of the door, hurrying back to court and leaving

the girl here in my care.

I should have thought that with all the money her pension brings, he could have found her something better to wear. For her dress, some dull beige stuff, is decidedly faded, and the lace at her neck is no longer crisp. Or is it that they think that for her, the appearance of her clothes does not matter?

Now the girl smiles in my general direction but the overall effect is awkward. Ingenhouz informs me that she is prey to melancholia, accompanied by stoppages in her spleen and liver, which often bring on attacks of delirium and rage. She is sometimes convinced she is out of her mind - however, today, in my presence, she seems calm enough.

Yet she says nothing. She just sits there and sips from her cup. Sometimes she moves it round in her hand, with delicate, tactile discernment, handling it as if it's a gift from the darkness, which she will pass back into that darkness again. Then too, her hand is lean and pale, emerging from the sleeve of her dress, but it's not beautiful, except for her white, glossy, almond-shaped nails. Otherwise, her knuckles seem too dry and the general outline of her hand is not pleasing, lacking soft curves. Her brow above her bloodless, oval face is still, and her eyes - at first glance, they're like anyone else's, shaded by the usual dark lashes. But if you look closely, there's something different about them. Too much white behind the blue irises, and the pupils seem to move around in the sockets without knowing it or being able to stop. And then the left pupil turns in towards her nose, whilst the right pupil tries to stay still - *tries*, for there it goes, moving again, without her knowledge or desire.

I help her up then seat her by the clinic window in order to examine her eyes. Now they begin to water, rolling in a way totally at variance with her features: a little, slightly bulbous nose, a full, mobile mouth which she sometimes nibbles, a troubled expression.

When I remove her hat, I see her long neck, emerging from her collar, the pink tips of her ears, and - her scalp, covered in uneven clumps of short, black hair.

'Your hair?'

She replies that it was shaved for the plaster-helmet, and has never grown back properly, although that was already a few years ago. Intended to hold her head still, to stop her eyes twitching. A foolish notion.

'You'll forgive me for saying so, my dear, but it hasn't done you much good.' Ingenhousz had also mentioned leeches, blisters, purgatives, even electrotherapy, with a Leyden jar administered by my old examiner, von Störck. All ultimately unsuccessful. And with her partial baldness from the wretched plaster, and the marks of leeches and bleedings on her arms, the girl's in a pitiful state.

Lapdogs! Bricoleurs! Unenlightened quacks!

Of course, someone more worldly than I would keep in mind that she is a protégée of the Empress. Only if I succeed with her where von Störck has failed, then, ah, what will my old mentor say? Plenty, I suppose, if I usurp his position at court. My wife, though, how delighted she would be!

Not that it is very likely. Franz Anton Mesmer, advancing across the chess-board of her Majesty's favour. Really, not very likely at all, given my past history. Because, every time, every single time I succeed, there is always some difficulty, some shadow, that follows in the wake of every one of my cures.

Can it be that the girl, Marie, is aware of this? Has the magnetic, dialogic rapport I wish to establish with her already begun? Because she starts to say that none of her previous treatments have ever helped her – then stops abruptly and bites her lip, as if she's afraid she's said too much.

'Go on, my dear,' I tell her, 'you can say anything you want to me, you know that.'

But she's shy now – or else, on her guard. She mumbles something indistinct, of which I only catch the words, '*last resort,*' and '*magician.*'

'I have that reputation,' I say. But how to reassure her? How to win her trust? Ah – I know. 'So you must take heart. Nobody ever thought my niece Franzl could recover from her many - illnesses, and yet, under my care, she improves daily.'

At this, another smile crosses the girl's face, more spontaneous, less painfully

anxious to please.

'And,' I say, 'I can tell you something else, Mademoiselle. Your pupils are responding to the light.'

She mumbles that she knows, that it's not completely dark over here. She bites her lip again then releases it and tells me all in a rush how her brother Malois once tipped her upside-down and she saw stars. As she flew through the air, she was sure she saw streaks of light, flashes of light and stars.

'But perhaps this is a memory from before you lost your sight, my dear? You were already seven when it happened.'

In another burst, she begins to contradict me, tells me it was definitely *after* she went blind because it was the first time her brother was home in ages, that the scarlet fever must have kept him away.

At last, something approaching a case-history! 'Scarlet fever?' I say, as encouragingly as I can.

She replies that she and her sister Liesl both had scarlet fever the winter she became blind – or at least, *Liesl* had it. But could it be the scarlet fever that made her lose her sight she wants to know.

'That's certainly possible,' I say, 'but your eyes are alive.' I tilt her head back towards the window and watch her pupils narrow.

She seems about to say something then but stops. So I say, as reassuringly as I can, 'I know you were only a child when it happened, but can you tell me about the events leading up to your blindness?'

Protracted silence, then she swallows, wets her lips, begins to speak.

Marie

Once, Doctor Franz, before I lost my sight, my brother Malois took me riding round the circle of the city one evening. Oh, I don't remember why – perhaps I'd begged him, or perhaps he had a new horse. But I do remember this horse's hooves sending up clouds of dust as they pounded the streets. That dust was bad, worse than ever, chalk and gravel mixed, so that it was like a fog, penetrating my mouth, my nose, my ears, making my eyes weep. I buried them against Malois's chest.

But when we were through the worst of it, he nudged me so that I could see the women in their stooping, dark little houses lighting candles in the ground floor windows. Then I felt peaceful, to see them burning there.

Those houses were quite little, but later, some were very tall, storey clapped upon storey, five or six times, and they seemed to tilt at the top, so that friends could lean across and shake hands if they wanted. And after these, the buildings became very fine, as fine as the Imperial Castle with its gap-tooth crenellations. For here was the Imperial Library, the Belvedere and the Imperial Stables. The sight of a black horse being exercised in the yard made Malois jiggle our own reins up-and-down.

Next we rode past the Hof but it was much too late now for all the different markets. Where were the stalls of herbs and fruit, milk and eggs, the chickens, ducks, capons, pigeons, turkeys, pheasants and rabbits? All sold or packed away, like toys into a toy-chest, the sellers and buyers with their faded bonnets, capes and fans packed away too, ready to return with the new day.

And how quiet it was now. Just a few people wandering the streets or riding, as we were. Except that a couple of girls in bright, shabby clothes huddled together in the market-place, for all the world as if they themselves were for sale! One of them directed a fiery, longing glance at Malois, so that he spurred up our horse and we rode away.

I think we may have ventured close to Landstrasse, Doctor Franz. Perhaps you even saw us, perhaps your carriage rumbled past us as the theatres began to close and

the soirées broke up. And then, later still, the big houses began to shut up for the night, their lights flickering out, one-by-one. You were surely sleeping now, Doctor Franz, when Malois began to say we should go back too or else he would have to pay the porter a *groschen* to let us in.

Except that now, as we tried to ride back through the city, it was so late that the street lanterns were being extinguished. In some places, there wasn't even a candle, shining through a smutty window-pane. And without light, the night was more chill and dark and our horse sometimes stumbled. Then Malois began to curse. We'd lost our way, entered an unknown street where the air smelt of spirits, stables and sewers, where voices from the taverns down in the cellars yelled out muffled obscenities. A bearded man in yellow mules lurched heavily towards us, past piles of wood waiting to be burned then shook his fist at us. And another man swathed in black, with his hair twisted in knots, slipped in front of us, a shadow come to life, that made the horse rear up, and so startled me, I screamed.

I shrank closer to Malois whilst he yelled something at the man, and then we clattered on through the night.

We passed down one street, then another and another and finally into one where ancient buildings loomed over slabs of paving stones, their plaster peeling, their slates missing, window-frames patched up with rotting branches of pine. At first I didn't know where we were. But then I did. Because now the air smelt of tanneries and tallow and coffee. And over there was the familiar outline of the Parish Church and the Schottentor, spreading their black bars of shadows. Then, set back farther from these other houses, was another house, equally crumbling, equally old, but larger and grander, with a courtyard, gatehouse, stables and even a garden.

It was *my* house, Doctor Franz, and as Malois spurred his weary horse towards it, I began to sob and sob until my face felt slippery with tears and snot – though I couldn't really tell you why I was crying.

When we'd passed through the gates, Malois climbed down from the horse, then hauled me down and tried to shush me. And then our front door swung open, a

rectangle of light above three white steps and I charged up them. I hurled myself against my nursemaid Aaleigha's lap. She rubbed my back as I cried and cried, until, with one last, great juddering sigh, I stopped, finally reassured that I was home and I was safe.

I was safe, wasn't I, Doctor Franz? Except I think it started then, my fear of the dark. I think that was when I began to insist they should always leave a night-light burning for me. They didn't always, though.

Marie

Another memory from *before* I lost my sight, Doctor Franz? Why? So you can understand me better? Erm, let me think. I was five. Newly five? And for my birthday, Aaleigha took me and my cousin Johann to the theatre at Schönbrunn to see the marionettes. '*Once upon a time, there was a princess.*' A little girl's voice. An Archduchess's? Then *clap clap clap* then - '*Every gift and grace was hers.*'

'The Archduchess is using marionettes to tell the story of the Empress's reign,' Johann whispered. 'There's a marionette for every single member of the Imperial family.' Because, Doctor Franz, Johann was seven and he knew *everything*. 'There's the Archduchess Maria Elisabethe, the Archduchess Maria Christina, the Archduchess Maria Josepha, the Archduchess Maria Antoine.'

The Archduchess Maria Antoine? Her marionette's eyes were sapphires. Her mouth was a cluster of pearls. Her face was made of porcelain and her wig of ash-blond hair was tugged upwards in a chignon. It looked heavy – too heavy for her neck. And round her neck, a circlet of blood-red rubies, glittering.

But the story of the Empress's reign was just the, what do you call it, the *prelude* to the main performance, Doctor Franz. Soon another puppet-master took over the world inside the box - a world made of silks and satins, china, wire and hinges; painted back-cloths, moving lights – and music. A sweet, tinkling sound, like from my music-box, *tinkle-tinkle* and then, there on the stage of the puppet-theatre, was a little puppet girl called Antonia, lying in her bed. Her fingers moved up-and-down, as if she was playing the piano on her counterpane. And *tinkle, tinkle, tinkle* played the puppet-music. And her nurse, she was just like a tiny Aaleigha because how she fussed over her! But behind them, Doctor Franz, there was a shadow, which was huge, bigger than them both.

The puppet nurse began to tell the little girl the tale of the Sandman: 'He steals the eyes of naughty little children,' she said, 'and feeds them to his own children, who live in a nest on the moon, and open up their beaks, just like baby owls.' Then –

tap tap tap – slow feet were climbing the stairs, Doctor Franz, and then the visitor's head loomed into view - there on the stage, his head and shoulders appeared, then *tap tap tap stump stump swish swish* his coat-skirts were set swinging. The little puppet-girl, Antonia, buried herself beneath the blankets and the stage went dark.

In the next scene, Antonia's father, the alchemist and his horrible visitor, Doctor Coppelius, were bent over their secret work in a cauldron, whilst all around them, the firelight shimmered. And the little girl, Antonia, she hid herself away in a cupboard to watch, just like Johann and I used to do. Only Doctor Coppelius found Antonia and dragged her, yes, dragged her out of her hiding-place and then waved his ebony stick – his magic wand? - but it was the father who fell down dead and crumpled into flames.

Smoke rose. When it had dispersed, many years had passed.

Now they were all grown-up and happy. Antonia with her nut-brown hair and a pale blue dress and the boy she had always loved, Nathanael. Nathanael and Antonia embraced in a garden filled with roses and lilies and blue light. Music began to play and the marionettes danced together. When they had finished dancing, Antonia tilted her head back and began to sing, and the sound of her voice, Doctor Franz, the sound of her voice was more beautiful than anything anyone had ever heard.

Then Antonia was getting ready to sing at a concert in Ingolstadt. She was staying in a beautiful hotel, surrounded by her music-books, a globe and glittering new dresses. And here, Doctor Franz, she was visited by the Doctor Coppelius puppet, in disguise. The disguise was a cloak, a brimmed hat and an eye-shade. He also carried a tray of glinting glass eyes and tiny tubes, spyglasses – and Antonia bought a spyglass. When she looked into it, holding it to her eye in her dainty white china hand, a circle of rosy light appeared.

Yes – there, on one side of the stage, was a circle of rosy light – and there was Antonia on the other side, staring at it through her glass. It was really clever how they did that, Doctor Franz. And inside the rosy light was a puppet-girl in a white

silk dress who looked just like Antonia. But could she sing like Antonia? Oh, no, Doctor Franz, no-one could sing like Antonia!

The girl inside the rosy light was quite still for a moment or two and then she raised her little hand to her mouth to stifle a yawn and dipped her head.

Next, the ballroom scene, and again, little tinkling sounds of music. Couples whirled and danced, curtseyed and bowed. But Nathanael didn't dance with Antonia, Doctor Franz, oh no, he danced with the girl from the circle of light, Olympia. He was jerky, agitated, bowing over her hand, trembling with emotion. He had fallen in love with the gliding Olympia! But then she stopped, dipped her head, raised her hand to her mouth.

The curtains closed then re-opened. Antonia burst into a room where Olympia's father was quarrelling with Doctor Coppelius. They jerked their canes at each other and then – flash of silver, their swords, while Olympia lay still, draped over a pink plush chair. They took hold of her, one by the neck, one by the feet, and tugged. And she – the puppet girl – she trembled but she didn't fight back. She just flew apart. Her head flew upwards; her body flew sideways and then the father and doctor began to fight each other using her arms and legs as weapons.

Antonia rushed to tell Nathanael what had happened to her rival. Then they went walking together along the battlements of a church-tower. Nathanael's arm was round Antonia's pale blue waist. But soon the sky turned dark and Antonia's shadow rose up huge and began to torment her. The shadow clawed at Antonia again and again; goaded, she lunged back, so that Nathanael suddenly let go of her waist. Her movements became wilder and wilder, more and more jerky, less and less human, and when, stricken, she began to sing, her silvery voice emerged in fits and starts, as if she were being wound-up, like a music-box, like the puppet-girl, Olympia.

But suddenly, singing more beautifully than ever, she leaped up, right up into the air, then down, down, down again, she plunged right down over the edge of the tower, to her doom.

Olympia was the puppet-girl but all the other characters were supposed to be real. Except, of course, they were marionettes too. They were all speechless dolls, being made to move. Like pianoforte music, Doctor Franz? Why? Well, because of the clever, controlling fingers. Or, like your magnetic treatment? The wand? Revealing feelings but not entirely through the volition of the self? So, like music, then?

4
Marie

Another early memory, Doctor Franz? Mamma telling me a story. I used to like the one she told about the Empress. There we'd be, all cuddled up together and she'd tell me about her, pregnant but riding in a tournament, riding side-saddle as women do, wearing a crimson velvet habit and a tricorne hat. Right there and then, Mamma decided that if she ever had another daughter, she'd name her after the Empress. I'd be Marie-Thérèse von Paradis.

Except – well, there was another story she used to tell too, another story about the Empress that I didn't like so much. But then it's like that with stories, isn't it? There's always one hidden beneath the other. Anyway, in this *other* story about the Empress, she cut off all her hair because the Emperor had died. And then she draped her apartments in sombre velvet and herself in widow's black. Can you imagine it?

No. No, I don't think so. Because she *chose* widow's black whereas I didn't choose what happened to me. Although, for years after, I thought it was to do with the doll.

The doll? Ugh! The one I was given on St. Nicholas's Day – a gift from Liesl but I don't know why. Maybe because I liked the dolls in her dolls' house. But oh – I didn't want to look after a doll-baby – *I* was the baby! The music-box from Mamma was a better gift. But the doll – Well, it's hard to explain. Just that, when my fingertips flicked over its porcelain limbs, its head of real hair, I felt – no, I *knew* that it wasn't the *doll's* real hair. Who had it come from? A dead person?

I snatched my hand away.

'You must take good care of her, Marie,' said Liesl, as we sat unwrapping our presents in the music-room. There we all were, reflected in the mahogany sheen of the piano's legs, whitened and elongated, whilst the fire in the hearth crackled away, sending up spurts of yellow sparks.

'You must love her, Marie,' Liesl added, 'what are you going to call her?'

Liesl, I thought. Then shook my head and muttered, '*Reisi*.' Which was what Mamma called me when I was good. Because, oh, the little angel. Little soft body stuffed with cloth. Porcelain limbs. But her mouth was painted onto her face. So the doll couldn't sing. Couldn't even open her mouth. Oh.

'Do you like *her*?' asked my cousin Johann.

No, I didn't like her, not one little bit. Doll face. Doll face. Painted mouth. Silly dolly eyes. You don't even have eyelashes or eyelids. Just glass eyes, that might fall on the floor if I shook your head.

Later that day, whilst everyone else was finishing their supper, I slipped back to the music-room. The logs in the hearth were burning slowly, with hot, almost invisible small flames. And the great piano on the dais in the alcove seemed to loom out of the shadows darkly. I turned my back on it, then sought out the doll, lying face down on a red plush music stool trimmed with blue braid.

Outside, the wind blew and snow *shushed* against the window-panes, sounding louder because of the closed golden shutters inside. And the fire had burnt down very low yet it still threw out enough sparks to make me jump.

But what should I do with *her*?

Push her beneath the piano -

And then - leave her there -

Alone in the dark.

That should scare her.

It would scare *me* -

The piano's sharp edges,

Its snap-shut lid.

But-

Someone was coming.

My heart jumped up into my mouth.

It began to beat - *thick, thick, thick*

Then fast, then the doll, the doll,

Right there in my hands and

Her skin felt just like a

Cup-and-saucer -

And the footsteps outside -
And no matter how I tried,
She wouldn't break -
Louder, louder, louder
And my heart beating till it *hurt*
And the cracks
Spreading out beneath my fingertips
And her eyes -

I shoved the doll beneath the piano. Then I waited a full five minutes to be sure she didn't try and come back out, whilst the footsteps retreated down the corridor.

After Christmas, Liesl caught a chill from practising her music too late into the night. Well, no, Doctor Franz, I don't remember that exactly but it's what Aaleigha used to say if she thought I was working too hard at my music, 'Going on like that, you'll wear yourself to nothing, like your big sister did.'

But I *do* remember when Liesl was sick, Doctor Franz. At first it was nothing more than a mild fever, though a dry, obstinate one. It refused to yield to compresses, leeches or even our love. And then the rash appeared, some spots on her shins and elbows and a few on her back. What sort of rash? Reddish blotches, the size of a *kreuzer*, that turned white if you pressed them. And that hurt her so that she screamed out. So Mamma tried the margrave powder and the black powder.

And then -

Liesl's face, flushed. Her eyes, that didn't seem to know me.
(I ran out of her room and went and hid -)
Someone was crying,
Somewhere in the dark.
First sobs, then howls -
Was it Cerberus - what had he done?
Bad dog.
What did you do?

I ran out into the garden, then stopped, suddenly overwhelmed. The snow had made a flat white blankness of everything and I didn't know where to go. It was too much - and I was too afraid. Of what, exactly, Doctor Franz? Ah, I wish I could tell you. Of

the blankness, and – of everything.

I wanted my Mamma but she wasn't there. I wanted Johann but his father had taken him away from our house for a short visit. Even Aaleigha was too busy to attend to me that day. Except that, later, she came and found me when I was scooping out holes in the snow, sticking in twigs here-and-there.

'Leave all that for now, Miss,' she said, putting my frozen hands into her apron pocket, where she chafed them between her own, 'we're going to go and play Hide-and-Seek.'

'But you said Johann and I weren't allowed to play that game anymore.'

Why wouldn't she let us play Hide-and-Seek? Well, because, she found us – well, not exactly kissing, Doctor Franz, but –

'Aaleigha will never find us in here,' I whispered.

'Hush,' my cousin Johann replied, 'she'll hear you.'

Don't breathe. Don't move. Stay dumb.

Not a breath, not a whisper! Hush!

Nothing between us now except this guessing silence. Then Johann slid further into the music-room cupboard. His hand just brushed against mine. Together, we listened out for the sound of footsteps returning from other rooms.

'Mutz,' Johann whispered – the name he liked to call me, I think, because it was the name Mamma called me when I was bad. And then – well – and then – his mouth just touched mine. But –

The door flew open.

We blinked as daylight dazzled us.

'I've found you, I've found you,' Aaleigha crowed, so swift, so sure, and too light on her feet for us to have heard her approach. I was seven and she was seventeen. And as she stood, stock still, staring at us, I wondered if I would look like her when I was older. Because then I would wear a corset, like her, and my shape would curve in-and-out, and, like her, I would have a small, springy waist. But –

'What on earth have you been up to now, the pair of you?' she demanded.

'Nothing,' said Johann.

'We were only h-h-hiding ttt-t-together,' I stammered.

'I don't want to hear your excuses,' Aaleigha said, 'you're both old enough to know the difference between right and wrong.'

Reisi and *Mutz*. Yes, we knew. But Johann was too proud to apologise and I was too ashamed. So we both stayed silent whilst Aaleigha muttered, 'From now on, I'll be watching you both.' And how she frowned and frowned, the scowl lines sending creases up through her freckles.

She was frowning too on that day she came to collect me from the garden. Well, not exactly in the same way, Doctor Franz. She looked worried rather than angry. And I had the feeling she was chafing my hands because her own were too fidgety to keep still. And she, who always prided herself on being honest and direct, on having a ready answer to all our questions, now didn't seem to know what to say.

'Well, don't worry about that for now, Missie. I just want you to go and hide.'

'But why?' I said. Then, when she wouldn't answer, I added mutinously, 'I want to stay out here.' Which wasn't true, of course, Doctor Franz, because it was growing colder and colder. But still, I wasn't ready to play this odd game of Aaleigha's.

'Oh Miss,' she sighed, 'must you choose today of all days to be difficult? I thought you'd want to play Hide-and-Seek down in the cellar.'

'The cellar?' I said, momentarily diverted. 'Like you used to do when you were little?' A dark little scrap of a girl, just like me, playing Hide-and-Seek with the twins, Malois and Liesl.

'Yes,' said Aaleigha. 'Now do come along, there's a good child.'

'But Mamma said I shouldn't play in the cellar,' announced the good child. 'She said it was too dark and too dangerous.'

'Well,' said Aaleigha, 'she won't mind just this once. And you only need to hide down there for a few minutes, whilst -'

'Whilst?'

'And don't worry if no-one comes to find you straight away.'

'Can't we wait until Johann gets back? Then he can hide with me.'

'Oh – no – no. We're not playing that game today. Just be a good girl. Go down into the cellar, and -'

The key turned easily in the lock. The hatch swung open. The lantern, held high, showed a narrow, wooden staircase. I hesitated and then she gave me a gentle shove. No, she did, Doctor Franz, I felt her hand on my back.

Then

Down

The

Steps

I

Went.

The cellar hatch slammed shut.

The rectangle of light disappeared.

Above me, dirty cobwebs dangled from the brick vaults. Beneath me, the stone coolness smelt of soil. I stood on a floor of trodden earth. The lantern showed rows and rows of wine, cold, green moons I touched as I slipped past. A tall barrel had split its sides and gaped wide. I dipped my fingers into the puddle beneath it – smelt them – Mamma's breath, after a musical soirée.

I licked my fingers. The taste of wine, forbidden to me, because I was still too young to drink it.

Like Johann's kisses, Doctor Franz.

Because, well, there are some people in life you can kiss and other people you

can't, aren't there, Doctor Franz? Just like there are some people you can marry and other people you can't. Like who? Oh, well, you know.

Liesl used to have a doll's house as tall as me, with a grey roof top and two solid chimneys, painted red-and-white. Then attics beneath them, then three storeys of crumbling brickwork, covered in ivy. The ivy was painted too but it looked real, except it was paler, brighter, scarlet-edged. In front, there was a miniature door, painted green, with a knocker and six steps leading up to it. And there were seventeen minute windows, real glass but all blank and staring and divided into panes by strips of lead.

I used to spend hours gazing at that house: its drawing-room, its dining-room, its kitchen. The rooms were papered over with clusters of roses and birds and there were pictures on the wall with real gold frames. Red carpet covered the floors; there were red velvet chairs and blue ones too, and a table and a piano, with paper notes, glued on. There was even a dresser with flowered cups and saucers and one pewter jug, no bigger than my little fingernail.

How often I used to trace its corridors in my mind, the long rows of attics, the maze of staircases, the grand master bedroom with its four poster bed. This was where the twin dolls, Ha and Fa slept, reflected in their oval looking-glass.

Oh, there used to be a Mamma, two boys, two girls and one big dog. But one day, everybody disappeared except for Ha and Fa. One brother, one sister, twins, living all by themselves in a mansion that smelt of varnish and new paint. They had nobody to please but themselves and no-one to teach them right from wrong. At first, they tried hard to be good. They tried to say their prayers at night. But without anyone to remind them of the words, they soon forgot them. So instead of praying, they would kiss each other good night and then lie down to whisper secrets in the dark.

Fa told Ha that she loved him so much that if he died, she would cut off all her

hair, like the Empress Maria-Theresa did when the Emperor died. But Ha told Fa that if she died, he would be very sad, but then he would find someone else to love.

This made Fa very cross. She told him that there was nobody to love in the world except her. She was so cross, she was going to cut all his hair off herself, in preparation for her death and his deep mourning. *Snip snip!*

But then Ha kissed her quiet and they rested their heads on the pillows of the four-poster bed. Rested their heads on the snowy white pillows, their faces just touching...

Pardon, Doctor Franz? Oh maybe it was because Aaleigha had read me that fairy-tale about a King whose first wife had died. Only, he didn't cut off all his hair and put on mourning-clothes, like the Empress Maria Theresa did. Instead, he decided that out of all the maidens in his Kingdom, only his sister was lovely enough to become his bride. But the girl knew it was wrong, Doctor Franz, so she wove herself a cloak of hair and escaped, hidden away inside it.

What did you say, Doctor Franz? You want to know *what* the girl knew was wrong? Oh, you know. You're doing that thing that doctors do when they ask you questions they already know the answers to.

Anyway, there I was, down in the cellar. Playing Hide-and-Seek in its shadows, with the cobwebs, the trodden earth, the spilt wine. In the puddle of wine, my reflection gazed up at me, an odd little figure with a white face and arms speckling the gloom.

I held the lantern up high, shone its light into the darkness. But the cellar walls lay all around me and I didn't think I would ever escape.

'I don't want to play anymore,' I called up now, 'I want to come upstairs.'

But no-one answered. Somewhere above me, a door slammed. And then the lantern flickered, and went out.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

St. Stephen's Church. It's only been a fortnight since Marie became a patient at my clinic but how many years since the Universal Creator saw me inside a Church. Why, the last time I was here must have been my wedding-day! My own dear Anna waiting for me at the altar, her face peeping out from her row of false curls in delighted anticipation.

Everyone was so happy for us that day. After the Mass, we pushed open the Giant's Door and crowds of well-wishers sent up a cheer. There they all were: the high-wigged society ladies, the children clutching bouquets, the market-sellers who seemed to have abandoned their stalls and carried humbler posies. They gathered round the cathedral's statues, half-burying Christ and his angels. I nodded at some army officers who made an archway for us to pass beneath.

As we ducked our heads beneath their raised arms, I felt my heart lift then begin to pound with pride. Great things were expected of me and with my bride by my side, I was sure to achieve them. And my happiness was complete when I glimpsed two of my colleagues in the crowd: Doctor Herr Bernhard, whom I knew from my university days and von Störck.

Well, today, there are no smiling crowds and blushing brides. But von Störck is here, his large, round head nodding away in the pew in front of mine, precisely the man I have come here to meet. And so, as the Mass ends, I greet my old friend and ask if he will accompany me for a walk along the Prater. He rubs his hands together in his characteristic, fleshy way then nods in agreement.

We make our way down the Prater's central avenue, through the passing crowds, past the grazing deer. Well, it's a pretty enough place, the Prater. Coloured lights are looped through clusters of chestnuts on the trees, just as they were in my courting days. And perhaps there's even the same people feasting outdoors on striped tablecloths, fried chicken, cold ham and sausages. And is Anna among them, her face shiny and happy with grease?

Still, it's not Anna I wish to speak of with von Störck but Marie. For she was once a patient of his and the good old man takes an interest in her still. And so as we pass beneath the Prater's trees, I start to tell him how my treatment sessions are progressing.

Each morning, I draw the curtains back and encourage her to negotiate the room as a seeing person might. This I require her to practise again throughout the afternoon and early evening. 'For it is my plan,' I tell von Störck, 'that she should appear before the Empress with her vision restored. She will approach the pianoforte unaided, she will seat herself before it and then she will play one of her own compositions more beautifully than a seraph in the Temple of the Universal Creator.'

In the evening, I remove her to the mirror-lined room in my clinic, pulling the heavy curtains across the windows so that we are in a kind of half-light. Then my musicians begin to play two rooms away so that the sound comes sweetly to the ear, coaxing it into attention. And as I massage her temples, I try to summon the vital fluid back into her eyes. Around us, our reflections, ghostly Mesmers and Maries do likewise, fixed in the same position of doctor and patient.

'I believe,' I say to von Störck, 'that even after this short time, the fluids are already flowing in such a state of harmony that Marie's eyes have grown increasingly sensitive. It is becoming harder and harder for her to tolerate the light.'

'Yes?' says von Störck.

I continue, 'Beneath my hands, her eyes screw themselves into wrinkled pits. And then, of course, she insists it is the light hurting them and she asks for bandages.'

At this, von Störck nods. 'I've seen similar behaviour among Doctor Herr Bernhard's cataract patients after surgery,' he says, before adding, 'it's almost as if they don't wish to be cured!'

'And then, of course, when I refuse to supply Mademoiselle von Paradis with bandages, she puts her hands over her eyes,' I reply. 'So childish! I didn't think she

was like that!

'Mademoiselle von Paradis is not without a stubborn streak,' von Störck says now. 'Though the same might be said of all such sweet, clinging souls. After all, they do need a certain amount of will-power to sustain their symptoms.' And he explains how, despite his best efforts, his many courses of electrotherapy, he was never able to cure Marie of her affliction.

'I think,' I begin to say, 'you misunderstand the nature of her malady. A surgeon can cut open an abdomen and display the spleen. And muscles can be cut out and shown to young students, just as they were to me. But the human psyche, the mind, the soul, cannot be dissected - nor the brain's workings put out on the table to display.' My object is to waken what lies dormant, to probe down below the threshold of her consciousness and to discover the memories that must lie buried there.

'The soul!' says von Störck. 'I thought it was her *sight* you wanted to restore.'

'But it is her soul,' I say slowly, 'which has been enmeshed in darkness. And now the light is beginning to pierce that net. Which is why,' I say, 'I'm trying to push her into a crisis state.'

'Which is?'

'First I point my wand between her eyes then begin to massage her eye sockets.'

Von Störck raises an eyebrow.

'Her eyes require so much attention that it is there where I must concentrate my efforts,' I reply.

'But the crisis?'

'It develops quite slowly at first, in clearly observable stages. Initially there is that high, fine flush that stains her forehead, neck, and bosom.' Though, actually, I have noticed that flush appear at other times of excitement, for example, when she plays duets with young Wolfgangeryl. But during the crisis, her face reddens and she lowers her head. Her eyelids grow moist and her breathing comes short and fast.

Then her breasts rise and fall, as if she is trying, and failing, to force air into her lungs. 'Then,' I add quickly, 'the tremors commence and her limbs begin to twitch. This twitching spreads from arm-to-arm then leg-to-leg then across her entire body.'

'It must be quite a spectacle,' says von Störck, drily.

'Finally, she convulses in one great, awful spasm,' I say. 'Then, and only then, is she still.'

'But,' von Störck replies, 'are you convinced that this crisis state, as you call it, is entirely genuine?'

The trouble with seeds of doubt is that once they're planted, there's no eradicating them. They are there now as I walk back through the Prater and then through the streets of Landstrasse towards home. They are there even as Marie holds her hands out into space and I guide her towards the dining-table. She moves tentatively at first but her head is carried high and light, her face, uplifted. And then, seated at the table, she feels for her plate, her knife, her spoon, with lithe, curious movements, almost like a cat's, like our Soukeryl, kneading her bed.

Yet she remains silent. The only sound occurs when she touches her plate with her knife-point, quickly, delicately, before she cuts irregular pieces of meat.

And I begin to notice how she takes pleasure in this kind of contact between the knife and the meat. This kind of contact with the world of objects seems to make her happy. Because there is something richly positive about her face at this moment. Does she even want any kind of visual consciousness? Perhaps, as von Störck suggested, this blind, feeling state is enough for her. More than enough? Does she even *try* and remember what a dinner-plate looks like?

The moment she's finished eating, I say, 'We should go to my clinic now.'

At that, her head jerks up, startled, so that then I'm sorry I spoke so abruptly.

'What's your consulting room like?' she asks me, moments later, as I guide her towards a chair set back from my desk. And so I glance around, trying to find the right words that will create the right visual image in her mind.

'Well, there's pictures and mirrors on the wall – all a bit haphazard though, because the plaster's irregular,' I say, pleased by her interest in her surroundings. Then, very deliberately, I add, 'Still, I quite like that. I could sit and stare at it forever.'

Her mouth twitches. I know why she's surprised. She's told me that everyone around her avoids saying 'look' or 'stare' or 'see.' But I believe it's important to use the language of the sighted world with her if she's to become part of it.

'The floor is tiled, like a mosaic, isn't it?' she says, arching her foot, then drawing small circles on the ground, 'I can feel it through my slippers.'

'Yes. Tiny black-and-white tiles.'

'Like a chessboard,' she says.

'Do you know, my dear,' I say, 'Prince Lichtenstein holds chess tournaments where his guests all have to dress in black-and-white. When your eyes are better, I'll take you to one and you can see it for yourself.'

'When my eyes are better?' she repeats, sounding more surprised than hopeful.

'Yes Marie, I believe you can recover most, if not all of your sight.'

'Oh-, ' she says, then stops, begins to bite her lip.

'What's the matter, Marie?'

'Nothing,' she says, then adds, 'but you might have asked me first,' and then, all in a rush, 'you might have asked me first if that was what I wanted.'

'I won't do anything you don't want me to do,' I say. The words are out before I know what I mean. 'Now suppose you carry on telling me your story.'

Marie

My story, Doctor Franz? Well, now I was alone in the dark, down in the cellar. The smell of damp was rising to my nostrils.

'I'm sorry,' I called out. Then, more loudly, 'I'M SORRY. I won't do it again.' Because I knew that was why they wanted me shut up in the cellar. Not because Aaleigha caught us kissing in the cupboard, but because of what I did to the doll. Reisi.

'I promise I'll be good,' I hollered, 'I promise.'

Bad girl. BAD MUTZ!

I pressed my knees together. If I pressed them very hard, my mouth wouldn't open to scream.

But it didn't work. Because now the terror rising up inside me was strong, so strong, and then, too, there was something evil moving near me, above me. Something wicked, that wanted to hold onto me, and never, ever, let me go. To keep me here, wrapped in a cloak of darkness though I wanted to escape, Doctor Franz, back up the stairs and into my own bed.

Dark little heap on the floor of the cellar.

It wasn't Cerberus crying.

It was me.

I wanted to escape, Doctor Franz. I wanted to escape but I couldn't. I wanted to be sick but I couldn't. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot and my endurance broke down.

'MAMMA,' I screamed, 'MAMMA.'

And then everything stopped.

Suddenly, I'm tired of talking. My voice slows to a halt. I turn my head to the window to try and guess what time it is by the sun. By its warmth on my skin, pricking beneath it. By the sounds of the garden, the calls of the birds. And then the

next thing I feel is the smooth sheen of a piano case.

'You keep a piano in your clinic?'

'I believe music is good for my patients.' There's a *cccc-lllic-rrrind*, the sound of a key turning in the lock, and then another, heavier *cccli-ccckkk* as he flips back the lid.

'Wolfgangeryl told me this was the best one to buy,' Doctor Franz says eagerly, 'he likes the sound of the cloth-covered hammerheads. Do you want to try it?'

I flex my fingers and touch the keyboard. 'They're all different sizes,' I protest. 'Give me a moment to get used to them.' I press down on the keys and, in the sound that emerges, try to exorcise the remnants of previous players. Then I-

Fumble my way through bits of fugues then
Dart up-and-down
The scales.

Now my fingers are more limber,
I begin a Scarlatti piano sonata
In G-major.
Presto, quanto sia possibile –

So fast, so fast
It's as if I'm flying-
And then, even faster –
A Prelude and a Fugue
Why do I play so fast?

Except –
The music is there,
Deep down inside me
So that my heart beats-
Loud and fast –
Mastering me

And my hands -
My hands are shaking.
So-

I break off, place my hands against my flaming cheeks.

'Next time,' Doctor Franz says, 'you'll be more used to me and you'll play something slower.'

Marie

'Allow me to introduce you to the Old Man of Crete, my dear,' says Doctor Franz a few days later in his clinic.

I hold out my hand but it's the doctor who seizes it then laughs. His hand is warm beneath the metal of his solitaire.

'No,' says Doctor Franz. 'The Old Man of Crete is a statue. Here – feel,' and he starts to run my hands over something that is cool, jutting, bulbous, even dented in places. 'His head is made of gold, his arms and legs are brass. But his right foot – and this is why I keep him here, in my clinic, to teach me humility – his right foot is made of terracotta clay.'

Ohhhh – a sudden network of cracks, spreading out beneath my fingertips, makes them tingle, makes me feel dizzy. 'It's like the plaster-casts in Pompeii,' I say.

'He's wept for the sorrows of every human being,' continues Doctor Franz. 'That's why every part of him, except for the gold of his head, has been cracked by tears.'

My hands fly to the hollows of the statue's eyes but then sudden nausea sluices through my guts. 'The doll,' I say.

Doctor Franz touches my arm. 'Come on,' he says. 'We'll go into my consulting room and you can carry on telling me about it.'

I suppose he seizes the candelabra because a path of light opens out before us. 'No need for that,' I nearly tell him then don't. Because, at home, Mamma always blows out the candles when it's just me in the music-room, practising by myself. She isn't being deliberately cruel, it's just a necessary economy. So I never tell her how lonely it makes me feel, knowing I'm sitting there in the dark.

Inside the consulting room, I say, 'When I came to, Doctor Franz, down in the cellar, someone was shaking me.'

'Miss, Miss, are you ill? Such a dreadful, dreadful scream. I've never heard

anything like it.'

It was Aaleigha.

But why her, Doctor Franz?

Why not Mamma?

'Take me out of here! Let me go back upstairs,' I cried, clutching hold of her, pressing my face against her. But how had she managed to find her way down here without a lantern? And what were we both doing, sitting here in the dark?

Yes, you're right, Doctor Franz. That must have been when it all started.

'Are you ill, Miss? Are you hurt?' cried Aaleigha. She put her hand to my forehead, sighed over it and stroked my back. She made me blow my nose but then she let me cry. My tears, scalding hot and wet, ran down my face. I held onto her so tightly. It was better to cry into her lap than alone in the dark. Cry out the most terror I'd ever felt, gasp it out, with tears and howls and great, awful sighs.

(The wary, watchful evil outside this place or-inside this place, the dark, creeping thing waiting, waiting, for me to go out into the night. Something, someone shadowy and dreadful calling to me, threatening me and challenging me, the evil all around me, ordinary, everyday evil - hidden under the bed, crouching beside the chair, in the shadows, hovering, just hovering in the air.)

Finally I stopped, let Aaleigha wipe away the gummy muck of snot and tears then relaxed against her. I put my thumb in my mouth, and sucked at the sore patch where I'd bitten the skin away from the nail.

'Come on, bed-time,' Aaleigha said.

'Is it?' I said. 'Is that why it's so dark?'

'Don't be silly,' Aaleigha said, helping me up. My legs were stiff and it was difficult to stand up straight. 'Now come on, walk properly. One foot in front of the other. That's right.'

Somehow I stumbled my way back up the stairs and along the corridor, towards my own room. In the darkness, the sweet-sour stench of rotting apples seemed even stronger than usual. Yes, yes, I know, Doctor Franz. That's the smell of

scarlet fever.

Soon I was in my own bed. Though, when Aaleigha closed the door behind her, its sudden, inexorable click made my heart sink.

Outside, in the corridor, I heard her say, *'Mother, come and sleep with me tonight. I think it's better if there's two of us close to the poor child.'*

Slow tread of footsteps, the creak of floorboards, the *tap tap* of old Mother Liebhart's cane. I heard them ready themselves for bed in the room next to mine then they began whispering together. What were they saying? I listened out, as hard as I could.

'Maybe I didn't get her into the cellar quickly enough. Maybe she saw something – maybe she saw the -'

'Or else – maybe she saw something – down there...'

Yes, yes. I had seen it. I had seen what I shouldn't have seen, been to a place I shouldn't have been, stayed up too late, sat up too long. Now I stared out into the darkness of the night and nothing but the darkness stared back.

But at last they stopped whispering and slept, though I couldn't. So I shut my eyes and waited for the morning.

Marie

Today, you want me to tell you more about my family, Doctor Franz. Oh but why? Just because you think it will help? Well then, they are mostly good to me. What's that? What can I tell you about Papa?

Papa rises, picks out his clothes, has his hair dressed, rides out to the Prater and then to the Palace, has an audience with the Empress, makes a little trouble, works a little in his office, visits a coffee-house, sits down at a table, calls in on a few people, listens to a singer or two (not Mamma), eats his supper, perhaps spends an hour or two in the company of the Queen of Hearts or the Queen of Spades, returns home then goes to bed.

But you want to know more? What he likes and dislikes? Well, he likes wine and church festivals and games of billiards. He likes picnics in the country where he can pretend he's an Englishman, drink punch and wear a round hat. He likes Hot Cross buns, Advent sausages with vermouth, Easter ham, Sauerkraut and mussels. He likes playing the lottery in the hope of improving his finances – though he spends six gulden and wins forty-five kreuzer. When Mamma remonstrates (loudly), he tells her, Enough! He's won, hasn't he?

What doesn't he like? The National Theatre in the Leopoldstadt (too crowded), bad cooking and scandal.

And Mamma? Well, she's easier to tell you about. She likes the latest fashions of hooped skirts and false *erm*, posteriors. She likes pretty clothes and an *equipage*. Unhurried *toilette* after a long sleep. Singing, music, speaking French and pretending to be English (though she's half-Italian and wears thick Italian bracelets.) She likes gossip spiced with scandal, expensive presents, even from Papa, and military decorations on a man's waistcoat. And so yes, she was the one who decided my brother Malois should train to be a soldier, which he did before he went to court. And then she also likes any man who pretends to be a count or a baron: a man's man, you understand, one who wears boots and spurs and understands horses. And every

male hand wearing a diamond ring.

What doesn't she like? Oh, that's easy. A face without make-up, powder or rouge. And not being the most important person on the sofa. And well, there are other things too, things that make her sad, so that her face is wet when she kisses me good night, but, well, I'm in an agreeable mood and I don't want to talk about those things today, Doctor Franz.

What do I want to talk about? Oh, you mean *who* do I want to talk about? Johann? Yes of course, Johann.

What does Johann like? He likes syrup drizzled on *strudel* in the morning. He likes butter on bread that's just beginning to turn stale in the afternoon. In the taverns in the evenings, he likes apple schnapps so fiery it scalds the back of his throat. But he likes that, he says.

Johann would like to like the theatre and the opera but he never has much money. Sometimes he tries to imagine the plays he's read since he can't afford to see them performed. Then he takes out his sketchbook and the pencil he always chews and tries to draw them. Though often his sketches are unfinished, Doctor Franz. He says it's because his friend von Hohenberg once painted a bird so perfect, so realistic, that it came to life and flew away.

Which reminds me, Doctor Franz, of something Johann doesn't like. The aviary. The birds in my mother's aviary. There was every kind of bird there that ever was. Bluebirds and blackbirds, popinjays, peacocks and cockatoos. And Johann hated it. Just hated it, to see them caged there.

And so, Doctor Franz, one day, Johann set the caged birds free. And that, Doctor Franz, *that's* what I like about Johann.

Johann

'They'll soon want us out of here,' I say to my friend von Hohenberg.

'But we're not ready to go yet,' he replies, banging his tankard down on the tavern table. It sets the light of the candle flickering across his face. Now he is ruddy and ghostly at the same time. And *mein Gott*, can't he talk! '*Halt die Klappe*,' I want to say, but I know there's no stopping him. The wine and opium have set him off. That, and the branches of pine fixed to the wall. 'Because those new branches,' he says, 'mean we can have new wine.' He starts thumping his hand on the table in time to his own slurred version of '*Ei, du lieber Augustin.*'

But I'm only half-listening. Really, I'm thinking about the story of a land where, when its people are sad, they buy a caged bird and set it free, so that they can be both the deed and the soaring bird. That's what I did for Marie. I set the birds free.

'How is Marie?' von Hohenberg asks suddenly, 'have you heard from her?'

'Not really,' I say now, 'she promised to write but so far all I've had is a few lines.'

'She's probably busy,' von Hohenberg says.

'Yes,' I say, 'very busy, with her new life at Doctor Mesmer's. Did I tell you about when I first met him? It was last year. On the evening of Marie's seventeenth birthday.'

Yes, von Hohenberg, seventeen. Certainly, dressed in her garnet gown for the Opera, she was quite the young lady. She tottered on her heels and her hair was dressed so high it poked the roof of the carriage. Then too, my aunt's pearls shone at her neck. My eyes wandered. How low her bodice was cut! I wished (but also didn't wish) that her veil was longer or that Aunt Marisa, sitting beside her, would lend Marie her gold-thread shawl...

Horses' hooves clipped the warm dust. Carriage springs squeaked. The harness

clinked. Marie and I murmured to each other across waves of billowing silk. And then, yes, there it was, the Empress Maria Theresa's K K Theater an der Burg, golden in the torch-flames.

Our carriage set us down just outside it. My aunt hurried us all inside. Into the gilded interior with its red curtained boxes, its red curtains sweeping across the stage. We sat down and dust rose up. There. I brushed away some cobwebs from the velvet whilst a spider scuttled across the rim of our box. Then I leaned forwards, sneaked a look at the people in the box below. The man had captain's stripes across his sleeve. His head was bending over a girl sitting beside him. She had something red – a flower, a feather? – in her hair.

He glanced up, saw me and his eyes widened. He raised his arm, as if to wave. But instead, he began to pull his box's curtains shut. Why? Because he knew me. Who do you think it was? My cousin Malois. For the rest of the evening, I saw no more of him.

Ahead of us, the stage curtains rose on nymphs and shepherds. They were gathered around Euridice's tomb, bidding her farewell.

Beside me, Marie shivered in her seat as Amore began to sing:

'Orfeo -
Don't you know
Lovers, confused, trembling,
Are blind to those they truly love?
Don't you know,
Orfeo-
They cannot speak?'

Marie caught her breath, sighed deeply. I took her hand, held it tight. How strange, von Hohenberg, music had never, ever moved me like that before. Yearning and insistent, the oboe and the strings. And then, so that I could take the libretto in, feel it more deeply, I let Marie's hand drop.

Euridice couldn't understand
Her husband's disdain.
'Please, please, please

Look at me,
Embrace me.
Aren't I still beautiful?
My eyes.
You said you loved my eyes.
My love, aren't they still
the colour of the skies?
Or are they, am I,
faded for you?'

Now she covered her hair with grave-cloth -
Bowed her head and followed him,
At every step,
Convinced he no longer loved her.
At every step,
Retreating further into herself.

Orpheus could no longer bear her entreaties.

Che farò senza Euridice?

But Amore decided
That Orpheus
Should not kill himself
Should not join Euridice
In death but in life.
Re-united, the lovers sang
Their final refrain -
Their happy ending.

The curtain dropped.

Che farò senza Maria? Marie was sobbing. For Eurydice or Orpheus? For the lost music of the underworld? Or for the pain of the approaching light?

Afterwards, Aunt Marisa forced us all from our box and out into the lobby. Here, a surprising number of opera-goers had already assembled: the barons and baronesses weary with boredom, the monocled critics, the frivolous dandies, the aged dowagers with their elaborate bustles, too sore to sit still any longer. Then, too, came a babble of voices discussing carriages, the rain, their mutual friends. Male

voices were deriding the performance, comparing it unfavourably with other voices heard in other lands in other years. Female voices were mocking Marianna Bianchi's dress sense, though one lone voice praised Lucia Clavereau's costumes. And through all this throng, Aunt Marisa herded us forwards.

'Ah Marisa,' cried a stout dowager in an offensive puce-coloured satin dress, too tight across her chest. 'Opinion, please!'

Aunt Marisa froze in her track then turned to face her opponent.

'Sublime, as ever, sublime. But now, if you will excuse me, I want to -,' and she shoved us all forwards again, towards an alcove where the great Gluck was standing, surrounded by well-wishers. Yet he was mainly conversing with a tall, portly man wearing a dark cloak with a lilac lining.

'Ritter von Gluck,' Aunt Marisa blurted out, so that the green and gold embroidered shoulder of his frock-coat turned towards her and an eyeglass came into play. 'Here's your little Marie-Thérèse, all grown up,' my aunt continued. And she pulled my cousin forwards and pressed down hard on the small of her back, compelling her to curtsy.

'How delightful to see you both again,' said Ritter von Gluck with a smile of great sweetness, 'and looking so well, too. Speaking of which, please allow me to introduce you to my good friend, Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer.'

Marie held out her hand in confusion and the doctor took it and bowed over it. His diamond solitaire gleamed in the light of the cut-glass chandelier.

'Did you care for the opera, Mademoiselle von Paradis?' he said.

'Oh,' she replied, 'the singing went through me like -'

'Like one of Amore's arrows?'

'Oh, but it was beautiful,' she said, 'and yet, yes, the emotions, they were somehow *piercing*.'

'You must forgive my daughter,' Aunt Marisa said then, 'she's very tired.'

'No. no, I'm not,' said Marie.

'We've only just returned from her European tour today,' said Aunt Marisa,

adding quickly, 'where she was a great success.' That was for Ritter von Gluck's benefit, of course, but it was Doctor Mesmer who replied, 'Mademoiselle von Paradis must certainly have her rest.'

Aunt Marisa nodded, then she and Marie curtsied again and we left the gentlemen to the compliments of their well-wishers.

We all went to stand in the lobby, waiting for our carriage to arrive. Here, high above us, candles had been lit on the branches of the chandelier. How fragile they were, the coloured tulips in their stems of glass, 'lighting us with their smiles,' I said foolishly, to Marie. But it was worth playing the fool, von Hohenberg, for at that, she lifted her veil and showed me her own smile.

The veil fell, the moment passed.

But that night, after the opera, asleep in my old room at my aunt's house, I found myself being propelled along a dark corridor towards a blazing rectangle of light. In my dream, I could hear the sound of the piano, mingling with the sound of Marie's voice. She was singing one of Euridice's arias:

'Che fiero momento?

My heart trembles. A secret trouble agitates me.'

Her voice guided me forwards, out of darkness, into light, my sweet Orpheus, my Eurydice. My Marie. But just when I was about to reach the light, the singing and the music stopped. I felt myself being forced through a door and into silence. Silence and radiance, for there she stood, so radiant I could hardly see her.

My eyes slowly grew accustomed to the light. And then I realised, her eyes were no longer blind though still huge and expressionless as they locked onto my own. Then too, a slight, ambiguous smile played about her mouth. I felt myself being propelled towards her. Reaching her, I closed my eyes and my arms went round her. In my embrace, she seemed thin and slight, the young girl of the portrait I once painted. For a moment, I was reassured. But then, somehow, her form filled out and

her caresses grew suggestive, even knowing.

Now I felt a kind of panic. Her touch appealed to something dark in my being.
I reached forwards and began to -

Light broke through my chamber window and lifted me out of the night.

'What can I tell you, Doctor Franz?' I say the following morning as I cross the clinic in a dress so heavy, its drag at my legs unsteadies me. Then I sit by the window on the hard-backed chair, waiting for his reply. Because he doesn't seem to want to talk about Johann anymore.

Instead, he begins to tell me that music seeks harmony just as the human body seeks harmony. That all the planets circle above us in celestial harmony and that all the instruments in an orchestra likewise play together. Then, when the human body is in a state of peace and tranquillity, it too resounds with its own music. And so I imagine what such music might sound like, feel like, as I begin to speak.

Aaleigha led me from the cellar to my own bed and I suppose I must have fallen asleep. I thought I would see her again the following morning but after all, Doctor Franz, morning never came. When I woke up, it was still dark. But I could hear voices speaking so quietly, I knew they didn't want me to hear. Then I became aware that someone was handling me, lifting me up into a sitting position. I rested my head against an arm.

How to describe to you what happened next, Doctor Franz?

The sound of a sleeve, rubbing.

A feeling of movement, creating breeze across my face.

Then a sensation of heat, closer to my face.

And then, before I could work out what was happening, Mamma was screaming.,

'MARIIEE, MARRIEE!

'What's wrong, Mamma?'

'Blind, blind, my baby's blind.'

Then, after all, I did feel it, Doctor Franz. My heart, beating too fast. Her screams, tearing at me, making me want to scream, too.

Oh no, no, Doctor Franz, it was only the *noise* that scared me. I didn't really know what she meant.

Except that – it was so dark. Everything was dark. The rough blankets, the prickly lace at the edge of the pillow-case, the sheets, all tangled up in a ball at my feet – I – I could feel them, but I couldn't see them. Nor Mamma's face, nor her hands. Her hands, grabbing at my hands, her meaty wrists with the veins sticking out beneath her thick bracelets, her lined palms, her smooth fingers. I could feel them but I couldn't see them. I couldn't even tell whose arm was supporting my head.

'Mamma, Mamma, it's all gone,' I shouted.

Later, Doctor Franz, Aaleigha told me it was her arm.

'I knew something was wrong,' she said, 'because though your neck was all floppy, your head was a dead weight. And your eyes -,' she stopped.

'My eyes?'

'Your eyes,' Aaleigha said – poor Aaleigha! 'Your eyes,' she said, very rapidly, 'were wide open, but -.'

But what?

'And then your Mamma came into the room,' Aaleigha said, 'but you-.'

'Well, what?'

'You didn't blink,' said Aaleigha, 'so she waved her hand again, closer to your eyes.'

'And then what?'

'Well, Miss, you just sort of stared ahead.'

'Oh,' I said, 'and then?'

'Then, Miss, your poor mother grabbed a candle. She waved it right under your eyes,' Aaleigha said. 'But you,' she swallowed, 'you just kept on staring. And then -.'

'Mamma started screaming.'

'You remember that?'

I nodded. It had sounded like the end of the world. It sounded like what I now

knew the word *blind* meant.

You want to know what happened then, Doctor Franz? Nothing. Days and days of darkness followed. And then came other days that dropped clean out of my memory. They told me to forget and I forgot. Not because I was good but because I was frightened. My head felt light and distant, my shoulders were hunched in bed and my breathing came too fast.

'Marie didn't see what happened.'
'You didn't hear that, did you, Marie?'
'She doesn't know...'
'We'll forget -,'
'Yes, we'll forget...'
'...all about it.'

My body trembled beneath the blanket, as if it knew things I didn't.

I felt thin, too. I felt like I needed looking after. My legs were long and useless. My hipbones jutted into the mattress. And it was cold, even beneath the blanket. The wool scratched. And then, one afternoon, confined to bed, my sleeve caught against something. Then, suddenly, *Cccrrr-rr-aa-mm-pp-ll*. The pitcher must have been rolling around, somewhere on the floor. And now I was even colder and wet.

I tried to scramble out of bed but I was slow, so slow. My body felt too heavy for my legs and my feet ached with cold against the frozen floorboards. I shivered and began to edge my way towards the fire. Then, when I thought I was standing in front of the hearth, I pulled my nightdress over my head. I held it up in front of me but it wouldn't dry.

It wouldn't dry, Doctor Franz. So I stepped forwards, moved it closer to where it was hot. And then, yes, you're right, Doctor Franz, I must have laid my nightdress right on top of the -

The flames. They shot up through the nightdress.

'Fire. I'm on fire!'

Scatter of footsteps, then someone, Aaleigha, rushed past me, put out the fire

before it did any harm. Yes, I suppose you could put it like that, Doctor Franz. Aaleigha saved my life. I placed my hand on Aaleigha's arm (an invisible hand on an invisible sleeve) and then she walked me through the empty air of my chamber back to my bed.

You ask me what my Mamma did, after I nearly set myself alight? Well, what did Mamma ever do, back then? She cried. And then she put me to bed. Her bed, that is. She decided I would be safer there. Her great bedstead, made of oak. Sometimes I liked to touch its carved fruit and flowers, its huge bunches of grapes. But I didn't always like the great swathes of velvet that hung around it. The feel of it, its softness then roughness, made me uneasy. I stroked then didn't stroke it.

Before I lost my sight, I used to love the pictures on Mamma's walls, Doctor Franz. Goddesses, shepherdesses, that sort of thing. There'd been one that I particularly liked of a lady in a blue dress, with a bird in a cage hanging beside her. The feathers of this bird were the same shades of blue as her dress. Later, I even wrote a song about it.

The Boucher Girl

c.1767?

*They told me that the bird was blue,
I do not think they lie,
The highlights of its plumage,
Shall be my sea and sky.*

*They said we made a picture,
Blue dress, blue bird - bright bars,
The cage, the frame, they glittered
Brighter than the stars.*

*Yes, such a pretty songbird
Trilling in its cage
Like a song about a sunset
Printed on a page.
So I take my quill, begin to write-
Your song, my stars; my song, your flight.*

Yes. You're right. Afterwards, I often wondered, was it all still there, even if I couldn't see it? Afterwards, I ran my fingers over the paint, tried to touch the bird's feathers and the folds of her dress. But no. Nothing. When I took my fingers away, they were covered in dust from the grooves of the frames.

The curtains, too, smelt of dust.

In the cool, early morning, whilst the wind whooped and howled and the great windows rattled in their frames, Mamma woke up beside me and started screaming.

'Aaaaaaaaaaiiiiiiiiiirrrrrreeeeeeee.'

The blankets were wet, the sheets were wet, my nightdress was soaked through. Maybe I'd knocked the pitcher over again in the middle of the night? But Mamma's elongated vowels soon settled into words, 'Bad girl, bad girl, you've wet the bed!'

Yet, just as suddenly as it had started, the shouting stopped. Mamma gave a great sigh and then Aaleigha was there, tugging up my nightdress, sodden and sticking to me. The horrible thing plastered itself to my face, all acid and acrid and oh, the stench of it, and then Aaleigha yanked it free and lifted me into the bath tub. She hurled jug upon jug of water over me so that I gasped with the shock then began to shiver as the water turned cold. Finally, she lifted me out, wrapped a towel round me and rubbed me dry.

'I'm sorry,' I said as Aaleigha huffed over me.

'There's nothing to be sorry for,' Aaleigha responded gruffly, pummelling me so hard I wasn't entirely sure she meant it. Besides, I knew there *was* something to be sorry for. Because later, even the *sloooossh* and *claank* and *sllllllliide* of the metal tub being dragged out of the room couldn't hide the sound of Mamma sobbing somewhere down the corridor, '*It's all my fault, it's all my fault, my poor, innocent child.*'

Day after day, I lay in Mamma's bed, listening to the sound of her clock. It always sounded the same. *Tick, tick, tick* then the slow whirr and fall of cogs. Moment after

moment ticking by, moment after moment of endless afternoons.

Doctors? Well, it's true, Doctor Franz, sometimes from the far side of the room came the sound of strange men's voices. Doctors' voices.

'The problem is in the organ's function, not in its structure.'

'But how did she fare with the purgative draught I left for her?'

'Oh bad – very bad. They had to bleed her to save her from collapse.'

Whatever they said, it made me feel uneasy. Like the feel, and then the not-feel, of the velvet curtains.

Oh, don't get me started talking about doctors, Doctor Franz. Why? Because I don't want to insult your colleagues. Oh – I know you're not like that. But they – they didn't help me. They – they – I hated them. And then sometimes, Doctor Franz, anger would rise up inside me. Then I could feel it, spreading all the way down to my fingertips. Then it was more than I could bear. So I kicked and screamed, made a grab for everything, *smassshed* everything I touched. But that didn't help much either. Because now there was another word that the doctors were using more and more often. Not *Blind*. But, hateful, hateful word, *Hysterie*.

Oh, well, yes, of course, sometimes they said it about Mamma, weeping and babbling, 'Darkness, darkness, such torments, my poor innocent ba-.' Those long a-sounds, which would trail off into long o's, and then more long a-s.

And then, '*Völlig hysterische*,' the doctors said. Oh no, Doctor Franz, not about Mamma, about me. Yes, yes, I agree with you, they shouldn't label people like that. Well, women really, women and girls. I never heard a man described as *hysterische*. Though I suppose, sometimes I did cry, just like Mamma did, in just the same way. It was as if I'd caught my own feelings from her – like I might catch a cold.

And Mamma herself, well, Doctor Franz – one time, when I was crying like that, she – she – well, she lifted me right out of bed, and shook me till my teeth rattled.

'You've got to stop doing this, Marie. You've got to stop it NOW.' And I – I

didn't know if she meant the crying or – or – the blindness. Because then she clutched me in her arms and began to rock me, back-and-forth. And as I sobbed, she cried, 'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.' And then, 'My darling, my darling, my darling, I didn't mean it.' And then again, 'Really, I didn't mean it.' So why did she do it, Doctor Franz?

'Wake up, Miss! Wake up!' A whispered voice and hot light wavered across my face.

'Is there another fire?' I said.

'No, no, Miss, I've come to help you,' Aaleigha said and then I realised, it was the heat of her candle. She slid her hand across my back and began to ease me out of bed. 'Jump out for a minute, there, that's it,' and then came the *sliiiiiiide* of something heavy across the floor. 'Just squat down,' she said and then she held up my nightdress so that there was a draught across the back of my legs. She pushed something cold and solid against me: the chamber pot. Its rim nudged my thighs.

But oh, the pleasure as I abandoned control! The relief of it as the bursting bladder emptied itself and the hot, rich, sour urine *sppploosshed* against the sides of the chamber-pot. Relief and release, as if all the badness was rushing out of me. Because I knew I was bad, Doctor Franz. Why? Because of what Mamma said. Because I'd made her cry.

Besides, another time, when Aaleigha came for me in the night, I accidentally kicked the chamber-pot over. It went everywhere, over my nightdress, over the floor, over my bare feet. Aaleigha had to clean me up, change me and mop the floor. She did it patiently enough, only a few mutters and tuts, yet how my cheeks burned and burned.

'I'm sorry Aaleigha,' I said but this time she didn't tell me there was nothing to be sorry about.

It's funny though, Doctor Franz, because I remember, years later, when Aaleigha and I were in Ravello, she guided me across a stinking square where I could

hear the *clack-clack* of balls hitting skittles. Then down an alleyway and, 'Careful Marie,' she called out, hauling me away from the *slosssh-slittherrrr* of a chamber-pot tipped over a balcony.

One afternoon, towards the end of March, when I was nearly eight, I was up and dressed, sitting wrapped in a shawl by the hearth. Aaleigha had propped me up in my rocking-chair, that was just my shape and size, that Malois had sent home from court. She only let me sit in it if my hands and feet were clean. Its back was knobbly with fish and leaves and other shapes I couldn't quite make out.

Then too, I was close but not *too* close to the heat. Yet I felt weak and wretched enough, so wretched that I wanted to cry, although just now, the tears wouldn't come.

When I lifted my hands to my face, they were shaking slightly. And I began to worry, what if the shaking spread, to my arms, to my legs?

To distract myself, I kept peering out, trying to see. Over there, in the far corner, wasn't that where Mamma kept her dressing-table, her jewellery-box, her pots of rouge, the glass jar with the intricate stoppers and her smelling salts?

I stared and stared but all I could make out was darkness. And then came the sound of footsteps. Light footsteps. Someone had entered the room. Aaleigha? Aaleigha? Over there? But I couldn't see what was happening. Over there, by herself, busy, and not with me? *Clatter, rattle, something heavy put down in a hurry, sudden ring then the reverberation.* It made me wonder, Doctor Franz, what on earth was she doing?

'Aaleigha? What are you doing, Aaleigha?'

'Putting things away, tidying drawers, keeping an eye on you, Missie.' After a moment she added, 'I found this in the music-room.' She placed it on my lap, something heavy, and oh! What felt like real hair. And something *smooth, then gritty*, then some sort of silky material.

'What is it?' I said.

'It's your doll,' Aaleigha replied.

I snatched my hand away.

'Get it off! Get it off me!' I said, wiping my fingers over and over on my sleeve, as though I'd touched a dead creature, or, worse than that, something only half-dead, that might at any moment be coming back to life.

Yes, yes, you're right, Doctor Franz. I wasn't a child to be playing with dolls. But Aaleigha said, 'For shame, Miss, a gift from your own dear sister. If I were you, I'd cherish it as a sort of - keepsake.'

'Where is Liesl?' I said, 'why doesn't she come and visit me?' After all, I visited *her* when *she* was sick.

'Oh, Miss, that's not – likely – now. The – the Empress has sent her to a foreign court to play, to – to Italy, I believe.'

Italy? Oh yes, I knew where it was because sometimes Aaleigha would hand me my globe, still spinning. And then I poked at it again and again with my thumb and she called out the names of places where it landed: London, Paris, Prague, St. Petersburg. And then I tried to guess the different colours of those places. But when my thumb reached Naples, I stopped poking. Because Italy, where my mother's family was from, was right on the edge of the globe. I used to hope it didn't fall off.

But now I wasn't sure I *did* believe Aaleigha, Doctor Franz. There was something in her voice that didn't sound true. I could hear it more now that I couldn't see her face.

'We'll forget -'

'Yes, we'll forget...'

'...all about it.'

'Oh,' I said, wriggling to try and ease the sudden ache in my heart.

'Come now, Miss, there's no need to fret,' Aaleigha said, 'shall I tell you a story? 'East of the Sun and West of the Moon'?'

I shook my head, asked for the Little Mermaid instead. Only now, when she read it, it all seemed wrong. You want to know how, Doctor Franz? Well, the little

mermaid would never become a flesh-and-blood girl, downstairs in the drawing-room. She would have to stay where she was, beneath the sea, swimming in caves and underwater pools.

'Oh Miss, don't cry,' Aaleigha said. But she might as well have told the fire, 'Don't burn.' Because now the tears had come. No sooner had I wiped one tear from my cheek then another one followed. Trembling and clammy, I cried and cried, gasped and choked, couldn't stop. And this time, Aaleigha couldn't comfort me. So, in the end, she went to fetch Mamma. But whilst it was fine for me to dribble and sob into Aaleigha's apron, Mamma told me that on no account was I to cry onto her freshly-powdered face. Besides, she said briskly, she could only stay with me for a short while.

Oh no, Doctor Franz, she didn't mean to be unkind. That was just her way. If I sometimes caught my crying from her, she herself had no intention of being infected with my sadness. Especially not, she said, when Malois was taking part in a concert at the Imperial Castle that evening and she was going to attend.

I was so surprised, I stopped crying at once. The Imperial Castle!

Yes, I recollected it from before, or else, I somehow knew about it or had been told. There was Mamma, passing through its iron gates. She walked past the ranks of fifty moustachioed soldiers with bayonets and bearskin hats. Her face masked, her heart pounding, her bracelets jangling, she made her way into the entrance hall, then climbed a flight of stairs, up, up, up, then along passages and round the sudden twist of a corridor. Then, suddenly, she burst into a lighted room. It was lit by thousands of wax candles, reflecting in crystal chandeliers and rows and rows of candelabras dazzling the eye. At her entrance came the fanfare of trumpets and drums. The concert was ready to begin – but was Mamma there in her finest dress to listen or to sing?

Ssss-ss---Ill-aaa. That was the rustle of her silk.

C-cc-c-cr-eak. Those were the protesting doors of her clothes press. Sometimes I wanted to climb inside it, press my face against her dresses: the slither of satin and

the rasp of wool. Then, too, I wanted the sweet-sour musty smell of her that lingered there in the unwashed dresses, beneath the whiff of smoke and tallow candles. The smell of her, taking me home, taking me back to the beginning, before all this had started.

Then, from over on the other side of the room, *Tssccccch-hhh-hh* and oh! The sudden scent of her perfume, a genie released from its bottle, *eau de cologne*, scented with apricots. Full and ripe, but you weren't sure you could touch them in case they bruised.

The fragrance came closer and closer then wrapped its arms round me. It made my eyes smart, caught in my throat so that I couldn't swallow.

'Before I go, my darling,' Mamma said, 'would you like me to tell you the story about Bad Gastein again?'

What did you just say, Doctor Franz? '*Capricious?*' Well, yes, I suppose she could be.

But I nodded and said to her, 'Not the one about the wounded deer and the hunters. The one about you and Aunt Marianne.'

'That's the one I meant,' said Mamma.

Her hand was cold against my forehead, surprisingly so. And when she tucked a strand of hair behind my ear, her bracelets and fingernails scratched me. She said, 'Your Aunt Marianne was always sickly after she married a doctor. And then, in the village of St. Johann, just outside the spa town, her health suddenly grew worse.'

'Poor Aunt Marianne,' I said on cue, such a good little girl as I was, Doctor Franz!

Mamma continued, 'Not because she'd eaten too much rainbow trout. Not indigestion at all. But because the thing that slopped and slithered wasn't a fish. It was a little -'

'Baby,' I whispered, though sometimes when she told me this story, I shouted it out. Johann swimming out into the world to meet us, all bloody and slimy and the midwife smacked his bottom and wiped him clean.

'And the midwife took such great care of Marianne, I brought her home with me to help look after Malois and Liesl,' Mamma said.

'And Aaleigha,' I said.

'Well, of course the midwife brought her own dear daughter with her,' Mamma said.

'And Johann,' I wanted to add, because right at that moment, there in my chair by the hearth, oh, how I missed him, I missed him – though I knew that Johann didn't come to live with us until many years after this story. After his own mother had died. But I didn't want to think about that, Aunt Marianne dying and poor, little, motherless Johann. No, no, no.

Because my Mamma was happy now, I could tell. For the first time in weeks, the fluting note was back in her voice. And after she'd kissed me goodbye, I heard her singing again in the corridor, *'The holly bears a berry.'*

I found my way to the bed, surprised by how easy it had suddenly become. Then I lay back against the pillows, and took in a deep breath, wondering if it was possible to breathe in Mamma's happiness with the scent of her perfume. Because, just at that moment, Doctor Franz, I wanted to be exactly like Mamma – Mamma when she was happy. I wanted to sound like her, sing like her – or, perhaps even, play the pianoforte, like her – and Liesl. I buried my face into Mamma's pillow, dribbled into her smell, whilst outside the wind and rain beat and beat, like a heart against the window-pane.

Marie

After Mamma had gone to the Imperial Castle, Doctor Franz, I suppose I fell asleep. But later, a rush of air woke me. Someone had drawn back the bed's curtains.

'Johann?'

'Your brother Malois is here, Miss,' Aaleigha said, her voice as soft as a feather-pillow. 'He travelled back with your Mamma from the Castle.'

'It's very cold in here, Aaleigha,' said a male voice, warm and mellow like a violin. 'Can't you stir up the fire a bit?'

'Your mother's afraid to let it blaze out when she's by herself,' Aaleigha replied. But soon -

Kcc-ee-erash
Then rrr-rr-aking out the cinders
Clatter and kindling
In the grate-
Wood against wood-
Spurts and sparks
Stirrrr and roooooaarr of flames.

The door shut. Aaleigha's footsteps sounded down the corridor as the milky coldness of the room began to melt. Little prickles of heat nipped at my skin. My nightdress tented the heat and sweat ran down my sides.

'Malois?' I said.

'Hey Marie,' he said. Slight breeze again from the flapping curtains and then the mattress sank beneath his weight. But was it *really* Malois, Doctor Franz? Because going to court had made him sound different, less like a soldier. Now there were rich tapestries in his voice, books and jewels and fur.

'I can't see you,' I said, starting to panic. Couldn't see his bright red hair. Couldn't see whether he still looked like his twin, Liesl, except for the fleck of brown in his blue eyes.

'No – but I can see you,' he replied. And then, the pounce of his fingers. He started to tickle me: rack of ribs, flesh, fingers, fingers, flesh, rack of ribs. But I had

no idea where the tickling was coming from. I couldn't breathe. My stomach was taut and tight with laughter. Aching and shivering, I squealed out,

'Stop it – stop it!' then gasped for breath.

Now my chest hurt. My face hurt. I started to wriggle. I wanted it to stop. I didn't want it to stop. I tried to get away. But I didn't want to get away. I was a stick, a ball. I was rolling round the bed.

At last, Malois did stop. 'There, you're smiling, that's better,' he said and took my hand. The mantle of his sleeve brushed against my wrist. But his hand felt solid enough, long and lean.

'It's a bit of a mess in here, isn't it?' Malois added unexpectedly, 'Mamma's clothes strewn about everywhere and your pills and potions all over the place.'

'Are they?' I said.

'Yes,' said Malois. 'Whatever can Aaleigha be thinking of?'

'It's not her fault,' I said. 'You know what Mamma's like when she's getting ready to go out.'

'All the same,' said Malois, 'everything ought to be kept tidy for you, kept in order so that you always know where to find it.'

What's that, Doctor Franz? Oh yes, I suppose it does help to create a sort of mind memory map if everything is kept in the same place.

'Should it?' I said to Malois now.

'Well, of course,' he replied. 'Otherwise, how can you stand it? Marie,' he continued, gripping my hand more firmly.

'What?'

'What do you *do* all day, Marie?'

'Well,' I said, 'when she's got time, Aaleigha reads to me. And she's promised to teach me lace-making.'

'Lace-making!'

'And knitting.'

'Knitting! Do you care about knitting? Wouldn't you like to go horse-riding

with me like you used to do?'

I shook my head. 'I like it here.'

'Do you?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, don't you remember how you used to play out in the garden? Don't you want to go outside again? Because you know you're not sick anymore, you're blind.'

There. That word again.

'You're hurting my hand,' I said.

'I'm sorry, Marie,' he said, dropping my fingers. 'It's just all this makes me angry. Why aren't you angry, too?'

'But I have been,' I said. I told him about the rage and hatred that boiled up inside me, about screaming and shouting and breaking things. I told him about all the doctors I murdered in my dreams. I almost told him about the doll, only something stopped me.

'Oh, I don't mean that sort of anger,' Malois said, 'that's too like Mamma. You know what she's like, how she frets till she can't cope. What I mean is, the kind of anger that makes you want to change things, ask for things.'

'What sort of things?'

'Well, for someone to teach you to read, for instance.'

'But how can I, like this?'

'Well,' said Malois, 'we could cut letters out for you. You were getting on so well with your reading before. And there's someone I know at court. Herr von Kempelen, an Inventor. He could rig you up a sort of writing machine. And Marie,' he paused.

'What?'

'Tomorrow, one thing's for certain: you're going to leave this room.'

No-oooo-ooo. That wasn't what I wanted at all, Doctor Franz. I wanted to stay safe in bed, with Mamma beside me, safe, forever. But I knew Malois wouldn't like it

if I said that, so I kept quiet.

The door shut. Malois stomped away down the corridor. Now I twisted the corner of my pillow-case into a tight spiral then began to drag it across my face. Without Mamma, this bed was too big for me. Invisible walls towered over me; shadows merged then fell apart. Even the ceiling was lost in darkness. Or perhaps – there wasn't even any ceiling any more.

Yes, I really did think that, Doctor Franz. Because it was too dark to know. Though I always know when it's night. How? Well, because the air grows colder. My skin feels clammy and my awareness of light disappears. In fact, at night, I feel more blind than ever, Doctor Franz. Sometimes I welcome it. But at other times it frightened me. When that happened, I used to beg them not to blow out the candle. The stump of candle that kept the shadow-demons at bay. No, don't laugh, Doctor Franz. That was really how I felt. And then there was that nursery song that Aaleigha used to sing:

*Quick, quick, say your prayers.
Blow out the candle and climb the stairs.
Who will come and kiss you good night?
Close your eyes! Keep them shut tight!*

*In-and-out-and-round-and-round-
Lie down, stay on the ground-*

*In-and-out and round-and-round-
He's creeping up without a sound.*

*It could be him, it could be me-
But which one will it be-*

*In-and-out and round-and-round,
Don't move, stay on the ground-*

*In-and-out and round-and-round,
Open your eyes, 'cause you've been found.*

It made me wonder, Doctor Franz, what if – what if someone did creep up behind me? What if the Sandman himself came, to drop heavy grains of sand onto my eyelids? He would scrape them up from the cellar floor and throw them into my

eyes. Then my eyes would fall out of my head, all bleeding.

The blood trickled down my face but the Sandman didn't care. He just threw my eyes into his bag, so that he could take them up to the moon as food for his children. Then he dragged me back to his nest and fed me, bit-by-bit, into his infants' sharp beaks.

The clock *tick-ed* in the shadows over the door. Now I wanted to lay myself out flat – flat as a sheet – and try and stop myself from breathing and my hands from shaking. I wanted to stop feeling so scared, Doctor Franz but I didn't know how.

Instead, I shook my hair out of my eyes, lifted my head and tried to look round. And there in the darkness came a sudden gleam of light. Yes, I thought it was that too, Doctor Franz, a ray of moonlight piercing some chink in the shutters. But it wasn't. Because moonlight is still and this stirred. It glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head.

No. No, it wasn't a gleam from a lantern, carried by someone across the lawn. How do I know? I just do. Because as I began to listen out, to strain every nerve, I could hear a faint *ru-ssstl-ling* sound. As if someone was tossing and turning in bed beside me. Rolling over, then sighing and groaning. And then I heard her call out, '*Marie-eee-e.*'

'Liesl?' I said, turning my face towards the sound of her voice. But her only reply was '*Hussssssh!*' and then the *ssssshhhhh-hhh-hh* grew fainter and fainter until it disappeared. But then from somewhere outside, along the corridor, came the sound of other, familiar voices.

'It's no life for anyone, Aaleigha.'

'I know, sir. Poor little mite. But your mother's frightened something will happen to her.'

'But that's just what she needs – something to happen to her.'

Ah! I was suddenly convinced, Doctor Franz, that now Malois was here, everything

was starting to change and would keep on changing. The ghost disappeared and the splatter of rain ceased against the window-pane. Even the wind died down so that the night grew peaceful and still.

I didn't wake until Mamma slipped into bed beside me. But I knew I mustn't thrash about and disturb her. I must lie still and let her sleep. You think I was a big girl still to be sleeping with my Mamma? Perhaps I was. I was nearly eight. But since I'd lost my sight, I'd been so little and helpless again. Besides, when I felt Mamma's breath on me, I liked to burrow beneath the blanket and bury my face in her neck. As she stirred, I would try to identify the different scents of her. She smelled of herself, something earthy and sweet, like newly turned soil and freshly bedded roses, and of something sharper too, as if a cat had pissed on the flowerbed, or perhaps it was just the after-scent of her cologne.

When I woke up in the morning, I never touched her, though I always wanted to. Instead, I'd trained myself to wake before she did. And then I liked to take my hand out from under the blanket and into the chilly air of the bedchamber. From the way her body was curled up beside me, I would guess at the outline of her face. Though I sometimes had a strong desire to kiss her, I didn't even touch her, just let my hand feel the warmth coming off her. It was that time in the morning, before she was even awake, that I felt closest to her.

Warmth: the April sun splashed in through the window. And after a breakfast of milk and bread and honey, Malois guided me towards the back door. He opened it and then I reached out, grasping for the wrought-iron rail. But it was hot, Doctor Franz, not cold. And Malois said that when we reached the bottom step, the handrail curved like a question mark. I suppose I must have looked puzzled because Malois laughed.

'Tell me now,' he said, a few moments later, 'where are we?'

'We're in the garden.'

'Oh, you're such a clever little girl. But exactly which part of the garden?'

'We're near the stream.'

'Stream? Do you hear a stream?'

I nodded, vigorously.

'I don't. Try again.'

'We're beside the sundial?'

'You're guessing, Marie.' (It's true, Doctor Franz, I was.) 'But you're right,' Malois continued, 'and at the bottom of the sundial, there's a cluster of globe flowers. There's about twenty of them, all huddled together in one bed. They are – what – about seven inches tall, spangled blue and gold. Touch them.'

And before I could protest, he grasped my ankles and tipped me upside-down. The sky jumped to the ground and the dark ground jumped into the sky. And *that* was when I saw stars, Doctor Franz. As I flew through the air, there were streaks of light, flashes of light, and stars.

You'd call it the *vestiges of visual awareness*? Well yes, perhaps you're right. Anyway, when I stopped feeling giddy, I started counting the globe-flowers with my fingertips. There were nineteen, not twenty. I began to stroke them, half afraid of their velvety petals, their sticky stems.

'Now Marie,' Malois said, turning me right side up again, 'your eyes are your hands. Tell me what you saw.'

'Globe flowers.'

'How many globe flowers did you see?'

'Nineteen.'

'Excellent. And what shape is their bed?'

'It's a circle.'

'Wonderful. You *are* a clever girl.' And to have it got it right for him, to hear the pleasure in his voice, made my heart leap up-and-down.

'The Empress's favourites are cornflowers,' said Malois, 'but I prefer the blue-eyed daisy. I know you can't see them, Marie, but they have beautiful blue eyes, just

like you and Liesl.'

Oh. That was the first time he'd mentioned his twin. But before, we used to joke they were so close, so alike, that each could have used the other for a mirror.

'You could ask for a little patch of garden,' Malois added, 'and then you could grow some for me.'

Liesl – I tried to stop thinking about Liesl. I said, 'But how would I know the difference between a flower and a weed?'

'You could ask Aaleigha to help you. Or Johann.'

Johann. Johann. Johann. But just for now, out here with Malois, I was free, *freeeeeeeee* of Johann, free even of myself. The scent of flowers was all around us, globe flowers, tulips, daffodils and something headier, more intoxicating – could it be jasmine?

A smooth-shelled insect crawled across my palm. '*Hehehehehhe*.' Its feet were ticklish and made me squirm. 'What is it?'

'A ladybird,' Malois replied. His shadow crossed my face so that I guessed he'd moved closer to me. 'And she has three, four, *five* black spots. One for each of her children. But there, she's gone now. Flown away home.'

From overhead came the *tee-whit, tee-whit* of a bird. And beside us, the *hummm* of a cloud of insects. They followed us over the stream's little wooden bridge. Our feet *ccc-ccl-clattered* against its slats. Before, when I could see, I'd been afraid of their gaps, afraid I might fall through them, into the water. But not anymore. Now, out here in the darkness and sunlight, I felt as if I could never be frightened again, Doctor Franz.

We sat down in the herb garden, shaded by a linden tree. Oh, you have a herb garden too, Doctor Franz? Then I believe it will be one of my favourite places whilst I'm here. Anyway, Malois broke off some of the nearest plant and gave it to me. I sniffed it.

'What is it, Marie?' he said.

'Is it – is it mint?' I said. A deep, clean smell. Then he pressed a few leaves from

another plant into my palm. I drew them along my cheek then placed them against my lips. Half-pliant, half-coarse. I bit off a piece. It was thyme but so strong, it made me dizzy, sending a rush of blood to my head.

Malois left me there for a moment whilst he went to unclog the fountain. Soon I could hear its trickle against the basin, *cchhcch-ccchchh-chhchh*, something like the chink of coins against stone.

'Come over here and feel the water,' he called out.

'Noooo,' I called back, 'the light is too bright over there. It will hurt my eyes.'

All at once, Malois was there, back at my side.

'Marie, you can tell the difference between light and dark?' he asked. 'Do the doctors know?'

I shrugged. 'I don't know what they know. Anyway, I don't care about them.' I began to pick at some thyme, caught between my teeth.

Overhead came the sound of the bird again. Perhaps it was calling to its mate, those long, fluting notes and then short, staccato cries.

I stopped picking at my teeth.

'Malois, I want to ask you something.'

'What is it, Marie?' And then, when I didn't say anything, 'What is it that you want?'

'Malois,' I said again, as the bird's song faded away, 'will you teach me to play the pianoforte?'

A muslin dress, a French collar round my neck. I waited for Malois in the corner of the music-room, like any pupil might wait for her teacher. Which I was. Which he was. Now was the time.

The First Music Lesson

*'This is your hand.
One day, each of your fingers,
Will take part in a hand ballet.
There will be complex interactions between fingers,
From hand to hand.
You will navigate the maze of piano keys.
But for now, you can use your dominant finger.
For now, you can play with your index finger.'*

Malois took my index finger, walked it across the keys,
then made it press down -
A note.

Laaaaaaaa-aaaaaaaaaaaaa-hhhh

'The note is called Middle C.'

He took his hand away.

'Can you find the note by yourself?'

But his voice sounded like he was playing.
So I smashed my hands down on the keys.

*'Oh no! You have to play just that single note.
It's the most special note in the world.'*

So I did.
I picked my way across the keys
Until I found it.
I played Middle C.

*'That is note number one.
Give me your index finger again.
Don't worry if you play a wrong note.
Everyone plays wrong notes.'*

But I didn't.
I didn't.

'Now play four times on each of the twelve keys.'

*1111 2222 3333 4444 etc.
Don't worry about finding a rhythm.'*

But I did.
I did.

*'Now I'm going to play what we call
glissandi
Up-and-down the piano.
Which side goes up?'*

To the right

'Which side goes down?'

To the left.

Then I played.

'And now play the top key.'

'And now the lowest key.'

'And now play all twelve notes together.'

*'Marie, you play better than I do!
But if you're so clever, what was the name
Of the first note we played?'*

And I couldn't remember.

*'Is it called Antonia,
Amalia,
Carolina,
Christina or
Elisabete?'*

Carolina reminded me.
Carolina was 'Middle C.'

'The note C is always to the left of the two black keys.'

'The black keys?'

'The short keys.'

He placed my hand on the short keys.
I made them make a sound.
And it was easy,
All so very, very easy,
And as if –
I understood it completely.

And that was the end of my first music lesson.

*'The point of a first piano lesson
Is to make you want to have a second piano lesson.'*

Now I smiled
Because my hands had begun to dance.

Though music staved and stuck to the page was not something I could ever see or know.

'They look like poppy-head seeds with sticks and legs,' Malois said, 'or else hairclips and sleeping chair-rests.'

'But how can they be music?' I said.

'They just are,' said Malois. 'In our house, we've always had music,' he added, so that I imagined it strewn on tables, piled in corners, scattered on the music-stand. Semi-quavers that ran all the way up the stairs or the jewelled swirling bracelets of stave brackets, the arcs and bows of phrasings, time signatures, ribbons of sharps, flats and naturals. This was the music of our home.

'Music is better than the alphabet, isn't it?' I said.

'Yes,' said Malois. 'Which is why Lessons, Practice, the Study of Theory, are all so necessary.' And then he began to play for me. Not Salieri or Gluck; he played his own compositions. Simple but effective. 'These same half-melodies are designed for discipline,' he said. 'Training.' His fourth finger stuck, then started again, staccato next time, contrary motion, sliding between major and minor.

'Patience, Practice, Endurance,' he said as his little G minor triplet passage ran into the distance, then back, then forth. And from across the corridor drifted the

sound of Mamma's singing:

*'As the holly groweth green
And never changes hue
So I am, and ever hath been
Unto my lady true.'*

He begins by locating the sore, sensitive areas on my scalp with his fingers. Like little bruises and *ouccch*, they're so tender where he kneads them. He's making everything worse! But then, just when I think I can't bear it anymore, he slides his fingers down and starts to press behind my earlobes. Pop! Pop! My ears are unblocked. Then he cups his hands over my ears so that I hear a rushing sound. I can hear the sound of his hands!

Now he curves his fingers round and begins to stroke my forehead. Can he plant his ideas in my mind like this? He draws circles with his thumbs round my eyes, over-and-over. Is he drawing pictures for my eyes? Is this how he intends to make me see?

He presses round my eyes, harder and harder, so that my head begins to tilt back. Now my head feels so heavy, my body can't bear its weight. My legs and arms begin to twitch then the twitching becomes convulsive. I start to shake. Then comes something, not quite a breeze and then a sensation of heat across the bridge of my nose.

'Your eyes followed the candle,' says Doctor Franz, 'they're still capable of responding to light. So -'

'So?'

'Like I said before, it's only a darkness of the mind that keeps them separated from the flame.'

He takes hold of my hands, helps me lie down on the chaise-longue. Then I wriggle round, somehow manage to turn myself over so that I'm lying face down, snuffling up dust, my face scratched by bristles of embroidery.

'*Aieeeeeeeeeee*.' Doctor Franz is palpating the rows of tiny knuckles on either side of my spine.

'I'm sorry,' he says, 'I don't mean to hurt you. But you're particularly sensitive to the movement of the fluid.' Then, a moment later, 'Marie, do try and keep still.'

Then, when he's finished, I turn over and rest. Is it true, what he told me, that my eyes are still alive? Just like it's true that the world is still there, even if I can't see it?

When I first lost my sight, I had a longing to know what the world *felt* like. Not just with my fingertips but by cramming it into my mouth: *buttons, shells, the tip of a paint-brush, (metallic, salty, sweet)*. When Johann saw what I was doing, he began to bring me things to taste: *toy soldiers, a florin, a marble, (lead, metallic, glassy, smooth.)* And then Johann said, 'Why don't we taste tongues?' And so I stuck out mine and he licked it. And his tasted – well, just sort of slobbery and wet. I didn't like it. And mine, well, he said mine was sharp and fruity, like blackcurrant. He said he did like it.

Yes, Doctor Franz, memories do rise up suddenly. Another memory from before, of Mamma – and of not wanting a doctor to come near me. Not to touch my face. Not to, not to. And not just because of his cold, bony hands (doctors' hands were always cold and bony.) But worse even than that. Worse than him touching me would be the leeches. The feel of them. Would they *crawl* all over my face? Would they *suck* me?

My hands flew upwards, covered my eyes.

'No,' said the doctor. 'Don't touch your face.' Then came a cold instrument behind my ear and then, 'I want to apply the leeches now.'

Was there, oh was there a watery spiral of blood swimming up, swimming all the way up through me to my head? Then the doctor's hands turned my head right round to repeat the process on the other side. And oh! The feel of them. The slurp and suck of them beneath my eyes. How much blood were they taking?

'I said, don't touch your face, Fräulein. Let the leeches do their work.'

But it was no good. No good at all. I wanted to be sick. I wanted -

And then came a scream from the other side of the room. A scream so heart-piercing it could only be from Mamma. And a thud that went right through me

though it didn't touch me.

'Your mother has fainted, Fräulein,' said the doctor, coolly. But someone, Aaleigha, must have tried to revive her, Doctor Franz, because soon I could hear *rustlliiings* and *unlacingggs*, *a few slapppps* and then the scent of her smelling salts drifted towards me. Smelling salts and something stronger, more acrid, like coffee and tanning leather but also sweet, like rotting apples. That's the scent of fear, isn't it, Doctor Franz?

Me? All the while I just stood there, glued to the spot, with the leeches still stuck to my cheeks. 'Like black tears,' Aaleigha said afterwards.

And from Mamma herself, sobs and whimpers. 'I th-th-ought it was your eyes,' she stammered, 'I th-thought it was your eyes, t-tr-ri-i-i-ickling down your face.' Then her arms went round me, squeezing the air right out of my body. What was she trying to do, Doctor Franz, *force* me to see?

I want different words, a different story.

My first book. I could not see the words, letters, notes. But there was the peppery smell of the pages. Sometimes when I slept, I thought I could read the words. Sometimes when I slept, I could hear Malois's deep, rich voice repeating them over-and-over:

Reckoning a Crotchet Rest
The PAUSE
A Continuation of Silence
then more silence -.

But can we talk about something else now, Doctor Franz? What do I want to talk about? Oh, I don't know, anything you like. Music, perhaps. When are you going to play the glass harmonica for me? Perhaps you could give me a lesson? Oh. Oh well.

Malois carried on teaching me to play the piano. Piano lesson after piano

lesson, day after day and soon it was summer. Then, outside in the garden, in the scorching heat, Malois began to teach me to read. I'd already learned my letters, of course. Before. Before I lost my sight. But that was the problem, Doctor Franz. I'd known what the letters looked like but now I couldn't see their shapes. Now I'd have to start all over again, from the very beginning.

I stuck out my hand.

'Run your fingers over this piece of parchment,' Malois said, 'what can you feel?'

I concentrated very hard.

'Little roughnesses,' I said, 'starting low, then slanting upwards.'



'Yes, but more than that,' said Malois, 'try again, Marie.'



'It runs down again,' I said, 'like the roof of a house.'

'Yes, but there's more,' said Malois, 'keep concentrating, Marie.'

M

'Up-down, up-down, like a mountain path.'

'Or like a range of mountains, yes,' said Malois. 'But it's an M, Marie. M for the first letter of your name. And what's next to it?'

I ran my fingers over the parchment's pinpricks.

MA

'Another rooftop? Another mountain?'

'It's the letter A,' said Malois. 'The second letter of your name. Or rather, the first letter of the alphabet.'

I sang the note I knew was A. *Laaaaaaaaa*, then *aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa*. Now I wanted to find Mamma, put my hands on her throat, touch her lips and tongue. I wanted to feel the way her throat vibrated when *she* made the sound *aaaaaa*.

'Yes, but that's not what I meant,' said Malois, 'I meant the letter A, not the note A. A for Archduchess.'

A-a-a-a-a-aié I sang. The letter, not the note.

Then-

'M.A.M.M.A

That's Mamma.'

'Yes,' said Malois, 'very good. But that's a word you know already. And it's not *MAMMA* spelled out on the parchment. What do you think it is?'

A note. A line. Like long-and-short piano keys. But it wasn't music that Malois was trying to teach me. Not today. It was letters. And so-

'MARIE,' I said.

'Oh, you're so clever,' Malois replied.

Oh. So the pinpricks beneath my fingers were letters and letters were shapes. Shapes I could feel. I knew what they were, Doctor Franz. *J* was Frau Liebhart's cane, turned the wrong way round. *O* was Mamma's open mouth, singing. *T* was when I

stretched out my arms and shrugged, *I don't know. No good asking me.* But why was *H* used for *H*? Or *K* for *K*? Why not *P* or *R*? Who said?

Malois said.

Malois said, 'When it's autumn, I'll have to return to the Palace.' And then, a few weeks later, he told me, 'The leaves are turning brown and falling off the trees.'

'No,' I said, 'I can't see them, so no, they're not.'

'Don't be like that, Marie. You know I have to go back to court. We need the money. What Papa earns isn't enough.'

'But I'll be all alone,' I said. 'You're leaving me all alone. First Liesl and now you. Nobody cares about me.'

'Mamma and Aaleigha are still here. And Johann. And I'll visit you when I can.'

'But you *promised* you'd help me make a kingdom of sound...'

'...*as splendid as the world of sight.* And that's what I've tried to do. But now I have to go back and teach the Archduchesses. Besides, Marie-'

'What?'

'I've told Mamma to get you another music-teacher. Because, one day, I'm sure the Empress will want to hear you play.'

But I turned away from Malois and felt my way into the garden. Muddy water squelched through my broken boots. And now the wind hurled up all the leaves, threw them against my face, dragged my cloak from me. I stretched out my arms and began to spin, whirl out everything I felt, all the sadness and excitement, whirl it right out of me, arms outstretched, like the letter *T*.

Learning to play. Learning to read. Over-and-over again, tracing the letters until my fingertips were sore. Then *really* learning to read, like the Boucher blue lady with her bird and book in Mamma's boudoir. Though perhaps the voice was where it all started: Mamma singing at the top of the stairs, Johann and I listening at

the bottom. Or else, she sang and I played. Scales that went *up-up-up* and *down-down-down*. Not the kind of scales that fell onto your fingers. Not fairy-tale scales, fishtails, mermaids or rainbow trout. Oh no. Scales were hard work.

But as my fingers learned their scales, Doctor Franz, they became quicker, cleverer. Soon they knew exactly where to find the door-knob, that solid china egg, cold in my palm, that always wobbled. They knew where the pitcher and basin hid behind the curtain. They even learned how to open Mamma's oak-dresser at the end of the bed, Doctor Franz. Because, after all, now I was growing used to the darkness. I washed in darkness. Put my hand in a drawer and it was darkness I felt first as I fumbled for a handkerchief. Went to the dresser to pull on a skirt and everything around me was black. Then, too, darkness squatted on the chairs and hung like the curtain round the bed, great, thick swathes of it.

Because now – it was as if the darkness was part of me, Doctor Franz. So that whenever I ran off to hide somewhere, you know, inside a cupboard or beneath the stairs, somehow I was already there. Me, myself, alone. Myself – and yet, quite different from what I used to be. Someone else entirely, Doctor Franz. Not Reisi or even Mutz anymore. So that, whereas before, Johann used to like to hide with me, now no-one, not even my own cousin could follow me. Because in music and in darkness, Doctor Franz, I was creating my own small spaces, that were mine and mine alone.

Malois's and Marie-Thérèse's Alphabet (July, 1767)

A The roof of a mansion
Where Malois lives
With his Archduchess.
(And Lies!?)

B Big Man
With a Big Belly
Sticking out.

C Gypsy's earring
Curving round
Ends almost meet.

D Dark wine
At the bottom
Of a glass.

E *Easy to play*
Two notes
On the pianoforte.

F *Finger*
Presses the key
Then pauses.

G Great Astronomer
Pushed a ladder
Against the moon.

H Head-board for a bed
Where you rest
Your weary Head.

I *stood very tall*
Inside the
Tall grass.

J Frau Liebhart can't Jump
When you turn her cane
Wrong-side-up.

K King Lear split the Kingdom
Into three.
Each had a triangle.

L Light
Casts the cool shadow
Of a tall tower.

M Up-down, Up-down,
A range of mountains
We won't reach before nightfall.

N *Each day*
Climb a New
Mountain

O *Open*
Mouth
Singing.

P *We Pulled*
Off a branch to make
A new cane.

Q The Queen's
Hand-mirror
Has a handle

R When you're tired
Rest your head
Against a wall

S Snake
Hi-sss-sses
But will not bite.

T You stretch out your arms
Shrug -
Tell me you don't know.

U Unbelievable!
The glass

Is empty.

V Between mountains
We rested
In a Valley.

W Wien
Where steeples and cathedrals
Crowd together.

X *Two pencils*
Balancing
EX-tremely carefully.

Y *Johann Yells*
One of his pencils
Is broken!

Z The path we take
Through the Empress's
AmaZing maZe.

My friendship with Wolfgangeryl? Why does that interest you, Doctor Franz? How did it begin? I can tell you that. My brother took me to see Wolfie's first opera performed somewhere in a private garden. Wolfie had written *Bastien et Bastienne* when he was only twelve. Malois thought it was going to be as childish as my whim to hear it: the story of a magician who brings a wayward shepherd back to a blushing maiden. And he thought the little composer looked childish too. He said Herr Mozart was small for his age (twelve) but I didn't mind because I was small for mine (nine.) Then, too, Malois said, he was thin and pale with powder-white clumps in some recent smallpox scars. And *how* Malois laughed at little Herr Mozart's full court costume, his crimson pelisse, his gold-laced waistcoat, his lofty, powdered wig.

Malois nudged me. 'Young Wolfgangeryl Mozart just bowed to you,' he said. And he stopped laughing when he heard the opera. Dialogue – then songs. That was something new! 'Oh,' said Malois then, 'you can tell he has genius from the expression in his eyes.'

Genius! There! That word! It was to be the first of many occasions when I was to hear it applied to Wolfgangeryl.

MOZART

Of course it was the family name that was embossed on their calling-card the first time they came to visit us in Vienna. Yes – I ran my fingertips over it, as Herr Mozart (the Papa) stood in our music-room and boasted. Herr Mozart said he had come back from his church duties to discover his four-year old son, sitting on a stool, writing a piano concerto. 'Madam,' he said to Mamma and then his voice shifted downwards as if he were bowing, 'I was smiling as I took up the inky manuscript. Smiling indulgently at my boy's nonsense, you understand. But then, as I stared at it,

mein Gott,' (pause), 'tears, Madam, tears of joy welled up and ran down my face. Because,' (another pause) 'my boy had just revealed his God-given genius to me.'

A rush of hot air. Herr Mozart must have stepped away from the fire-place. Then his voice began to move down again, so that I assumed he was bowing to me. 'And you, my dear Fräulein Paradis,-'

'*Von Paradis,*' murmured Mamma.

'Of course, my dear Fräulein *von* Paradis. How did *your* musical talent first become known?'

But I didn't get a chance to answer. Wolfgangeryl interrupted. 'I should so like to play a duet with you, dear Fräulein,' he said. His piping voice, close to a tenor, sounded soft and delicate, deceptively so, for, as I later learned, when he needed it to be or when he was excited, it became powerful and energetic. For now, he gave a high-pitched giggle, irritating and endearing in equal measure.

And then – there we were, sitting side-by-side, at the pianoforte. But how different to when I played with Malois. Because this was a boy not much older than me and not my brother or cousin either. Heat emanated from him, allowing me to judge the nearness of his hands, his arms, his body. And-

My fingers were
Poised over the piano-keys-
Ready to play – when-
Wolfgangeryl
Put his hands over mine.
'Wait,' he said. 'Frau *von* Paradis,
Tie a cloth round my eyes.'
So Mamma did.

'Fräulein *von* Paradis,
I want to know
What it feels like
To be you.'
And so we played, we played.
My old dog, Cerberus, whined softly,
Then settled back into sleep.
Until-

Herr Mozart called out, 'Take off that ridiculous cloth, Wolfgangeryl. I

apologise for his impertinence, dear ladies. It's a trick he's played many times in London's drawing rooms.'

'Oh,' I said, slipping down from the piano stool. 'London?' I had liked him when he said he wanted to be like me. But now I knew it was a trick, I didn't like him quite so much.

'Soon, my dear Fräulein,' said Wolfgangeryl then, 'there will not be a single city where I have not played at least once. But you, you should accompany me on my concert tour. What a sensation we should be together!'

But from the way his father inhaled heavily, I knew that he would not care for my presence. So I shook my head. And then Wolfgangeryl began to reminisce about his concert tours to Paris, London, Rome and Prague. At that time, Doctor Franz, I had not yet undertaken my own concert tour of Europe so all I could do was join in when he spoke about Prague. Prague, with its October chill over the river and lamps on the bridges, like willo-the-wisps in glass. Then too, the marionettes, the music, the curtain-calls, the dumplings!

On another visit, Wolfgangeryl began to tell me about the Kingdom of Back, which he and his sister had founded. 'I'm the King,' he said, 'King Gnagflow Trazom and my sister is the Queen.'

(Go away Ha! Go away Fa! I don't want you here.)

'What's wrong, Marie?' Wolfgangeryl said then, 'you know you can be a visiting princess if you like. My starbright princess.'

But then Cerberus began to whine and thump his tail so the matter was forgotten. I heard Wolfgangeryl crouch down on the floor and begin to whisper nonsense in my dog's ears.

'You're just like my Bimperyl back home in Salzburg,' he said. 'Are you my dog's cousin, eh, eh, you silly, pretty thing?' There, that hint of malice, barely perceptible except to those who knew him. Because, of course, Wolfgangeryl was well aware by now that Johann was my cousin.

But did Johann put an end to Wolfgangeryl's visits? I'm not sure. Though one day I heard him call out, 'Wolfgangeryl, come and see Feste in his stall.' But I don't know that they ever reached the stables. A few steps perhaps, then *thwack, thwack, thwack*.

Skin pummelling skin, then – *splaaash!*

Was someone's head being ducked in the water-trough?

'Johann? Wolfgangeryl?' I called out of the window but no-one answered me. And then a short while later I heard the sound of Wolfgangeryl's carriage wheels. And then, after that, he never wrote to me or visited me again. I suppose Salzburg and his later concert tours claimed all his attention. And of course, there were my own travels to Naples, Ravello, Sicily and Paris. So even if he had wanted to write, he would not have known where to send a letter. But what a happy coincidence, Doctor Franz, that I should meet him again here, that he should be such a regular guest at your home.

My own travels? Well, I recollect such peculiar things about them, like, like finding a witch-ball on Salvatore's balcony in Ravello. Oh. I haven't told you about Salvatore yet. But I recall pressing the witch-ball to my forehead. Cool and smooth then something blue and flickering, that seemed to promise a sea-voyage. Which was quite true, because after that, we did sail to Sicily. And at one point on the voyage, I decided to smash the witch-ball against the ship's railings. And then I imagined the pieces of broken glass scattering onto the waves beneath me whilst the prow of the ship cleared a path through the sea.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

Marie has, for some time, been good friends with our own Wolfgangeryl. He, of course, has been a regular visitor here for many years, first of all with his father, and now, often by himself. I might have to curtail some of his visits.

Because, returning to my clinic after luncheon, there is Wolfgangeryl (again), sitting with Marie at the piano. Neither of them, however, look up at my approach. The little noise I make is covered by the sound of their music. And so - I become a spy. I'm not proud of it, but I hide myself behind the statue of the Old Man of Crete in the clinic's antechamber.

Well, the young people behave themselves, more or less. Or at least, they say nothing to each other which they couldn't have said before me. It's just that Wolfgangeryl sits next to her very closely - I might say *too* closely. And several times he, well, he takes her hand in order to guide her fingers over the keys. And then, once the music stops, he places his hand over hers.

I'm just on the point of stepping forwards when Wolfgangeryl takes out his watch.

'I must leave you now, Marie,' he says, 'Doctor Franz will be back in a minute.'

He lifts her unresisting hand to his lips and then departs. A few moments later, I slip out from behind the statue, then stamp as loudly as I can into the clinic so that Marie might think I have only just arrived.

'Well, Marie, how are you getting on?'

'Very well,' she replies, 'I really believe I've made some progress today.'

Progress? Yes. Progress and Improvement. Those doctor's words that she has caught from me. For, after all, I am her doctor. If I behaved like a spy just now, it is only because everything which touches her touches me.

The water slips into the glass goblets. Now I must balance the fluid levels: an imprecise art! A little more in this one, tip this one into the next, until it is as close to

the perfect balance as it is possible for a human being to achieve. Then I touch my fingers to the water to find out if it as cold as it should be to conjure up the necessary quality of sound.

Now I pass my hands over the goblets until they are magnetised.

My foot begins to pump the iron spindle, a heavy percussion, whilst I rub my hands round the moist rim of the goblets. Soon my glass harmonica emits its customary, pure notes. And yet the music is always, somehow, just beyond my grasp. Unreachable. And I have the impression that someone is imprisoned inside the glass – is it the sounds that will set her free?

Her release. That is what I am striving for.

Of course, the mind itself is like a shadow that lengthens and shrinks with the impact of the universal fluid - though it is difficult to preserve the purity of that fluid from contamination. Many forces slide into it, like stars, comets, planets, traversing the night-sky, comprising the celestial harmonies which we each aspire to in our short circulation through this world. For truly, we are both shadow and substance and it is the shadow that propels the substance through the magnetic force.

And yet no-one seems to understand these beliefs of mine – and perhaps this lack of comprehension is indeed the shadow that has beset all my cures.

My cures – my cures. Now I have lulled my patient into submission with the sound of the glass harmonica, I pass my hands across her brows and temples. I massage from the outer corner of her eyes. She begins to nod, so that for a moment I imagine she is approving of my treatment. That someone would! But I know that it is the fluid of her eyes coming back into harmony with the tides of the magnetic force that guide the poles of her being into sympathy with the forces that control the planets. Yet, after all, it is a slow and hazardous process.

Now her eyes roll up into her head so that it is as if she is trying to peer inside her own skull. Then down again, so that she is staring straight ahead – staring, but without seeing anything. Yet even in her eyes' current swollen state, they make me think of the heavenly spheres, which, in their harmony, bring all living things to

light, including the organs through which light enters the soul.

I pass my wand over her body, so sensitive, so responsive to the influence of the heavenly bodies and then, too, to the reciprocal action of the bodies around it. And this girl, who, as she tells me herself, catches emotions from others 'like a cold' is in fact so susceptible today that I do not even need to reinforce my treatment with the magnets. Today my own body is sufficient to exert its own animal magnetism.

And see! - it works: she moves her head to follow the wand! It moves first to the left then to the right and the spasms of her eyes begin to increase and then decrease noticeably, to be followed by total quiescence. And then, in the sing-song voice she adopts at these times, she begins to answer my questions.

Oh no, Doctor Franz, no. I hope I haven't made you think that just because I was blind, my life was full of sorrow and darkness. It was strange at first and I'm not quite sure I ever lost the fear of it, which was somehow even worse than being blind. But still. I had my music. Music and the people that loved me – and those were gleams of sunshine enough.

That was how I felt even after Wolfgangeryl had gone. Even when it was winter, when snow fell upon snow then turned to slush which soaked through the holes in my boots. Then the birds stopped singing but I wasn't sad. I was excited, so excited, about the two gentlemen from court coming to hear me play.

Who were they? Count Durazzio and his friend, Doctor Herr Sebastian Bernhard. Do you know them, Doctor Franz? Oh, a little. Well, I suppose I only know them a little, too. But I knew if they liked my playing, they would tell the Empress.

If they liked it.

Though Mamma said, 'Count Durazzio has been chosen because he doesn't easily succumb to the charm of a child prodigy. He once refused to perform Wolfgangeryl Mozart's opera at the Palace because he didn't believe that a boy of only twelve could have written it.'

'Oh,' I said, 'poor Wolfie!'

'Oh, don't worry about him, darling,' said Mamma, 'just concentrate on your own début.'

My début, Doctor Franz.

My hands. My pianist's hands.

First they had learned to play then to read. And now, as I waited for the gentlemen from court to arrive, I buried them in Cerberus's thick, soft fur. It felt – *ahhhhh* – it felt exquisite, his fur filling the palms of my hands. But then –

'I don't want your fur to get on my dress,' I whispered. A white dress, white lace drawers and slippers but nothing new: they were all *darned*. Aaleigha could do

little mouse stitches so that I would not be shabby for the gentlemen.

Mamma had asked her to, though Mamma would have liked it if I had stopped growing. Because, she said, as I grew taller, my frocks grew shorter and sadder and shabbier and she did not like her own dear daughter to present such a spectacle. With holes in the soles of her boots too, so that they had to be re-cobbled and then Aaleigha buffed them till they shone, till she could see her freckles reflected in them. But still. Mamma thought new boots would have been better. If only the Empress would give Papa more money. Or if only he would abandon his card parties for a while. At which Mamma paused because she knew that she too liked *a little flutter*. 'So,' she added then, 'it would be better if you stopped growing altogether. You're going to be taller than your Mamma, that's for certain and who wants a giantess for a daughter?'

Cerberus thumped his tail now so I knew he didn't mind me not stroking him. Except that then I felt the vibrations in his throat. His first, warning growl. And then outside, the whine of hinges *eeeeeee-eh-eh* as the courtyard gate swung open. *Clough-clough, clough-clough* of horses' hooves against the gravel. The slide of carriage wheels. Upraised voices as the ostlers rushed out to take the horses to the stables.

Then the bell rang and our front door opened. Wintry, pine-scented air followed them inside. The chandelier in the hallway rocked in the draught, sounding like the *chiiinnkkk* of Mamma's bracelets. By the time the gentlemen reached the music-room, I was already at the piano. Hesitant phrasing and then a rush and ripple of notes. That was me.

The notes rose up higher and higher, brushed against the ceiling, seeped into the cracks in the plaster-work where I used to insert my fingers. Oh, how I played and played and played. Because a house dies as quickly as a body and at the moment, Doctor Franz, ours was only half alive. So every note was another brick to restore our crumbling house. *If* the gentlemen liked my playing.

Afterwards, the Count kissed my hand, his mouth and moustache as bristling and scratchy as his name. *Her début, the Empress, her further tuition. And of course, a great advantage to the von Paradis family.* He talked and talked, in a noticeable voice, so that Mamma *fluted* and *fluttered*, and I wished *she would not*.

And the doctor? Doctor Herr Bernhard you mean, Doctor Franz? Well, he said nothing at all. But now the music was over so I went out into the courtyard. The air was cool, and something wet, cooler, softer than rain, kept landing on my cheeks and eyelids. More snow?

And I was wearing a white muslin dress, Doctor Franz and Mamma had said *I* looked like a snowflake as she twirled me round and round and tied my sash. But now I shivered beneath its light material.

A twig snapped, not far from me. Then *Cccr-unnchhh*. Heavy footsteps. Male footsteps. Then came the words, 'Child prodigy, *pah*.'

'Who's there?' I called out, turning my head towards the noise.

'Doctor Herr Bernhard. And if you were my daughter, I'd keep you at home until you were seventeen.'

'But I'm not your daughter,' I said and I began to blow on my fingers. I didn't mean to be rude, it was just that Mamma's bad days, my bad days were always when doctors were there, Doctor Franz. Doctor Barth, Doctor De Wenzl, Doctor Van Swieten, Doctor Ost. And now Doctor Herr Bernhard. So many doctors, some for Mamma, some for me.

And all their-

Words, words, words.

Filling up the spaces where Papa never was.

(Mamma.

Mamma needed a doctor.

Mamma was burning hot. She threw her arms round me, and she was shaking,
Doctor Franz – or perhaps the shaking started in me?

But Mamma kissed my hair, kissed my head with burning kisses.

Her breath was thick and hot by my ear as she clutched me to her.

'My darling,' she said, *'my darling, I named you for the Empress. Doesn't that count for anything?'*

I wriggled and twisted but I couldn't get away from the sound of her voice.

'What have I done, that you should suffer like this? Why? Why? My darling, my darling.' Over-and-over again, all her words mingling with her hot breath or jumbling up inside my head.)

I want different words, a different story.

When he first came to live with us, when he was still a little boy, Johann told me, 'I don't believe my Mamma's gone *up-the-stairs and into the sky*, like you say. I can still hear her singing.'

'No, that's *my* Mamma singing,' I told him. My Mamma's voice, wrapping itself around the house, from attics to cellars, filling up the cracks in the peeling plaster-work, making fires blaze in the empty grates, spotting the looking-glasses with song. When she sang, we didn't remember that the steps were frozen and our feet were cold and covered in chilblains.

But-

'No, it's *my* Mamma,' Johann insisted. 'It sounds just like her.'

'Our mothers used to sing duets together,' I said then, 'that's why they sound the same.'

The two sisters singing together before they were mothers, Marisa (mine) and Marianne (his), all ribbons and muslins and tiny seed-pearls. But then the sisters our mothers gave up the concert hall to rock the cradle.

A few days after the gentlemen from court had been to visit us, Johann and I climbed to the very top of the house, to the uppermost attic with its slanting roof. To reach the heavens. 'To reach the sky,' said Johann as he tugged me upwards.

We creaked across the darkness to the attic skylight. And then Johann scraped an old table beneath it and lifted me onto it, then climbed up himself. We stood there together and he began to tell me what he could see. The sky so much nearer, the courtyards beneath us, quite unreal. And then, as he looked all around, he saw roofs spreading out on either side of us, with grey slates missing ('like your front teeth, Marie!'), chipped or cracked. And chimneys quite close to us, with smoke curling up into the sky. And sparrows hopping about and other attic windows where heads might pop out at any moment. But the garret window next to ours was shut because the house next door was empty.

And then, past all the houses, past the courtyards and coffee shops, cellars and taverns, was the dark shape of the Parish Church, St. Jakob's. Here, said Johann, he could see the *Lichtsäule*, the Light Column, at the edge of the cemetery. This, we both knew, was a little tabernacle where a flame burned in memory of the dead.

'It's so bright,' Johann said then, quietly, so that I thought he was remembering his mother. 'But they have them all over the city,' he added and began to mumble about meadows and vineyards to the west and the north and the parkland of Schönbrunn and the rapid rush of the River Wien that could carry him away from this hurting day. And I could hear it too, the *shushhh-hussssh* of the river beneath the roll of carriage wheels in the courtyard. Yet still, from so high up, these sounds seemed to belong to another life altogether.

Marie

At daybreak, though my face is turned to the wall and my eyes are still quite blind, I already know what the weather outside is like. The first sounds from the street reveal it to me. If the sun shines, then someone is invariably singing or whistling and even the horses' hooves seem to strike out more smartly against the cobbles. But if it's raining, the sounds come to my ears distorted and deadened. I can even tell whether the wheels of the carriage are sodden with rain or snow or whether they're just setting forth. Though of course, at Doctor Franz's, these sounds are always accentuated by the sounds of the glass harmonica.

But whereas before, music was always a certainty for me, my one sure way of knowing, now it's only part of my dazed state. Under his influence, doors become avenues, the past reflects the future, the future visits the past and the present hardly even exists for me anymore. Then I lose all sense of myself, become entirely obedient to the Doctor's whim so that my mind is as malleable as a pair of his gloves. And then, what is it he says? That he can sense my inner being because the magnetic fluid that surrounds us extends far beyond his life and mine, enclosing us both.

Is that what's happening? Are you invading my mind, Doctor Franz?

I shan't say that to you, though. I shall keep it to myself, like I keep so many things – for all that you imagine that I'm your star patient, so tractable and confiding. You don't know that there are things I never tell you, shall never tell you, things I keep to myself. My own secret garden. Though I'm sure you know, I'm sure I told you, that there's always one story hidden beneath another.

Even that old story Mamma used to tell me, about the Empress riding in a tournament, riding side-saddle, as pregnant women do, wearing a habit of crimson velvet and a tricorne hat.

'She rode her horse very well, you know,' Mamma said, 'she controlled it, led it through the movements of the quadrangle. And then, brandishing her dainty sword, she chopped off as many of the wooden Turks' Heads as any of the men.'

'And she did better than most at target shooting with a pistol,' I added.

'There, you do know it,' said Mamma. And then, my favourite part, '*Pppppit ppppit ppppit.*' With each *ppppppppit*, Mamma dropped another kiss on my cheek. *Ppppppit ppppit ppppppit.* But the sound was *really* the sound of bullets, hitting their targets. And because the Empress's skill had so impressed my Mamma, she decided to name me, her second daughter, after her.

Mamma said.

But Mamma was lying.

I must remember to tell *that* to Doctor Franz.

I must remember to tell Doctor Franz - something.

Have *you* ever met the Empress yourself, Doctor Franz? No? That surprises me. Why? Well, because your old, what was the word you used, *mentor*, (my old tormentor!) Doctor von Störck was the Empress's personal physician. I thought he would have introduced you. It doesn't work like that? Oh well. I was only asking because I wanted to compare experiences. I first met the Empress at Schönbrunn Palace when I was nearly nine. It was May, the month of Our Lady, Mary, the Blessed Virgin, but also our shared birthday month.

Do you know, instead of saying *Hail Marys*, I used my rosary beads to count off the days until I met the Empress.

10, 9, 8, 7...

Or her approaching fifty years, and my own nearly nine.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7...

Sometimes, Doctor Franz, I even used the beads to count up the Empress's many daughters. To arrange them in an alphabetical pattern.

Number 1: *Maria Amalia*

Number 2: *Maria Anna*

Number 3: *Maria Antonia*

Number 4: *Maria Carolina*

Number 5: *Maria Christina*

Number 6: *Maria Elisabethe*

Number 7: *Maria Josepha*

Round-and-round, I rolled those ebony beads between my thumb and forefinger, round-and-round. Trying to imagine the Archduchesses, trying to imagine the Empress Maria Theresa, with her love of good behaviour, of holiness, chastity and fresh air. Because I wanted her to like me *so much*, Doctor Franz. But then, I always want people to like me. Besides, I knew just how important this was. Why? Because of money, I suppose. Only, not just that. I wondered, would she like me enough to become *my* holy mother? *My* patroness, *my* own special saint?

Because – well, I had heard so many different stories about the Empress from different people. When he was in the army, Malois's superior officer told Malois and Malois told Johann and Johann told me that the Empress once refused to promote officers who frequented houses where naked ladies lived. The officer said it was just as well the law was no longer enforced or Malois would still be an army ensign.

(In order to meet the word limits of the PhD, I have had to remove extracts from the novel. The rest of chapter 16 and chapters 17-21 form the first appendix at the novel's end. In these chapters, Marie, speaking to Mesmer, wonders about the character of the Empress Maria Theresa. She tells him how, at Schönbrunn Palace, she and Johann met the court artist von Hohenberg, who showed Johann the paintings in the Great Gallery and became his friend. Marie later describes how she played for the Empress and the Archduchess Maria Elisabethe, whom Malois admired. The Empress promised to grant Marie a pension of two hundred gold florins. Marie then reveals a dream she had after this audience with the Empress in which she saw her sister Liesl's reflection in the mirror. She describes how, in the dream, she swapped books with her sister's reflection and then felt as if they had swapped the stories of their lives.

Marie also describes how she, Johann, Malois and the Archduchess Maria Elisabeth skated over Schönbrunn lake towards the Snow Pavilion. This incident seemed to herald the parting of Malois and the Archduchess as well as Marie's awareness of her own and Johann's unhappy future.)

Marie

Round-and-round. He winds the bandages round my eyes, round-and-round, not like a doctor at all, more like a child, playing a game. Ah, I can't help it, I start to laugh. His hands brush ticklish against my forehead, my hair, the tips of my ears. I enjoy the snug linen over my eyes, across the bridge of my nose.

But then – memory fetches me a sly blow. I jerk away from his hands.

I was a child, sobbing, shaking, sick in bed, Doctor Franz. And then your old mentor, Doctor von Störck himself, came to see me. He brought with him herbs from the *Hofapotheke*, concoctions of camomile and jimsonweed, a tisane of feverfew and poultices of hemlock, henbane and autumn crocus.

'Don't be afraid of me, little *Mädchen*,' he said, his voice too soft and a little quavery. 'I'm here to make you better.' But he smelt of his herbs, Doctor Franz. Do you remember that about him? Breathing him in, snuffling him up, his insidious scent inside my nostrils, across the roof of my mouth so that soon I felt queasy and drowsy.

He prised apart my eyelids and shone – well, a lantern I suppose, into my face. 'Your pupils are responding,' he said then, just like you did, Doctor Franz. 'So,' he added, patting my hand, 'it's clearly a case of psychogenic blindness.' Then, '*Hem-Hem*,' then, 'you know, little *Mädchen*, the Empress has given me my own clinic and laboratory at the Palace. And there are one or two things I'd like to try to help you.'

The Palace! That meant Schönbrunn again, Doctor Franz. Whilst I was sick, Johann went sledging there every day, on the great hill that dipped right down to the gateposts. Every day he went there, without me. Then over to the kitchens of the Imperial Castle for lunch. He's so *gefressig*, your cousin, Mamma always said and she was right. Because one evening, Johann returned to my sickroom with the news that the court artists and cooks were designing a cake for the engagement party, a wonderful *torte*.

'I watched the cook beat the eggs,' he said, making the mattress *siinnnnnnnk* as he sat down beside me, 'and I threw handfuls of sugar into the mix. And then, guess what Mutz, another cook made an icing sugar valley!'

'Oh?'

'Yes, and at the top of the valley, there's a model of a sleigh, with a miniature Archduchess Maria Josepha inside it. And behind her, a miniature King of Naples.'

'What else?' I said.

'Well, at the bottom of the valley, there's the domes of the Palace and cheering crowds, all modelled out of marchpane. But – whatever's the matter, Marie?'

It was the thought of all that rich, sweet sludge, Doctor Franz and the air of the sickroom still muggy with the doctor's herbal concoctions and Mamma's stale perfume, mingling with the transported odours of the castle kitchens: cake and mutton fat, lard, marchpane and old meat. It made every inch of my skin prickle with sweat, my back, my belly, wet and slippery as a peeled pear. Then my guts began to convulse and up it all came, a vile mixture of wormwood, tansy and undigested dinner, all spewing out into the invalid feeder that Johann shoved beneath my chin. I puked and puked but even in the midst of another spasm, mouth and nose burning with the stench, my misery was nothing at all compared with my sudden fear that Johann might not want to stay with me when I was like *this*.

But after all, he *did* stay with me, Doctor Franz. As I puked, he pushed my hair back from my face and kept the china feeder firmly in place beneath my chin.

In a few days, I was well enough to climb onto Johann's sledge (that used to be mine, when I could see) to make the journey down the valley to Schönbrunn Palace for the Archduchess's Party. A long, steep slope it was, just right for sledging. And once the sledge was launched, then, oh, how swift and exhilarating. I really believe, Doctor Franz, that I derived more pleasure from this experience than I would have done if I could see. The pure sensation of it, Doctor Franz, skimming over the snow, so swiftly, so surely, as if – well, as if I was flying.

'The gate-posts, the gate-posts,' called out Johann then *gaaaaaaaasped* as we sped through them. Behind us, the gate *claaannggged* shut and I remember thinking, Doctor Franz, what if we were to be shut in forever, in the world inside the Palace?

But then – *aaaaaaah* then, Doctor Franz, a sudden dazzle of light on snow, light pouring out of the Palace windows and doors. And as our sledge passed along the Grand Parterre and into the courtyard, there came the sound of music and laughter, the chink of cutlery, the tinkle of glasses. And then when we entered the Lanterns Room, more light, light everywhere, spilling out from lanterns intended to guide the guests through the Palace. So we left the sledge behind there and Johann seized a lantern in one hand and my hand in the other and led me into the Archduchess Maria Josepha's suite.

The Rosa Rooms, that's what he called them, so that I thought I could smell attar of roses drifting among the sweaty, powdered and perfumed bodies, the tallow wax and smoke. The Rosa Rooms, where Papa and Malois waited to introduce me to the Archduchess. Mamma? Oh, she was back at home with Aaleigha, Doctor Franz, preparing for St. Nicholas's Day.

As Johann and I crossed the threshold, a cacophony of music, laughter and loud voices rose up to greet us.

'Come on,' called Johann, tugging me forwards, 'I want to see the cake now it's finished.' And so, away we went, away from the sounds and the noise and the laughter, to a part of the suite that was cooler and quieter.

Hem-Hem I heard then. Doctor von Störck? Here? At the party? 'Ah, my dear little *Mädchen*, how fortunate. My new machine, the Electrical Apparatus, has just been delivered to my laboratory.'

'The Electrical *what?*'

'The Apparatus. I ordered it especially. And though I'm sorry to take you away from the party, I'm most eager to try it out.'

A fleshy *swiisssh-swiisssh*. That was the sound of Doctor von Störck rubbing his hands together, Doctor Franz, you know, like he does. And then, when I didn't

reply, he said, 'The young man can accompany you, if you wish.'

There was another pause and then Johann mumbled something. I thought I heard the word, '*Torte*,' so I sighed, '*gefrässig*,' at him as Doctor von Störck began to lead me away, out of the Rosa Rooms and down a corridor that ran the length of the Great Gallery. But then, 'Wait for me,' called out Johann.

So we slowed our footsteps and he caught us up. Then we turned a sudden corner and a moment later, 'Sit down,' rasped Doctor von Störck, settling me onto what felt like a hard, high-backed bench. 'You can wait here whilst I go and fetch the keys to my laboratory.'

How loudly that word *laboratory* resounded in the quiet space around us, that, and the heavy sound of his departing footsteps, **THUMP-THUMP,**
THUMP-THUMP, THUMP-Thump, Thump-Thump, thump-thump, thump-
thump.

And now Johann began to pace up-and-down, his restlessness adding to my own.

'Mutz,' he announced, '**VERBOTEN** is written in big letters on a sign on the laboratory door.'

'Oh, do come and sit back down,' I called out to him but he wouldn't. Then I heard him push something across the wall, some curtain or canvas, and then, 'Oh,' he said.

'What is it?'

'There's a peep-hole behind this tapestry.'

'Oh but put the tapestry back, Johann, put it back!'

'Why are you so scaredy?'

It's true, Doctor Franz, I was scared, so scared that my tongue thickened in my mouth and I could hardly tell him what Malois had told me, that there were peep-holes all over the Palace, that the Empress used them to spy on her children – and, before he died, her husband. Instead, I stammered out, 'I-I-I d-d-d-on't want us to

get into t-t-t-rouble.'

'Yes, but Mutz,' said Johann, 'I can see inside the doctor's laboratory.'

'W-w-whattt can you ss-ssee?'

'I'm not sure. It's quite dark – no, hang on, I'm getting used to it – there's something gleaming. Some kind of tubes and – a whatdeyoucallit, a funnel and, and smoke, or no, it must be steam, because, there's some brightish liquid bubbling in a glass vial.'

'What else?'

'Oh, but you won't like this, Mutz. There's a stuffed creature hung from the ceiling, sort of greenish-brown, with, you know, scales, sharp teeth and dead, glassy eyes.'

What's that, Doctor Franz? You remember making the acquaintance of Doctor von Störck's stuffed crocodile? Ah, I suppose you're pretty familiar with the contents of his laboratory. And for you it was just a workroom, a place of learning. But for me, the way Johann described it, with its rows and rows of bottles and jars set back against one wall filled with little yellow flowers or dark green and brown crinkled leaves and with a raven perched, wings outstretched, above them, it was something else. A mysterious place, *verboten*, that filled me with foreboding. And then - oh, but I can't tell you.

Very well then, I shall. Johann began to describe a -a curled up creature in a glass jar, all tiny and shrivelled. And then, over by the window, there was another jar. A *huu-ge* jar, he said, so that my heart began to beat even faster.

'Or, at least,' said Johann, 'it's a sort of glass cylinder on top of two wooden things. And there's a metal bar running through it that's attached to a handle.'

'Www-h-h-at do you think it is?'

'I'm not sure,' said Johann, 'but there's a platform thingy and a metal arm and a kind of metal ball, all shiny.'

'It must be the Apparatus,' I said.

Then thump- thump, thump- thump, Thump- Thump, Thump- THUMP,

THUMP-THUMP, THUMP-THUMP, the

sound of Doctor von Störck's returning footsteps, growing ever louder, ever closer, accompanied by a kind of *cccough-cccough, mumble, mumble* and the *clang clang* of his keys. Or was it just the sound of the party guests, scraping *torte* from the bottom of their dishes?

Then **THUMP-THUMP, THUMP-**

THUMP — the doctor's footsteps were crossing the

antechamber as Johann landed on the bench beside me. Then a heavy, valerian scented hand gripped my shoulder, and, as I stood up, began to propel me forwards.

Then *Clccicccck-Grinnnnddd*.

We entered the laboratory. The door *ccclicccked* shut behind us.

Marie

One clear, bright day in March, Doctor Franz opens the shutters of his consulting-room just a crack. Then sunlight streaked with dust motes spills in, just for a moment reminding me of Italy. A sky that dazzled, and all around, the scent of sun-baked hills. No shadows, no colours, just pale, unending light. But then the heat, the light, the smell of the sun begins to settle and Doctor Franz tells me there are an assortment of objects on the table in front of me.

Oh yes! They are all bright and glittering in the still, quiet room. And he says there are:

trinkets

coins

statuettes

silverware

pins

pottery

glasses

Doctor Franz says he wants me to arrange them in a scale, from very dull to very bright. But their brightness makes my eyes tingle, a familiar sensation, by now. Sometimes it's pleasurable. But, at other times, it irritates them so that they begin to water and then the room round me uproots itself, starts to slip and spin so that I cry out.

'It's vertigo,' says Doctor Franz, 'and it's a sure sign that you're improving.'

'But it makes it harder to do anything,' I say, 'even simple things, like climbing the staircase.' I try to explain how when I place my foot on the first step and seize hold of the banister, its firm coolness no longer guides me safely upwards.

'You're just a bit confused at the moment,' says the Doctor. 'Your head is spinning because you're getting well.' And then he takes my hand and holds it and explains how my eyes are sending nervous impulses to my brain. But my brain doesn't know what to do with them, nor with – what does he call it? - *visual*

perceptions.

What he says is true. Every day I draw closer to the world of sight and it frightens me. I want to go back into the darkness, to safety and peace of mind. And I try – I really try to explain this to Doctor Franz. But as I start to speak, he begins to stroke my hand. Oh, I know what he's doing, of course I do. He's trying to soothe me with his touch, stroke me into submission as if I were his dog or cat. Which makes me angry. Nooo – it makes me *furios*. I snatch my hand out of his grasp.

But just as quickly, he snatches it back, crushes my fingers in his grip. And then the moment hangs between us like a crystal prism suspended in mid-air, an infinitely delicate balance liable to shatter at any moment.

He releases my hand.

'Ah,' he says. Now he's standing so close to me, I can feel the warmth coming from his body, mingling with the odour of his cologne, sandalwood? Then, 'My wife will be wondering where we are,' says Doctor Franz. His mouth is so close to my ear that I can feel his breath's moisture. 'She'll be wanting to pour the tea,' he adds. But still, he doesn't move away from me. So we stand like that together for a long time, not saying anything. Between us, just the faint sound of our own breathing. Then, 'We must go into the parlour,' he says at last.

Later, as Doctor Franz, Frau Mesmer and I are sitting in the parlour and I am beginning my lace-work, he suddenly gives voice to one of his secret thoughts.

'Your hands,' he says.

'My hands?' I say.

My hands -
There are webs between my fingers.
But my hands are soft.
They are lady's hands,
Until -
The joints flex,
The muscles clench
Then relax.

And my mind sends
Impulses
Along the nerves
To the fingers
To create
Animation
Movement -

Life
Travelling along tendons
To the fingertips
To twist the threads
To press the keys
To bring out the music.
Lace-maker's hands.
Pianist's hands.
My hands.

'They're so deft,' Doctor Franz says now, 'moving the bobbins like that. Look, Anna, aren't they? And I was wondering whether -'

'Whether?'

'Whether your sight returned when you worked or whether your hands were just instinctively skilful. What do you think, Anna?'

Always this need to bring her into the conversation. To ensure that she has her proper share of attention. But I don't believe he really values her opinions. Besides, she doesn't reply. So then he says, 'Marie, you could try wearing a blindfold to test it out.'

'Oh, leave the girl alone,' says Frau Mesmer now, 'let her just enjoy the evening.'

This surprises me, because, after all, I didn't think she liked me very much. Like their cat, Soukeryl, who always disappears when I arrive, as if she resents my presence.

Sure enough, Frau Mesmer adds, 'Besides, you'll have her to yourself all day tomorrow to test out your theories.'

But the Doctor doesn't listen to his wife. Instead, I hear him *sliiiiiide* open a drawer, rummage around inside it, and then, 'Ahh! Here it is, '- and then –

round-and-round
the blindfold crosses my nose
over my eyes
round-and-round,

and then – somehow -
I'm nine years old again,
sobbing, shaking.

It was the doctor, Doctor Franz. Doctor von Störck. Once I was inside his laboratory, he placed a metal dome in my hands. He said it was part of the Apparatus – though I expect you know what that is better than I do. The Leyden jar. Because all I knew was that it was some kind of machine. I could hear the doctor wheeling it towards me. Once it got stuck in the flagstones and then he pushed it forwards again, wobbling, whirring, clicking.

Doctor von Störck told me that the Apparatus could cure agues, St. Anthony's Fire, Chlorosis, Consumption, King's Evil, Knots-in-flesh, lameness, leprosy, Mortification, palsy, surfeit, wen and all kinds of swellings. But I told him, Doctor Franz, that I didn't have any of *those*.

'And hysteria,' he added. Then -
Crankkk-crankkk-crankkk -
Something was being twisted,
round-and-round.

'Do you know, little *Mädchen*,' he said then, 'once we were all perfect, with no illness and no ills. But then, what do you think happened?'

'I don't know,' I replied, above *Crankkk-crankkk-crankkk*.

'The Fall. Sin, original sin. Because it's sin that sired all diseases.'

My palms began to sweat. My stomach lurched up into my mouth, leaving behind a vile, bitter taste.

(But far away, the Archduchesses were all eating cake.
I could hear the delicate *scrape-tinkle* of their spoons.
Scrape-tinkle, scrape-tinkle)
and then-

Huhhhh-Huhhhh-Huhhhh

Electric shocks!

My eyes, my eyes -
were being electrocuted

The Sandman was
electrocuting my eyes!

(Scrape-tinkle, scrape-tinkle)

I put my hands up to my face to try to shield them.
Then something warm began to trickle down my cheeks.
Not tears.

'That's not supposed to happen,' screeched Doctor von Störck.
'There's not supposed to be any blood.'

And then I heard someone,
calling out my name,

'MUTZ!'

It was Johann.

Then *Crasssssh-*
something heavy fell to the floor.

And then-

The key turned -
R-r-r-r-rattl-ll-ed in the lock, then-

the door *sssscr-aaaa-pppp-ped*
accccrossss-the-floooooor
and all the time my heart beat
Dd-dun, dd-dun, dd-dun, then
shudder shudder shudder -

THUMP-THUMP,

thump-thump,

thump-thump, thump-thump
the doctor's
footsteps were retreating rapidly
down the corridor.

I sobbed and shook and someone
(not the doctor)
began to wrap
(round-and-round)
my eyes-
a cloth.

'That should do it,' said a familiar voice, tying a tight knot above my ear, 'my poor little Marie.' It was Malois. And from somewhere behind him, Johann.

'I tried,' he gasped, 'I really tried. Couldn't you hear me calling you? I looked through the peep-hole and I saw what he did to you. And when you started screaming – I – I wanted to smash the door into a million pieces.' He took another deep breath. 'B-b-but I couldn't. It was too big and too heavy. And that doctor had locked it. So I ran to fetch Malois.'

Malois hurried me and Johann back out into Schönbrunn's Lantern Room, to find our sledge, to send us back home. He forced my ankles into my outdoor boots. Then Johann grabbed my hand and we tore out into the snow, stumbled, righted ourselves, then, still gripping my hand, he helped me onto the sledge.

'Just in time,' said Johann, 'now for the homeward run.'

I clung to his waist, taut-knuckled, terrified, then buried my bandaged face between his shoulder-blades as we sped for home.

Aiiiiiiiii-eeeeeee-eeeeeee-eeee
Mamma was screaming.
Aiiiiiiiii-eeeeeee-eeeeeee-eeee
Aiiiiiiiii-eeeeeee-eeeeeee-eeee
Aiiiiiiiii-eeeeeee-eeeeeee-eeee
Then the sounds became words -
Marieeeee Marieeeee My Marieee
(the sound of her screams
striking against the raw parts of my face.)
'Holy Mother, what have they done to you?'

Poor Mamma. She couldn't help it. Well, yes. I did wish she would show more self-restraint. I wished if she had to cry, she would do it under her breath, at least *try* and hide it from me. But she never did. That's just how she was, how she screamed, Doctor Franz. She was like that even when I first lost my sight, first walked into walls, collided with tables. Perhaps because -

Before I lost my sight, they said I had my mother's eyes.

No, no, it's all right. I'm not upset. And see, your blindfold doesn't impede the progress of my hands. They still twist the bobbins, fly across the lace, just the same as ever.

'While I think of it,' Doctor Franz says now, 'I've ordered one of the new spinets for your personal use. Wolfgangeryl's suggestion,' he adds as I start to thank him.

But then Frau Mesmer mumbles something I don't quite catch, which sounds like, '*Wolfgangeryl*' but might even be, '*fol-de-rol*.' And then I wonder if she minds, that Doctor Franz didn't buy her the spinet, or that - she can't play it.

Marie

Late March. Now in the darkened room, he tells me all the mirrors are covered. But not my eyes. Nor a few of the shutters. For Doctor Franz insists that I brave this light, which is, after all, dull and muted.

To my left, a dark shape in a dark chair. Here, Doctor Franz sits, watching me. Sometimes he speaks to me, in a voice I know he thinks is reassuring. But at other times he is silent, waiting for me to continue my story.

Well, he can wait a little longer. Wait until twilight, Doctor Franz. I need a place of – what's the word Johann uses when he's painting, *chiaroscuro*?, somewhere transitional, where I can think about the darkness before I approach the terrors of the light.

The light, the light, and I will run to a cave, a cellar beneath the bed and I will shelter there – and I will not come out, no, no matter how much you beg me. I will keep my eyes shut and then you cannot see me. But perhaps here, here in the familiar darkness that pulls in everything, shapes, chairs, you, me, *everything*, I can find the words.

So, Doctor Franz, Malois bandaged my eyes, found our sledge, sent us home, to Mamma and to Aaleigha. Because at the sound of Mamma's screams, Aaleigha came running. But the rapid patter of her feet suddenly halted.

'Oh Miss,' she said, 'Oh Miss, whatever's happened?' And whilst she bathed my eyes and changed my bandages, Doctor Franz, I sobbed out my story. Then she helped me back into bed and there I stayed, for days and days and days. Because my eyes wept blood – for ages. And then, shaking, shaking and convulsing in the night and then, more purgings and bleedings and – no, not leeches, this time. More doctors again, though not Doctor von Störck. And all the time, Mamma, helpless and wailing, 'What to do? What to do?' or else scraping the hair back from my scalp, hair clotted with blood.

And now, ever since you removed the bandages, Doctor Franz, time moves slowly, oddly. I haven't ever told you this before, but sometimes, if I'm standing in a room, I don't remember how I got there. It's as if I've suddenly come to and there I am, splashing water over my hands, over-and-over again, until I realise that the water's cold, that actually, I've been standing there for a long, long time.

I used to feel safe inside your house, Doctor Franz. But now – now I don't even know if - I am still safe, aren't I, Doctor Franz? Doctor Franz?

Marie

Another day in March and here, in their parlour, with his wife beside him, Doctor Franz isn't listening to me anymore.

Instead – *ruusshsssslopppppp* –

Oh yes,
russsschlossppppp,
 water into goblets -
 then he
 magnetises the liquid -
 and then, yes,
 I can hear his wet
 hand *sliiiide*
 round the rim
 of the glass -
 and then his foot
ppp-u-mpppps the spindle
 the floorboards *creeeakkk* -
 and then-

Music.
 That ethereal
 is it music?
 Notes
 are they notes?
 Near orrrrrrrrrr-
 farrrrrrr awaaaaayyyyyy
 Orrrrrrrrrrrrr

then
 it
 Stoppppppps

then
 Silenccccce.

But of course, Frau Mesmer has to spoil the silence by speaking. She's like that. Sometimes she and her niece chatter together like all my lace-threads tangling on their bobbins and then it's too much and I can't hear myself think.

'You never played me anything worth hearing before,' she says now, sounding

pleased. 'How does it work, that contraption of yours?'

'There are glasses mounted on an iron spindle,' says Doctor Franz. 'I turn them with a foot treadle. And I make the sound by rubbing the bowls with moistened hands. Sometimes, I try to play ten glasses at once,' he adds, 'but I can't always manage it.'

'How do you know which bowl makes which sound?' I ask.

'Ah,' says Doctor Franz, 'well, the rims are painted in different shades, according to the sound of the note. So A's are dark blue, B's are purple, C's are red. Accidentals are white.'

'Oh,' I say, 'oh,' groping for the memory of -

Johann and I, that St. Nicholas's Eve when I was nine, listening to the court musicians play in our house. And then, later, Malois said, 'The reds and oranges are like the sound of horn trombones. Yellows and greens are like the violins, cellos and double basses and the violets and blues are the clarinets and the oboes.'

'But what about white?' I asked him.

'White is the extreme treble limit where all the tones are blended into one, just as black is the bass or dark limit.'

'I don't understand,' I said.

'Ah Marie,' said Malois, 'try and imagine that white is something absolutely pure, in which colour no longer exists, only light, and black is something so full of colour that it has become dark.'

But it's only now, at a distance of, what – eight, nine years? listening to Doctor Franz explain his blend of colour and sound that I begin to understand what Malois tried to teach me.

'What's an accidental?' Frau Mesmer says now.

'You tell her, Marie,' says Doctor Franz.

'An accidental is a note whose pitch is not a member of a scale or mode

indicated by the key signature.'

'Oh,' says Frau Mesmer but she sounds like she doesn't understand. Perhaps that's why she stands up, bids us a quiet good night then leaves the room.

Doctor Franz, now that we're alone, I want to tell you about that St. Nicholas's Eve when I was nine. Do you mind?

There was the window-seat in the music-room, where Johann and I sat (Aaleigha had looped up its curtains.) Then -

Swisssh Swiiiish Swiiiish.

Uncle Friedrich's sledge?

'How far away is it?' I said to Johann.

He began to move my hands through the air then *smmmudgesquueeaksqueak* he rubbed our fingers across the window-pane, tracing out the journey. It helped me to, what's that word you keep using, Doctor Franz? Yes, that's it. It helped me to *visualise* sledge-tracks in the snow. Parallel lines that could never meet.

We didn't jump out of the window-seat to greet him, Doctor Franz. Johann's father, my Uncle Friedrich, I mean. Instead, we sat very still, so still that I could hear *ras-sh-sh-sh-ush*. The sound of snow against the window-pane. Then a loud *r-r-r-r-rap* on the front door and then the *c-c-awwww* of the door hinges followed by the *ting-ttt-ting-ching* of the hallway's chandelier. Then -

'Hans,' called Uncle Friedrich from the hallway.

'No-one calls me that anymore,' Johann muttered to me.

'We'd better go and welcome him,' I whispered back, 'he has travelled all the way from Hungary.' And then, after we'd made our reluctant way into the hallway and Johann stood silent before his father, I said, as politely as I could, 'How was your journey, Uncle Friedrich?'

'Ah, a two-day sledge ride is nothing to a man with my sound constitution, Marie,' he clicked, 'it's a shame that my illustrious patient, the Baron Hareczy de Horka, is not as fortunate as I am.' And then, a short while later, he began to say, as

he did every year, that he'd looked inside St. Nicholas's book 'to see if you've been good or naughty.' Yes, that's right. Good children receive presents. Naughty children have to go inside a sack. The Devil Krampus's sack, to be made into mincemeat.

Later that evening, from our window-seat (again), Johann and I could hear the servants' huffings and puffings, the sudden *j-j-j-jangle* of keys as they set the piano down.

'Little angel, little devil,' said Mamma then, sounding quite near to us. Then she *c-c-c-r-un-ccched* down and I suddenly realised what she meant. The Bishop Nicholas and Devil Krampus biscuits from the Christchildmarket. Then came the touch of Mamma's fingers and then, a crumbly morsel lay in my palm.

'Is it the angel or the devil?' I said.

But Mamma was already gone, Doctor Franz, leaving behind an odour of candied violets, raisins, oranges and cloves which partially hid the tang of tallow mingling with tannin and her own sweet-sour sweat.

I think it was around that time that Malois began to call her, 'Sweetmeat Mamma.' And it was true: ever since the Empress had granted me a pension, Mamma had grown plumper, cushiony even, on chocolate from Milan, pheasants from Bohemia, Istrian oysters, wine from the cellars of Tokay and cakes from the bakers, cakes from the kitchen: *Palatschnicken*, *Wiener Hornchen*, *Apfelstrudel* with its paper-thin pastry and her favourites, the jam-filled *Linzetortes*.

So *gefrässig*, my Mamma.

Papa? Yes, Doctor Franz, he was home for the holidays, too. That evening, he and Uncle Friedrich stood in front of the fire-place, in the music-room. I know because they were blocking off all the heat.

I heard Papa say to Uncle Friedrich, '*a blind child is a terrible burden, no matter how you look at it.*' And then two little spots of hurt sprang up in my heart and set it pounding until the pain stretched all across my cheeks.

'But Josef,' Uncle replied, 'how did she fare with the Empress?'

'Didn't I tell you? She was granted a pension. But, well, Marisa and I were hoping for rather more. I mean – that's why I named her Marie-Thérèse, after all.'

Oh no, Papa, oh no. It was *Mamma* who chose my name. She told me when she saw the Empress's bullets hit their targets, she knew what I would be called.

And so, Doctor Franz, Papa must have been lying.

Or else – Mamma was.

Angel, devil, which was which?

There came a sudden blaze of warmth and pine-smoke. Uncle or Papa must have moved away from the hearth.

Warmth and pine-smoke. Whispers and mutters.

'How did she cope with von Störck's course of electrotherapy?'

'Oh bad, very bad, Friedrich.'

Then-

mumble mumble mumble

mutter mutter mutter

something else, then

something else, then -

From Uncle, 'Doctor Ingenhousz is a very clever man. And he isn't tied to the Viennese Faculty of Medicine and their traditions. I'll write you a letter of introduction, if you like.'

'Would you?' said Papa, 'we should be so pleased.'

Then *mumble mumble mutter mutter something* and then,

'Presents,' Mamma said brightly, 'it's time for presents.'

So, Mamma gave Johann a box of paints. His father gave him a fob watch. Johann pretended to dislike it, but really, Doctor Franz, he was fascinated by its delicate intricacies. And Papa gave me a gold chain and Malois gave me a bottle of

perfume and well, Uncle Friedrich had promised me the gift of sight, hadn't he?
Again.

But the music, Doctor Franz. That was what your glass harmonica reminded me of, earlier this evening. Because, Doctor Franz, the court musicians were starting to arrive for our St. Nicholas's Eve celebrations. Johann and I could hear them as we stood on the staircase above the hallway. They began to tune up their instruments: the trumpet, the trombone, the clarinets, the bassoons and the horn, and then, Doctor Franz, the music began, swirling around us, the darkness intensifying it, holding us close and -

'Do you think we should dance?' whispered Johann.

Something that was part fear, part exhilaration, shifted in my stomach, made my heart thump, caught at my throat. I wanted to – but -

'They'll catch us if we do,' I said.

And then, over the music came the sound of wheels crossing the courtyard and then *ting-ttt-ting-tt-ching* and *c-c-aww* then *bangggg-shut*. But then the music stopped, Doctor Franz, and the shouting started.

No, no, nothing's the matter, it's just that I hate it when they shout.

Marie

I think, Doctor Franz, that your mansion has many moods. I'm beginning to get used to it now but when I first came here, it bewildered me. All the emotions of all your patients, of all those different women who were here at various times, spreading down from the slate roof at the top of the house, then down past the attics, the three storeys and sweeping right into the cellar.

You disagree, Doctor Franz? You think it's a happy house, your magnetic mansion? Why? Because you've magnetised every part of it, every floor, every ceiling, every brick, every beam. But it's strange that you and I should have such different experiences of the same place. It's like when you play the glass harmonica. I don't know what it means to you, but to me it's *painful* somehow and yet, it's a clean pain, a healing pain – and then, everything is running backwards – tomorrow and today becoming yesterday, so that somehow, instead, I hear -

The convulsive spasms of a tambourine and -

Stamp stamp stamp

Shaking us on the stairs

Stamp stamp stamp

Thudding right through us -

Stamp stamp stamp

Across the oak floor whilst

The tambourine shivered and shook until

With one final, frenzied outburst,

It subsided.

And then, all I could hear was the *sss-h-uss* of the snow and the quiet in-and-out of Johann's breathing. 'Don't go,' I whispered, 'don't go.'

Oh, that's right, Doctor Franz, I forgot to tell you. It was that St. Nicholas's Eve when Uncle Friedrich decided that Johann should be sent away to school. The Lowenburgisches Erziehunghaus, 'the most distinguished institution of its kind,' Uncle said. Literature, Geography, German, Latin, French - 'and drawing lessons too, Hans, just think of that!' Uncle had even joined the procession to the Josephstadt

carrying a candle in order to make a good impression on Johann's future headmaster, 'a retired general, I might add.'

But anyway, Doctor Franz, Johann stayed quiet. The staircase where we were sitting folded up into silence.

Later that evening, someone else, not Johann, sat down heavily beside me on the top step.

'It's you Malois, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'What was all that shouting about, earlier on?'

'Oh well,' said Malois, and, 'yes, well,' and then, 'it was because of the gypsies. They turned up just after the court musicians.'

'The gypsies?'

'Yes,' said Malois, 'two of them – an old man with a violin and a girl with a tambourine. And Uncle Friedrich, you know what he's like, he was all for kicking them out.'

'Ah,' I said.

'Yes, ah,' said Malois, 'because he started shouting at them to leave, that it would be an insult to the court musicians if they played, that they would be after the horses or the silver or something.'

'Oh – oh – oh dear,' I said.

'Yes,' said Malois, 'and Papa was just beginning to agree with him, you know, like he does, and I thought Mamma was about to start wailing, like *she* does but actually she told them both to *halt die Klappe!* Then she gave the girl a big, encouraging smile, so that she, the girl, I mean, began to shake her tambourine. And then - ah, Marie, I wish you could have seen it - she sprang into dance.'

Somehow I knew it as if I had seen it, how her eyes flashed, her hair blazed, and how, when she shook out her dress, there was fire, fanning out from her body, spreading all across the hallway. Spreading fast, fast, fast, a scarlet spinning-top, a

flickering flame.

'And then,' said Malois, 'my heart began to beat to the rhythm of her dance, until, that is, she lifted her head and - smiled.'

His words touched something in my own heart so that I said, 'Malois, I don't want Johann to go away to school.'

'Eh? What's this? What school?'

So I told him what I just told you, Doctor Franz, about the future headmaster and the procession and the candle and Malois replied, 'Oh, but he's an excellent fencing-master. And that school's meant to be very good. Mamma and Papa nearly sent me there.'

'Yes, but Malois,' I whispered, 'I miss him. I miss him. Oh, how I miss him.'

'Don't be silly, Marie. He hasn't gone yet.'

'I'm not being silly. Because you don't even *know* that dancing-girl, Malois, but you already miss her. And that's just how I feel.'

No reply. But from his silence, I knew I'd made him see her again, the red of her dress, her flickering dance in the darkening hall.

But Johann, Doctor Franz. Do you know what one of the most awful things about losing my sight is? That I've lost what he looks like. Does he have shiny, conker-brown hair? Or is it red? Ashen, maybe? Raven-black? And are his eyes blue or hazel? Grey or green?

No. Now I do remember. His eyes are blue.

But does he have a high colour or sallow skin, or is he pale and waxy, like a candle? Oh, Doctor Franz, it's no good. It's been too long – and I can't see him again to remind me. No, no, of course I can't just *ask* him what he looks like. Because then he'd know. Know what? That I'd forgotten.

And, do you know, I can't see *your* face either, Doctor Franz, and that hurts me too.

White, white, white, snow, pillows, sheets, and there I was, Doctor Franz, lying in bed, my arm stiffening beneath me, or else, trying to dig my own nest out of the blankets. And yet, through all my shiftings and shapings, one terrible truth remained: they were sending Johann away.

I shoved back the thick curtain, and then somehow, there I was, *rap tap tap* on his bedroom door.

But though he opened the door, *crrreeakkk*, he wouldn't speak to me. So I asked him something stupid, something about the stars.

But he didn't answer. It was only as I was turning away to go that he muttered, 'I wish I had a sword, a proper sword, like Malois's.'

'Why?'

'So I can pay my father back.'

'Don't say that,' I said.

But then, at the end of the holidays, Doctor Franz, Malois couldn't find his precious sword. And then, how he swore and swore! '*Koffer, Deppertter, Schneebrunzer, Beidl, Arsch mit Orren!*' All the swear words I know, Doctor Franz, I learnt from him. He swore so much that in the end Uncle Friedrich gave Malois his own sword. And then we said our farewells and they left us.

'Papa has taken Malois up onto his sledge,' Johann called out then from the music room's window-seat. So I imagined the fur rug spread out, the foot muff put ready, a tug at the reins and then the sleigh bells resounded with their familiar *j-j-j-angle* and then – *Swiiiiish. Swiiiiish. Swiiiiish.*

The sound of their sledge-blades, slicing through snow – or the sound of the stolen sword, being drawn from Johann's sheath?

Later, oh but it was months and months later, Doctor Franz, winters and winters after Johann had been sent away to his school, I stood in his empty room, trying to, well, trying to breathe him in (and, at the same time, trying not to): his scent of roast

chestnuts and linseed oil.

But then, quite suddenly, I wanted him gone. So I stepped forwards and reached for the window. I struggled with it then forced it open. The wind blew in, blew all around me, blew every last trace of Johann away. Then I stuck my hand out onto the snowy window-ledge and pressed down *hard*. Again and again, harder and harder, until my hand was sunk in snow. I didn't care that I wasn't wearing gloves, that I might get chilblains that would stop me playing. Oh no. Instead, I clenched my fist, tightened it to numbness. Only when I'd stopped hating Johann did I exhale, relax my hand, splay out my fingers.

A piano, Doctor Franz.

But just like that, quick as a flash, I felt myself slide back into hatred. Just then I hated all of them, all my family who'd gone away. I jabbed my tallest finger into the snow. *There*. That was for Malois. And the ring finger – *there* – for Liesl. And finally, *there*, the thumb for Johann. Because in that moment, I hated him more than anyone, even though he wasn't a sibling, only my cousin, or a – what was that word? – an accidental. He'd left me when I needed him most and there was no forgiving him for it.

Still, that final jab calmed me, Doctor Franz. I brushed the snow from the ledge and pulled the window shut.

Marie

When I wake, after a short sleep, once again I'm lying on the chaise-longue in his clinic. It's twilight save for a few candles gleaming. And I can hear somebody playing the new Stein. Who? One of the musicians that Doctor Franz employs for just such an occasion - as he tries, *tries*, to coax me out of my darkness with his magic water, his spinning planets and the sound of the Stein.

But what if in regaining my sight, I should lose my music? What if my hands lose their memory so that I cannot strike the keys square as I must do? I can't say this to Doctor Franz, who is so good and kind, who tries so hard to help me but Holy Mother! if I weren't a musician, then what would I be? Just a useless *thing* that could not play, a girl in the drawing-room after all and not a mermaid?

I still remember that winter before I lost my sight, when Liesl was sick. When she lost her music. Because whenever Mamma tried to play or sing to her, she'd scream and put her hands over her ears.

'You're hurting me,' she'd shriek.

But really, Doctor Franz, it was the scarlet-fever hurting her, that flushed her face like sunburn – or a slap. And that rash, those blotches the size of *kreuzer*, that turned white when I touched them. Only the area around her mouth stayed clear. Her kissing mouth.

Malois. I tapped out a note on my writing-machine to ask if I could come and have tea with him and the Archduchess at Schönbrunn again. But he replied that he hadn't seen her since that day when we all skated across the lake. And so my tenth birthday came and went and then the Empress's birthday passed us by, without another summons to the Palace.

And after that, we weren't allowed to go anywhere near the Palace at all because of the outbreak of smallpox.

'Is smallpox like chicken-pox?' I asked Aaleigha, wincing at the remembered burning itch.

'No,' said Aaleigha, 'smallpox is much worse. It can kill you.'

Yes, that's right. Because Johann's father wrote to us that of every ten children on the death register, nine of them had died from smallpox. And then I thought, well, I have lived, when bigger children have died. So it must mean I have been chosen for something. I have been spared because of my music. And another good thing, Doctor Franz, was that Johann was sent home from school until the epidemic had passed. Sent home, to quarantine, to me. So one less person to miss. One less person to count off on my rosary beads. Yes, Doctor Franz, illness had its compensations, after all.

Except that, as Johann and I sat there in the music-room's window-seat, inhaling the dry rot he said looked like a bruise against the frame's white paint, Aaleigha muttered, 'My mother had smallpox when she was a baby.'

'Oh?' I said.

'Yes – and they refused to name her until they knew she was going to survive.'

Oh! The poor little nameless baby, who was also, somehow, Frau Liebhart!

Aaleigha continued, 'Even when she was out of danger, they were worried she'd lose her sight.'

The church-bells began to toll out their *Never Never Never*, over-and-over again.

'Why are they making all that noise, Aaleigha?' I said.

'Is it for dead people?' asked Johann, in the new, growlley voice he'd acquired since he went away to school.

'Oh no,' said Aaleigha hurriedly, 'it's just that they think the movement in the air will disperse infection. That's why, where I'm from, near Bad Gastein, people release birds from cages when there's a plague.'

'Johann,' I whispered then, 'we should set free the birds from Mamma's aviary.'

But Johann didn't want to. He didn't even want to *pretend* to. Instead he said, 'One hundred years ago, there was a great plague. The people drank the sufferers' piss so that they wouldn't catch it.'

'Euggggh! But how do you know?'

'Malois told me,' said Johann. Then I heard him begin to pick at the window-frame's wood shavings. 'He said they even drank the blood of newly decapitated heads.'

'*Halt die Klappe*, Johann,' I said then, 'shut up.' And when he continued to goad me, 'Go away. I hate you. I wish you hadn't come back.' And even, finally, 'I wish you were dead.' Which wasn't true, of course, Doctor Franz. Not true at all.

Weeks later, after the smallpox epidemic had passed, Malois and I stood outside the Mirror Room at Schönbrunn Palace, waiting for the Empress to call me inside. As we waited, I began to recall what Malois had described to me so many times before. Gold, gilt and white walls and ceilings with cascades of chandeliers whose lit candles made the court bright though the heavy curtains were drawn across the windows. Then too, there was usually a footman with a pronounced nose and a dark ribbon in his wig who bowed low and pulled apart the double doors. The Empress in her black widow's dress often swept in after, followed by little girls with bunches of flowers. She would proceed through a corridor of courtiers: curtsying ladies who would straighten up to swish their fans and gentlemen in dark frock-coats who bowed low, one or two of them wearing the Order of the Empress. However, Malois had told me that since the smallpox epidemic, the Empress, indeed, the entire Imperial family, had kept themselves very quiet.

'But why is it called the Mirror Room?' I whispered.

'Oh – I think it was after some game of the Archduchesses. They arranged all the mirrors to create corridors of reflection that go on forever.'

'The Archduchess Elisabethe too?'

'No,' said Malois, 'oh no. Because she's been very sick, they say, and now – now she's quite altered.'

'Altered? How?'

But he had no time to tell me, Doctor Franz. A moment later, I stood on the other side of the door, in front of the Empress and the Archduchess.

The Empress stroked my cheeks, like she did before. Except that now, her fingers shook slightly and curled under themselves, as if weighed down by weariness. And her voice sounded heavy, too. 'The smallpox took my son's wife from us,' she said, 'and now we are very sad. So, little namesake, will you play something to make the sad feeling go away?' She guided me over to the piano and I played out the notes of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*:

*Cuius animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransivit gladius*

Except that as I played, my hands began to jangle over the keys. Because it was just too sad here. It was making me so sad I couldn't play. So I stopped. Placed my hands, folded, in my lap.

'Oh Marie,' the Archduchess said then, 'I wish you hadn't stopped.'

'Elisabete,' said the Empress, in such a sour tone I was surprised, 'lifting your veil to someone who can't see your face isn't particularly brave.'

A pause, a sigh, and then, 'Marie,' said the Archduchess, 'do you mind if I approach you?'

I shook my head.

Click click click of heels towards me. And then, before I could say anything, the Archduchess plucked my hands from my lap. She lifted our fingers through the air then down, right down onto her face. I didn't mean to, Doctor Franz, but I gasped. Because, Doctor Franz, her face wasn't smooth like mine. Or Aaleigha's. Or even Mamma's. No! It was pitted all over with bumps and holes like the pinprick

letters from when I was learning to read. Except I didn't like the story of her face.

It was uglier even than Liesl's now.

And then I thought of all those mirrors repeating the Archduchess's poor face, over-and-over again.

Something – a mist of cloth fell against my fingers. Her veil? A veil, dark and safe, where she could hide away? Yes. Because White Liz's loveliest granddaughter, the girl who used to smile at herself in the glass, eventually ended her days in a nunnery. Poor *kropferte Elisabethe*. (Poor Malois.)

And yet, Doctor Franz, after this particular audience, the Empress was happy with me. She increased my pension, both for my blindness and for my talent. And so finally, Doctor Franz, there were new chocolates and silk dresses at home, new books and new paintings. No, not for me, for Mamma, I mean. More Boucher ladies to grace her boudoir's satin-lined walls. A new looking-glass, scratched with the diamonds of courtesans – oh, and flowers, fresh flowers, even though it wasn't really Spring.

And yet, even though they could now afford to cut the ivy leaves back from the windows, there still came rustles and quivers, which gave way to whispering: *'There must be more money! Oh-h-h-h-h, there must be more money. Oh now, now-w—w-w-w! Now, more than ever!'* Insistent, insidious, those whispers were everywhere: beneath the sprays of roses and branches of almond blossom, underneath the piles of silken cushions. On and on they went, like a sort of madness, until the sound of them made me attack the piano keys. Made me thunder through the same chords, over-and-over. Why? To drown them out, Doctor Franz. And to perfect my playing. So that I could earn more money. Over-and-over again, I played, I played, in a sort of frenzy.

Until – the plaster helmet.

Marie

Oh yes, Doctor Franz, that's right. Doctor Ingenhousz has already written to you about the plaster-helmet. But it was because of the smallpox epidemic that I met him. Malois wrote to us from the Palace that there had been further deaths. The Empress had sent her daughter Josepha down into the crypt to pray for her dead sister-in-law. Only the tomb wasn't probably sealed. So Josepha caught smallpox – and died.

So the Empress decided that Doctor Ingenhousz should inoculate her entire family against smallpox. And then Uncle Friedrich decided that Doctor Ingenhousz should inoculate Johann – and me too. Except that when he finally saw me, it was my blindness that interested him. Over a few weeks, he invented the plaster-helmet to realign my eyes. To stop them jerking around 'like little marionettes,' he said.

First came the *snip-snip* of scissors and my hair fell all around me. Then my head felt so cool and light. But I barely had a moment to enjoy the sensation. What Johann called a *cut-throat razor* sliced across my sopping scalp.

They nicked me accidentally once or twice, had to staunch the flow of blood with some muslin. I thought they would leave my scalp a smooth egg-shell. But when they had finished, it was as bristling as Papa's cheeks, with a coarse, wayward tuft of hair just above my cold, sticking-out ears.

Then Doctor Ingenhousz kept slathering the wire cage of the helmet in plaster of Paris so that it grew heavier and heavier. And it smelt so musty and acrid, it was awful. It caught in my throat and made me gag. And as the plaster set, it burned my brow, my eyelids, the tip of my nose.

So I took my mind away. Mentally, I began to count my rosary beads but then, when I could bear it no longer, I gripped hold of Johann's knuckles.

'Doctor, you're hurting her,' he said.

'Good,' said Doctor Ingenhousz, 'then it's doing what it's supposed to do.'

'What's that?' said Johann as I clutched his fingers.

'In order to hold her eyes in place,' Doctor Ingenhousz said, 'the plaster needs to be as hard as her own bone, as tight as the skin on her own skull.'

After Doctor Ingenhousz had finished, I was put to rest in a chamber by myself. Except that Johann and I could no more keep apart than metal can avoid a magnet. So as I lay there on my bed, I heard his whisper outside my door.

'Mutz, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to run that Doctor through with my sword?'

'How will you?' I said. (*squeaks, shuffles, a thud, a cry?*)

Silence on my side of the door met with silence on Johann's.

'Johann?' I called out.

'I'm still here, Mutz,' he replied, 'and I've just thought of something.' But as he whispered his plan, I stopped listening. I suddenly remembered my long-ago music-box. Not what it had looked like or even how it had sounded. No. But how it had *felt*. One compartment sliding into another, *sliiiiide-shut*, ah, just like that. Why? Well, because, Doctor Franz, suppose the entire Palace shrank to music-box size – or even doll's house size. And then, like one compartment sliding into another, his corridor could slide into my chamber. And then, from this sliding, our hands could clasp.

Yes, yes, they were strange fancies, Doctor Franz. Perhaps it was because of the plaster helmet, its weight and pressure on my head. Anyway, as the wire-cage cut into my face, holding my eyes perfectly still, I began to listen to Johann.

The next day, we left the Palace. Outside, was it Spring? Had all the snow melted away? Usually, I could sense the world I could not see. Usually, I knew the trot of the horses' hooves, the quiver of the driver's whip, the upraised voices in the street. I knew the cobbles beneath my feet, the curves of the road, the quick trick of the ditches. Usually, I could smell the snow, the Spring. But now everything smelt of

plaster, Doctor Franz. My entire world contained within that plaster-helmet.

The next day, Doctor Franz, but did I tell you this before? Johann rode out to my mother's aviary. He slid open the padlock on the cage-door. *Swiiiiisssh. Swiiiiisssh. Swisssssh. Flappppp-fluttter*. Sunshine on their wings as the birds soared out towards the light.

But for nights and nights after they had applied the plaster-helmet, I couldn't sleep. My muscles burned and twitched. And then my skin felt so hot, I couldn't bear the touch of the sheet upon it, nor my bones, the pressure of the mattress beneath. Our mattress was now so old and sagging in the middle that Mamma and I kept meeting in the course of the night. But whereas before that was what I wanted, now I hurt so much that whenever her body touched mine, I flinched and moved over to the edge. And then - then I began to drench my pillow with tears. Not so much because my body hurt, Doctor Franz, but because I was so disappointed. Doctor Ingenhouz had promised that I would get better - and he was wrong.

But - *Swiish. Swiiiiish. Swiish*. The next time I heard that sound, Doctor Franz, they were cutting me free from the plaster helmet so that I could play the *Stabat Mater* at the new Royal Wedding. The Empress's youngest daughter, the Archduchess Maria Antoine, was to be married to the Dauphin Louis of France.

'And perhaps,' the doctors said, 'perhaps when we remove the plaster-helmet, Fräulein von Paradis, you will not only be able to sing but also to see again.' And that was what I hoped. Hoped for so hard I could feel it deep down inside me, clenching and unclenching with every slice of the blade. *Swiish. Swiiiiish. Swiish*. Not that I expected it, really. The main thing was just being cut free. Because Holy Mother, I was thirteen years old now. Thirteen, blind, but I yearned to be lovely. Oh. Oh how I wanted my face to please.

The doctors took a long time to cut me free. I heard their knives slice through

the plaster with delicacy and finesse. And it pleased me that they took such care over my face. Why? Well, because it made me think they were my sculptors and I was their creation. Then, as they continued to cut the plaster away, I felt as if I were a bird, Doctor Franz, a bird hatching. And that I could pass off all the blood and pus as the normal nascence of a downy chick (*squawking and jostling, clamour and din.*)

And Mamma. Mamma was leaning over my broken shell, comforting me as they cut, cut, cut. Except that, Doctor Franz, as the last of the plaster fell away – nothing. No sudden blaze of light. Not even the shadows and shapes around me. Certainly not Mamma's blurred, anxious face.

'Your face,' she started to scream, 'your face.' Her screams were so loud that I was afraid to touch it. But when I did, it felt – swollen and distorted. Not like anything of mine. It didn't belong to me. It hurt.

The wire cage had cut into my face, Doctor Franz, had rubbed away my skin, leaving it raw and -

'Flayed,' Mamma screamed, 'Marie, they've flayed you.' And she clutched me to her, with frantic, indecent haste. Pillowed against her breasts, I cried out. The material, the fibres of her dress, were sticking to my skin. I knew if I took my face away, it would start bleeding again. Yet still I jerked it free.

I had to know the truth.

I began to touch my face. But how monstrous! My cheeks scorched and blazed. My mouth was cracked and bleeding, the delicate skin dried out by the surrounding plaster. My skin quivered beneath my fingertips, no matter how gentle I tried to be.

Mamma was right, Doctor Franz.

They had flayed me.

I was right.

I was a monster.

And my eyes?

But now I was afraid to touch them.

Doctor Ingenhousz had thought he could realign my eyes with his plaster-

helmet. He even thought he might be able to restore my sight.

Well, Doctor Franz, he'd failed.

Gingerly, I touched the skin round my eyes. It was much puffier and more swollen than it had ever been before. And oh, there was a searing pain behind my eyeballs. That was new and severe. So severe it made me want to *puke*.

Puke it all up, the pain and fear and oh God, the *loneliness* of it, all those weeks trapped behind a wire-cage, encased in plaster, whilst Johann was away at school. But I knew if I carried on like this, Doctor Franz, I'd only set Mamma off again. And I've always found the sound of her crying unbearable. Worse, far worse than the weight of the plaster-helmet.

Worse even than the sorry mess of my face.

My face. My poor face, Doctor Franz. Still, I'd told myself the truth about it and somehow that made it seem less bad. Some kind of truth whispered somewhere in the darkness. Mustn't let Mamma overhear. Though Mamma carried on crying. So I folded myself up and sat myself down on the floor by the window. I leaned my cheek against the wall and let the cool air wash round my face. Because I knew. Oh yes I knew, perfectly well, Mamma wasn't crying for me but for herself.

Marie

'A face like that is hardly a good omen for a wedding,' Papa said when he first saw me. My fingers flew to my face, the pus-oozing scabs, the lacerations round my eyes. 'How on earth can she appear in public like that?'

My face, my poor face, like butcher's meat, though no-one, Doctor Franz, would tell me how bad it looked. But it must have been awful because Papa decided that, from now on, in public, I would wear a veil. But even like that, I was not allowed to attend the Archduchess Maria Antoine's ball

And Johann wasn't allowed to attend it either, though he had been sent home from school especially to take part in the wedding celebrations. Or else, no, there was some problem with his school fees. Johann's father said he had forwarded the money to my father but the money hadn't reached the school. Or something. Anyway, Mamma *fff-l-l-u-tt-er-ed* her peacock fan and said that Johann and I were too young to go. Instead, she took Aaleigha with her to Prince Lichtenstein's Palace. And so it was Aaleigha who told us about the engagement ball the following day.

'I stepped over the threshold,' she said, 'and took off my cloak. I could see a candelabra, silver dishes, cut-glass crystal and bouquets lined up all along the table.'

'And what else?' I said.

'Ah Missie, ever-curious, aren't you? There were gold-rimmed plates and snowy napkins, all folded up so prettily.'

'Ahhhh,' I said, 'and then?'

'Well, then they lifted the covers and a steward flicked a bit of meat onto my plate.'

'Is that all you had to eat?'

'Well Missie, I'm not like Johann, I was there for dancing, not guzzling. And so when we were all tidied up, I came down a great staircase. A violin began to play and a horn began to parp,' she said, squeezing my arm. 'The dancing had begun. But me, I didn't have a partner. So I sat down near the door, next to all the painted ladies.'

There they were, their fans fluttering, their nosegays half-hiding smiles as their beaux approached.'

She sighed, then said, 'The mothers and chaperones began to nod to each other beneath their turbans. But it felt really stuffy inside. So Missie, I stepped out onto the terrace for a breath of air.'

'And then what?' I said.

'Well,' she said, 'over in the garden, I could see all the people from the village pressed against the windows. One man had hoisted his little daughter onto his shoulders and was pointing out the details of the fine folk inside. I could hear him telling her all about the lacework trimmings, the brooches and bracelets, the twists of ribbon and knots of flowers in high-powdered wigs. And Marie, it's the funniest thing, but as I listened, I suddenly felt that *I* was that ragged little girl, watching all the swirl and splendour of other peoples' lives.'

She was quiet for a moment, then continued, 'Anyway, I went back inside and ate a lemon sorbet. They were serving them with liquors all night long. And then,' she added, sounding brighter, 'at the stroke of midnight, a man, dressed all in red, appeared on the ballroom floor.'

'Oh, who was it? Who was it?' I said, 'the Dauphin?'

'The Devil Krampus?' Johann piped up.

'No,' said Aaleigha. 'It was our very own Malois. And at his side, the most exquisite creature, wearing a mask too, studded with diamonds and rubies.'

'Did you ask Malois who she was?' said Johann.

'Yes,' said Aaleigha. 'In an interval, I went up to him and asked him. I thought she must be an Archduchess or a visiting princess, at least. But he just grinned and wouldn't tell me.'

'I know who she was,' I said, 'I know.'

'Who?'

'Cendrillon!' I said, smiling. But really, Doctor Franz, I was smiling because it was just like Malois to take the gypsy girl to the ball and pass her off as an

Archduchess. How did I know it was the gypsy girl? Well, because Aaleigha said she was wearing rubies. And rubies are red, aren't they, Doctor Franz? And red was the colour of her dress when she danced for Malois that St. Nicholas's Eve.

'Didn't you dance with anyone, Aaleigha?' I asked then.

'No,' said Aaleigha. 'I was hoping your brother might ask me. But, you know Missie, Malois never left his companion's side.'

I felt the cinders blow all around me in the cool draught as doors banged open-and-shut. It was the night after the Archduchess's ball. Now it was the Dauphin's turn to be fêted. And so Mamma and Aaleigha *russstllllled* past me, trailing the scent of silks, satins, tallow-wax, tannin and attar of roses. Then, *ccccaw* of hinges, *ccccreeeeak* of frames, *tting-ttt-ting-ching* of the chandelier. When they'd finally left for Prince Lichtenstein's Palace, the fire in the hearth died down. Then I began to wait for Johann to finish shifting the music room's piano.

Dull *j-j-jangle* from the rattled keys as he heaved away, out-of-breath, laughing. I could smell him then, the linen of his shirt, his sweat, his paints, his linseed oil. I walked towards the window-seat, the skirt of my dress sweeping behind me. I stopped to touch the cloth that had once touched the body of the youngest Archduchess. Touched the body of my sister...

Breath of silk against our limbs.

This dress, Liesl's dress, the colour of the night-sky. Though what if Papa had lied, Doctor Franz, about the colour? What if he had twisted the truth the way I twisted the folds of fabric between my fingers?

I asked Johann then, about the truth, of clothes and colours. My blue dress. His red frock-coat. He said we would wear them to a ball when we were old enough. Everyone would stare.

Then he said he had finished moving the piano. So I told him to fetch us some candles from the kitchen. And saucers to put them in. And then he lit candles on the window-seat, on the mantelpiece, beside the clock, on top of the piano. And now the

warmth of the candles drew out the scent of the roses.

Perhaps candle shadows leapt from our feet as we began to dance. *Tick-Tick* of his fob-watch. *Puck-Puck* of our slippers against the mosaic tiles. Only the music was silence. So we danced in silence, like yet unlike the silence of my blindness. My hips swayed. Johann's hands went everywhere, cool, then warm around my waist. The dance caressed me under my clothes.

Then Johann began to spin me round, faster-and-faster. Perhaps we made the roses tremble on their stems, brushed against them with my skirt, trod them into the tiles as we turned, spun, swooped but we didn't care.

Johann.

My Johann.

My eyes.

Suddenly, I was laughing without knowing why.

The door clicked open. 'Oh,' said Aaleigha, 'you're dancing, too.' But she wasn't cross. Instead, she re-lit our candles, stirred up our fire. 'It's only right the pair of you should enjoy yourselves as well,' she said. And as the flames leapt towards her, she began to tell us about the fireworks and Turkish music and the gold dolphins for the Dauphin and Dauphine lit by flaming torches.

And her voice was so happy, I wasn't surprised when she began to say that tonight there was no red-clad companion, that tonight, she and Malois had danced. And then, how well could I imagine it!

The throb of her heart as he clasped her fingers, the sudden glide forwards, the smiles rising to her lips, her feet stepping back-and-forth, her skirts rustling against his breeches, their legs interlaced, her head dipping against his chest.

But after the balls, after the public and private dances, Doctor Franz, came practice for the Royal Wedding. Practice. Practice. Practice. Which was playing. Which was work. Over-and-over, I twisted the piano seat, adjusted it to my height.

Pulled back my sleeves, flexed my fingers, hoping all the while that the piano was willing. Took a deep breath then settled into silence. Listened out until a door opened up inside me, ready to let the music in. Then, my head tilted back, I leaned forwards, took another deep breath. And surrendered myself to where the music was. And though there were moments when my mind went blank, still my fingers were always able to pick their way through them, to find what the composer had intended. And this then was practising, was playing. Was work.

Except that, despite all my practising, the Empress didn't want me to play at the Royal Wedding. Oh no. She wanted me to sing.

On the day of the wedding, Johann put his hand on my arm, to help guide me towards my place in front of the cathedral altar. But I didn't want his help, this time. I shook off his hand and then collided with someone.

'Sorry,' I mouthed.

'No, no, it's a statue,' Johann whispered.

As I stood at the front of the cathedral, ready to sing the *Stabat Mater*, I began to shiver. Oh the cloying scent of incense, and the candles, and the music, well, of course, the music, the sad passion of it:

*Cuius animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransivit gladius*

*Through her weeping soul,
Compassionate and grieving,
A sword had passed.*

It was a proxy marriage. The Archduke Ferdinand intoned, 'I am willing and thus make my promise.' Then his sister, the Archduchess Maria Antoine, must have knelt down beside him, and I heard her say the same whilst the guns were fired at the Spitalplatz. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

No. No, of course not, Doctor Franz. I shouldn't have liked to marry my

brother or Johann, not even in play. (*Go away Ha. Go away Fa.*) But would I like to be married? Ah, one day, maybe, Doctor Franz.

After the ceremony, outside the cathedral, a breeze began to tug at my veil but I pulled it back in place.

That night, in bed, Liesl's dress lay on the other side of me where Mamma would lie. I tugged at the crinkle of a long lace sleeve, brought it beneath my nose. Gingerbread and puff-powder, the acrid notes of perfume and that deep dark down mushroomy, lost in the soil smell. Ah. Did the dress still smell like Liesl or did it smell like me now?

I began to breathe in the scent of the dress, and then, somehow, it seemed as if someone was stooping over me, troubled eyes looking down on me as a candle was thrust up close to my face. And then her face flamed over mine and I heard that noise again, that could have been *shuffle-flutter, shuffle-flutter* or else - soft ripping.

And then, the candle was extinguished.

And in the morning, Aaleigha tutted and exclaimed because the dress's sleeve was torn from top to bottom in two halves.

And she couldn't mend it in time, Doctor Franz, for us to go back to Schönbrunn. Because, later that day, Johann, Aaleigha and I, we all stood with the gathered crowds on the slope outside the Palace, waiting for the carriage that was to drive the Archduchess, or rather, the Dauphine, Marie Antoinette, to her new home.

'Oh, look, Johann,' said Aaleigha, 'the Dauphine's poked her head right out of the carriage window and she's waving goodbye, poor mite.'

'Waving goodbye to her Mamma,' I said. 'Is the Empress still dressed in black?' I hoped not, Doctor Franz. Because that was the last sight the Dauphine might ever have of her mother.

And oh, the poor Empress, Doctor Franz. How she missed and mourned, no, not her daughter but the Emperor. Malois told me that one of the Archduchesses

once opened up her mother's prayer-book. From it, there fluttered to the ground a piece of paper. And on that piece of paper, written over-and-over again, *mein Liebling, mein Liebling, mein Liebling, mein Liebling, mein Liebling* followed by calculations for how long she had been married: twenty-nine years, six months and six days, which made three hundred and thirty-five months, which was one thousand five hundred and forty weeks or ten thousand seven hundred and eighty-one days or two hundred and fifty thousand, seven hundred and forty-four hours.

Except that, well, Malois or someone once told me that the Emperor had a mistress. And Doctor Franz, I know the Empress never had another lover. And so the Empress must have loved the Emperor more than he loved her. And so it's true, Doctor Franz, isn't it, what they say about love, that there's always one who loves more than the other? Yes. Yes, you agree. Always.

Marie

For weeks and weeks now Doctor Franz, I've been wanting to touch your face. It would be my way of seeing you, of knowing you, and yet I don't know how to ask you. You see, I need your consent, my dear Doctor Franz, as you needed mine when you began to treat me. I don't want to pretend to touch you accidentally. Reach out, grasp you, my dear, my darling Doctor Franz, propel your face towards my own...

No.

I'm too scared to ask if I can touch your face. Which is strange, because for weeks now, you've been touching mine. You massage my forehead, the skin round my eyes. Sometimes your touch is fluttering and delicate. But at other times, you hurt me. Then I'm not sure that I can bear such suffering. It's when you hurt me that I want to slap your face. Because I love you, I want to hurt you.

Ah, let me know you, let me love you, but in my way, not in yours. After all, it's only fair. Every day you see me but every day I stay in darkness, where I cannot see your face. I don't want the light you promise me but I do want to touch your face.

I begin my entreaties.

You stop touching my face. You tell me you are at my disposal. And I glory in the submissive note to your voice, you, who have been my master.

Now you let me touch your face.

My heart aches as I trace your contours. Your eyebrows seem vast. I might lose myself in them. Your eyelids flutter against my palm. Perhaps I make you nervous. Or perhaps my hand presses too hard. Hard as your cheek-bones. Craggy ridges, like the mountains where you grew up, the rocks you clambered over with your mother in search of healing flowers.

But when I touch you, you keep your secrets. Are your temples really temples where you burn incense to the great god Apollo? But you tell me you have no gods except for your magnets, your medicine and yourself.

Oh but worship me. Worship my face as now I worship yours. Give me the homage that I give you, my fingertips trembling over your face.

Doctor Franz, you do not stay my touch. And so, though my hand trembles, my fingertips move towards your mouth. It is soft and dry and fleshy and wet. I cannot stop touching your mouth. I touch it more than I should. Because, for weeks now, I've been wondering how it would feel to - press my mouth to yours.

That night, I wake suddenly, to the chimes of the grandfather clock in the hallway. *Dongggg. Donggggg. Donggggg.* The quarter hour. A quarter to midnight and now I can't sleep. I sense the night-light has burned down to its wick and I'm alone in the dark. Alone in my bed.

I'm cold.

And I can hear everything. Every rustle. Every screech. Overhead, the floorboards creak. Above me, Doctor Franz is pacing up-and-down in his chamber, long, deliberate strides, just above my head. *Tap-tap-tap*, it sounds like a blind person's cane but really it's the very particular way he has of striking out with his toe-caps. There it is again, even louder. *Tap-tap-tap*. Is it the Doctor pressing down on my head? Or is it just the branch of a tree outside, tapping steadily against the window-pane?

I pull the wrapper round myself, swing my bare feet onto the floor, *oooaahhh*, so cold, the stone flags, my whole body thins to its bones. Then I scabble around, find my slippers and pad over to the window.

I can't really see what lies outside. I can't tell which are clouds and which are leaves. But for a moment, I think I glimpse the moon. Almost full, it shines onto the river. Or is just the light glittering out from the gatehouse, flanked by tall trees? Now I see it, now I don't. But it's dark now, so dark I almost see my own face opposite me in the window. My face - or? For just as I start to trace its outline with my finger, there comes again the sound of *tap-tap-tap*, followed by a sort of fretful moan. And I, who can differentiate between every person's footstep and the particular click of

who closes which door, am puzzled.

Who is it?

Liesl? Is it you? I didn't mean to forget about you. It's just that I tucked you away into a corner of my mind. And then you became so far away from me, it felt like I was rubbing my fingers on the fabric of a dress I'd worn a long time ago.

Ah, Liesl!

I grope my way back towards the bed, reach for my pillow, hug it close.

Doctor Franz, I say the next day, I lost my sight when I was very young. I lost my sister then I lost my sight. Everything went black.

He tells me I must trust him.

He tells me I'm not blind.

He tells me I can see.

But even though I do trust him, I'm still scared when he pulls the last of the bandages away from my face. Because now there's a light so bright it dazzles me. *He* dazzles me. So bright, it hurts. And so I avert my eyes.

Out of kindness, he pulls down a shutter, draws one of the curtains, so that now we are in a half-light of his creation. Then and only then does he thrust a looking-glass into my hand, tells me to look at myself.

My hands tense, close round the handle of the looking-glass.

I see a blur of white and blue.

And then, all at once, I see my sister's face in the mirror. I begin to remember the dream I once had as a child, my sister in the glass, her face a puzzled reflection of mine.

Doctor Franz starts to speak to me again. His voice is deep and soothing. He tells me that many of our thoughts lead a kind of shadow existence. They remain on the fringes of our conscious experience, even after numerous impressions are condensed and seem to push in the direction of recognition. Some chance words, some inconspicuous new impression, facilitates their arrival at the surface of thought.

And then, he says, their formerly shadowy nature can finally be voiced. He pauses expectantly, wanting me to speak, willing me to see.

I finger the bandages in my lap. I don't want to touch what lies beneath the bed, the floor, the earth. So silence stretches out between us as the hour begins to darken.

I'm still afraid. I don't want to see myself. I avert my eyes from the looking-glass. And yet, with strange, sudden boldness, I say to Doctor Franz, 'I would rather look at you.' And it's true. My eyes hunger for the sight of the face my hands have learned to love. But I don't know, how could I know, if I can endure the sight. I reach out and once again, I touch his upturned mouth.

And then I remember my sister's mouth. The area around it was clear although the rest of her skin was covered in blotches the size of a *kreuzer*. How strange it was that her mouth was unspoiled. Her guilty mouth.

The looking-glass watched. I watched.

It was winter, cold and dark. My toes curled back frozen from the floorboards as I hid behind my big sister's wardrobe. It was like playing Hide-and-Seek, only, all by myself, not wanting anyone to find me. Bad little Mutz, spying on lovely grown-up Liesl! She was sitting in front of her mirror, wearing a long, white dress. Her dark red hair shone because she'd rinsed it through with rosemary and rainwater.

Liesl smiled at herself in the glass then seized a clump of hair and parted it in three. Criss-cross, criss-cross, back-and -forth. I wanted to reach out and touch it. But all of a sudden, her twin Malois was there, inside the oval frame, inside the mirror. *He* touched the new plait then let his hand drop and smiled at his twin.

'Look,' he said, 'we're the same.' And they were, like red-and-gold chess pieces, or tiny, identical dolls, except that one was a boy and one was a girl.

'Like one person,' said Liesl with all the wisdom of her eighteen years and then, 'should you like to be one person with anyone?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Malois. 'Sometimes I want to be free to think my own thoughts, to be my own self.'

'Oh,' said Liesl. Inside the mirror, her face fell. But then it flushed and the pupils of her eyes bloomed. Her hand disappeared up his sleeve, whilst her other hand reached round his neck. Then a gleam of silver in the glass, then *snip-snip*, then down, down, down.

Behind them, in the looking-glass, was the bed.

Fa kissed Ha. The twin dolls rested their heads on the pillows of the dolls' house's four poster bed. Rested their heads on the snowy-white pillows, their faces just touching.

After Christmas that winter, my sister Liesl fell sick. And whereas before she'd loved her music, now, if Mamma tried to play or sing to her, she would put her hands over her ears and shriek, 'You're hurting me.' But really, it was the scarlet fever hurting her, the fever that wouldn't yield to herbs, compresses, leeches or even our love.

'Liesl,' I said, stepping towards her. Her face was covered in a rash, except for round her mouth, which was clear. And her hair lay in a plait across her pillow, shining, thick and snake-like.

'*Mon amour*,' she murmured, smiling, 'is it you?'

'It's me, Marie,' I wanted to say. 'Mutz.' But her eyes flickered uncertainly over my face so I glanced down. Her chest was covered in pinkish blotches. But there, something glinted. A locket, rising, falling, rising, falling.

I reached out. The rash felt gritty, like sand. My fingers made it turn white. Then I grasped the locket, prised my fingernail inside it.

It sprang open. And there lay a lock of our brother's hair, bright red and slightly coiled.

That locket, those spots on Liesl's shins and elbows, those reddish blotches on

her poor face. Days later, they tried to hide the rash with roses but it didn't work. I could still see it. And when I saw her body, laid out like that on the bed and surrounded by flowers, I knew she was dead. I knew it too when I ran out into the garden and began to stab the soil with twigs. I knew it then forgot it in the cellar where Aaleigha hid me so that I wouldn't see them take the body away.

I've always known it, Doctor Franz. Just as I've always known that my sister loved my brother more than she should. So whenever anyone told me Liesl was travelling or touring, Austria or Italy, I knew they were lying. And yet somehow, I've always not known it too, so that every time somebody lied to me, I could keep on believing.

There.

Doctor Franz, you approached my lost sight as if it were a locked box and now, together, we have found the key. And yet I can neither look at you nor into the mirror. Instead, I glance down and there they are. My own hands revealed to me. And I can really see them. They astonish me! My hands unfolding like so many lengths of ribbon, over-and-over, forever and ever. I stretch out my fingers, flex and unfurl them, again and again.

'What can you see?' you say. *'When you can, tell me what you see.'*

Your words proceed from a blur. Then comes a sudden flowering of light and colour and movement.

To me, it makes no sense at all (this is a painful, incomprehensible hatching.)

But don't fret. A voice comes from a face. That haze is his face. Look at him.

'What can you see?'

A reddish blur in front of my face. Hovering, glowing, throbbing. Keep calm, Marie. Keep calm and concentrate. But how can I tell you? How can I tell you that your face looks like my face felt, when they removed the plaster-helmet?

Like butcher's meat.

How can I tell you that though you're the first man I've ever loved (really? What about Johann?) your face does not please me? That, in fact, it repulses me. That

I'm sure I should like my dog's face better. And that if you were to kiss me, to bring that great, slobbering, wet bruise towards me, I should scream. I know I should.

I want to scream now. To shatter the seeing world into a million different pieces.

Your face frightens me.

Please – I beg of you – can't you keep it still? All that quivering movement, every muscle of your face in motion, all of the time.

Keep it away from me.

Keep your face, your mouth, your eyes away from me, or I shall scream.

Because if you, you magician you, make one more thing appear in front of my eyes, my mind will break. Already, I'm sick with panic. And the only thing I can do, the only escape I have, is to sit absolutely still. To shut my eyes. To submerge myself in darkness and wait. Then, when my heartbeat has slowed and my hands cease trembling, perhaps I can open my eyes. But can I find the courage to face you again?

Perhaps.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

6th May, 1777. I note this date in my journal as if it were a birthday. For Marie's smile reveals that she is touched to understanding by what I have been trying to teach her. And such a smile!

And yet the restoration of her sight places her in a peculiarly untutored relation to the world around her. This means that she is able to express her opinions just as prejudice takes her. For example, when she first began to see, she said about me, 'That is horrid. Can that really be the figure of a man? It is not what I remember.' Or of noses, 'They seem to be threatening me, as if they wanted to pluck out my eyes.' At her request, Soukeryl was brought into her. Very attentively, she contemplated this new apparition. 'The cat,' she said, 'pleases me better than the man.'

Colour, for her, is also not without its problems. When she was confronted with black, she declared it to be the picture of her former blindness. This colour invariably provokes a melancholy mood, a mood she is prone to anyway during the course of a treatment, so that she often burst into tears for no apparent reason. Otherwise, she remembered red but it was painful to her. Blue was a fortunate colour since she could at least see its resemblance to the sky. Yet green and yellow bewildered her so that she could not be brought to perceive any difference between them.

However, these are just the kinds of difficulties I would expect in someone newly encountering the world of light after so many years of darkness. Poor Marie. She must also learn to re-integrate her sight with all her other senses. With the recovery of her vision, these other senses grow more distraught. Now she has to spend more time in thought before starting to play pieces on the piano which she had formerly performed with absolute precision. In fact, now that she can see, she finds it difficult to play anything at all.

Perhaps the difficulty is that now she is starting to *see* the spaces where sounds

reverberate. Even the walls of the room appear, she tells me, an immense distance away, as far above her as the night-sky. Nor has the piano resumed its familiar contours for her. Instead, it remains one dark shape among many.

And her own bodily spaces, she can no longer negotiate them either. The spoon does not reach her mouth but instead passes to her cheek or chin. Once, when she was about to put a piece of bread in her mouth, it suddenly seemed so large that she did not believe it would fit. Sometimes, she would not eat at all if I did not give her permission to shut her eyes and cocoon herself in darkness. Then, and only then, can she take a morsel of food, a sip of drink.

But when her eyes are open, she loses this complicity of darkness. Then I have observed her bring whichever object it is to her mouth, like an infant would do. It is as if she believes her lips are so much more sensitive than her eyes. And yet, I remain convinced that it is not a problem of vision but rather, one of language. She lacks the words to describe shapes and, with her eyes open, anything beyond smooth or rough.

Then, too, when I show her an object, she frequently identifies not the one I am holding out to her but the one before it. The image of an object so burns itself onto her retina that she continues to see it, even after it has been withdrawn. It takes time for the object, feather, ring, miniature, to fade from her sight.

Marie

I stand up from the piano and begin to make my way towards the sound of Frau Mesmer's voice. Keep talking, keep talking so that I can find my way. (Though sometimes when you do speak, I long for you to be quiet. *Halt die Klappe!*)

Which is of course what she does now. Silence. I try to find my way towards her while the room blurs and whirls around me. Corners slide away, chairs tilt at strange angles, tables spin and cushions leap into the air, like the rapid pell-mell of oranges from a juggler's hands.

'Stop it,' I want to shout, 'stop it!' But the words stick in my throat. So I reach over to a dark, black shape – the one solid thing among the shifting, heaving masses. But somehow, the desk slips through my fingers and then the candelabra is flying. Sudden brightness until the flame is extinguished.

Then comes something like the flap of crow's wings and she says, quite kindly for her, 'Don't fret. When you get used to being able to see, you'll negotiate these spaces just as easily as you could when you were blind.'

But I shut my eyes. Darkness. And now I'm rummaging inside the desk drawer for the roll of bandages. I pull it out, unwind it then wrap the bandages round my eyes.

Frau Mesmer's voice starts frowning. 'My husband says you don't need to wear bandages at night. There's no light to hurt your eyes. Besides, it's important that you learn to manage without them.'

'I'll take them off when I'm in bed,' I say, as sweetly as I can, 'it's just that, without them, I won't be able to find my way to my room.'

'You can always ask me for help,' she says, so gently that I wonder whether I've been mistaken about her. Perhaps we can be friends?

No!

She never says it and I never say it but we both know it. We're not friends. We're rivals.

I bid Frau Mesmer, 'Good night,' and find my way up the staircase. Then I slide beneath the sheets and begin to shiver. It doesn't make sense but it feels like not being able to see is what keeps me here, cold and alone. So, I decide to honour my promise to Frau Mesmer. I reach round and begin to tug at the bandages. Surely candlelight won't hurt my eyes?

But no. It dazzles me – makes me drunk – makes the room spin before me – fast, too fast, with the dizzying intensity of a piece of music I don't like but am compelled to hear. And, unlike my own music, I can find no place of stillness within it.

The room tilts its kaleidoscope shapes. Then I realise the world outside the bandages is not the one I had imagined beneath them. Even the earthenware jug bewilders me. Is there an elfin, elongated face, gleaming in it? And now, when I try to fix my eyes on the objects around me, they won't stay still. They keep sliding away from me. Since I can't recognise them, I'm forced to consign them to the cyclone.

I want to blow out the candle now. Except that the danger of trying to see, of depending on the light, is that once the candle is snuffed out, I will be extinguished too. So instead, I stare at the heart of the flame. Not just the light but the *colour* seems to burn itself into my mind. Who? Ah, who can explain this strange new world to me? The shapes and colours? Who?

And then his face begins to appear in the candle-flame. Not as he is because that I don't know. But as he used to be, a nine-year-old boy. A glance, a smile, from inside the flame. And here I am, without him. And so, shielding my eyes, I reach over to the writing-machine and begin to tap out the words:

*Johann, I need you.
Come and see me, please.*

Tomorrow, the 15th May, is my eighteenth birthday. That is why my parents are paying me a visit now at Doctor Franz's, although it is not his usual policy to allow his patients their guests unless their cure is at an advanced stage.

After the preliminary greetings are over, Mamma mumbles something about Johann borrowing a horse. But she breaks off when she sees I am smiling. Perhaps that's not something she's used to at home. I'm smiling because I can see her speaking. I can see the shapes her mouth makes. I put my fingers to her lips to feel their quirk and twitch. And they do so tickle me that I start to laugh and then she is laughing too, and spinning me round and round, shouting,

'My daughter can see! My daughter can see!'

Mingling with the sound of her voice, Cerberus's joyful *Whouff! Whouff! Whouff!* And then, oh but then, I can see the swish of his tail and a rapid blur of dark colours, blues within blacks, aubergines within purples.

'She can see,' Mamma says again as I begin to twist my head this way and that, at every twist, assaulted by new sights and colours.

I sit down at the spinet and try to play for Mamma but now I am too excited. I am flooded with the feeling. It is too much. Now the notes are like birds, warbling away, each individual sound memorable enough but together they make a discordant cacophony. And at their most shrill, little bits break off and form a figure beneath the door-frame.

Papa. There he stands, disapproving, among the sharp shadows of the doorway.

'Stop that nonsense, Marie,' he says, 'you will oblige me by playing properly. The Empress is anxious to welcome you back to court.'

I shake my head. But straight away, I realise that this is a mistake. Because now his voice grows ominously quiet.

'Marie,' he says.

I don't want to play for him. I don't even want to play for myself. But I play, I play. Except, now I can see, my strangely visible hands jangle on the black-and-

white blur of the keys. Now I can see, I cannot play.

No good.
I try again.
No.
There it is -
That odd slippage -
I'm losing my tempos.
It's my hands' fault.
I hold them up in front of my face.
Then I put them down again on the keys.

I resume the treble.
That's fine.
Right hand to play base,
Left hand in my lap.
All fine.
But as soon as I try to play with both hands,
They lose the sense of each other -
Such a shrill jangle,

So I snatch my hands away from the spinet.

These are not, cannot be, my hands,
Trembling, nervy, and then – the shaking
Begins to spread from my fingers and soon
Encompasses my entire body -

So that I -
I begin to rock back-and-forth
To-and-fro,

Mamma!

There she sits, her face wincing, mirroring mine, except more tired, more lined. Even her silk dress, her satin slippers, seem worn and faded. Poor Mamma. Now I can see but no longer play, what will happen to my pension from the Empress?

And I begin to hear again the terrible whispering: *Ohhhhh, there must be more money! There must be more money! Now more than ever!* Only now I cannot drown out the noise with my playing. Now I cannot play a note. So – smash all the flutes, the spinets, the violins. Let shards of the glass harmonica shiver then splinter.

Because I don't want to hear them.

I remain seated at the spinet, my eyes full of tears, my hands quivering in my lap. Because now I know, I would gouge out my own eyes, not mad, Mamma, but blind once more if only that would stop that ceaseless, frenzied whisper, *There must be more money! There must!*

Later, I hear my parents shouting at Doctor Franz although he had carefully shut his clinic door.

'It's just wishful thinking,' Mamma shrills.

And then Papa yells, 'We need to remove her from your conjurer's Palace.'

I try and block my ears with my fingers as tears form, slide, scald my face. But somehow I can still hear Doctor Franz's voice, stern but icily polite.

'I will return your daughter to you, fully cured and playing the piano better than the Prodigy himself.'

This surprises me so much, I drop my hands in time to catch Papa say, 'You'll hear from me about this again, sir.' He's courteous enough now that he's stopped shouting yet his words seem menacing. Perhaps because he said, 'hear.' Because that is the sense that he values above all others. Which is only natural, I suppose, for the Imperial Secretary at the Empress's musical court. For the father of a musical daughter.

'Don't be alarmed, Marie,' says Doctor Franz a little while later, 'your parents have gone now. And I've promised them that you shall play for them another time.'

'It will have to be,' I say, 'at the moment, I can't play at all. Why is that?'

'Perhaps because you are not yet happy in your mind,' says Doctor Franz.

'Certainly, I'm less happy than I used to be,' I say, 'and less peaceful.'

He is kind. He tries to comfort me. He tells me that there is still much work for us to do. That is why I'm still here, a patient of his at his clinic. 'But when you grow more accustomed to *seeing* your surroundings,' he adds, 'then you will feel happier

and your music will return.'

'Good,' I reply, 'for otherwise, how could I bear it?'

Doctor Franz does not answer immediately. When he does speak, it is merely to say, 'Shall we go and have some tea?' And he sweeps me out of the clinic along the tiled corridor into the main house. As we cross the hallway, towards the flames in the parlour hearth, I feel like I'm leaving my own world and entering – well, Johann's. Because how often has he described it to me, those leaping patches of light, those dark, quivering shadows?

Though if I can now see the world, does that mean I am becoming him or that he is somehow me? Or do I really belong to Doctor Franz? Bah! Sometimes, they're both the same, each as bad as the other. Johann and his opium dreams and his paints too bright and hurting; Doctor Franz and his glass harmonica and his prisms refracting rainbow light. Perhaps I'm better off without either of them. Perhaps I don't need anyone at all.

Johann

*Johann, I need you.
Come and see me, please.*

Her letter, tapped out on her writing-machine, sits propped up on my easel. Beside it, my old pen-and-ink copy of a drawing von Hohenberg once showed me. A woman, standing behind a man, her head bowed. The limbs of both figures are strangely elongated with elbows and neck joints at awkward angles: nonsensical skeletons.

If I can borrow a horse, I shall go and see Marie for her birthday.

My aunt is happy to lend me Feste, and so, towards evening, I saddle him up and begin to ride him round the city's circle until I reach the suburb of Landstrasse.

At first, my eyes dart back-and-forth, picking out the passers-by with the help of candles burning in the low-set windows. Soon however, they begin to water, irritated by the constant dried-out dust of chalk and gravel stirred up by carriage wheels and the Föhn wind. *Fwaaaagh!* My eyes smart, my nose and throat sting. This dust is as bad as fog and almost prevents me from discerning the lanterns flickering outside the doctor's house.

Her birthday – and I will see her again for the first time in some five months. And on her birthday last year, it was the first time I'd seen her in almost two years.

Last year, I travelled from my lodgings to my aunt's house. Returned to my childhood home because Marie and Aaleigha and Aunt Marisa had also returned that day from their European tour. And so I climbed the steps to the front door, then paused for a moment before I let the lion's head drop. Was that Marie, making the window-seat's curtain shake?

What if she'd never been away at all?

No, that was absurd. I had two years of her letters tucked beneath my mattress, rustling her news from Naples, Ravello, Sicily and Paris. In her last letter, she said that they were finally coming back to Vienna, that her Mamma was intending to

take them to the opera for her seventeenth birthday. Ritter von Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. *Can you join us, Johann?* she wrote, *it wouldn't be the same without you.*

I let the lion-head drop. The door swung away from me. Through the ever-widening gap, I glimpsed Marie's portrait that I painted just before she went away. There it was, above the staircase. Thick, black curls I'd been forced to imagine, a pale, oval face and slightly protruding blue eyes, sparsely fringed with dark lashes. Because I had given her the eyes she used to have, before she lost her sight. Beneath them, a little, bulbous nose with flaring nostrils and a full, wide mouth, her lips slightly parted as if she were about to speak.

'Johann!'

'Mutz,' I murmured to the portrait as I stepped into the hall.

'Johann,' I heard again, 'I know your way of rapping at a door. As if there was a fire and it was your duty to wake us.' I turned towards the sound of her voice. And there she was, smothered in a travelling cloak, emerging from the music-room. '*Je reviens,*' she said.

Speaking in French! But she still fitted inside my arms, she still felt gentle and she still - smelt the same.

'There's no need to crush me,' she said, slipping out of my arms. Her fingers, wonderfully whitened, began to tug at the clasp of her cloak.

'Let me,' I said. But as I began to help her, the movement set the little gold roses in her ears swinging to-and-fro. 'Oh,' I said, 'ear-bobs.'

'Don't you like them?' she replied.

Before I could answer, there came a great barking and tail-swishing and Cerberus forced himself between us. Swift tongue-lick against my hand and then he buried his nose in Marie's skirt.

'Darling,' she said, 'did you miss me?'

'Marieeeee,' called a familiar voice, 'don't allow him to spoil your dress.' And then my Aunt Marisa swept through the hallway, her cheeks flaring and fading with every step. A maid tripped after her, attempting to loosen the ribbons of her bonnet

and *she* was followed by two other maids and a serving-boy, laden down with luggage.

'Well, Johann,' said Aunt Marisa, finally coming to a halt, 'where's my kiss?'

I approached her gladly and brushed my lips against her firm cheek. Her eyes widened and as she straightened my cravat, she said, 'Johann, you've grown quite handsome.'

I shrugged and my aunt laughed.

'But still so shy,' she said. Her blue eyes narrowed. 'And Marie? No doubt you think she's greatly changed?'

I turned back towards Marie, who was fondling Cerberus. 'Good boy,' she was saying, 'good, beautiful, *clever* boy.'

'Not so very much,' I replied.

Today, at Doctor Mesmer's, a gryphon knocker, not a lion's head. I seize it then rap on the wide blue door.

No answer. I step back, crane my neck upwards and the house rises up before me. I catch the green and purple shimmer of pigeons nesting among the grey stone turrets. Beneath the turrets, three solid storeys of leaf-covered stone, a brighter leaf than the ivy and bindweed that used to block out the light at home. And up there, on the third storey, beneath the twisting leaves, a curtain twitches.

A moment later, the front door opens. One ray of light from the hanging lantern is enough to show me that this lady is at least fifty, worn and tired, though her skin still appears soft and her dark hair is abundant though somewhat streaked with grey. Her eyes are grey too, greyish-green, and they survey me dispassionately.

'So you've come to be healed, have you?' she says at last, taking in my unkempt hair, my bedraggled cloak. 'They all come to be healed. The doctor is with the others, over by the fountain.' She points across the courtyard, towards the gardens.

I want to explain that I'm here to see my cousin but before I can get the words out, a male voice calls, 'Mother,' and she slams the door.

Down the steps, across the courtyard, along paths lined with statues: Diana holding her hunter's quiver, Eros, clutching his bow, Apollo wearing a garland of laurels. But onwards, into the gardens. At the end of an avenue leafy with trees, there's a round basin, the shape of a soup tureen, where a fountain spurts. And sat round this basin are -

Well, cripples and beggars, I suppose. Or are they? Because lying behind them, discarded on the grass, are their crutches and walking-stick and capes, none more tattered than my own. And walking round this motley company, his own lilac-lined cloak shimmering with half visible moons, stars and planets is Doctor Mesmer. Of course, I recognise him from our meeting at the opera last year. A stocky, imposing man, well-made, with strong, jowly features beneath black whiskers.

'Link hands, everyone,' he calls out, 'the stream increases in potency when it has passed through several bodies.' The beggars, cripples, what must I call them? obey his command. They all sit bathing their feet, contemplating their mirrored faces as he joins them in the circle.

A man with three fingers missing from his right hand mumbles something. Doctor Mesmer replies, 'The trees are magnetised, the water is magnetised, we, my friends, are magnetised.' As he speaks, the young man begins to tremble. His limbs twitch. Sweat beads his forehead.

Whilst he's groaning, the person next to him also begins to twitch and the person next to him, to convulse. Another falls to the ground; another shrills with laughter, another screams then chokes, whilst another keeps moaning to herself, over-and-over again. Others tip their heads to one side and seem to fall asleep – or even faint – whilst yet another man jumps up and whirls round like a spinning-top.

This frightful scene begins to remind of the humpbacks and withered arms I saw in Hallstadt a few years ago. Godforsaken place! As horrifying to me then as these people are now. And *Mein Gott*, the lady who answered the door must have mistaken me for one of their number! Hot with shame, I turn and flee, back down the avenue, past the statues, past the trees and into an arbour hidden among paths

and pines. Here comes the gentle breeze and the sounds of the River Danube, soothing me, lulling me. Now I don't care about the appalling sights I've just witnessed, nor about the Föhn wind, which once again tugs at my cloak, blows dust in my eyes.

Marie

After my parents have gone, Doctor Franz, his wife and I settle in the parlour. Frau Mesmer begins to hand round our cups of tea and one of her specialities, slices of *Linzertorte* with plum butter oozing through the lattices. 'Franz Anton tells me,' she begins. But we're spared the necessity of polite conversation by the sound of boots *cl-cl-cl-umping* down the hallway. At first, I think it must be her son, Hans. But these footsteps sound familiar. And that voice, as the parlour door opens. Its tremor remains the same, though it's more gravelly than it used to be.

'Marie!' says Johann, 'I've found you out at last.'

'Johann,' I call back, 'I thought you were working in the tavern.'

'I was,' he says, 'but I received your letter and I asked for a holiday. Do you think I'd miss your birthday?'

'Your birthday?' says Doctor Franz, 'ah yes, but of course it is, tomorrow. You're a child of May but with the determination of a Taurus - and on the cusp, the very cusp, of the Twins.' But even to me, the Doctor's words sound forced, as if he's trying to make a point, assert his claim over me in front of my cousin.

After the Mesmers have welcomed him, Johann sits down beside me on the chaise-longue. But he's awkward here, shifting about as if his legs are too heavy, as if he doesn't really belong. 'Let's go for a walk together,' he whispers, 'just you and me.'

'But you've only just sat down,' I whisper back. It's funny, whilst we've been apart, I've missed him so much. But now he's actually here, I feel like I don't want him at all. Now his presence sets me on edge, makes me worry about what he might say or do. Because he always manages to spoil things when he's unhappy.

'Your letter said you needed me,' Johann hisses now, 'and I want to speak to you. Privately.'

And then, somehow, in a way I don't quite understand, his will becomes my will, as if we're two children again, two chaise-scuffing children, petulant in the parlour of someone else's beautiful house.

So, 'Johann and I are going for a walk,' I say.

'Don't you want to wait for my son?' says Frau Mesmer, 'he'll be disappointed to have missed you.'

'Later,' I say, as politely as I can. I rise up, give my hand to Doctor Franz and again to his wife. I smile at them both but then, as Johann and I turn to leave, I realise something. I'm the only one smiling.

Once we're out in the garden, I can't help it, I smile again because I realise now *I'm* the one telling Johann what the world is like. Red, red gives me pain (though it makes me recall a dress of flame) and blue is a scarf that Doctor Franz placed on my lap. It was the colour of the sky and I tried to put my hand through it. But the sky is more *specific* than that. The shapes of clouds, those castles in the air, those curtains of light and shade, those glorious experiments with golden arrows and blue shadows, veiling the sun, unveiling it, all this endless activity, a whole, magnificent symphony of colour is being played out right above our heads.

But now something fleshy, large, familiar and strange reaches out towards me, makes me flinch. 'I'm sorry,' I say to Johann's murmur of protest, 'but your hand looked so odd, coming at me like that.'

And then Johann blurts out what, for him, must be the most natural question in the world: 'Can you see me?'

I squint at him. But now his face is in shadow from the shadow cast by my face. I can just about make out his nose – that part of the human face I find threatening. Of course, Doctor Franz said it was difficult for me because I lack *visual discernment*. I see too many details at once. Too many edges, too many borders – except that sometimes it's as if bodies have melted into their clothes. Then I can't tell where flesh ends and fabric begins.

'No Johann,' I say, 'I'm sorry.'

'Tell me something else, then.'

'What?' I say.

'Tell me what that doctor does to you.'

'What do you mean?'

'Doctor Mesmer. Because the men in the tavern say that with one touch of his hand, he can make a woman do his bidding.'

'Johann! You shouldn't listen to tavern-talk. Doctor Franz just magnetises me, that's all.'

'And then you can see?'

'Ye-es. Sort of. But it isn't as simple as that,' I say. And I try to tell Johann what Doctor Franz tells me, about the planets' movements and the movement of the fluids and of how they are duplicated in our organs. But as I speak, Johann starts frowning. He doesn't like hearing the doctor's words in my mouth. And somehow, my sense of his anger and dislike and the sky growing dark all around me, agitates me. Agitates me in the old, familiar way so that I start to shake. I can't help it, I swear I can't help it but there I am, shrieking and crying, 'Blind! Blind! Blind!'

Johann stares at me, his own eyes growing wider and wider. Then he reaches for me and holds me against him. 'Oh Marie,' he says, 'it's night-fall. You remember the night, don't you?'

'Not like this,' I say into his shoulder, 'it got dark so quickly, I thought I'd lost my sight again.'

'But night follows day,' Johann says helplessly, 'you know that.' And finally I do. Finally I relax into his arms. The mountains lean forwards in a dense, dark mass but the folly, the fountain and the theatre stand out, small and white. And the River Danube- over there? Or is it a fallen ribbon I once twisted through my hair?

'I brought you something,' Johann says at last, stepping away from me. He reaches for his knapsack and brings out something thin and papery.

'What is it?'

'A birthday gift. A sky lantern,' he says, unfolding it and pulling it open. 'See, you light the candle here and it heats the air inside and then *whoooosh!* up it goes. Shall I light it now?'

'But then I won't have it anymore,' I say, fingering the oiled rice paper, the bamboo cane. There are pictures painted on it too, pictures and stories I can't quite see.

'No but you'll have something else,' says Johann.

'What's that?'

'The memory.' And he becomes very busy with kindling and stone and sparks until he lights the candle. And then, oh then, the pictures and stories come alive. Gently curving prows of mysterious boats, oars dipping in mists and lotuses, painted flowers and birds. And Johann, you have bought this for me! How then can I bear to part with it? And yet you release the lantern and it starts to rise, those prows, trees, clouds. And look, Johann, look, the petals, how they glow, audacious in light and paint and look, even the painted birds – they fly!

Now the lantern rises higher and higher into the sky. I can't see the pictures anymore. Just the light of the flame inside the lantern, growing fainter and fainter as it floats further and further away from me until it's no more than a pinhole in the night-sky.

(In order to meet the word requirements of the PhD, I have had to remove another extract from the novel, Chapters 36-40, which can now be found in the second appendix. In these chapters Johann relates his memories of Bad Gastein to von Hohenberg. He, Marie, Aaleigha and his Aunt Marisa once travelled there. They passed through the village of St. Johann which was his birthplace. Here too, he developed a fancy for Christiane, the innkeeper's daughter. Afterwards, he and his family travelled to Straubinger's Inn in Bad Gastein, where Johann's opium addiction was revealed. Later, Johann taught Marie how to swim.

Marie's memories of Bad Gastein also comprise part of these chapters. Marie recalls how Johann licked her knee in the parlour of Straubinger's Inn. She also remembers the exhilarating experience of the Gastein mineral baths. Later, when Johann and Marie were by the lake, there was a storm. As they were escaping the rising water, Johann tried to kiss her. Marie ran from him to the safety of the inn. When Johann did not return, she remembered that it was also the anniversary of his mother's death. As his absence continued, she developed a fever.

Also in these chapters, Johann reveals that during his absence from Marie, he took further opium in a forest, and then beheaded the statues of the suicide graves in a clearing. After that, he travelled to Hallstadt then returned to the village of St. Johann where he found work with the innkeeper's daughter. Some weeks later, he sent his family a note and Marie and Aaleigha came to find him and take him away. They all met Malois in a church on the outskirts of the forest. Malois began a flirtation with Aaleigha. Then, as they rode back through the forest, they discovered the desecration of the statues, which Johann passed off as the work of Krampus, the devil.)

Marie

My memories of Bad Gastein are complete. Now Doctor Franz and I take a walk in his garden. We pass the flower-beds, the statues, the sundial. Close beside it, the hawthorn bush throws wide its scent. The sky above us is a fierce, deep blue.

'The sunny skies of Italy could scarcely rival it,' says Doctor Franz, who once, when he was young, took the Grand Tour. 'Though we're not so far away from Italy here - we have the vineyards if not the olive groves.'

'Have you ever been to Ravello?' I say.

'Ravello?' asks Doctor Franz.

'Yes,' I say, 'I have. Because after we returned to Straubinger's, the royal invitation to Italy arrived. So Johann and Malois travelled back to Vienna together whilst Mamma and Aaleigha and I set sail for the court of Queen Caroline.'

'That's in Naples, though,' says Doctor Franz.

'Naples first, then Pompeii, then Ravello,' I reply.

Once the ship hit the waves, Doctor Franz, I felt, ah, I felt exhilarated. Even though we docked a number of times to pick up fresh water and let people or cargo down, still, there was the sun on my skin, the stewed tang of the sea, the surge of the waves.

Until, that is, we docked in Naples. Then *euggghhhh* the stench of dried fish, the cacophony of fish-wives and market-women, the buzz of flies. It was overwhelming. I sank back against the carriage's cushioned interior, listening to the horses' *clop-clough* as we approached the Palace.

We didn't stay long in Naples, Doctor Franz. Mamma and Aaleigha were fluent in Italian and I could speak a little, but at Queen Caroline's court, they spoke nothing but Spanish. And though the King and Queen were very kind, they were also very formal, which somehow seemed to hamper my playing.

So we travelled on to Mount Vesuvius which they had promised us was very quiet, no fire, little smoke. But Aaleigha gripped hold of my hand, and then, pressing down

together on a stick, we pierced the earth's crust. And then, *euggggh*, some vapour that smelt like rotten eggs. I pulled my face out of the heat and stench, and then, Holy Mother, we both dropped the stick because it was so hot.

Next - Pompeii. And, Doctor Franz, something Aaleigha said about a fragment of scorched earth found beneath a portico. It was, she said, the moulded shape of a woman's breast, that had been impressed there by the molten lava of Vesuvius. I put my fingers inside the mould, made myself touch the warm, dry earth.

And then, on to Ravello. Do you know why it's called that, Doctor Franz? Because it's a place of revels – and bright lights that even I could see. Because there were fireworks for the festival and lanterns that Mamma said were set in stone-walled gardens that jutted out across the sea.

On the first night at our inn, the other travellers offered us slices of Bologna sausage and little rice-balls and great throatfuls of red wine.

'*Buono? Buono?*' somebody, a woman said. And I, who knew very little Italian, certainly understood this one word.

'Yes. Good. *Buono*,' I said, nodding.

'*Se vuole ancora?*' said the woman.

'Yes, very nice,' I said, not understanding, and then Mamma answered for me,

'*Grazie ma no, non ne vogliamo più!*'

'Thank you, but no thank you, we don't want any more,' is what she said, she explained later. And that word *più* – *more* – stayed in my mind, Doctor Franz. The next day, at Ravello's Villa Rufolo, I stood on the Terrace of the Infinite, listening to the sea. The waves were toppling piles of shingle against the sand, retreating, returning, retreating, returning. I stood there listening. I didn't know what it was that I wanted but I knew I wanted something *more*, I wanted something *infinite*.

'Come back, Marie,' Mamma called then.

I turned back from the sea and walked towards her.

'I thought you were going to fall off the edge, my darling,' she said, throwing

her arms round me.

That evening, there was a concert in the courtyard outside the Church of Santa Pantaleone. The violinist began his solo. As I listened, I suddenly recalled that my Italian grandfather, Bartolomeo Colnbach, had also been a violinist.

Did you know that I was a quarter Italian?

Santa Pantaleone? Ah, the story I know is, his mother taught him how to be a Christian, but then, after she died, he fell away from the church and began to study medicine. But a bishop, I think it was, persuaded him that Christ was the better doctor. And so, after that, Pantaleone believed that faith was to be trusted over medicine. He even managed to convert his own father to his beliefs by healing a blind man.

Do you think you'll ever bring my Papa round like that, Doctor Franz?

At the concert, the violin music grew soft, mingled with the sounds of the sea, slurs and waves, waves and slurs, and then one final, piercing note.

'Oh I can't bear it,' whispered Aaleigha sitting beside me, and then I knew, she felt it too.

'*Viva Amore! Viva Amore!*' the assembled crowd began to shout and then something else about blood and miracles that I didn't understand until Aaleigha whispered, 'It's Santa Panteleone's dried blood that they kept in a vial inside the church. It's liquefying.'

'But how is that possible?'

'They say it's the miracle of his love,' said Aaleigha but the rest of her words were drowned out by drumbeats so that we couldn't hear the violin anymore.

'It's all spoilt now,' I shouted out above the noise. So Aaleigha took my arm and guided me back towards our inn.

In the centre of the inn's front parlour, there glowed a pool of fire. Really, it

was a great round pan of charcoal, Aaleigha said. And then,

'Come and warm yourselves,' a man called out, speaking so simply and clearly that even I could understand. Instead, we sat down to dinner with Mamma. A very good dinner, Doctor Franz, one of those salads you like, with spinach, pursilane, carrots, dandelions and chicory and a dish of fried potatoes and onions.

But then the innkeeper's wife brought in a dish of game.

'Due usignoli, tre storni, un fanello e una motacilla,' she said.

'What did she say?'

'Two thrushes, three starlings, a linnet and a wagtail,' translated Mamma, reluctantly. She knew that if she told me what it was then I wouldn't want to eat it. She was right. Instead, I ate melons, grapes, peaches and figs. Somehow the figs reminded Mamma of the Bologna sausage we'd eaten the day before, and she began to sigh for it now.

'You should come back when the landlord slaughters his pig,' said the same voice who had offered us the fire. 'Fat and black, they say, yes, extremely fat and fatter still when they cram him full of chestnuts.'

'Ugh,' I said but Aaleigha just laughed.

Then came *glug-glugg-glugg-gluggg*.

'Aaleigha?' I said. 'Aaleigha?' Had he offered her wine and was she drinking it?

'*Vin buono*,' I heard her say and then she put my hands round a glass bottle-neck, solid and cool.

'Shall I drink some?' I asked her.

'If you like,' she replied.

The bottle was heavy, hard to hold. Still, I managed to gulp some wine down, savouring its fiery taste.

'Le piace? Le piace?' said the man.

'Do you like it?' translated Mamma.

'*Si*, very much,' I said to her then, 'how do you say, very much?'

'Molto.'

'*Si, molto.* Yes, yes, of course, I know *molto* from music,' I said.

'*Musica?*' said the man.

'Would you like to sit with us?' said Aaleigha then so that Mamma began to mutter. 'Don't fret,' she replied, starting to laugh, 'it's the violinist from the concert.' So I shuffled down the bench and the violinist sat down, in between Aaleigha and me and opposite Mamma.

He gulped down some wine and then in polite, fairly correct German, he asked us how we liked Ravello.

'Oh, very much,' said Aaleigha, 'it's the most beautiful place I've ever seen.'

'But you only know it in summer,' said the violinist, 'you should come back in winter.'

'Why?' I said.

'Because,' said the violinist, 'my friends say that on a bright winter's day, the sky and the sea are each so blue, so very blue, that it's as if they're part of each other.'

'But it's like Vienna then,' said Aaleigha, 'hot in summer, cold in winter.'

'Yes,' said the violinist. 'I like it here,' he added, 'but there's no work for musicians. Not much real work either.'

'Have you always lived here?' asked Aaleigha.

'I live, I travel,' said the violinist. 'When I was a small boy, my mother, she brought me to Ravello. Here, I learned to play the violin. Later I travelled to Hungary, to be the musician of a great Baron. But you know, these Barons.'

'Not really,' said Aaleigha.

'So now I am back in Ravello and I go with my friends in their boats and they catch fish.'

'Your friends?' said Mamma suspiciously, 'but not you?'

'Ah signora, signorine, I thought you knew. I thought that was why you asked me to join you, because you felt sorry for me.'

'Why should we?' I said.

'Thought we knew what?' Aaleigha said.

'That I've never seen the sea or the sky. I was born blind.'

'Oh,' said Aaleigha, 'Ohhhhh, I'm so sorry. But Marie here, you know, she lost most of her sight when she was only seven.'

'But I still remember the sky,' I said, 'I still remember blue and the sun shining.'

'That's what it's like here,' Aaleigha said, 'such a blue sky and the sun always shining.'

'It must be that you're in love,' said the violinist, laughing. And then, more seriously, 'but ladies, why are you travelling alone? If I had *una bella donna*, I wouldn't let her roam the world without me.'

'Perhaps I'm not so very *bella*,' said Aaleigha, adding quickly, 'I'm covered in freckles. We stayed out too long in the sun at the Villa Rufolo.'

'The Villa Rufolo? Yes, yes, I know it. There's a tree there which they say has heart-shaped leaves. They call it the traitor's tree, no, the Judas tree, something like that.'

'If it's a traitor's tree, why does it have heart-shaped leaves?' I asked.

'Because Judas betrayed the one he loved best,' replied the violinist, 'his Lord and Saviour.' Then the laughter came back into his voice. 'That's my name too, Saviour. *Salvatore Mascara*.'

Later that night, when they had shared the wine between them, he offered to sing for Aaleigha. His voice? You want to know what his voice was like, Doctor Franz? Well, it was quite faint, shy even, a sort of tremulous baritone. No, no, you have to understand, Doctor Franz, here in Vienna, I'm used to hearing some of the finest singers in the world. Salvatore's untrained voice couldn't even begin to compare. And yet there was something pleasing about it, something melancholy. Aaleigha felt it too. Because that night, she and Salvatore fell in love.

On our last day in Ravello, I asked Mamma to take me to the Villa Rufolo's gardens. As we walked among the flower beds, Mamma looked out for the trees that

Salvatore had described, the ones with the heart-shaped leaves.

'Here's a leaf for you,' she said, pressing it into my palm.

'I'm tired, Mamma,' I said.

Mamma said that she was tired too, that it was just as bad for her as it was for me. But then she settled me beneath the tree, arranging my skirts whilst I rested against its trunk.

Then she sat down on the other side of the tree and presently I heard the familiar snorts and sighs, the occasional whimper that meant she was asleep. And as she and I drowsed that hot afternoon, I began to dream the nasal yearnings of the violin. One of those wild Neapolitan songs Salvatore had played in his courtship of Aaleigha. But the imaginary music infinitely surpassed the real, swooping and soaring whilst I sat there, quiet and still beneath the shadows of the Judas Tree, my thoughts turning once more to-

'Johann!' Mamma called out, breaking her own sleep with the cry.

In the Villa Rufolo's gardens, beneath the shadows of the Judas tree, my arms reached out and touched - empty air -

But I remember drawing a snake upon his back. Then I jabbed him between the shoulder-blades. Which finger did that? Ten, Twenty, Thirty. Finally he guessed the index finger. Forty. Forty seconds for me to count and him to hide. One, two, three, four... I soon found him, beneath the bed. He always hid in the same place. I slipped under there to be with him. Impossible for us to be so close in the daylight. Only here, in the dark, with his breath against my cheek. We settled against each other, not knowing, not caring, where my body ended and his began. Elbows, hands, fingers, eyelids.

Johann.

Where was he hiding now?

Why did he leave me alone in the dark?

Once we had left Ravello, there were more tours around Italy. This meant sweaty coaches with squeaking springs and no sleep, the flick of whips and the protest of tired horses trudging another mile, always another mile. Then, arriving late in the evenings at villages on the outskirts of towns where nothing was open. So then there was nothing to eat unless Mamma or Aaleigha could charm food out of thin air. And scarcely a friendly greeting or a pair of strong willing arms to carry our bags. Instead, there were just new inns with sheets that needed airing and cats caterwauling until morning sounds, birdsong and bustle filled the air. Then came breakfasts of bread and black coffee and afternoons of hiring and haggling, demanding and blustering, of contracts, booking and accounts.

And somehow Aaleigha and Mamma and I had to manage it all by ourselves. Mamma had to make herself known to music society presidents, administrators, critics, tuners, dealers, bodice fitters, clerks, censors and town officials who took three days to process a request then asked for another signature, another fee. But all this was necessary for me to give concerts, in halls that Mamma sniffed, 'were more like barns,' or in villas, or even in mansions or palazzos, on pianos so finely tuned it seemed an affront to touch them.

But still I did. One night in a mansion in Naples, I gave a concert for perfumed ladies and gentlemen who smoked cigars. Their scent and my music drifted out of the windows. Then too, I was aware of the *rusttttlllle* of ladies' bustles, the darkness of men's suits. Ah, I prayed, let the orchestra stay together, let the pieces sound rehearsed enough, let my tuning hold, let my wig stay put. Let my nerves not overtake me.

'Magnifica. signorina, your Beethoven is *magnifica*,' the men said afterwards.

'Grazie mille,' I replied. Though some visiting dignitary wasn't quite so complimentary.

'Mi scusi, but how old are you, signorina? '

' Fifteen, signor.'

'Fifteen? Well, your interpretation of Mozart is quite clever for a girl your age.'

But was it all your own idea?'

I didn't know how to reply that though many fine music masters had tutored me, I always played as I felt. That I always revealed the music as I heard it in the secret chambers of my own heart. So I gave another curtsey, knowing that I was awkward, clumsy even. But it didn't matter, because I had survived another public appearance. That night in bed, I could still hear the applause resounding in my ears.

And as my popularity grew, Mamma told me that people would queue for two days for tickets, then clap their hands until they hurt at my concerts. However, I could not be content with my success whilst Aaleigha was so restless, so much sharper and more snappish than usual. 'It's because I miss Salvatore,' she admitted at last. And that, of course, I understood. And out of sympathy for her, I grew restless too, so restless that it was difficult for me to gather my thoughts at the piano. How glad I was then that my Papa was not there to hear me smudge my pieces!

Though Mamma was. 'Playing is your work and your duty,' she tried to tell me. 'It is entirely necessary to save your family from poverty and disgrace.'

'Really?' I mumbled.

So then she said, 'Patience and persistence, discipline and determination, are essential qualities for a musician,' at which I nodded in agreement.

But eventually she grew tired of parroting my father - and her own. She decided that we all, herself, her daughter and her daughter's companion needed *a little holiday*. We would travel to Rome to visit her Aunt Rosalia. On the way, if Aaleigha liked, we could return to Ravello so that she could seek out Salvatore. Ah, how happy Aaleigha was then as she packed up my sets of scores, my books of songs and all my concert dresses!

'And you were happy in Ravello too,' says Doctor Franz. 'You should go back there.' From his words, I somehow see what I've never seen before, the midday sun blazing down on the sloped roofs, bleaching them of colour and the deep, crooked streets that run between them. 'Or perhaps we should go there together,' he adds. But I

know he doesn't mean it, that he's only teasing me. His voice is too light, like sunshine on a river.

But, 'Very well then,' I say, my voice high and taut. 'Let's do that. Let's go there.'

He doesn't reply. I suppose there's nothing he can say. Anyway, I find I can't remain angry with him for long. The grain of my liking runs too deep. And so as we walk back towards the house, I start to tell him about Sicily.

Marie

So, Doctor Franz, after many entreaties, Mamma let me make the voyage to Sicily with Aaleigha whilst she went to Rome to visit her Aunt Rosalia. Why Sicily? Because someone in Ravello told Aaleigha that Salvatore had inherited some money from his uncle and now lived there in a large house on a hill in Palermo.

Our ship, *La Fenice*, docked and we rode out towards it.

'Marie,' Aaleigha called out from inside our carriage, 'it's not so very different here to Vienna. It's just drier – and the colours are more bleached by the sun. But there's the same low, shuttered houses and convents – and yes, the domes of some monasteries.'

But after all, Sicily didn't smell like Vienna. Where was the odour of perfume and manure, the aroma of freshly baked pastries and cakes, the burnt mutton fat, the coffee, the chocolate, the tea tannins and the fragrance of roast chestnuts? Instead, I snuffled up the lingering scent of lemons, sharp and sweet, which, for a moment, masked the stench of the sweating horses and the stinking leather of the carriage's upholstery.

And then, Aaleigha said, there was Salvatore's house, his *Villa d'Oro* at the very top of the hill. On one side, she said, the hill sloped towards the sea, and on the other, it sank into the dark woods.

As we clambered down from the carriage in the courtyard, we heard the clicking lament of the cicadas. Then on into the garden. How cool it was, how secluded and shadowy, though Aaleigha whispered that many plants were sprouting up in the reddish clay.

Suddenly she grabbed my arm. 'A statue of Diana,' she said.

A statue covered in lichen, perhaps, but with her bow and arrow pointing upwards, to the sky. And perhaps around her was an arbour beneath a canopy of blossoms.

Yet there was nothing delicate or lemony here. The garden was cloying with

the aroma of carnations, roses and magnolias that mingled with fresh mint and the vile odour of valerian. Then, too, from a distance came a whiff of orange blossom.

'What's so funny?' said Aaleigha.

'All these smells,' I said, 'it's truly a garden for the blind.'

Now came a flurry of barks, the breeze of wagging tails.

'*Three Great Danes?*' said Aaleigha.

More frantic wags, a few more barks, a few sniffs and then the dogs led us up a short flight of steps and into the house. A servant left us in the drawing-room whilst he went to find Salvatore.

'What's it like here?' I whispered.

'Oh, it's very lovely,' Aaleigha replied, 'the walls are all silken and shimmering.'

'What else?'

'Oh – well, between two windows there's a huge portrait of Mary Magdalene.'
Smack smack pat pat! Aaleigha was brushing the travel dust off me.

Oh Aaleigha! Aaleigha! Whenever I said her name, I was really saying *sister*. It was always her in that space that Liesl left behind. But now I had the feeling that she was going to stay here and marry Salvatore – and I knew that if she did, that if I left her behind in Sicily, I'd be leaving the best part of myself.

There – I couldn't avoid it, a jab of homesickness and a sudden longing for Mamma to clutch me to her, as she always did, with such rapacious energy that she left the imprint of her pearls against my flesh.

A pair of footsteps was approaching us. *Thump- thump, thump-thump*, then *thump-thump, thump-thump* down the staircase, then through that tapestry hall where shades filtered the light and the clock ticked out the afternoon. Then *thump-thump-thump*, across another hall where there were no shades, where the light was brilliant, fierce, where *thump, thump, thump, clicccccck-grrriiiiind*, now the door handle was turning, *eee-eee-eeeh-eeeh*, now the door was opening.

Whoufff! Whoufff! Whoufff! And-
'Salvatore!' Aaleigha cried.

Glove-tip by glove-tip, finger by finger, I stripped the creaking leather from my hands, let my sweating skin breathe before I began to flex my fingers. All that sun and dust! My legs were still stiff from the carriage and I was hot and grimy. My forehead prickled with sweat; sweat soaked my back, trickled down my sides, made my knee-pits slippery. And my arms were stifled inside my tight sleeves: there were wet patches beneath my armpits. So I was glad enough of a pitcher of water and a rag to scrub myself clean before dinner.

Of course, young ladies are supposed to smell like bread and milk and honey. Unless – unless they wet the bed, like I used to do. And then, even when the bed linen was blowing clean in the breeze outside, I still thought that the whole house would never be free of my stink. And it grew worse as I grew older. There was more bad smell to conceal.

The sweat under my armpits was turning cold: there was a damp chill along my spine.

We all sat down to dinner together, a simple meal of bread, pigeon seasoned with garlic, plums and figs. And, as he had done once before, Salvatore ensured the fire was lit, not because it was cold but to make the room beautiful for Aaleigha. I felt the flames quiver across the floor, loosening gleams from the dull gold of the ornate furniture.

But though Salvatore was now a wealthy man, Aaleigha whispered that after all, he had not changed so very much. He still had those same eyes like pieces of the sky. Eyes that you looked into, rather than at, though he could not see you. But at the touch of Aaleigha's hand, he knew her.

'Aaleigha,' Salvatore said softly, after the servants had cleared the plates away and we were lingering over the wine, 'you love me, yes?'

Without hesitation, she replied, 'Yes.'

'Then stay with me, Aaleigha,' he said, 'stay with me, be married to me, my good, my beautiful Aaleigha.'

'Yes,' she said, 'Yes.' Just like that, one simple word and her whole life changed! There was silence then one quick intake of breath and I guessed that Aaleigha was leaning across the table to kiss Salvatore.

After a moment or two, I said, brightly, 'Do you still play the violin, Salvatore?'

'Of course,' he laughed. 'She's kept me company all these months.'

'She?'

'Yes,' said Salvatore, 'don't you know that the Devil made himself a violin because he was lonely and envious of God's creation of woman. And that's why the violin has the body and throat of a woman and her songs spring from a female heart.'

'At the Devil's instigation,' said Aaleigha, starting to laugh. The sound of her laughter seeped through the gaps in the window-frames and the cracks in the doors, rose up in a spiral from the courtyard, began to twist and shudder across Palermo so that the townsfolk stirred in their beds, chucked in their dreams, although tomorrow morning they would not remember nor understand why they were smiling.

And still Aaleigha laughed and laughed, the sound reverberating out all across Sicily and perhaps it even reached our dear ones in Vienna so that they too started laughing, without knowing why. Perhaps everything that lived and breathed became infected by the sound: perhaps everyone, everywhere, was laughing.

Then came the day when Salvatore stood waiting for Aaleigha at the altar of the chapel. Waiting with the priest from Palermo and the choir-boys, who would sing every word of the Mass soaring and sweet.

Let them wait. I was not quite sure I was ready to give her up yet.

I was Aaleigha's *damigella d'onore*, her bridesmaid.

'*Damigella*, that means lady-in-waiting too,' said Aaleigha, with a quick, nervous laugh.

'And companion?' I said and smiled, smiled, smiled though my heart ached.

But Mamma, newly arrived from Rome, had no qualms about giving our dear Aaleigha away. She liked being at the head of our little procession, imagining all the eyes of the assembled townsfolk and visiting dignitaries on her rather than the bride.

'*O giorno felice, O giorno felice,*' someone called out as slowly, swaying beneath the weight of Aaleigha's blue train, we picked our way across the courtyard. Aaleigha's dress was blue too, she said, *il colore della Vergine* – or perhaps she looked like the blue Boucher girl in Mamma's boudoir.

'There's an arch,' Mamma called out from in front. It was one of the customs that Salvatore had mentioned. When there was a wedding, the townsfolk starched their best white clothes then twisted them round branches to make a bridal arch. The cool shadows of clothes crossed my face as we passed beneath it.

Mamma sat beside me during the long Mass. I sensed her stiffen when the priest said, '*Ego conjungo vos in matrimonium in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*' Because Papa and she were not happy together, I was sure. Now Mamma clutched my hand with her own, scratched me with her thick bracelets, stabbed me with her nails. After a moment or two, I extricated my fingers from her grasp.

Like Aaleigha's laugh, the voices of the choir floated upwards. A cloud of song, rising up high in the rafters, then through the chapel roof into the air outside whilst Salvatore and Aaleigha were called to sign the wedding contract. But I could not know what their handwriting looked like. I could not know how Aaleigha signed herself as Salvatore's wife. Now the choir's singing moved like smoke through Palermo, twisting and turning through temples and palazzos, passing through casements, echoing through chambers before cascading down to the river then spiralling upwards, towards the heavens and the stars.

Then came a few tears when it was time to pelt the couple with *confetti*. That's

what they called it there, those little pieces of torn-up paper or sweetmeats.

Confetti and tears and now the music sank down, down, down. But after all, everyone cries at weddings, don't they? Weddings and -

Whenever anyone died, Frau Liebahart draped black cloth over all the mirrors and over paintings showing landscapes, fields, forests, the sea. In this way, she said, the soul leaving her body on its last journey could not be distracted by a final glimpse of its own reflection – or of the land it was relinquishing forever.

Is that what she did for Liesl?

O giorno felice, giorno felice. After the Wedding Mass, *una festa*. We filled every avenue, every grove, every pavilion with candles and lanterns. And the house too, every room inside it was resplendent with glass and crystal and candles, mirrors hung at every interval to multiply the constellations of light. And in all that expanse of light, I imagined, as I could not do inside the Chapel, trailing towards my own bridegroom. Ah, but who will he be, Doctor Franz?

Marie

Shapes move and shift. Where's the foreground? Where, the background?. What's real, what's visionary; what's living, what's dead? Ribbons of smoke twist round the red silk of the Automaton's turban, ribbons of smoke which rise up from the long, Turkish pipe balanced in its left hand. The fingers of its right hand are stretched out towards the chess-board in front of it.

A dark-skinned man sits opposite the Automaton, his ebony hand hovering, poised, over the pieces. I've never seen a black man before. Nor, judging by the gasps and exclamations of the other guests, has anyone else.

'Do you know who that is, my dear?' says Doctor Franz, 'that's Angelo Soliman, servant to the Prince. Though some say he's a Prince himself.'

The path of light streams out from the open door. The Doctor's hand is at my elbow, white ruffles at his throat, as he guides me further into the dim, golden interior of Prince Lichtenstein's ballroom. I want to shake him off – and yet, I don't know how I can manage without him. The music swirls around us as the Doctor continues, 'Angelo was captured in Africa by an enemy tribe many years ago and was forced to convert to Christianity. They say,' and now his voice drops to a whisper, 'he's secretly married to a Dutch widow.'

'But why is it a secret?'

'Because his Master wouldn't approve.'

The Doctor looks down at me and smiles. I want him to stop looking at me like that. But also, I want him never to stop looking. 'I must say, my dear,' he adds, 'that dress I bought you really suits you.' Because after all, that's the real reason why we're here. Not to witness the chess game between the Automaton and Angelo Soliman, oh no. But to show me off.

The game has already begun. The Automaton grips a pawn and pushes it forwards to the centre of a black square.

Angelo Soliman's black pawn mirrors the move.

A white horse dips and charges onto the board.

A black knight is set upon a square.

The white bishop takes a diagonal path towards him, so the black knight prances forward two squares, then veers to the left in his characteristic L-shape.

'Are you following the game, Marie?' the Doctor whispers.

I nod: *of course* I'm following the game. 'My brother Malois used to play chess with me.' Oh. Those interminable games of chess with Malois! Mathematics equalling nothing. Architecture without structure. Art – but no art – strange logic of the black-and-white board. So that, even if today, I find it difficult to discern the pieces, I know full well what's happening.

The white bishop.

The black pawn.

Then- wooden ears approach each other from either side of the chessboard.

And then – the Automaton castles.

So Angelo Soliman pushes another pawn forwards.

In the corner of the ballroom, another pianist pauses for a moment, stumbles over a note then resumes playing. Is he, like me, nervous when he plays for Royalty? Though I haven't played for the Empress for many months now. Not since the Doctor restored my sight. It's quite simple, now I can see, I can no longer play my music. I don't understand the equation, the correlation between these two states, but there it is. Now, when my hands touch the keys, they panic over the blur of black-and-white, panic, jangle and then – nothing...

My palms begin to sweat. The Doctor smiles down at me again. 'Oh, Marie,' he murmurs, gripping my fingers.

The Automaton grips a pawn and shoves it into a square.

A black pawn mirrors the move.

Then the white knight takes the black pawn.

The Doctor's mother-of-pearl buttons gleam. *Those are eyes, that once were pearls.* 'But why are you crying, Marie?' he says.

I shake my head as if to say it's nothing – though it isn't nothing. But how to tell him? How to tell him that I'm crying because I'm ashamed. Ashamed that I can no longer play. Ashamed that the Doctor's Protégée is not, after all, the same person as the Empress's Prodigy. I pull my hand out of the Doctor's grasp and use it to wipe away my tears.

And then, suddenly, I can see it all: the knots of rococo flowers round the mirrors gilded blonde with light from the chandelier. Then too, the haloes of the chandelier's candles are almost touching, like seraphs whispering together. And I think of how beholden I am to him for all of this, for every beautiful thing I can see. So I tuck my hand into the crook of his arm and we stand there, together, on the ballroom's black-and-white tiled floor.

The Automaton's bishop slides forwards.

The black bishop shadows him.

The white bishop steps up to the black king.

CHECK.

Doctor Franz nudges me and points. 'Someone you know,' he says, so that my eyes follow the length of his arm. And there is a man neither young nor old but wiry and spry. His half-moon spectacles magnify the crows' feet splayed round his eyes. His thin lips are pursed with butterfly clips. But of course, I've never *seen* him before in my life.

'Who is it?' I whisper.

'Herr von Kempelen. Someone almost as devoted to you as I am, my dear.'

'Eh?'

'He invented that writing machine for you.'

'Oh – the Inventor.' From years and years ago. A friend of Malois's from court.

'Are you feeling better now, Marie?' the Doctor adds. An uncertain smile hovers at my mouth but I can feel new tears prickling my eyes. Because how can I tell what's real and what isn't...? Is the Automaton a real machine? Or is there a little man, a chess-playing Grand Master, hidden away inside? Perhaps a war-veteran, his legs blown off in Russia, moving the pieces, winning the games?

The white bishop has the black king in CHECK.

But the black king takes the white bishop.

Then the White Queen approaches the black king.

CHECKMATE.

Game over.

But across what board are we all being played?

What player holds us in his hand?

Because somehow I know that one day, perhaps after many years, the Inventor will tire of his Automaton (which is, after all, only a machine) and consign it to the furthest corner of the Palace. And from thence to a museum, where it will perish in a fire. And that Angelo Soliman's secret marriage will be discovered. Dismissed, disgraced, debt-ridden, he will die. And then, oh so frightening image that appears in my mind's eye, his Royal Master will have him stuffed.

First, he will be positioned in the Imperial Library between the bookcases. Then he will be moved to the Zoological Gardens and placed among the plants. Next to him, there will be an African zookeeper and a little African girl. The highlights of her bones will be polished to perfection. But perhaps, one day, those poor, stuffed bodies will also catch fire, begin to melt, bend towards each other in haloes of flame before they, too, find release in a little heap of ash.

'Marie?' says Doctor Franz, '*are* you better, my dear? You have such a strange

look on your face.'

At that, I don't know what to say. Because what if my own release is not to be in the realm of sight? What if I am only truly myself within my blindness, Queen of my own Eternal Night? Perhaps if I were blind again, my music might return, the music I play and compose, the music, ah, dear Holy Mother, that my voice and fingertips must never again fail to bring forth.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

'You do things for her that you never do for me.'

Oh, of course, Anna cannot actually bring herself to say these words. Not straight away. Because though her mind remains sadly undeveloped, it is not without its own devious complexities. So whilst she does not say anything out of turn when we get back from the Palace, still she manages to make me feel the weight of her disapproval. Her silent reproach is louder than any complaint she might utter.

Oh Anna, if you minded so much you should have said something before we left. Then I wouldn't have taken Marie to the chess tournament and you would have been spared feeling neglected. Not that you will admit that anything is wrong. It's only the bitter quality of your silence which informs me. Because you do not ask us about anything that we have seen or heard. In fact, you do not address a single word to us. And it is this coldness which remains so difficult to excuse. Surely you know that dear little Marie's pleasure in the outing could only be increased if you took an interest in it? For Marie has tried, so hard, to love you like a good daughter loves her mother and yet how many times have you rebuffed her advances, as indeed, you repeatedly repel mine?

Oh Anna. Though you know when you've gone too far. You begin to mutter a few words about the indifferent quality of our dinner's cut of meat and Hans's excursion into town. So much for your good breeding, your aristocratic notions of politeness which save you from making a total fool of yourself in front of our guest. For it is only when Marie has kissed you good night and gone to bed that you finally say, 'You do things for her that you never do for me.'

Oh, selfish, selfish woman! It's always the same complaint, whether you voice it or not. And you never stop to think of Marie, of her great sufferings, her too few pleasures. But so it is with these narrow minds. The degree to which she has already narrowed my own life is a thing she cannot realise. Whereas with Marie, from the first moment that I met her, there was that sense of brightness about her, so that I

could feel my own mind expanding to take in her light. Dear little Marie!

If Anna falls asleep early enough tonight, then I could, I might - but what is the use in thinking like that? I am not going to do anything that would confirm those vicious rumours that already circulate about me and my assistants, rumours about what happens to young girls when they are left in my care: unspeakable acts in darkened rooms.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

Our visit to Prince Lichtenstein's Palace the other night might be counted a success. So now I'm more than happy to write to my old professor, Doctor Herr Bernhard, and ask if he would like to visit and give his opinion about my patient. He is, after all, an authority on diseases of the eye. I used to attend his lectures at the University.

And so, a few days later, after the preliminary greetings are over, he tilts her head back and peers into her eyes.

Now there's a frown creasing her brow, her expression is pensive and she nibbles her lower lip. I'm sure she wants to tell him that she doesn't have cataracts. That he isn't going to find any, no matter how hard he looks. Yet she remains silent.

Doctor Herr Bernhard's own eyes gleam behind his oval spectacles. That special, professorial gleam because, after all, she is such a very interesting case. And yet his eager expression rapidly shifts to bewilderment and then, even, to annoyance. For no matter how hard the poor girl tries, she cannot find the right names for the objects he shows her.

'A snuffbox,' she says. And then, more uncertainly, 'A pipe?' Then, 'Perhaps a glass cube?' Of course, she's wrong nearly every time. The snuff-box is actually an ash tray, the pipe, a pen - and what she mistook for a glass cube is a chess piece cast in bronze. She begins to fondle its contours. Then, curious thing, she puts it under her nose and sniffs. And perhaps it is this action which causes the good doctor to take pity on her. On me.

'Mademoiselle von Paradis,' he says, 'if you are not able to name the object, perhaps you could tell me what it is like?'

Silence.

'Then perhaps you could tell me what it's not like?'

'It isn't a plum. It isn't a cigar,' she mumbles.

Next Doctor Herr Bernhard begins to tilt each object in turn, until I realise, by the roll of her eyes and their dazed expression, that he's making her dizzy.

'She might do better if you hold the objects still,' I say. But he just shakes his

head and continues.

'Stop!' I call out. A quick smile for Marie, then I clap Doctor Herr Bernhard on the shoulder and lead him over to the bay window. Outside, beyond my courtyard, the church and bell-tower, there's the Prater, green and gracious beneath its chestnut trees. Then too, great swells of long grass wave beside the river, which snakes its way towards the mountains some fifty miles away.

A bee recalls me, buzzing loudly on the window-sill.

'Well Franz,' Doctor Herr Bernhard says, 'I believe I have satisfied myself that the young lady cannot actually see.'

'My dear Sebastian,' I reply, 'I fear you're mistaken. Marie's difficulty is one of language, not vision. How can she name objects when she has forgotten the words?'

'Why should she forget? She was seven when she lost her sight.'

'Think of this. She has not seen, say, a jug for eleven years. When she sees one now, she has to try and remember what it is, what it's used for, and then to give it its correct name. She has to associate *jugness* with the name of *jug*.'

'But among my own patients...'

'Forgive me, Sebastian. You're confusing the inability of someone who has, after all, been blind from a very young age, the inability, as I say, to know what she's looking at, with your own cataract patients' memories of sight.'

'My dear Franz,' he exclaims, 'I know how to deal with patients.'

His tone of voice is as peremptory as if I were a student in his lecture theatre, one who has just given the wrong answer. Ah, how often I used to rebel at the arrogant way he lectured us about cataract operations, how I chafed at his criticisms and yet how glad I was of any word of praise or mark of approval.

But then, professors should be as aware of their relationship with students as doctors should be with their patients. Like a father, professors and doctors receive the full weight of the student's and the patient's respect and expectations, as well as their ambivalence and even their aggression. Marie, for instance, daily expresses her irritation with my treatment, but I must learn not to regard this as ingratitude to me

personally. No! It is a sign of years of frustration towards the many others, doctors, family members, who have failed her.

The bee continues to buzz loudly on the window-sill, still trapped on the wrong side of the glass.

46

Marie

CANDLESTICK -

WRONG

CLOCK -

WRONG

JUG -

WRONG

WRONG

WRONG

ALL WRONG.

Only once do I think I'm right. Doctor Herr Bernhard shows me what I'm sure is a pair of spectacles that he's just plucked from his nose. Instead (oh dear), it turns out to be a sovereign ring slipped from his finger. And then he shakes his head and begins to tilt each object in turn, in such a way that they multiply, so many and many of them. And then it's as if I'm standing in front of a mirror again, with no hope of finding a true reflection in the blurred, refracting glass.

Doctor Franz smiles at me and then the two men retire to the bay window. There they stand, outlined in light: Doctor Franz, stocky and imposing, with his red, red mouth and Doctor Herr Bernhard in a dark blue frock-coat, his side-whiskers neatly trimmed.

Though their voices are pitched low, I can hear every word they're saying. And that is how I know I've failed Doctor Franz. I am not his *little miracle*. I have not put on the wonderful display, the verification of all his healing methods, for which he so hoped.

I hear Doctor Herr Bernhard protest, 'My dear Franz, I don't need lessons from you in how to treat patients.'

And then Doctor Franz calls me back to his side. Lightly, he touches my face.

Then he begins to rub his fingertips around the hollows of my eyes. And his touch seems both determined and insistent - yet, can it be that his fingers are trembling? Once Doctor Herr Bernhard has left the clinic, I retire to my own room. I lie down on my bed, twist round and squash my head into the pillow. It smells of clean linen and the garlic we sometimes eat here. Except that, just for a moment, I feel like I'm a little girl again, making a nest of Mamma's flesh in the early days of my blindness.

Presently, a shiver travels between my shoulder-blades. Because it's all still there, sluggish in my veins, foul in my innards, my bad memories, the bitterness of it all. If only I could've taken Johann's sword and cut the past open, let it all gush out, leaving me sweet and clean and light. I make a sudden grab beneath the bed for the chamber-pot, hunch over it, gag, retch but nothing comes out except saliva. But then, from outside the door, Doctor Franz calls my name.

'Marie, may I come in?'

'Yes,' I call back and so he enters the room. As he approaches me, I can't help it, thick, burning tears gather behind my eyes then start to drop.

'Oh, Marie,' he says, 'my poor Marie. But you mustn't cry. He's gone now. And you don't ever have to see him again.'

After a moment, I realise he means Doctor Herr Bernhard. And then he is beside me on the bed and his arms are reaching round me. He presses his cheek against my tears. And I lean my head against him, let him comfort me. Except that when I lift my head from his shoulder, his lips brush against my cheek. In wonder, I turn towards him.

And then he kisses my forehead, my cheeks, the corners of my mouth but so precisely, so delicately and all with that same curious compassion. And then – oh, but does he press his lips against mine? Does he? Is that what I feel? Something like that? A brief, confused intention to kiss me – or not?

In Sicily, Aaleigha told me that a woman always knows how a man feels about her. But I don't. Though Holy Mother, how I do love him in this moment!

Even after he leaves and I pull shut the door and begin to pace back-and-forth

then crush my pillow against my chest, it's all because – I love him. Then I'm bent down, bent double before I realise that I'm swaying slightly. I yank at my hair then run my fingers over my face, stroke the places that he has stroked.

Marie

It's not too bright this June evening. Beneath the pale blue sky, the haymakers are leaving their work in the fields, returning home with their rakes on their shoulders. And I am returning too, from a day spent in an open carriage with Johann. *Clop-clough, clop-clough, clop-clough, skimmmm-trundle*. Returning to Landstrasse and - Doctor Franz.

There are just a few roads to cross, a few fields, a gate or two to open. How full the hedgerows are of flowers. But I don't want to gather any. I want to be at home. *Clop-clough, clop-clough, skimm-trundle*. What's that, Johann? What did you say? Something I didn't quite catch, something about, *'Home to your precious Doctor.'*

Ah – now I know. You think I'm choosing Doctor Franz over you. That's the way your mind works. If you aren't on one side, then you must be on the other.

Well, perhaps you're right.

Johann *or* Doctor Franz. It's like having to choose between music and sight. And I can't choose both, can I? Can I?

We drive on into the evening. As the road shortens, my heart gladdens and leaps towards him who is waiting for me. Past further fields with their sweet, dry smell of hay. Then beneath the trees, the shadows of leaves and branches and then we are clattering through the gate, across the courtyard. Johann hands me down from the carriage and disappears to tend to the horses.

I begin to make my way across the cobbles. And then, out into the garden, where I stand quite still, not sure where to go. But the path I should take winds through the rose garden. And here are the roses, large as dinner-plates, high as my waist and sweet smelling. And there are patterns of sunlight among the rose-petals and roses, roses everywhere, the scent, strong enough to choke me.

'Hallo!' he calls out then, 'there you are!'

His voice is so sudden and loud that my heart jumps up. I can feel my face

muscles twitch, my mouth tremble, longing to express - ah, Holy Mother, what I must conceal.

But I have a veil. I will pull it down.

'Why Marie,' Doctor Franz says now, walking towards me, 'you're shivering.' He places his cloak across my back. He has given me his cloak, that feels like him, that smells like him, as I stand there shivering. There's the prickle of silk and new wool across my legs.

'Marie,' I hear Johann call. Then, as he looms into view, 'shall we take a walk together before I leave?'

'Your cousin is cold,' Doctor Franz says to him, 'and doubtless she is tired. She needs her supper - and then bed.' He speaks lightly and yet there's an edge of challenge to his voice. It's like that time in the parlour when I wasn't sure I wanted Johann with me and yet I left with him. But now I want to stay with Doctor Franz. Now I know, wherever he is, feels like my home. So -

'No,' I say to Johann. For though I love you still, you're no longer my all-in-all, my eyes on all the world. And I'm not a child anymore.

But neither are you. Because instead of the sly pinch I half-anticipate, you just take my hand.

'Good night then, Marie,' you say, quietly. And, 'Good night, Doctor Mesmer.' Even your voice sounds different, constrained rather than boyish.

Doctor Franz must sense the change in you too, because he replies, 'Good night, Herr Nachtigall.' And then he pulls his cloak round me so tightly that it crushes my breasts.

Now I can hardly wait for Johann to leave.

In the twilight, I listen out, strain every nerve for the *clop-clough, clop-clough*, of his horses' hooves, growing fainter and fainter, until the only sound I can hear is our breathing. Now Doctor Franz takes my hand, just like Johann did. Two different hands. Johann's so lean, with such long fingers and Doctor Franz's, shorter, stubbier, with a blister from writing on one finger and a scar on his thumb.

Whose hands do I prefer?

Whose hands do I want to feel, making me feel, making me feel -

But Doctor Franz is taking my arm.

'This way, my dear,' he says, escorting me back along the path towards the house. There are petals everywhere and the smell of roses licks at us like a cat's tongue, the smell that hurts my nose, hurts my eyes, trickles down my face.

But I'm hidden behind my veil. He shall not know I'm crying.

At the foot of the stairs, he takes his cloak from me then presses his lips against my forehead. 'Good night, my dear,' he says.

I make my way up the stairs, along the corridor then enter my chamber. Soon though, the heat and light from the hearth hurts my eyes. I shut them against the glare. I know that what might have happened with Johann is just as real, just as vivid, as what is going to happen now with - Franz.

And yes, beneath me, doors are opening and closing, footsteps *shusssh-husssh* along passages. Now I clamber out of bed, find my way in darkness to the door, open it, then stand there in its shadows, waiting for him. All around me, it is still and dark. I cannot see my own hand in front of my face. But then -

His footsteps.

That is the unmistakable sound of his footsteps. *Shusssh-husssssh* and then his arms reach up around me. He pulls me into my chamber. Will he light a candle for me? But no. He leaves me in this strange darkness and then, because I can't see him, how *unknown* he is, how unbearably unknown. If I could escape right now from what is going to happen, then I would. But I don't know how to. And so – I rest my head against his chest.

He strokes my back with his hand but lightly, so lightly – and – but is he smiling? Is he laughing at me, silently, invisibly, as he touches my neck, then, as I take a deep breath, the top of my spine?

My heart starts to beat fast, very fast as I turn in his arms and then – as our mouths meet – ohhhh, how dear and familiar he is.

Something – and I know – I know you have been mine before – a story, a song I know, or music, a piece of music I played or wrote – or -

and yet this is the first time I ever heard it, ever knew it -

this is the first time I ever knew,

this is the first time.

He lies me down on my bed and when I shiver, he draws his cloak over me again, though his hands are shaking.

'It's you,' I say, 'it's you.'

And then he grips my shoulders – but so hard, I'm sure he will leave bruises there, bruises that will last under my clothes and Holy Mother, how it feels, it feels – and then, oh but I can't breathe – just shuddering – and, is that me – is that *me* screaming like that?

And then – ah, but I'm burning hot.

And then, when he enters me – I – I clutch against him, open myself up to him. He pushes against me and it is like a flame, spurting inside me. Has my whole life been leading me here, drawing me to this place, this bed, this man? Shudders, moans and ahhhhh, the breathing end, light, darkness, chiaroscuro, the balance that we have finally achieved. A shadow, a cloak to wrap round me and a flame -

Afterwards, I can feel I'm bleeding, in that place, there. That new, sore place between my legs. I smile at the warm trickle. For happiness is flooding through me. I smile and smile and smile. But then he whispers – something.

'What's that?' I say, trying to haul myself up onto my elbows. 'Everything's fine now, isn't it?' But my heart starts up again with that painful *judder-judder*.

'Stay,' I call out now against the fear, 'stay.' But he's already leaving me. He's slipping away from my arms, from my bed, crossing the floor – ah, how far away he

is and then the door slams shut behind him. The sound – abrupt – and now I hear mice scuttling among the rafters. No, not mice. Rats. And the birds outside my window, they're ravens, grown hoarse with cawing.

Is it my fault?

Ha and Fa, is it my fault?

I pull his cloak around me, snuffle in his scent, breathe him up. But he's gone. The promises made in a darkened room will not be kept in the light of day.

The following morning, when I open my eyes, there it is again, the darkness, blindness, less shocking this time than the loneliness of him not being there. You leave me and the light goes out but the music, oh, it has come back. Was my music only waiting for this, my second blindness, in order to return? I clamber out of bed, grope round for my writing-machine, press my fingers to its keys.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

Whilst Marie was out driving with her cousin the other week, our cat Soukeryl died. And the loss of this small member of my household saddened me. So when I was in Imst the other day, visiting von Störck, I bought myself a pet canary. A vivid little thing it is. But I do not lock it in a cage. Instead, I keep the door open and then the bird can fly around the parlour. Sometimes it even perches on the rim of my cup or pecks at sugar-lumps from my hand.

My own little performing bird, squawking, '*Ça va? Ça va?*'

Though, of course, my name for my discovery is *animal* magnetism and so it's not surprising that the canary should evidence such a strong, instinctive connection to me and to the magnetic movements within the invisible fluid that circulates through me.

I used to live in Paris, some ten years ago. And, one day, my man servant Antoine encountered a grey poodle in the street. Despite his best efforts, he could not shoo it away. Instead, the dog began to follow him, remaining close to his heels all the way home.

Upon their arrival at my lodgings, I went outside to make friends with the dog. It is normally easy for me to establish a rapport with animals. But the grey poodle would have none of it. Instead, it backed away, head lowered, tail between its legs, not angry or frightened since its tail was wagging. Still, the dog would not let me touch it. Nor would it come inside when Antoine offered it food.

No. The dog would stay where it was. Through rain, through sleet, through snow, the dog remained on guard outside my lodgings – only scrambling to its feet when the front door opened then paddling after Antoine when he emerged.

The mystery, in fact, was only resolved towards the end of winter when I sent Antoine to take a letter to my friend on the Rue d'*Orléans*. The dog followed him through the streets. And when Antoine went into a shop to ask directions, the dog,

as usual, settled himself outside.

Antoine was inside the shop when all at once the dog began to make a great commotion, leaping, barking, leaping beneath the window on the opposite side of the road. A man was leaning out of it, similarly delighted, laughing and smiling.

The dog, patient for over six weeks, had finally found its master.

The dog leapt all over the man. The man explained to Antoine that he had raised the dog in Moscow, brought him to Paris a year ago, and lost him on arrival.

Where had the dog been for all but the six weeks he spent at our door?

How did it survive?

Why did it never enter the house but stay outside in all weathers?

Why did it attach itself to my servant as its guide to its lost master?

Surely instinct is the answer to all these questions. Reason derives from the senses, it is true, but instinct has a direct connection with nature and therefore has certain powers denied to reason. Out of all the people in Paris, of all the myriad crowds, the dog recognised that Antoine had its master in its future. And so it waited for him and followed him home.

Her coming back after her day out with her cousin made me feel - uplifted. As if my favourite child, my prodigal daughter, had returned to me. I wrapped my cloak around her as she shivered then left it draped over the banister before I kissed her good night.

But after that, for days and days afterwards, she changed, grew stubborn, recalcitrant, even reproachful towards me. At first I thought it was because her blindness had returned (a great shock, certainly), and that, as so often happens, the patient was blaming the doctor for her illness. But she told me, pettishly enough, that this had nothing to do with it.

Dear God, do I have another Anna on my hands?

Almost in spite of my own inclination, I persist with her, flatter her even, so that I can coax the magnetic fluid around her eyes back into alignment. So, 'I'm sure

it will all work out for you,' I say to her one afternoon in my clinic, 'you're a wonderful girl, you really are.'

But she rubs her jaw as if it aches and as I knead her eye-sockets, I realise that her forehead is clammy.

'Marie,' I say, 'you're very hot.' I step away from her to open the window. Then, returning to her, I reach for her wrist, feel her pulse. 'Too fast,' I tell her, 'and when did you last eat something?'

'I had some porridge for breakfast.'

'Well,' I say, reaching for my fob watch, 'it's four o' clock now. You need to eat something else.'

'I'm not hungry,' she replies.

'Still,' I say, 'you're looking thin.'

'Thin?' she retorts, 'nonsense!'

'Ah, Marie,' I say, 'I ought to have seen it before. You're not well, my dear.'

'I'm fine,' she says but then her mouth starts trembling and she can't say anything else. And because I don't want to see her cry, I pick up an apple from the fruit-bowl on my desk and hold it to her mouth.

'Go on, eat this,' I say.

She shakes her head.

'But Marie, you like apples and this is such a good one.'

Instead of opening her mouth, she starts to cry in earnest, fat, round tears, 'I don't want anything.'

'Shall I fetch my wife?' I say quickly before she can add the inevitable, '*from you.*'

'Yes, yes,' she sobs.

So, 'Anna,' I call and then again, more urgently, 'ANNA!'

Marie

Doctor Franz wants me to tell him about the workings of my mind. But it seems to me that the workings of my body are just as important. In my blindness, my body governs the way I negotiate the world. And then, since I cannot see its workings, how much more am I its prisoner? Oh yes, of course, I know what they say, that one day the body will no longer exist and then the soul will escape. But that is a long time away. Until then, how many more wearying days trapped inside the sickroom, trapped inside my own body, must I endure?

'What's wrong with you *now*, Marie?' Frau Mesmer says after Doctor Franz has summoned her to put me to bed.

'It's the smell,' I say before I can stop myself. Burnt chicory from her cup. 'It makes me feel sick.'

Craaaampppll. That is Frau Mesmer placing the cup carefully away from me on the table. The mattress groans then gives way to her bulk as she sits down. I feel her hands, patting mine awkwardly.

'You're not yourself today, certainly,' she says, sounding worried.

That's it, precisely. I'm not myself. My own body doesn't make sense to me anymore. There's no room for me in it. And whilst my bones dig into the mattress, my stomach is soft and round. My breasts, too. They are heavy, swollen even, beneath my nightgown. So heavy, they stop me from drawing breath.

'If you were a different girl,' Frau Mesmer adds, 'I'd say-' But her voice trails off.

And my heartbeat is too painful, too fast. It kept me awake last night with its persistent *throb-echo, throb-echo*. A double heart-beat?

And then I catch Frau Mesmer's meaning.

'How are babies made?' I once asked Mamma when I was eight or nine. And Mamma replied, 'Husbands make babies - and money too, if you're lucky.'

'And will I have a husband?' I said.

'I don't know,' Mamma replied, 'but I am going to make sure that you can sing and play so that you will always have money.'

'But not a husband?' I said.

Around that time, Papa made one of his rare visits home from court. Then Mamma took me from her bed and put me to sleep in her dressing-room just along the corridor. But I woke up and missed her. So I climbed out of the makeshift bed. The floor was cold. My night-dress shifted in the draught as I pulled open the dressing-room door.

Then I padded along the corridor, stood outside Mamma's door. Now I was fully awake and my hearing was sharp. I heard the mattress squeak, my father shout, my mother cry. The sounds made me feel strange, made me blush hot on the inside. As if I were becoming a different girl. Lies! The hot feeling grew sharper, more painful and more wrong. And in that feeling, a baby stirred, waiting to be born.

I start to laugh and Frau Mesmer laughs too, in relief. Almost I think I see the gleam of her teeth in the quiet, dark room.

'But of course not,' she says, 'you're only a child yourself.'

Only after she is gone do I touch my breasts, the veins which feel so thick and snaky.

Doctor Franz said I was thin and for a time, it is true: I am never hungry. But as the weeks pass, so does the sickness and then my appetite returns. I eat and eat and eat. I am relieved I was mistaken. I am not sick: I am well. So sometimes in the middle of the hot August nights, I creep downstairs into the kitchen, grope my way round the pantry and pull out some leftover pie-crust and gravy or sweet pastry and cram it into my mouth. But then, when I return to my bed, I still dream about food, waking to find my pillow covered with drool.

And I always wake hungry. Then I long for soft, boiled eggs that spurt their yoke into my throat, for fried bread, salted butter. Each morning, I am early for

breakfast and sit over it late whilst the canary flaps round the room. I drench my porridge with cream, drizzle it with honey, crunch sugar-lumps from the bowl. Then I sit back and drink cup after cup of tea, my eyes shut, basking in the morning sunlight.

'We'll have to let your skirt out,' Frau Mesmer says, joining me in the breakfast parlour one morning, 'the darts are starting to pull.'

She's right. The crêpe of my dress is straining away from me, creasing and wrinkling at the slightest opportunity. And the bodice is so tight now, it pinches my ribs when I breathe – and the seam where it joins my skirt is chafing my hips. Did the seamstress make a mistake? But she's always so reliable when she sews my concert dresses.

'It must be all the food I've been eating,' I say.

'Stand up for a moment,' Frau Mesmer says then, slowly.

The crêpe rustles as I pull myself upright.

'Now turn sideways,' she says. Then, 'Marie,' she says and stops. 'Marie, my dear-'

'What's wrong?' I say.

'It couldn't be,' she says. 'No. It couldn't be,' she says again, her voice sounding a little louder, a little more alarmed.

Marie

Yesterday evening, Papa and Mamma arrived here at Doctor Mesmer's and now Frau Mesmer is showing them around the house and clinic. So I step inside the guest chamber, sit down at Mamma's table. Here I can smell the cornflowers and roses that I picked for her.

Here too is Mamma's valise.

I rummage around inside it, touch her nightdress, silken and soft, quite different to the crotched wool of her travelling shawl. Just for a moment, I long to do what I did when I was a child, bury my face in the sweet, musty scent that lingers there, beneath the whiff of smoke and tallow candles. Now I start to breathe in her nightdress. And here she is - Mamma, the smell of her, all of her. This is Mamma - and I stuff her nightdress back inside her valise, seal her up, shut her up, a cry inside a bag. Now she can't ever get out again, not with the weight of all that cloth pressing down on her.

Through the open door, Mamma calls, 'I'm going to help you pack up your things, Marie. Frau Mesmer thinks it best you should leave and we all agree with her.'

No. No. No. I push past her, elude her grasping hands. I run down the corridor, reaching for the banisters then hasten down the stairs. I must find Doctor Franz. Surely he hasn't given his consent to my leaving?

I hear the clatter of his breakfast crockery coming from the parlour. And the ceaseless twitter of his canary. As I cross the threshold, he calls out that the canary is perched on the rim of his cup. Urgh. Just the thought of its little, hooked beak that bites and bites and bites. And so close to Doctor Franz's mouth.

Squawwwwwk – and then -

A rapid flutter of wings and-

Ça va? Ça va? Ça va? And-

Ça va? Ça va?

Ohhh-hhh-hhh-hhh and then

sharp claws against my scalp,

tangling up in hair.

'It's going to peck out my eyes!' I scream.

And then the Doctor is shouting, '*Shoooo! Shoooo!*'

Hands flap round my face, feather-shapes, bird-shapes -

The floor begins to grab me and pull me down.

And then Mamma is there beside me, shrieking my name, 'Marrrieeee.' Her arms wrap round me in a tigerish embrace – and then she is hauling me up, but no, she throws me to the wall – is it the wall, is it the floor? It is Mamma. She gathers me up all the better to strike me down, down on the ground where it is safer to remain, there, in total darkness.

And Papa? He is here too. I hear him begin to curse Doctor Franz and *his household of charlatans and fools*. My jaw clenches. My muscles stiffen, all over.

But now Doctor Franz is there at my side. He massages my temples, kneads the skin round my eyes. Then he begins to palpitate the glands in my neck.

Mamma gasps.

The pressure from his fingers is persistent, heavy. But somehow I know that this is the last time he will ever touch me.

Swiissssh.

From Papa? Or is it – but how could it be -

Johann?

Johann has drawn his sword. A serpent, darting poisonous glances from its steely eye.

The serpent *hissssssessssssssss*.

Swiiiiisssssshhhh-hisssssssss.

Then -

'Johann!' Papa shouts.

Johann

Here in the tavern, von Hohenberg is telling me stories again. Nothing I haven't heard before. He was once the lover of a married lady with a beautiful singing voice, much admired at court. 'And if some of her children look a little like me,' he says, 'that's no bad thing.' He winks. 'Though the Empress's Chastity Commission would soon have been after us if they'd found out. But we were always very discreet.'

'Discretion isn't what I prize in you,' I say, interrupting the *Hausfreund's* reminiscences. 'But a listening ear is. Can I tell you something?'

'What is it?' says von Hohenberg, suddenly serious. 'The statues again?'

'No, not the statues,' I reply. 'Worse than that.'

'Perhaps you should speak to a priest,' says von Hohenberg.

'No,' I say. 'A priest doesn't understand anything about sin. But you, von Hohenberg, you understand everything.'

'Very well,' he says, 'begin.' And he settles back on the hard tavern bench the better to hear my confession.

Well, von Hohenberg, it started a couple of months ago, when Marie told me no that time at the doctor's. I don't think she'd ever said no to me before. And I - what could I say in return? Nothing, except good night. And though the words almost choked me, I bid *him* good night too. Her precious doctor. And then they both stood there in the garden, waiting for me to leave.

I can't tell you how angry I was. Both hands clenched into fists. I could feel rage surging through me with the gallop of the horses' hooves. But I only drove them just past the gate-house. Then, when I reached the curve of the drive, I spun the carriage back round again. I hauled myself out of it, pulled the horses to the stables, locked them inside. I ran to the back of the doctor's house and found an open window.

Up onto the window-ledge, then I jumped down inside.

In the doctor's hallway, every shape seemed sharp and menacing - and the reek of tobacco from that cloak of his, slung over the banister! But, von Hohenberg, the air I breathe in a room that's empty of her seems unhealthy. to me. Oh, I know I'm not the same to her. No. She has her music, her medics, her treatments and a thousand and one different activities connected with them. The sun rises and sets, the days pass and she follows the bent of her own inclinations. Anything to fill up the day keeps her happy. She can smile at anyone, be happy with anyone. She doesn't need me to make her joy.

Marie had told me that she liked his house precisely because here, everything was different. Here, there were no angels or devils sucked into the wallpaper, no ghosts in the looking-glass. Here, she could be braver, she said. But I felt myself a coward, von Hohenberg. Creeping around another man's house. Stealing his cloak from the banister. And yet, would it be more cowardly, do you think, to enter her chamber, pretending to be him or to let her sleep undisturbed? To depart there and then, knowing I lacked the courage to be the same in act as I was in desire?

Ah, von Hohenberg, I never felt anything like it before, such rage and love mingled. Before, I would never have believed in it. Now I was afraid of it.

The clock in the hallway struck the hour. Ten. And it was that which decided me. The time had come to do what I was meant to do. To take what I was meant to have. Because Destiny had brought me here: his house, her bed, my love. And she must have known it. Because she was standing there, waiting for me. My arms gathered her up. Now I could no longer feel my own breath on my lips, the pressure of the ground beneath my feet, the tick of time in my blood.

Ah, von Hohenberg, I can still recall when I first saw the paintings in the Great Gallery at Schönbrunn. The servant walked me round, shining his lantern on various portraits. Its light shattered against them, accentuating the cracks in the varnish. And from these black squares, there emerged a few portions picked out in gold: a pale brow, dark curls falling onto a pale dress, a pair of eyes that stared out at you.

And then I saw it. The painting that moved me. The painting that made me want to be something better than I was.

It was a painting of light and dark. The foreground was made up of dark arches inside a church, lonely and still. But light shone in from an unseen window, so that the wall above another arch appeared tender and mellow. And then, far in the background, there was another arch, and yet more golden light spilled in through stained glass. This light lit up the figure of a girl, kneeling beneath the window, her hands folded in prayer.

The light was golden but when you looked at it long and hard enough, it seemed like it was made up of blue and violet and even green. It illuminated the girl from the left side, falling across her face, outlining the curve of her forehead and nose. How strange it was that a girl, quite an ordinary girl, became beautiful in that light. She looked as if she had retreated into herself and that it was a better place to be. Better even than the church of the painting, which was yet cleaner and purer than the gallery outside the frame.

Me, I wanted to be inside that painting, too. I wanted to speak to the kneeling girl who looked so entranced. Then I might understand why Marie looks like that sometimes.

But now, von Hohenberg, another memory rises up that torments me. Her head thrown back. No, not in ecstasy. Not like when I came to her bed. No. Now her eyes were falling back into her head in terror so that all I could see were the whites.

And it was all my fault. Because when I went to Doctor Mesmer's with my aunt and uncle, I drew my sword. Though I only drew it because Aunt Marisa gasped so loud.

My aunt screaming, 'Marrrrrieeeeee!'

My uncle shouting, 'Wretched household of charlatans and fools!'

That canary, squawking, '*Ça va? Ça va?*'

Then two of the doctor's servants, those men in black, appeared. One grabbed

my sword then he and the other forced me from the room.

Oh yes, of course, von Hohenberg, I struggled against them, tried to fight them off. But my assailants soon had my arms pinned behind my back. As they dragged me off, I managed to look over and see what had happened to Marie.

Mein Gott, there she was, von Hohenberg, lying so pale and still. And it was all my fault. I should never have unsheathed my sword. But I swear, my love for her has ever been greater than my rage, which is short-lived, whereas my love, come what may, shall last forever.

Marie

'Yes, yes, take her to her room,' says Doctor Franz, 'I can hardly bear to look at her now.'

Even as he says it, I somehow know that these are the last words I will ever hear from him. Then his servant carries me to my chamber. And here I will remain, with the curtains drawn, in the dark. In double darkness now, with no hope of light because – oh how disappointed Doctor Franz is in me.

Doctor Franz, my Franz, he once told me that if the body was dead then the spirit could not function. But if the body lived, then sometimes, what happened was the spirit fell into a swoon, a darkness. But to call into that darkness, to listen for its echo, is sometimes possible. Because if the organs are without fault, then the darkness can be lifted from them. Doctor Franz, my Franz, said that when he looked at my sightless eyes, he thought he could still bring light to my soul. And so even though I stumbled and suffered, I walked towards him, towards the light.

But now I lie in a darkened room. And I begin to hear *dongggg dongggg dongggg*, the sound of bells. Is the sound outside or inside my head? The jangling bells that make the tiny bones inside my ears vibrate. But Mamma says it is the bells from St. Stephen's Church that are ringing.

D-d-d-d-an-an-dong-nggg!

D-d-d-d-an-an-dong-nggg!

And now my music comes sidling back to me. I can hear it, everything I will write as soon as I am well. *Psyche and Eros. Psyche and Venus. Ariadne and Bacchus.*

Except that, sometimes, late at night, I hear, not music, but soft sighs then shudders and moans. Is the Doctor treating another patient?

Or is Doctor Franz with his wife?

No. No. Not that.

I didn't mean to wake her but here is Mamma, with her hand on my face, stroking my hair.

'What is it, darling?' she says.

'Take me away from here,' I beg, 'take me home.'

And so that's that. Mamma directs the maid to finish packing my clothes and possessions. And then in a few days, when I am well enough to travel, we set off. So goodbye to it all. My last steps on his stairs, my last *tap-tap-tap* down his corridor. No more glass prisms, no more impromptu concerts on the glass harmonica. Goodbye to the careful arrangement of looking-glasses in his clinic.

Because, I once told Doctor Franz about the Mirrors Room at Schönbrunn Palace and then he was of a mind to try something similar. He positioned opposing mirrors for me across the walls of the clinic and then, oh, but it was droll, I could see myself as a corridor of persons, each smaller than the last.

When I had recovered from my first surprise, I began to bow and sway and behold! my likeness did the same. Then I dipped my most graceful curtsy, as if the girls in the glass were Archduchesses. Only they were not Archduchesses because they were curtseying to me in turn.

But now I will never see inside his looking-glass again. I must leave it all behind.

Very dark beneath the eucalyptus tree. Dark, still, along the trailing path. Soapy, medicinal scent and then the bitter aroma of herbs. The spread of the hawthorn bushes invisible. The dark rockery. The statues that loll across the path but do not fall on us as we slip beneath their pedestals. Dark garden with its deep avenue of trees, hidden flower-beds and rose-bushes. I am leaving you all behind. I am slinking away. Out between the hedges, over the stream, past the Soup Tureen and the fountain that sometimes is silent but now resounds with a low murmur.

Mamma helps me into the carriage. And then *clop-clough, clop-clough* through the courtyard gates and onto the stony road. *Clop-clough, clop-clough*, my head sinks against her shoulder. Then *screeeeccch*. A stray cat. The coachman swears. The carriage halts. I jolt forwards into wakefulness. And now I can't sleep anymore. It hurts. It feels as bad as if I'd called his name in darkness and he had not

replied.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

'Yes, yes, take her to her room. I can hardly bear to look at her now.'

After they have taken her away, I go back to my clinic and stare at the black-and-white tiles of the floor. The clock in the hallway has stopped striking. I cannot hear the chimes of the bells from St. Stephen's. I would like to pray. It's a long time since I called on the Universal Creator but surely there's one white star left in the sky to which I can pray?

That night, when I retreat to our chamber, there is my wife in our bed in a terrible rage. She reviles me in the bitterest manner in the world, calls me the harshest names. *Dog* and *blackguard* are not the worst of it. And when I come to sit beside her, she flails at me with her bony arms then begins to pull my hair. She manages to tug a thick, painful handful out from the roots before I grab her hand away. After that, her rage turns to sobbing and then, thinking it will calm her, I make a few magnetic passes above her head. But this seems to incite her to greater anger and then it is only the combined efforts of myself and her maid that manage to allay her fury. Finally, knowing that neither of us will sleep if I remain beside her, I fling myself in a sad state upon the bed in the blue room.

Later that night, I hear a sound. Soft sighs and shuddering moans. Slowly, I realise what the sound is. It's my wife, crying. And though she's weeping far away in another room, still it seems I hear her rebukes. And there is such bitterness in her voice that I shrink into myself, into my lungs, my stomach, my heart. And yet this bitterness is not as awful to me as the cold, hard look I daily encounter in her eyes.

Days pass. Clouds come and go. Nights pass. The moon waxes and wanes. But still the suffering goes on and on. It lasts much too long. It hurts. It is impossible to bear. So, hoping that there is something left to salvage, I return to our bed. But sometimes in the night, I am restless. My wife tells me that this is something new, that ever before I was a sound sleeper and that it must be that I have evil thoughts in my dreams. Sometimes, she even places her hand on my manhood to observe what

she can. And then, at these times, I lie with her as a husband, with more pleasure to her, I believe, than at any other time in our marriage.

But still, she will not be persuaded that I do not dream of Marie. She told me that I speak in my sleep and that one time I cried out, '*Mutz!*' She said I meant Marie, for that is the name they sometimes call her at home. And I started at that, for I thought it might be true. But I told Anna that perhaps I was calling out, '*Mutter,*' calling for my mother. In truth, I do not know who it is I dream of now, though I cannot deny that my waking thoughts do run upon the girl. And so I begin to wish that Marie were safely out of the house, for all our peace is broken up while she remains.

On the morning of Marie's departure, I rise early. I want to say goodbye to her, to give her a glass prism wrapped up in a farewell note. There is nothing shameful in it; her mother might read it if she would. But my wife rises when I do and will not let me out of her sight. She steps before me on the staircase so that I cannot pass in front of her. Then, when we hear a carriage pulling up to the front door, she will not let me go out into the garden. When I attempt to move her aside, she calls me *a dog* and *a rogue* and *a black-hearted villain*. All of which I bear as patiently as I can. It is only when servants send up word that Mademoiselle von Paradis and her mother are gone away in the carriage that my wife grows quiet. Then I repair to my clinic, only to find it is impossible to forget the girl.

And there is nothing in my wife's touch that can console me for her loss. She is thin and troubled; she wears an unbecoming black shawl whose tip points down sharply between her shoulder-blades; her dresses are cut too severely. Her stockings are brown and her criticisms are unceasing. And when her eyes are not red-rimmed with weeping, they are still cold and hard.

Finally, one day, she leaves off crying and says she has a request to make of me. She wants to stop supporting me in my work. She wants me to leave this house, which

though it is mine by marriage, is hers from her late husband.

And then it is I who let out a great, convulsive sob and reach for her hands. Across from us on the white-washed walls, our entwined shadows reel with the gesture. 'But Anna,' I say, 'I swear to you, I did nothing.'

Anna's green eyes narrow and her upper lip curls. Because she knows what I know, that I am not the sinner yet how many times have I committed that particular sin in my mind!

'Yes, Franz Anton,' she says slowly, 'you never *do* anything. All this time I've been waiting for you to become the great doctor you said you were. All the things I've suffered. All the things I've gone without.'

'But Anna,' I protest, 'you never told me before that you were unhappy.'

She continues as if she has not heard me, 'And now this business with the girl. Yes, I've seen what your *doing nothing* can do. And I'm tired of it being at my expense. So you must go.'

'Anna, this is terrible. Must we really part?' Must I travel? Must I set out for a country that you do not know?

'Yes,' she replies.

'But where should I go?' I say.

'I don't know,' she snaps back, 'anywhere!'

She pulls her fingers from my grasp, stands up and leaves the room. Her shadow trails after her, small, sharp and unhappy.

Early September, no words left to say, I stand in my clinic sorting through my drawers. Over there, on my desk, a few papers and books on the undecided pile. I pick up a book, leaf through it. My journal, from the start of the year.

'**So then, the girl..**' The words leap out at me from the first page. The blue-eyed, unseeing girl, with the solemn anguish of a child, happier in shadows than out in the light. How much hope I had that day when she first came to me. But though in time her eyes grew radiant with joy, it was as if she was still dreaming. Only now

one dream had replaced another. I was what she dreamt.

The words scribbled in my journal begin to make no sense to me. I can't see them. I'm crying. After a long time, I reach for my handkerchief. But it isn't there. Anna hasn't put a fresh one in my pocket. So I dry my eyes on my sleeve.

I lift my head, open my eyes and all around me the bright mirage begins to fade. The walls shimmer and glide away from me. How very strange it all seems, blending and breaking, far and near. I will have no home now, will never have one, perhaps. I will be alone and perhaps I will stay alone. But I have been too comfortable here. I have not had to struggle, to strive and endure. And so now, from this faded place, I must go forward. I must find out what it is that I'm meant to be. For otherwise it is too easy to slip back from what I have struggled to attain into a life I never wanted; to find that I am trapped, as if in a dream, and die there, without ever waking.

I push my bags along the floor towards the door, then, in the antechamber, turn once more to look back. And there, of course, is the Old Man of Crete, too heavy to take with me. He stands there, his limbs constrained in clay, in brass, his legs and torso covered in cracks. My gaze travels upwards to his golden head. How dully the gold now gleams! Anna used to polish it until it was so bright, it was as if a lamp were shining inside.

But now the statue has retreated into himself, all inwardness, this recent sorrow too great for his comprehension. And yet it seems that something glitters in his eye. The dark jewel of his disenchantment. A single tear.

Marie*Je te regrette*

The long, sleepless hours.
 Somewhere beneath me,
 a closing door.
 Somewhere outside,
 The rumble of distant wheels –
 And that clock
 Tutting loudly-
 In the silence of the night.

The heartbeat of the night.

Where are the flowers, the music, the fêtes?
 Where is the palace that was meant for me?

The wine is bitter,
 A glass filled with grief.

The night's beating heart
 Will not let me sleep.

I put the writing-machine to one side. It's late. It's winter. The birds have stopped singing and I'm cold and sad.

But on St. Nicholas's Eve, I sit at the top of the stairs and listen to the stargazers' carolling, like I used to do when I was a girl. The strain of strings, the cello, the violin and the songs. Except that now there's no gypsy girl beneath me, stamping her feet to the shivers of a tambourine, no brother or cousin beside me. Because Malois and Johann do not return home for Christmas this year. Instead, Johann writes to me, telling me that he and Malois have climbed the Kahlenberg. A great hill on the outskirts of Vienna, where Doctor Franz once said he would take me. He said we would stand at the top of St. Joseph's tower and there we would see all the city beneath us.

Except that Johann travelled there first.

He writes that he has seen Alpine peaks so distant that their grey limestone looks smoke-blue with patches of perpetual snow glittering in the sunlight. And the sluggish Danube disappears through fields and inlets into the haze of Hungary. And

that beneath the forests and mountain springs, there are palaces and theatres, temples and domes, houses and cottages.

I don't believe that I will ever go travelling again. My future feels like a dark corridor with a door slam-shut at the end of it. And on the other side of the door, there's nothing but a baby crying.

On Twelfth Night, Mamma decides that she and I will paint the initials of the Magi, the Three Wise Men, on the door lintels. An old superstition of Frau Liebhart's.

'It will keep us all safe for another year,' she says, 'B for Balthazar, G for Gaspar, M for Melchior.'

As I start to paint the letters I cannot see, my hand trembles. Especially over the M. And then it feels like a sort of witchcraft, as if I'm trying to summon him back. Because these days, M is not for Mamma or even Marie. No. M is for Mesmer. Even if that is living in the past.

Perhaps it would be better if I tried to convince myself that his mansion does not exist.

He does not exist.

And my baby?

My baby is a gift from God.

That's all.

And so, instead of summoning backwards, I must try to conjure forwards.

I can turn the G into a J.

Johann?

Oh Johann. What a sorry mess we made of it all. I couldn't ever see your paintings and you, well, you stopped liking my music. You said it made you long for what you could not have. And then, when the music ended, you felt disillusioned, cheated even, by the emotions it made you feel. Was that when you stopped listening? Was that why you became indifferent to my playing?

But a few days later, Johann sends me a note to say he will be visiting. I wait for him in the music-room, resting my head against the window, filled partly with longing, partly, dread. Outside, it is white with snow. But I still remember the colours he wanted me to see: mauve, purple, peacock-feather blue. My whole life he guided me through those colours, my heart and eyes in one. And yet if he returns to me with cold hands and wild stories, then I shall start to wish him away.

Ra-ssssh-sssh-sss-ush. Snow against the glass. And far away, the bells of St. Stephen's are ringing and beyond them, the full mellow flow of the Prater sounds soothingly.

Then -

A loud rap on the front door. As it opens, the hinges *cawwww* and *creaaaaak*. The chandelier begins to *chiiime* and then I hear the familiar sound of his footsteps. Beside me, Cerberus gives a joyful whine and then comes the rapid wag of his tail. He knows that the person approaching us is not a stranger.

I ease myself out of the music-room's window-seat as the door opens. Now there's a cool draught. I start to shiver then try to smile. He walks towards me but does not speak. My smile feels strained, begins to hurt my cheeks.

Finally he speaks. 'Marie. You look different. I heard you'd been ill.'

'Different?' I say, 'how am I different?'

'Paler,' he says. 'And something else. Older perhaps. *Are you ill?*'

'Not ill,' I say but I can go no further. Johann has taken me in his arms and he is kissing my hair, my cheeks, my lips, giving me more kisses in this one moment than he ever bestowed before and it feels like he will never, ever stop.

'Marie, Marie,' he says, over-and-over, grasping my hands. Then, 'They wouldn't let me see you. That's why I stayed away at Christmas. But I longed to be with you.' His hands are as cold as ever but he himself is restless, anxious even, as he pulls me back into his arms.

Now my own face grows wet with his tears.

'Johann,' I say, 'what is it?'

Johann

Do you remember when I set free the birds? I did it for you, Marie, as I do everything. But there is one thing I did for myself. One day, last summer, I travelled to a stonemason's yard in Badehose. There I bought a block of stone and the right tools. And there in the yard, I began to carve the name 'Marianne' into the stone. Yes. My mother's name. But it was also the name of the woman whose grave I'd destroyed.

Yes. Yes Marie, you were right. The forest. The statues. The graves. You've always known it was me.

Hunched over the slab in the stonemason's yard, the chisel noise was loud. The shards of stone scattered and flew.

I hired a carriage and took the slab into the heart of the forest. I looked for the clearing I had once desecrated. When I found it, I gathered up all the broken pieces of stone. There was nothing I could do about the mutilated statues but I set down the new headstone. Then I stepped back and saw all the marble angels gathered round and the light slanting through the trees. The forest is the place of the mother, Marie, and now I could say farewell to my own mother and to the wrong I had done.

'The place of the mother?' Marie says, sounding faint.

'What's wrong, Marie?'

'I'm going to have a baby.'

There's a moment when I can't breathe. But then I want to offer her my love. Except that she starts to tell me that her child's father is Doctor Franz. And she seems so certain. And for all I know it might be true.

Is it true? Or is the baby mine from that night when I came to her bed?

'Johann,' she says then. Her hand fumbles to my sleeve. But when she touches my hand, she starts to tremble. And I want to take her hand in my own but I can't. I

drop her hand - or else, she drops mine. But I follow her when she rushes from the room, down the staircase, past her portrait. I hate it now. All that ghastly innocence smiling down on me. And yet if I could take it off the wall, take it with me, then I would.

We stand together at the bottom of the staircase. And then I touch her cheek in farewell. As a gesture it is nothing, less than nothing but it's all I can do - and so it's everything.

But I don't think I want to see her ever again. I can't bear these flashes of light and then falling back into misery. To be happy with her is an impossibility. It requires a luckier Star than mine. And she herself is alternately Star and Stone.

'We paint our prison-walls with gaily covered figures and luminous prospects.'

'What's that?' says Marie.

'*The Sorrows of Young Werther*,' I reply, 'there are parts I like to repeat to myself as a sort of consolation.'

'That doesn't sound so very consoling,' she says, 'what happens at the end?'

'He kills himself,' I say. I don't mean it as harshly as it sounds. Though it's true, if in this moment I could take poison from her lips, then I would. Or if she were but mine in heart and soul, then I could die more happily than I do now live, blessing only her with my final breath.

Marie

What if? What if? clops the horses' hooves along the cobbled streets a few weeks after Johann's visit. It is February and Papa has finally persuaded me to go with him to Schönbrunn Palace. He has promised me that a performance for the Empress will not be so very terrible. But if there is no peace inside myself, how can there possibly be harmony in my music? My hands are sweating inside my gloves as we rattle along.

What if? What if?

Papa helps me down from the carriage, his hand at my waist. I stumble on the last carriage step and fall against his velvet lapels. Afterwards, we walk round the gardens then go down to the lake. Here, I take off my shoes and dip my feet in the cool water. Just for a moment, I imagine I'm dissolving into it.

'There are fish flicking their tails all around us,' says Papa.

And so I imagine myself a fish, silver, swirling, swimming, no walls, no boundaries, just swimming, swimming but then -

'What's wrong?' asks Papa.

'When I was a little girl,' I say, 'I used to imagine that fish were coins thrown into the lake.' I know that Papa understands what I mean. That it's the potential loss of the Empress's pension which worries me. It worries him too. That's why we're here. But then I let my mind drift back into the water, into the liquid darkness that keeps me safe and sets me free.

'Come back, Marie,' Papa calls out now. 'Let's go inside.'

The Empress's letter said that she would grant me an audience in the Bergl Rooms. The Bergl Rooms, those are her summer rooms. I part the ivy, curtsy to the Empress.

'There you are, Marie,' she says, 'my little namesake.' She hands me a cup of tea. What was it Johann once said? That the cups in the Pavilion were made of solid gold. Is that true, your Majesty? But the Empress leads me to the pianoforte. Nerves,

nerves, all these years of playing and I have never entirely overcome them. There's a gripe in my innards, a sudden stab of pain. My belly is full of *bor-borygmi* and growls. I begin to play for her, one of my more recent compositions.

La Sicilienne
1777

Roses are faded,
Dreams undone -
Flowers have thorns.
They blew out the candles -
Each – every one –

Surrender me now
To the dark lovely nest.

The bewildered swan
Who lost her lake.

The pianoforte
I no longer play.

Silent.
Forgotten.

But she burns her herbs in the morning,
Hope rises with the steam.
Birdsong.
Springsong.
Now it is morning.

The last part is for Aaleigha. On our voyage to Sicily, she was seasick so I went down into the ship's hold with a servant to find some herbs for her. Oh the reek of salt and beef and dried peas and smoke! And oh the stench and squeal and bleat of goats and pigs, the whinny of a brood mare, the creak of wood, the slap of water. I followed the servant down into the compartment near the fo-castle and began to rummage around inside our chest. Beneath a silky scarf, there were some little cloth bags sewn up with herbs and seeds. Camomile, vervain, ginger, rosemary and feverfew. All the herbs we burned or infused. All the herbs that made her well.

My playing comes to an end. The Empress is silent for a moment and then she simply says, 'Thank you.' And I hear in her voice that she, who also hid herself in darkness,

cannot escape my music's force. After another moment, she asks me to stand and touch the walls with my fingertips.

'What do you feel?' she says.

I touch – the smooth bark of a tree. 'Wood, your Majesty,' I say.

'Oak panelling,' says the Empress. 'When I was first married,' she continues, 'these walls were decorated with paintings of birds and beasts and frolicking human beings. My husband used to sit and drink his breakfast tea with me here and tell me stories about them. And that's what your playing reminded me of just now – my husband's stories.'

'But the oak panelling, your Majesty?' I say.

The Empress pauses then says, 'After my husband died, I covered the paintings over.'

'I'm so sorry.'

'Don't be sorry,' she says, 'your music made me remember them.'

Her voice sounds like she's smiling but I'm too old now to touch my fingers to her lips. All the same, I smile back.

'And now,' says the Empress, 'perhaps you'll be so kind as to accompany me for a walk around the garden?'

'Yes, your Majesty,' I reply and then I hear the *russssttttlllle* of her skirts as she begins to rise from her seat – slowly enough because, after all, she's an elderly lady now. And then she approaches me and leans all the weight of her solid frame on my shoulder. Together we set off through the corridors of the Palace and out into the garden – I her prop and she, my guide.

Out in the garden, I grip the cool stone balustrade as we descend the steps. The Empress begins to describe the Snow Pavilion to me. I don't tell her that I went there once, many years ago, that I crunched Ladies' Fingers between my gloves and fed them to the swans.

We walk across the garden, to the sound of liquid arching upwards then falling

into a pool. *Ssssppl-o-ossch-chug-sppp-lasssh, ssssppl-o-ossch-chug-sppp-lasssh* grows louder and louder. *Ssssppl-o-ossch-chug-sppp-lasssh* – of course, the Neptune Fountain, finally finished after all these years.

The Empress guides us towards a bench which, judging by the sudden shade upon my face, must be beneath a tree. And I can still hear the *tumble-and-splash* of the fountain's water so we must be close to it.

'Oh,' says the Empress, 'I have something for you.' And she presses a thin, wooden rectangle into the palm of my hand.

'What is it?' I say.

'A carved limewood image of the Virgin,' she says, proudly.

'Thank you, your Majesty.'

The Empress continues, 'I went on a pilgrimage with my daughters to the Marian Shrine of Mariazell. There,' she says, 'behind a silver railing is the miracle-working limewood image of the Virgin. Women and girls who wear its emblem about their necks are protected from evil and granted charm and cheerfulness to help them on their way.'

'Oh,' I say. Then, 'It's not the first time your Majesty has made this pilgrimage, I think?'

'Oh no,' she replies, 'I've been many times before. Whenever I feel the need. But I first went with my husband, when we were just married. At that time, I desperately wanted a child and I did not know how long Our Lady would make me wait. So Francis Stephen and I, we left two golden hearts at the foot of the Virgin.'

'Oh,' I say again.

'And you, Marie,' says the Empress, 'what do you want from Our Lady? A husband, perhaps?'

She must mean a father for my baby. Because she surely knows of my condition. She has eyes, hasn't she? She sees and knows and of course, she disapproves. What was it Johann once told me? Something he had from Malois, that the Empress had created a police force which would apprehend anyone suspected of

doing anything indecent. And the penalty? To be sent away to villages in the east. 'That's why,' Johann had said, 'we have so many exceptionally beautiful women living in our villages.'

'Well, Marie?' says the Empress now.

I take a deep breath then reply, 'Your Majesty, though I know marriage brings many blessings, I find I'm not yet ready to become a wife.'

Beside me, I sense the Empress stiffen. Of course, she married when she was twenty-one and she bore her husband thirteen children. So she must be angry now, angry that I am trying to reject the life she chose.

'My dear,' she begins, as if she's going to give me the same lecture she has given her daughters, many, many times before. *You are born to obey, and must learn to do so in good time.* And in my mind, a fish flicks his tail and flits away into the darkness. But the sound of the water from the Triton's trumpet saves me. *Sssspl-osssh-chug-sppp-lasssh!* It reminds me of what Johann once said when we were children, that a Triton is a merman or a mermaid.

'Your Majesty,' I say then, 'music is my true element, the only place where I'm truly myself. If I married, I might lose that and then I'd be like a captured mermaid, longing for the sea.'

'You speak of freedom?' says the Empress.

I nod. 'I lost my music once: I don't want that to happen again.'

'But one day, my dear,' she says, 'you'll meet and marry a man you'll learn to love so much that marriage to him will feel like freedom.'

Perhaps that's it. Perhaps I just haven't met him yet.

'Mermaids,' the Empress says then, slowly. 'You put me in mind of – come along, we'll go there now.'

'Where?'

'Schöner Brunnen.'

'Back to the Palace?'

'No – no. Come along.' And so on we go, until we reach somewhere where the

shadows are damper, darker. 'We're in the well-house,' the Empress says now, 'with a statue of a mermaid framed in the arch on the back wall.' Her voice sounds hushed and sweeps past me with the *rustle-swisssh* of her skirt. 'The mermaid is holding,' she calls back, 'a shell that spills water.' The next moment, the Empress's hands interrupt the water's trickle: I hear her *sluurrrp*. A moment later, her scooped hands are against my mouth. She tells me to drink.

The water is cool, wriggling, alive.

'When I was a girl,' the Empress says afterwards, 'I often used to wonder if that mermaid wouldn't be happier out in the sunlight. But who knows what a mermaid wants?'

I know.

'Still, there's a legend,' the Empress says now, 'about a mermaid captured in the Leopoldsteinersee. She offered her captors a choice of mountain treasure if they would set her free: gold for one year, silver for ten, iron forever.'

'And which did they choose?'

'Ah,' says the Empress, 'they were sensible and chose iron. But that's not what I'm trying to tell you. I'm trying to tell you that if you don't have a husband, you must still have an income.'

'Oh,' I say.

'Yes,' says the Empress and now she sounds like she's smiling again. 'Because I believe that money can buy you freedom. And so I have decided to increase your pension for five years – on one condition.'

'Yes, your Majesty?'

'That you use it to improve your life so that it does not remain your only source of income.'

I'm silent now because I can't see the shape of my future. Is the Empress going away to search for it? Because she's leaving me.

But then, after a moment, she calls out, 'Oh, there it is. It's so dark in here, it was hard to make out.'

'What?' I say.

'The crowned initial that commemorates the discovery of the Fair Spring. It was the Emperor Matthias that found it – and there it is. His letter. M.'

I shake my head. Not M. Not him.

Mesmermesmesmermesmermesmermesmermanmesmer.

The Empress's voice swings towards me. 'What's the matter?' she says, 'you look faint. Come, sit down over here.'

'No,' I say, stabbing my nails into my palms. 'There's no air in here, that's all.' I inhale deeply, force the air back into my lungs, turn the 'M' back into:

*Up-down, up-down,
a range of mountains
we won't reach before nightfall.*

But the Empress leads me out of the well-house, into sunlight, where she says, 'You look better now,' above *Sssspl-o-osssh-chug-sppp-lasssh!*

'Are we near to the Neptune Fountain?' I say.

'No, no,' the Empress says, 'the Angel Fountain. A baby sits astride a whale that spouts water into a basin.'

A marble baby?

Mist is rising from the ground and mixing with the cool air. But the Empress takes my arm and together we enter a house of white light. Glass. And there are dots of light all around and their warmth is drawing out a sweet-sour smell beneath the dusty smell of indoor soil.

'My husband ordered this orangery built,' says the Empress, 'he planted thirty orange trees with his own bare hands. And six have survived.'

'What are they like?' I say.

'From here, the oranges look pretty, like little lamps. It's only when you stand up close that you can see how small, how wizened the fruit really is. And the taste – oh the taste. So sour. So disappointing. Overwintering, bitter oranges. For really good ones, you have to go to- ' Then, in a more peremptory tone, 'yes, yes, that's what you should do. You should go back to Italy, Marie. You should travel, give concerts, like

you used to do.'

'Italy?' I say and in my mind, orange trees kindle with fruit.

'Yes. I know my dear daughter Caroline would be happy to see you again in Naples. And then, after a successful concert tour, perhaps you could return to Vienna and-'

'Start a music school?' I say and my heart begins to beat faster-*Dduh-duh, Dduh-duh, Dduh-duh* because this – *this* feels like the shape of my future.

My music-school, with well-scoured boards, benches, desks, the teacher's desk on its own platform with a comfortable chair and on an opposite platform, a new pianoforte with cloth-covered hammerheads.

But then fear clutches my heart. How can I? How can I the way I am? How can I with a baby?

But - 'It's time,' the Empress says solemnly, as if she wishes to impart the wisdom of these, her final days, 'for the pupil to become the teacher.'

Marie

It is eight months since I was a guest at Doctor Franz's house and the memory of him still burns like a lone candle in an open window.

Then too, Johann has disappeared. The landlady from the tavern where Johann was lodging writes and tells me that he has left without saying goodbye, that no-one has seen him for several weeks. At first I assume it's a *flâneur* episode like before. *Flanieren, bummeln*. But then, a week or so later, still no word from him and she sends me the objects she found in his room. I run my fingers over them: a glass vial, empty, a sable brush, worn, a box of paints, the colours all gone. Only his fob watch is missing.

Johann, where did you go?

The landlady also sends me his few books: poems, fairy-tales, philosophy. I touch the thin paper, the invisible words. Ah, it was years ago when Aaleigha taught Johann to read. He used to spell out the headlines slowly from the pages of the daily newspaper. Though he had little interest in happy events or proud achievements like *Empress decrees protection for the population* or *The Premiere of Mozart's violin sonata k379*. But as soon as he came across a headline for a calamity or a battle, he used to shout out: *French Fleet occupies Tobago!* Or, *French Fleet stops Britain from seizing Cape of Good Hope!*

One of Johann's books feels familiar. My fingertips sink into the deep letters of the title embossed on the leather cover. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. My hand drops. I will not let myself think it.

That's what I always do, though. Only believe what I want to believe. After all, all cats are black at night. And for so long it's been too easy to pretend that it was the one man, the one I wanted, who came to my bed and not the other. Doctor Franz, not Johann. But of course, I knew the truth the moment he kissed me. His lips had felt so familiar. Too familiar. They had been mine before. Johann's.

A few days later, Mamma calls me to come and sit with her. So I enter her chamber. There's smoke from the oil lamp whilst the light shivers then begins to burn clear. I find my way to her table, hear the thud of her elbows on the wood. She always loses her manners when she's *en famille*.

She presses Johann's fob-watch into my hand.

'For you,' she says.

'Oh, you have it,' I say, 'don't you want to keep it?'

'I have his last sketch-book,' she replies, 'and, oh, but you can have the letter.'

The letter, written in a stranger's hand, she explains. A priest's from St. Johann's. He wrote that they had found the remains of Johann's body in a little hut on the outskirts of the village.

Someone is crying, somewhere far away. And, dear God, the *loneliness* of it- and knowing that was how Johann had felt and how I will always feel, now that he is gone.

'So he died where he was born,' Mamma says.

With a bullet in his forehead, a pool of blackened blood beneath his skull and his flesh hanging loose as the rags of his clothes.

At first, they didn't know who he was. They only knew that he'd taken his own life. So the priest buried him in the forest, set up a headstone among the suicide graves. And then he made enquiries. At last he wrote to Mamma, sent her the sketch-book, the fob-watch.

Mamma adds, 'When I first read that letter, I couldn't speak, couldn't move. I couldn't do anything at all except wish I had been a better person, a better mother - to all of you, not just Johann.'

I don't know what to say. Mamma doesn't need my reproaches to add to her own.

'Poor Johann,' Mamma says then, 'because when I did allow myself to think of him, there he was, everywhere and no-where, all at once. All round my room. A howling newborn baby with a shock of dark hair. A tottering infant, a crying little

boy. Then too,' she continues, 'I could hear him everywhere, his laugh, his voice, his fights along the corridor with Malois. Really, he only ever behaved himself with you, Marie.'

'Yes,' I say, 'he loved me.'

And then - but now there is something bubbling in my nostril and then it is slicking my upper lip. And so - I make a grab for my handkerchief and blow my nose - and oh, how giddy I suddenly am, giddy and swaying and the soft, warm square of cotton is slowly - oh so slowly as the blood seeps into it, transforming into a sopping wet rag. And then Aaleigha but no, of course it is Mamma, she is there beside me.

'Lean back,' she commands so that I begin to wonder. 'It's better when you lean back, *I know*,' she says. Then as her plump hand makes circles round-and-round on my back, jangling her bracelets, how is it, I wonder, that she has grown so kind?

Now I feel her hand on my shoulder and then she is pushing and pushing until - my head is pushed back as far as it will go, the bones in my neck creaking in protest and my hand - but it is dangling somewhere in space, my shoulder-blades bracing, my eyelids fluttering as blood fills my head, trickles into my gullet, tickles the back of my throat.

'Try to breathe normally, or you'll faint,' Mamma says then, her voice sounding steely even as I shudder and gasp. And all the while, my head is tilted back, my hand pressed with my handkerchief to my nose. And my right hand - Mamma is holding my right hand.

Finally, the bleeding stops. So now is the time. Now is the time to tell her my secret. Then together we can begin the work of making it not exist. Together we can bury it beneath the walls, beneath the floors, in the deep dark earth where I keep everything that hurts me. Except - oh Mamma, I don't need to tell you anything. You know it all already. And now I return the pressure of your hand. My gesture says the words for me: *Ich liebe dich*.

In bed that night, the priest's letter crackles beneath my pillow. When I draw it out,

smooth it over, I can feel the words raised on the opposite side. I know what they say. I wish - and don't wish - that I could read them for myself.

I still recall the raised alphabet that Malois and I once made. Back then, I used to wish I could *read* music. That I could hear a whole orchestra play just by looking at a piece of paper. A music score is singing paper, sounding paper, Malois used to say. So now, the priest's letter must be *speaking* paper. But as I think of what it says, I begin to feel a sense of doom. As if something is ripping me in two. Or is it Johann, poor Johann, who is that torn sheet of paper?

No - no - I must put these things away, stuff them back beneath my pillow. And what I must do instead is - I must unpack my long-neglected writing machine and write something myself.

Ah, dear Doctor Franz, I've written you so many, many letters in my head. I've tried so hard to arrive at the right way of apologising to you. Because I am sorry. So very, very sorry. I was wrong about you. And my pregnancy has made a great scandal for you, when all you ever were was kind and circumspect to me. Such a great scandal that you were forced to leave Vienna, leave it all behind, your mansion, your garden, your fountains, your folly. Your wife. But perhaps when I finally write this letter to you, it will be enough to clear your name - and then my dear Doctor Franz, you can return to this city that you love.

Except that, as you read this letter, Doctor Franz, you and I, reader and writer, we both will remember the feelings we shared. We both will know the truths that lie buried beneath my words. We will know, Doctor Franz, and we will never forget.

Because how often after that first shock of sight did I gaze at you in wonder? Your breath moved tenderly across my face and I memorised the upward curve of your smile. You were my window on the whole world, and through you I could look out at the marvellous city. Marvellous and strange and forbidden were you to me.

And so then when I felt your shutters begin to close, somewhere in this city, a child began to cry. And I, realising that love is cruel and subtle, knew that these tears

were inconsolable. That there were boundaries to looking, to learning, to love. But though I knew all of this, still it was hard for me to understand. For it was you, you who were playing with me, grown-up games with an uncomprehending child who gazed at you in wonder.

And yet still I thank you for the things you helped me see.

Song-shine

Cyclical,
I live,
I dream,
I die.
And I am
Mesmerised
By lighted shadows
By the shadows within the light
The sudden disconnected
gleamings
and
darkenings

So that I.
delight
in the moon
fear
the blaze of the sun
fear
separation
and
perpetual wandering

fear
perpetual light

fear
memories

(though drawn to them-
drawn of them - still)

I let the light fade,
yellowing,
greying,
misty,
departing slowly.
slowly withdrawing their light.

These days, as I approach my time, I begin to hear what I have always heard. The

sound of voices from the far side of the room. Except that now it isn't doctors speaking. It is my parents, their voices as uneasy as velvet.

'We should keep it as quiet as possible.'

'So should she be sent to a nunnery?'

'For her confinement? Maybe, yes.'

Confinement? But isn't that what's happening now? These days, Mamma insists I remain confined to her room, just like when I was a child. Is she afraid that the servants might see me and guess? Though some of them surely know. Because one afternoon out in the corridor, I accidentally brushed against Frau Liebhart. I know it was her from the sound of her voice. Except that she spoke so softly, I'm not sure I heard her correctly.

'Slut,' she said.

Aaleigha once told me about a girl at her school who took to rising before the rest of them. One morning, Aaleigha found her looking at her waist with a little piece of broken mirror.

'Today will be the day,' she was muttering to herself. 'Today will be the day when people start to notice.'

Frau Liebhart had noticed. And Frau Mesmer. And Mamma. It takes a woman to see. Though for now, there's no-one except Mamma to keep me company. And you, you inside my body, you, who will cause me pain, perhaps even danger. And all of it - entirely out of my control.

I cross the floorboards, listening to my shoes' faint *clack-clack*. And oh, the confusion of corridors, the tangled interstices of passageways, the doors, slamming shut against me. Even the windows are blind with frost, rattling with lies.

I grope my way towards the staircase. I start to shiver then soon after comes a flash of heat. Now I am at the top of the stairs, clutching the banister. How smooth it is and cold. I rest my other hand on my belly. The slow stretch of cloth, the tough mound of muscle that has swallowed my waist. Because now I can feel it. Jolts and

shudders of alien limbs. Kicks and gouges. Then, waiting, tugging at me, fighting for its time to come.

I feel too the house's inward and outward breathing, which makes me want, oh, to stretch my arms out like wings, like the letter *T*, and - but do I really want to do this? - hurl myself down the staircase. Because now my heart is beating loud and fast and the blood is pumping in my head -

I step back. I can't do it to you.

Yet the thought of it, the thought of what I nearly did, makes me tilt my head towards my lap and then I am breathing shallowly, breathing in-and-out, trying to do anything, that will stop me crying. But someone *is* crying, somewhere far away. Is it me or is it Mamma? Ah, how will we ever tell?

Hysterische, Hysterische, Völlig Hysterische, weeping and babbling, those long a-sounds, trailing off into low o-s then more long a-s and then -

Oh, the crying, the crying, it will not stop. On and on, the worst sound in the world and the pain, oh the *pain* of it. It twists me up, fells me, chokes my heart so that I can scarcely breathe. It is the worst pain I have ever known. I don't know what to do.

That's not true. I *do* know what to do. I always know. Work - which is playing - has always been my saviour. I take hold of the hand-rail and proceed slowly down the staircase. Now I enter the music-room and begin to play another piece of music I composed for the Empress.

I play, I play, I play. Sometimes when I start, I have the feeling that I am to fall, to fail. But today a door opens up inside my music. And now everything changes. And so it suddenly seems that though I wrote this piece for the Empress, all my life is in it. This piece of music is meant for me.

There are the sounds of spring, of birds stirring. All the birds in the aviary singing, singing, singing, chaffinches, doves, nightingales. Then it is summer and

there is silver in the air, water is arching upwards, then falling down, down, down to the sorrowful beat of a soldier's drum. *Thump-thump, thump-thump*. That is the quickening beat of a heart. Then comes the returning chords of the calling birds and snow is falling to the cold metal *clap-clap* of church bells. Blades are slicing through snow, cutting through ice; a sabre is being drawn from its scabbard.

And then, from far away, there comes something like the sound of Salvatore's violin developing the refrain. The wailing sound that makes my heart ache - but then follows a few surprising alternations of notes. The hairs on the back of my neck prickle.

It sounds like a human voice, a baby crying.

The baby inside me stirs. My playing falters. What should I do now? A barrage of crashing chords perhaps - and no more doubts or digressions? But the ending I had intended no longer fits the music. I come to a sudden halt. I cannot see my hands, poised over the keys. How can I end this?

Author's Note

When I travelled to Vienna in January 2010 to research the case-history of Marie-Thérèse von Paradis and Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer, I was surprised to discover how little-known they both were, or, if anything was known about them, it was based on rumour and gossip. Professor Hauer of Landstrasse Museum seemed convinced that Doctor Mesmer had indeed seduced his young, vulnerable, blind, female patient and that this was the reason for his exile from Vienna. However, many of the historical accounts (Zweig, Buranelli) portray Mesmer's conduct as beyond reproach. So, between the opposing poles of rumour and strict historical account there was space for this novel to emerge.

Perhaps enough rapport existed between Mesmer and Marie that a seduction was possible - or perhaps, as I suggest in my novel with the creation of the entirely fictitious character of Marie's cousin, Johann Nachtigall, Mesmer was not the seducer. Certainly, I was intrigued by the historical accounts' descriptions of the mysterious men in black whom Mesmer kept as servants and assistants and the musicians he employed to lull his patients into what kind of submission.

Then too, the absence of personal material was both a problem and an opportunity. I had the historical accounts, including excerpts from Mesmer's *Memoirs* and Marie's father's initially glowing article about Mesmer's treatment sessions which included Marie's reported comments. But there was nothing in Marie's own voice - despite her own writing-machine (a real invention) I had no access to her letters and diaries. However, this lack of personal material meant that I was free to create Marie's voice for myself, at times, troubled, confused and inarticulate, and at other times, vibrant and strong. In any case, as Marie attempts to reveal some, but not all of her secrets, to Mesmer, she also shows how incomplete and sporadic our inner records and memories of our own lives are likely to be.

This renders my protagonist something like her novelist, acting on imperfect information and unconscious motives, walking forwards, hands outstretched into the dark, not knowing where the light might fall. But it was here, in this dark, uncanny

space, on the threshold between historical account and my own speculation, that the novel took shape.

Appendix 1: Chapters 16-21

16 continued

Marie

No, Doctor Franz. I didn't really understand what Johann meant. I was too young. But then Malois told Johann and Johann told me that the Empress used to employ spies to patrol the streets, night and day. Cafés and billiard rooms were always being inspected. Waitresses were prohibited. Waitresses who wore short skirts, the hem line so high as to show their pretty ankles, like Malois's friend Sukey did, were *especially* prohibited

And Doctor Franz, there was one lady Johann told me about, a Frau von Weber, who lived near the Palace. Her husband had abandoned her – no-one knew why. Well, Johann told me that one day she was taken away to the station-house and shipped off to Eastern Hungary! No-one ever saw her again. Can you imagine it, Doctor Franz, to be sent into exile like that, from everyone and everything that you love?

And then, actually, there was another woman, a Frau Stiller who lived in our street. No, not *von* Stiller, just Stiller I think. She didn't behave like a *von*, Johann said. She behaved so badly that one of the neighbours (not us) reported her to the Chastity Commission. Yes, I suppose someone must have had a grudge against her – or her husband. Anyway, one day, we heard her screams growing fainter and fainter as they dragged her off down the street. And then later, Johann heard a rumour that they had put her in prison, even though her husband didn't want her to go.

No, no, Doctor Franz. I didn't understand how she had behaved badly – and Johann wouldn't tell me either. He only sniggered. So I just told Johann to, '*Halt die Klappe!*' Shut up! So instead, he started to tell me about a portrait he'd once seen of the Empress.

'She had an *ennorrrrmous* bosom,' he said, 'and sparkling eyes and teeth.'

I ran my tongue over my own teeth, jagged craters and smooth saucers. Was

that what the Empress was like? A mother to the nation, to her teeming nursery, but then, when they misbehaved, she gave them a sharp little bite? After all, that's what my Mamma used to do, when we were bad.

'Have you ever met the Empress, Aaleigha?' I asked her later.

'I haven't met her,' said Aaleigha. 'But I have seen her. Once. When I was a little girl, just arrived at your house, your Papa took us all to Schönbrunn. Your Mamma, your brother, your sister, my Mamma and me.'

'What about me?'

'You weren't born yet, Missie, or even thought of, I daresay. Anyway, it had been snowing heavily, and we saw, oh, such a sight! The Empress in fur-trimmed velvet and sparkling diamonds, gliding along with her daughters in golden sledges the shape of swans. The Archdukes Max and Ferdinand were the drivers and everywhere was lit up by torchlight. Ah, Marie, it was wonderful!' Which was all very well, I suppose, Doctor Franz but it still didn't tell me what the Empress was *like*.

'The Empress is great in great affairs and small in small ones,' Papa said later. And then I heard something *russsstttlllle*. 'It used to belong to Liesl,' he said. 'A gift from the Empress. But I think Liesl would want you to have it now.'

'I've seen the Archduchess Maria Antoine wear it,' he added as I plucked at the full, lacy skirt.

'What colour is it?' I said.

'It's blue,' Papa said, 'like your -.' And I knew, Doctor Franz, that he'd wanted to be gallant and say, '*blue like your eyes*.' But he couldn't. No-one could even see my eye colour anymore.

'It's blue like the night-sky,' Papa said after an awkward moment or two.

And as I grasped the cloth, somehow I knew, Doctor Franz, that the dress was lovelier than I would ever be.

Though, 'You look just your big sister,' Mamma said quietly. But that was all the comfort she could give me as she spun me round to tie my sash. Then, into the

carriage, Johann and I, and off down the slope to meet Malois at Schönbrunn Palace.

Malois met us on the terrace outside the Palace, the same terrace, he said, where the Empress always took her brisk morning walk. When I stuck my hands out to find my way, there was a long stone balustrade, its touch as cold as Johann's fingers. And-

'Over there, near the lake, they're building a fountain,' Johann said in excitement, 'part of it is a bronze statue of a Triton, holding a trumpet shell in his mouth.'

'What's a Triton?' I asked.

'Something like a merman or a mermaid. The top half is like us and the bottom half is all scaly, like a fish.'

'Why's that?'

'It's to make the tail more streamlined,' said Malois. 'A mermaid can swim through the water like birds can fly through the air.'

'Oh,' I said.

'I'll teach you to swim, one day,' Johann said.

'It's always one day,' I said. *One day, the Empress would grant me a pension. One day, I would be a great pianist. One day, I would travel the world, giving concerts.*

'One day, the fountain will be finished,' said a strange voice close beside us, making me jump.

'Who are you?' I said. I hadn't heard his footsteps.

'I'm a court artist,' he replied, so that I sensed Johann tense in excitement beside me. But though the stranger's voice was pleasant and even-toned, still, there was something about it that I didn't like. What? Well, I'm not sure that I could even tell you, Doctor Franz. Probably it was nothing. Or perhaps I was just jealous. Because Johann laughed at all his jokes, seemed to like him so much, even from the first. And, after all, *I* couldn't see the sketches of the fountain he showed to Johann. *F-fff-ttt-ttt*, the flutter of so many pages in the breeze, that's all they were to me.

Another book I couldn't see. I would rather have carried on talking about mermaids.

Marie

One morning in early March, I stretch out in my bed, brushing against my blankets so that they prickle my flesh. And now I arch my body to the emanations of his music. Again, the glass harmonica emits its perfect, crystal notes. Now I feel so light, so lovely and gauzy. Like Johann says he feels when he takes opium.

Last night, as I lay in bed, I had a strong desire to touch my breasts and listen to the quiet, rhythmic beat of my own heart. And then, when I was asleep, I dreamt about you, Doctor Franz. I shan't tell you that but I dreamt about you. You were stroking my forehead, to coax the magnetic fluid into circulating round my eyes, you said. You whispered that the eyes take up so much energy that in cases like mine, they need all the body's resources. Your own eyes, you said, were shut as you stroked me. You said it was because you wished to share my condition. A more sincere version, perhaps, of Wolfgangeryl's parlour game.

A game. Is that what I am to you, Doctor Franz? A sort of curiosity? A little bronze figure, a chess-piece, to be displayed on the occasional table?

But in my dream, Doctor Franz, your touch became a caress. I felt my eyes roll up under their lids, not with blindness or with fear but in ecstasy.

No, I shan't ever tell you about this dream, Doctor Franz.

Music. The sound of the glass harmonica. No, the imaginary sound of the fountain. It followed me into the Palace, Doctor Franz. As I sat down at the pianoforte, water tumbled from the trumpet-shell, fell down, splashed into the pool beneath. *Sssspl-o-osssh-chug-sppp-lasssh* I played to the Empress.

Afterwards, I took a deep breath, stood up from the piano, then reached round behind me for the stool. Edging my way to the front of it, I bobbed, as well as I could, to the ground.

'Arise my dear,' said a gracious voice not far from me, dark and rich, like

gingerbread. The Empress. 'A talented musician doesn't need to sink before me.'

'But Mamma told me to curtsy to the Empress,' I said, trying to twist round in the direction of her voice. Then came a rustling sound and another voice rang out, a little distance behind the first.

'What beautiful manners you have, child.' It was a blonde, lilting voice, like the sound of water against marble. An Archduchess, maybe?

'Quite different from that impudent puppy, Wolfgangeryl,' said the first voice. 'Why, he jumped on my lap and demanded a kiss!'

'And then, do you remember, Mamma,' said the blonde voice, 'how we heard that he had tried the same trick with Madame du Barry at Versailles?'

'Yes,' said the Empress, 'he told her that what was good enough for an Empress was certainly good enough for her! But Marie-Thérèse, my little namesake, I'm sure you're nothing like that rude boy.'

'And you're not at all like they said, either,' I replied.

There was a pause. 'And what exactly did *they* say?' said the Empress then with a sudden *fff-f-lutter* of her fan.

'Oh, Mamma,' protested the Archduchess.

'No, let her speak. What did they say?'

I stood there stupid, biting my lip. After all, what could I say, Doctor Franz? How could I tell the Empress that she was full of *fumo*? That she had a majestic temper but that there was no-one who could tell her to control it? Not her husband anymore, certainly not her children. No-one to push *her* down into the cellar until *she* behaved. So instead, I just said, 'They told me you loved to sing.' And perhaps, after all, it was true. A Mamma, like my Mamma, standing and singing at the top of the stairs so that her voice floated down to her children.

'Do you want Mamma to sing?' asked the Archduchess.

I nodded.

'I could accompany you, Mamma, if you wish,' the Archduchess added but the Empress had already cleared her throat. Straight away, she launched into an aria.

And oh, the power in her voice, beating and throbbing until it made your own heart feel as if it was going to *burst*.

And Doctor Franz, I realised something. It was the same in the Palace as at home. The mother sang and the daughter played. Except – except, Doctor Franz, in the fairy-tale about the mermaid, the daughter couldn't sing because the Sea Witch had stolen her voice. And the mothers couldn't play because – well, because they were mothers. Most of the music had fallen out of their fingertips. It was only the daughters who could still press the keys with their soft little hands.

When the Empress had finished singing, I heard her quick step across the floor. In a moment, she stood beside me and then the warmth of her body spread into mine. She took both my hands in hers and kissed me. As she did so, some of her hair rubbed against my cheek. I wondered if it was still cropped short, for mourning, you know, like I told you, Doctor Franz, in Mamma's story.

'We must be great friends already, my little namesake, for you to persuade me to sing,' the Empress murmured. Then she called for my father and brother to be brought to the Millions Room. 'Whilst I discuss the matter of your pension with your Papa,' she said, 'your brother can introduce you to some of the other court musicians.' So I sank to the ground in another grateful curtsy.

I wanted to tell Malois about my pension, Doctor Franz. But after we had passed through somewhere he called the Miniatures Cabinet and stood alone together in the Porcelain Room, he grabbed my wrist and mumbled something I didn't understand.

'What?' I said.

'The Archduchess,' Malois repeated, 'how did you like her?'

'Which Archduchess was it?' I said.

'Maria Elisabete. White Liz's loveliest granddaughter. Ah, Marie,' said Malois, 'I know you can't see her but she's just like one of your mermaids.' He began to tell me how she looked, about her greenish-blond skin, her pearly-blond hair. But then he added, 'With her, you never know what she's thinking. She smiles when you

praise her playing, but she never looks at you directly. And when we go skating together, she never lets you ki-'

'Don't you want to know what the Empress said?' I interrupted.

Before I had the chance to tell him, we heard someone approaching us. *Flipperty-flopperty, flipperty-flopperty.* He was talking to himself as he passed through the suite of chambers, his voice growing louder and louder with the sound of his footsteps.

'How much? How much?'

'Papa,' I called out but I took a firmer hold of Malois's arm.

'Oh, there you are, Marie. Well, how did it go?'

'The Empress is going to give me a pension,' I said proudly.

'Oh yes?' said Malois.

'Ah, but did she promise you a million gulden?' said Papa with a slight edge to his voice. Oh no, that's just how he is. He worries. And then it makes me worry too and it's as if I'm sinking back into all those bad times of threadbare clothes and bindweed that can't be cut. And then that sound, that imploring sound, of all the money notes we didn't have. *Shuffle-flutter, shuffle-flutter.*

'Oh, but that's silly,' I replied before I could stop myself, 'nobody has that much money.'

'That's where you're wrong, young lady,' said Papa. 'That room where you just were? It's covered in rosewood panelling and paintings of Mogul rulers. It's called the Millions Room because that's how much it cost.'

I felt my cheeks burn. The Empress had said she would give me a pension but it wouldn't be a million gulden.

'Don't mind him, Marie,' whispered Malois, drawing me away. 'Shall we go and find Signor Salieri?' I nodded and so we slipped out of the Porcelain Room, slipping and sliding across the polished floor as if we were skating.

In a corridor that Malois said ran the length of the Great Gallery, we collided with Johann.

'I met the Empress, Johann, I met the Empress. Why weren't you there?'

'Well, first we went to the Portraits Room and then we came here. That artist was showing me some paintings. Some really great paintings,' Johann replied.

'But I needed your help,' I said, suddenly afraid. Why? Well, I knew that before, Johann would always have wanted me to be with him, as close to him as he was to himself.

'Oh. Sorry. But you should have seen the pictures they have in there.' He began to tell me about a painting of a church but then launched into a description of another one, an imperial eagle spreading its wings over its head. Two little Archdukes were standing in its shade. In the caption beneath, Archduke Charles was urging Archduke Joseph '*to capture grandpa's birdie.*' Joseph replied that he couldn't, that he was too small and that they had better ask Papa.

I couldn't really imagine the picture that Johann described. But what he said made me think of *my* Papa. My Papa, the Birdcatcher, with his net spread out to catch the pretty songbird. And ever afterwards, she would make music, but only in the cage that he had built for her.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

To watch a young woman without sight is both a pleasure and a pain. At first she navigates my rooms hesitantly, her eyes twitching and with a peculiar grimace on her face. And nothing around her, not doors, not floors, not hallways, touches her any deeper than her own skin. Yet somehow she is alive, alert, as if she experiences sensations deep inside herself, as if everything in the world is reverberating itself back to her.

She pauses, trying to decide, then makes a courtly gesture with her hand, as if she is standing in front of the Empress. And now her confidence and certainty grows and her movements develop a floating quality, very graceful to behold.

Very graceful too are her lace-making and knitting, although they fade into insignificance when compared to her playing on the pianoforte. Then comes a burst of feeling, chords, intricacies – a sort of visual equivalent of, but how much more infinitely fine, than her lace.

If I had not become a doctor, become what I am, then I should like to have become a musician myself. One of the legends, like Papa Haydn, or no, something like the genius that I believe young Wolfgangeryl to be – which is why I commissioned and allowed him to perform his opera *Bastien und Bastienne* in my garden. Dear little chap, resplendent in his powdered wig and velvet waistcoat, exactly what I should have liked to have been at the age of twelve. Precious chance of that with my Papa out trapping hares in the forest and my poor Mamma, well, she tried her best.

Certainly, at the age of forty-three, I've left it too late to be an infant prodigy! Even if my work were to permit me three hours a day to practise the harpsichord, say, or the pianoforte, at best I could only achieve mediocrity. Still, this was why I chose to become proficient at the glass harmonica. The instrument

is so unusual it means I have few rivals.

Of course, when I first began to play, my wife kindly informed me that it sounded like the amorous caterwauling of our cat, Soukeryl. But in time, of course, I began to improve. Even dear Gluck commented favourably on one of my own compositions.

Sometimes, when I give little concerts in the evening, I ask my guests to shut their eyes. Blinded in this way, the strangeness of the sound is accentuated, before it becomes, for some, pleasing, even harmonious. For music seeks harmony just as the human body does. And then it might be said that the human body itself becomes musical when the organs are at peace, when the blood flows freely and unimpeded, when muscles, sinews, nerves find their own perfect counterpoise and balance.

Sometimes, when Marie plays, I also close my eyes. Like this, I begin to touch her own mind and feelings. And if this is an invasion of her privacy, then good, for it is precisely this kind of intimacy I need to establish with my patient if the important work we do is to be successful. Besides, when I close my eyes, I begin to share her darkness. For music makes me desire a kind of blindness for myself, a place where I can rest my eyes and absorb the great wonder of her sound. Because her music – her music is like a seraph in the temple of the Universal Creator that covers its eyes with its wings. It brings forth feelings that language cannot name.

Still, sometimes I keep my eyes open because her appearance is so astonishing. Her usually impassive features become expressive, mobile, to the point where she screws them up, twists her beautiful mouth, purses it, pouts, then stretches, then bites her lips so that they disappear between her teeth. She frowns, she grimaces, seeming anguished or as if about to weep. In this way, her emotions, called forth by the music, are played out on her face and body – played

out but not exorcised for I remain convinced that there is a mystery, a secret at the heart of this blindness which I cannot solve.

But here comes Anna, bustling in. She starts to tell me something about Soukeryl, who apparently leapt down the first flight of our staircase. Poor Anna found this so frightening that for a moment she could not tell if it was a cat or a phantom. 'Or possessed with evil spirits,' she adds then, with a curious, sidelong glance. For I know that Anna, a conventionally good woman, sometimes believes this about my patients.

Oh, not the circle of beggars and cripples who I attempt to heal around the fountain, passing the universal fluid through our joined hands. For that there would be some justification, what with the fearful shrieks and moans of the poor devils as they approach their crisis. But no. Anna does not concern herself with them beyond wishing they would make less noise. She does not know, she cannot comprehend, that these people flock to our courtyard in order to be safe from a world which has rejected them cruelly. Their lives have passed them by and it is my intention to try and restore them back to them again.

They walk past each other. They return. They move in circles. Simple people who pick out the familiar ways. Some crouch down to the flowers, the blades of grass, as if these are the only places where they can experience kindness.

But I know that with my animal magnetism, I can cure, that by my arts, a madman feeling madness ceases to feel it, that he suddenly recovers his sanity and finds himself again. And then all his strange obsessions, borne for years and weighty as a stone, loosen and fall away, so that he is left swiftly cured and quite at ease, healed, delivered, mind and spirit freed.

But Anna knows nothing of this. She only sees beggars, madmen, fools, their thin arms reaching out, offering hands cupped in the shape of a plea. No, it

is my young female patients who she thinks are possessed 'with sheer wanton wickedness,' she once said.

'Not that again, Anna,' I say now, 'neither the animals nor the occupants of this house are possessed by anything other than their own feelings.'

'A guilty conscience is a heavy load indeed,' says Anna smoothly, so that just for a moment I wonder who she means. Marie? Myself? Herself even, for after all, she is not always so kind to the girl. I suppose, though, they have nothing in common. Marie is a wonderful musician and Anna can't play a note. And, of course, between them there isn't that magnetic, dialogic rapport which exists between Marie and me, and which is so essential to the work we do. Otherwise, when Anna fetches Marie and helps her to settle on the chaise-longue, I should have asked her to stay, as witness or chaperone. But as I begin to stroke Marie's breasts and thighs, I know it cannot be. The antipathy between them would be detrimental to this very important work since it surely threatens the smooth flow of the universal fluid.

For it is very delicate, this affinity that passes between us. It is like a shared secret or something in my patient's nature that speaks to an aspect of mine, transmitted through a vibration in the magnetic field. And as I move the fluids in their proper polar direction by moulding her pliant body, following its firm contours with my magnetised hands, I know this affinity must be preserved at all costs.

Now I push the fluid towards her expressive face, her shapely feet. Though I believe I'm more anxious for her cure than I've ever been for that of any other patient, I never try to force it. I try to curb my impatience and attempt to sense her own skin's response to the universal field. I try and make the fluid flow in accordance with the magnetic energy that unites the spheres with all living things.

I'm simply the conductor of these energies, that's all, though I do believe they flow very powerfully in my patient - powerfully, but with no proper conduit. Her system is unbalanced, disturbed even, and I must strive to restore its harmony because I can see it on her face, that ghastly thing which haunts her, which has driven the light from her eyes.

'Dear God, what happened to you?' I murmur.

Marie bites down on her lower lip and once again, begins to speak.

Marie

On the night of my audience with the Empress, I lay back at home in the bed I still shared with Mamma. No, Mamma wasn't there, Doctor Franz, though I was waiting for her. I was listening out for the jangle of her bracelets. Did I tell you about those bracelets before, Doctor Franz? No? She was very proud of them. They were engraved and made of heavy Italian gold. They used to belong to her own mother and Mamma always said that she would give one to each of her children when we married. Except that, whenever she said that, it always made me feel sad. Where was Liesl? And would I ever be married?

Still, I listened out for the *tinnnnkkkille-jannnnngggle* of her bracelets. But what I could hear instead was the *pppp-attt-ttter* of light rain against the window and the wind, sighing in the grove outside. Then came a knock at the door. A few moments later, a breeze against my face as the curtains parted and a smell like horse-sweat.

When I sat up, it was Malois who spoke.

'Hey Marie, guess what? You've been awarded two hundred gold florins a year.'

'Is that good?' I said, imagining two hundred goldfish, gleaming beneath the surface of the frozen Palace lake.

'It's not bad,' said Malois. 'It's about half of what I need to live on in a year.'

The cheek of him, Doctor Franz! I felt compelled to say, 'Then it's enough for *me*.' Because it was *my* pension, after all. Intended for *my* treatment, *my* blindness.

'Oh, for *you*, little Marie-Thérèse, yes,' said Malois and the mattress squeaked then sank as he sat down beside me. 'But for *me*.' He broke off, began to tell me about how, when five year-old Wolfgangeryl Mozart slipped and

banged his head on the floor, the Archduchess Maria Antonia ran over to comfort him. 'And do you know what he did then?'

I shook my head.

'Why, he asked to marry her,' said Malois. He paused for a moment, then added, 'As if an Archduchess could ever marry a musician.'

'Oh,' I said, and I shifted uncomfortably beneath the rough wool of my blanket.

'Marie, I'm sorry,' Malois said after a moment's silence. 'It's been your big day, and I haven't stopped talking about Archduchesses, have I?'

'Not *all* the Archduchesses,' I said. Because, you know, Maria Elisabete was the one he really liked, Doctor Franz. She was the one he was teaching to play the pianoforte. But, child that I was, I started thinking, why her? Why not me?

'Well, I'm sorry, anyway,' said Malois, 'but I did bring you a new book. A fairy-tale.' He placed something heavy on my lap, something that smelt of parchment and leather. For a moment I allowed my hand to rest on its thick covers, let my fingertips sink into its swirls of letters.

'Would you like me to read it to you?' he said.

I took my hand away. 'No, thank you,' I said. 'If you don't mind, I'll ask Aaleigha to read it to me. She does the voices better than you do.'

'Oh, don't be like that, Marie. I said I was sorry.'

But it was too late for sorry now, Doctor Franz. I wanted Malois still to be at home with me, teaching me Middle C. Teaching me how to read. Though I suppose I had learned some numbers today. Not just counting out the rosary beads, but real, *big* numbers. A million gulden. Two hundred gold florins. Money for a dutiful nine-year old daughter. Reisi now, Reisi. Not Mutz anymore.

So, though Mutz was still cross with him, I let Malois kiss Reisi good night (*whilst he and the Archduchess whirled and pirouetted across a frozen lake and*

the Empress began to toss, not snowballs, but diamonds, into a sky that glittered with the light of two hundred gold moons.)

Yes, I suppose that was a strange dream, Doctor Franz. But I've often had more unusual dreams than that.

Yes. Because later that night, in the shifting darkness, I became aware of the regular *cccr-rr-ee-ak* of the wainscot and floorboards, the rhythmic tut of the clock. Then, when the clock struck eleven, it all started up again. That strange sensation of everything revolving around me: the invisible walls, the furniture, the curtains, the bed, even the doors. And then, against this dark, revolving backdrop, with my eyes starting, ears straining, heart beating, all the people I'd met that day began to appear. The Empress. Mamma, Papa, Johann, the artist. Malois and the Archduchess, who was like a mermaid and also like a fountain. Yes, there they all were, luminous among the shadows, glowing characters on a dark page, everyone except -

Yes, a dark, dark page. So dark that I couldn't tell if I was dreaming or not. Or perhaps, Doctor Franz, one of those dreams where you feel like you're still awake. Because now I had the feeling that I could see again – so, it must have been a dream. Yes, then I was dreaming that the moon shone into my chamber and the moonbeams began to weave themselves together to form a mirror – the perfect full moon of a mirror.

Inside the mirror, there she was again, my sister, holding a book up to the glass. But I couldn't read it, Doctor Franz. Not because I was blind; now, I wasn't blind but because all the writing ran backwards.

Mirror-writing.

But as the moonbeams flooded the floorboards, I felt around me for Malois's fairy-tale.

When I found it, I held it up to the mirror.

But the girl in the looking-glass couldn't read it either. Her face was a puzzled reflection of mine.

What to do? What to do?

Yet, after all, the answer was quite simple:

We exchanged books.

Now I could read her book and she could read mine. And, as I turned the pages, I discovered every solution to every problem I'd ever had; every answer to every question I'd ever wanted to know. Because, after all, it was as if we'd somehow swapped the stories of our lives. I'd become her story and she was mine.

'Liesl,' I whispered, 'don't go.'

She turned and smiled at me. But it was the kind of smile that made me feel sad, Doctor Franz. Because I knew that in the morning, I would wake up and she would be gone again. That in the morning, I would be blind.

But for now, I glanced back, over at the mirror. There, inside the glass, was my sister, her head bent over letters, words, pages, completely absorbed in my book.

Re-vision

(A revised version from a translation of a song set to one of Marie-Thérèse von Paradis's own melodies and sung during her musical tour to Colmar, 1783)

I was a little girl,
Less than four hands high,
Sitting in the summer house,
On my mother's lap,
Popping golden grapes into my mouth.

My mother loved me but-
She didn't see the black dragon,
Its foul shadow crossing my face,
The flash of flame
It breathed into my eyes.

Then –
Darkness.
Desolation.
The sun didn't shine any more.
The flame had robbed my eyes of light.

Mamma!
Where are you?
Your cheeks are wet.
Mamma!
Where am I?

Her tears rained down on me,
Then she turned her cries to Heaven,
'Please help my daughter.'
Her cheeks were wet with tears.
But no-one could help me.

I lay in her arms.
My fingers touched
The rope of pearls
Around her neck
That no longer shone for me.

Then, one day at a feast,
I sang a song to the Heavens.
Then came the flutter of wings,
A warble, tender, like a nightingale's,
Silver, like a flute's.

It was the voice of an angel.

She said she would lend me her harp.
Its melodious notes would be
My solace.
My consolation.
She said she was Cecilia,
The patron saint of music.
That the Pope's lute praised her –
And that the strange prophet Franklin
Had made her a glass harmonica.

As she spoke, she clasped me,
And I felt a brave new soul
Enter my throat and hand,
New flame to my song,
New fire for my playing.

And then she left me
Not bereft, like before –
Because, on my lap she left
A stringed instrument
With the voice of an angel.

Once I played it in a temple,
Played out the notes
Of famous Pergolesi-
The Empress heard my music
It eased her troubled heart.

Before, all over her domain,
East, South, North and West –
No-one could comfort her
But now my music was her balm
And so she took care of me.

Hear the sweet tremor
Of my cembalo
Notes so sweet
That a pastor
Crowned my head with myrtle.
But sweeter still
Is the touch of my mother's hand –
And her gentle tears
A more beautiful, invisible crown
Than her faded pearls.

Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer

Marie often plays for me on the piano I bought for her especial use in my clinic. And then I watch as her hands cross the keys in their easy, accustomed manner, sometimes strong and capable, at other times, more delicately. Except that, as I watch her, I begin to fear for her playing when she regains her sight.

And that's when I start to tell Marie that you have to look in before you can look out, that is, you have to know and understand yourself fully, have to love yourself before you can have any hope of perceiving the outer world. This is, after all, the purpose of our treatment sessions when I persuade her to confide in me.

At other times, of course, my advice to Marie is the opposite: that she must look out before she looks in. By this, I mean that she must seek to understand the outer world rather than retreat to her own self-absorbed inner world. She must be made to see the spaces she walks through, rather than build up pictures of them in her mind as, so far, she has been permitted to do.

Sometimes I feel that my treatment methods are showing signs of success. Sometimes, after all, Marie manages to negotiate the spaces of my clinic without begging for bandages, without clinging onto the chairs for guides. And I consider too as progress her growing curiosity about the outer world. The number of questions she asks me about everyone and everything. Just like a child might do. Though, to my surprise, rather than question me about her own appearance, Marie begins to quiz me about my wife.

'Is Frau Mesmer pretty?' she wants to know.

'Pretty enough,' I reply. 'She has green eyes,' (like Soukeryl's, I nearly add but don't) 'and a fair complexion.' That is the gentlemanly response, after all. Because Anna no longer looks like that now. Passing fair when I married her but

now - how quickly the fruit ripened then began to rot.

'But I think you said Frau Mesmer is a little older than you, isn't she?'

'Seven years older,' I reply.

'Why, she must be nearly fifty then!' says Marie, astonished. Then, recovering herself, 'but I suppose she's very wealthy.'

'She inherited this mansion and its grounds from her first husband,' I say. And then I can't help but add, 'though that's not why I married her.'

'Why did you then?' asks Marie.

'Because,' I say slowly, 'I thought she would be company for me at the end of a long day.'

'And is she?' says Marie.

At which I start to mutter that Anna is very helpful to me in my work.

'What do you think of her?' I ask.

'Well,' says Marie, 'I'm not sure. I'm used to Mamma, who has a more fiery temperament. Frau Mesmer seems a bit - cold in comparison. And you're not at all like that yourself, Doctor Franz. Your voice is so - *warm*.'

Marie's comparison of my wife to her mother surprises me. But it makes me realise something. When I was first introduced to Anna, the widowed Frau von Bosch as she was then, there was something about her, a look, a smile, that did remind me of my own mother.

Later that night, when I stand alone in our bed-chamber, waiting for Anna to finish her household tasks and come to bed, I think back to my conversation with Marie. I pull off my shirt and ease myself out of my breeches until they are lying inside-out on the floorboards. The sight of them makes me feel oddly vulnerable, like a snake who has shed its skin. What is it that I'm becoming?

The cheval mirror is over beside the washstand, where it always is, its glass

tilted up to the ceiling. I am not a vain man, at least, not where my appearance is concerned but now I approach the glass cautiously then straighten it until I confront my own reflection. I look at myself long and hard, until my gaze blurs and my own shape seems strange to me.

I glance down.

Dear God, there is even grey in my pubic hair!

And yet I'm still strong. My body hasn't dwindled into an old man's, with scrawny legs, a round belly and a wrinkled scrotum. But still, that old man waits for me there, beneath the dust, within the mirror. And then, when that happens, who will ever want me? Not my wife, certainly, with her mouth curving into a brittle smile, turning away from me.

Would Marie?

The next day in the clinic, when I point my wand at one of the mirrors, Marie follows its movements with her eyes, not directly but in the glass. So then I point my wand at the spot between her eyes. And she cries out in alarm. Her eyelids close and she twitches and shivers.

'Open your eyes, Marie,' I say now and I take a small bronze statue of a hunter and his dog (one of the few gifts my mother received from her family when she married my father) and pass it in front of her eyes. They flicker – and yes, then her pupils move from side-to-side, jerkily, it's true, but this will surely improve, given time. And yet she cannot fully discern what the object is itself. And so she bites her lip, wedges her eyelids shut and turns her head away, her bosom rising and falling with – what emotion? Fear?

Well, of course it would frighten anyone. To perceive a half-light full of unknown shapes and masses, moving towards her at different rates, must be frightening. A kind of ghost-seeing, born of the mind, that the mind itself cannot

alleviate.

Her eyes remain shut. How delicate and precise her own organism has become! After all, her condition reveals to me the fragility of the balance of the fluids and their need for perfect harmony within the body, which is, after all, only a manifestation of the greater harmony of the universe, of the ebb and flow of the great forces that move the stars and planets. And so I must take pains to speak to her soothingly, so that once again she becomes receptive to the movement of the magnetic fluid.

'Open your eyes again, Marie,' I entreat now.

But no, she will not let me examine them! Her head twitches out of my grasp and her eyes veer away, watering. And so, for the moment at least, I'm compelled to wind a bandage three times around them.

Marie

This evening, Doctor Franz manages to persuade me to sit down in front of an uncovered mirror. Then he places another object in front of my eyes. I can't tell what it is. How can I? But he says, 'Your eyes followed its movement in the glass.'

'Really?' I say.

'Yes,' says Doctor Franz, 'and now your pupils are expanding to take in the last of the light.'

'Oh,' I say, and now the twilight is full of strange shapes and masses, all moving at different speeds.

'Marie,' says Doctor Franz then, 'can you see *yourself* in the mirror?'

'Myself?' I say, 'no, why, should I?'

'Well, that is why you're here, at my clinic,' he replies, 'to learn how to see.'

'But the light's hurting my eyes,' I say. 'I can't bear it.' I throw my hands over them. 'Let me have another bandage,' I beg.

'It's only twilight,' I hear him reply and this time, he doesn't do what I say. He doesn't reach for another bandage. Instead, his fingers pass over the hollows beneath my eyes, throbbing as they trace the sockets' bony edges. And the mirror in front of us, is it really a connecting door, leading me back into the past? Because I feel myself passing through it, Doctor Franz, so that I am skating over the lake, surface-and-depth, past-and-present-in-one -

I was skating over Schönbrunn lake with the Archduchess Maria Elisabeth, Malois and of course, Johann. He was clutching my arm and guiding me forwards. I was nine and he was eleven and so much better at everything than me.

Swiiish Swiiiiish Swiiiiish Swiiiiish. There we were, shifting one foot in front of the other, wobbling, tottering, everything chill and still except for the *dent-skimmm* of our skates.

The Archduchess's voice floated back towards me.

'Marie, *Liebling*, how are you managing? I want to go to the Snow Pavilion but won't that be too much for you?'

My upper lip began to curl. My *hochnasig* look, Johann called it.

'I'm sure she can manage,' said Malois.

'Of course, when it's spring,' the Archduchess called back, 'we'll be able to take the boat out to the Pavilion.'

'It's a shame Josepha will be gone by then,' said Malois, 'I expect she'll miss all this.'

'Josepha?' said the Archduchess. 'She'll be horribly homesick.' Then, sounding nearer, and more gentle, 'they say the King of Portugal planted apple trees so that the blossom would remind his bride of snowflakes. I wonder if Ferdinand will do the same for Josepha?'

I didn't hear Malois's reply. Instead, *gasssp*, something fell against my face. Not a snowflake but a swan's feather, Johann said, clutching my hands. 'There's swans, right at the edge of the lake,' he added, 'where there's slurry rather than frozen ice. One of the swans is swimming in circles, round-and-round.'

Ah, Doctor Franz, if only I'd been like you! Why? Well, what I mean is, if only I could have been a magician, too. Because then I could have cast a spell, a spell to stop time. Then I could have suspended everything, right there and then: Johann holding me upright, the swan, just pausing in the middle of her circle, the feather, falling -

But as we approached the island where the Snow Pavilion lay, the other ice-bound birds began to *honnknk*.

Then *crrrracck*, how brittle the ice sounded beneath my blades.

Then *crrrracccck* again, the ice moved a bit.

Then it moved a bit more, up-and-down, like a see-saw so that I - I lost my footing and then - my legs splayed out onto the ice. *Oeeeeiiiaahh*, how the cold stung, but Johann hoisted me upright - and the ice held.

The Snow Pavilion's roof, Johann said, was pointed like a church steeple but sloped, like his winter cap. The latest fall of snow made it sparkle above the frozen lake, itself so white and still and strange.

Inside the Snow Pavilion, it was cold, so very cold that I began to think the walls must be made of snow and the windows and doors of ice. But Johann said no, it was a room of blue-and-white. 'There are blue ink drawings all over the walls,' he said, 'in white porcelain frames and above the faraway doors, there are candle-holders with glass ornaments hanging down from them.' Yes! Far away, I could hear their *tin-kkkle*, *tin-kkle*, *chiim-mee*, whilst closer to us was the subdued murmur of Malois and the Archduchess. Though all I could hear them say were *parting* and *pianoforte*.

Johann said they were sitting very close to each other, on white spindly chairs above jagged tiles of cut-glass. Then, when they had run out of things to say, the Archduchess gave us biscuits she called Lady's Fingers. Crunching down on them, they sounded like shattering icicles.

I raised my cup to my mouth but the porcelain was so thin, it burnt my lips. So I put it down again and sat there quite still, not saying anything, just letting my tea cool, occasionally stirring my spoon. There it went, *tiiiiiiing-and-fade*, *tiiiiiiing-and-fade*, like the ice-skater I would never be, pirouetting, pirouetting, *tingggg-and-fade*.

'Marie,' said the Archduchess edgily and then, '*Liebling*, please.'

But my lips brushed against a hairline crack and then, somehow, there I was, back in the first weeks of my blindness, with the *tap tap tap tap tap* of Frau Liebhart's borrowed cane, trying to find something, *anything*, in the darkness. *Tap tap tap* and shapes loomed out at me, rolled towards me as I tried, *tried* to get the feel of things, *tap tap tap tap*, tried to decide, waiting and wanting so much, and it's funny, Doctor Franz, isn't it, how that entire memory was contained within a teacup's crack? I might never have known.

What?

I might never have known that I was waiting for a hand to haul me back to safety.

I put the teacup down.

'Marie,' the Archduchess said again, more gently, 'why don't you and Johann take some of the biscuits and go outside to feed the swans?'

'But I'm happy here,' I said.

And I was, until I heard a strange sound. A sort of warble, low and full and clear, that made me shiver. That made the back of my throat ache. What did it sound like? Nothing at all like Mamma's singing. More ragged, more breathless. Like a baby's wail. Or, no. Not like that either. More of a rattle and then a gasp. A jagged sound, full of layers and songs and patterns criss-crossing. The sound the music-box made when it was winding down.

'Oh, what is it?' I said.

'It's a swan singing,' said Malois.

'For the last time,' said the Archduchess, sounding sad. But why should she? Just as I was trying to work it out, up came the ice, tilting right up in my mind's eye. And as I sank into the icy water, I screamed,

'Johann, help me! Help me!'

Because though it wasn't real, that dark, icy water, still, I had the strangest

feeling that – well, that Johann and I were drowning.

Appendix 2: Chapters 36-40

36

Johann

Von Hohenberg, it frightened me when Marie began to rock backwards and forwards in Doctor Mesmer's garden, groaning, 'Blind! Blind!' I didn't understand. There were her irises, and there, the whites of her eyes. All clear. Her pupils were even expanding to take in the last of the evening light.

Then I understood. It wasn't that she'd lost her sight again, it was that she was frightened of the dark. And now she had no music to console her. But what she did have was the gift I'd brought her. The sky lantern. I lit it and *whoosh!* we watched it disappear into the sky. And then the stars came out and I tried to tell her their names: the Great Bear, Orion's Belt, the Pleiades. But now it was the *sight* of the stars, not their names, that captivated her.

'They're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,' she said.

I left her at the door of her chamber, promising to return the next day for her birthday. Then I began to walk away through the streets of Landstrasse. I stopped for a moment on the High Bridge, gripping the balustrade, watching the sun rise over the sleeping city. There it lay, silent and splendid, towers, temples, theatres and domes. How they glittered in the early morning sunlight, the river too, gliding out to the Danube and then to other seas and other shores. Marie, Marie, I thought then, for me there is neither night nor day, sun, moon, nor stars because you have made the entire universe cease to exist for me.

I've said too much. But what I've said reminds von Hohenberg of something. He begins to tell me that he makes pinholes on sheets of paper. Then he looks through them and draws what he can see: his entire world narrowed down to the size of a pinhole. He says that the world is full of these holes, tiny

apertures of meaning or meaninglessness that the mind can wander through. He says that once you are on the other side of them, you become free: free of your life, free of your death, free of everything that used to belong to you.

'Ahhh! That's exactly how I felt when I went to Bad Gastein,' I say. 'Free of everything. You and I should really take a sketching-holiday there, von Hohenberg. It's beautiful. Mountains all around- '

And so – the journey to Bad Gastein. At first, it was cold enough in the open carriage and we covered our shivering selves in rugs and shawls and greatcoats, we being my Aunt Marisa, Aaleigha, Marie and I. But a few hours later, the sun had climbed higher in the sky and so we threw off all the rugs and shawls, insufferably hot. That was when we were passing through Salzburg. Mozart? Well, yes, of course, Marie wanted to stop and visit him but I convinced her that the horses would suffer if we delayed. Besides, von Hohenberg, I already told you how I dealt with him before. I had no wish to encounter him again.

Salzburg's white houses shone out in the sunlight. And towering above them, on the summit of a rock, was a castle. 'Famous for its cruel overlords,' Aunt Marisa said, 'in centuries gone by, they tortured and killed Protestants then pitched their bodies from the rocks down the precipice.'

I glanced up at the castle, stark and grey against the snow. It was set about by rocks wooded with pine trees, sent aslant by the wind. But I had scarcely begun to examine it when the church bells began to chime. And then, looking up to the sound, there were ropes stretched across the street, from upper window to upper window. Each rope was covered in flags, flowers and bell-shaped ornaments, made out of pipes and pieces of red flannel, the ends finished off with glass cut in diamond shapes.

Marie? Yes, Marie put her hands to her ears, tortured by the incessant jangling.

But the noise was all that remained. We'd come too late to witness the procession. There was nothing left of the altars except boards, carpets and green branches. And so our driver spurred on our horses. We swept through hills, vales and wooded slopes, rivalling the river Salza in speed.

We soon approached the wild mass of the Tännengebirge mountains. Threads of snow ran down their slopes until they melted and disappeared. The next village was Kuckl, then Gollig with its sparse houses and then finally the chain of mountains was broken. We crossed the Salza and began to follow its right bank, heading up towards the village of St. Johann. My birthplace.

Though the village itself is really nothing to boast about. A village of snow, with one, long, winding street dotted with houses with overhanging roofs.

'Now that we're here,' said Aaleigha, 'perhaps we should have some lunch. How about over there?' And she pointed to a large woman waving at us from the window of what looked like an inn, with a tavern next to it. Indeed, von Hohenberg, the woman's bulk alone was sufficient recommendation for the resources of her larder.

We all trooped inside and ate lunch: soup and surprisingly good fried trout and pastry. But the fat landlady could speak neither German nor French but kept repeating a few broken phrases from her own language, '*Uverjrssky. Uverjrssky urolig.*'

'It sounds like seagulls,' I whispered to Marie.

'Or the piano-tuner jangling,' she whispered back.

It wasn't until we heard the word, '*Sturmfeld*' that we thought we understood. Then, when the landlady's pretty daughter brought a dish of wild strawberries for us into the parlour, she said, 'My mother's been trying to warn

you. There'll be a storm in the next few days.'

'How does she know?' I said.

'Oh, she just gets a certain kind of headache and then she knows,' the girl replied, smiling at me.

'What's your name?' I asked, because really, von Hohenberg, she was the prettiest thing. One of those golden girls, you know, fair hair, fair skin, fair everything. And when she began to spoon honey over our strawberries, her gold filigree chain dangled between her breasts.

'Christiane,' she said, straightening up and then, suddenly serious, 'all the same, you should be careful. Last year, a little girl was blown off the rocks when she was gathering birds' eggs.'

We stayed the night in St. Johann then set out again for Bad Gastein the following morning. Straubinger's Inn was our destination. Aaleigha said it was the best inn in the region and she should know, I suppose, since she used to live there.

Beyond the village, the road swept through another valley then round the mountains. Here we sometimes passed beneath overhanging rocks, so cracked and fissured it was as if they were suspended by a thread and on the point of snapping. In fact, all around us lay pieces already snapped off. Our carriage took an unexpected turn to avoid them and then the wind came sighing after us, sighing and sobbing, as if unhappy spirits were hovering there, unable to rest in peace.

Yet the turn took us into a new valley, filled with wild flowers and here and there, Alpine roses. Then, down hills and up hills yet steeper, winding through narrow roads where the heights of the mountains would seem to close in upon us, and then suddenly, to open out or recede. And all the while, the stream

was running along beside us, leading us towards Bad Gastein.

Finally, we entered the pass which led into the valley of Gastein. Somehow I'd thought that the valley would be perched high on the mountain, exposed to the pure, cold air. But instead, it was embedded in earth with a kind of glowing heat. Have you ever been anywhere like that, von Hohenberg? Almost like a volcano, if you know what I mean. And yet here was a village and we drove into it, past a church, past a house or two, past a long, low room that seemed to be built of nothing except glass and then into the yard of Straubinger's Inn.

The inn itself was filled with short staircases and passages with unexpected twists. But one more turn down the corridor led us into a good-sized parlour which opened out into a smaller one where the walls and ceilings were panelled with polished maplewood.

There we sat, suffering. 'I've never known it to be like this before,' Aaleigha said, 'so hot.' It was true. Hot white light fell through the parlour window, dappling the mosaic floor with the shapes and shadows of leaves. But outside, the courtyard and orchard looked dried up. The trees were sunburnt, drooping even and all the flowers had withered and died.

Inside the parlour, there was even less to engage my attention. There was only a small axe by the hearth, next to a basket filled with branches of pine. For want of any other occupation, I reached for it, and began to hack the branches into smaller pieces.

Meanwhile, Aaleigha was dragging a thread of red wool across the floor, pursued by a stripy grey kitten, all paws and claws. She looked up to see what I was doing.

'Oh, bravo Johann,' she said, 'and I thought you were just going to sit there and pick the skin off your thumbs.'

My cheeks grew hot. 'This axe is useless,' I said and I dropped it with a clatter. At the sound, Marie raised her head from her lace-work. Warming to my theme, I continued, 'You couldn't use it to chop butter.'

'Well, what do you expect?' said Aaleigha, 'a hunter's axe?'

So then, you know, I wondered if wolves' heads would part cleanly from their necks or whether threads of gristle and tufts of grey fur would impede the axe's progress.

'Bored?' said Aaleigha. 'Poor Johann. Here, you take him,' she continued, scooping up the kitten and dropping him unceremoniously onto my lap. 'It's funny there are cats here,' she added, 'normally the climate and the vapours coming off the water make them too nervous.'

'Yes, Doctor Herr Bernhard told me that too,' said Marie.

'And you, Marie,' said Aaleigha, 'you can put down your lace-work and hold your hands out. Yes, there, that's right, cat's cradle,' and she looped a skein of red wool over my cousin's hands.

'Steady,' said Aaleigha, 'I'll set you free when I'm done,' and she began to wind the wool into a large red ball. Back-and-forth, round-and-round; the kitten tracked the movement with interest. Then he began to purr and then, for no reason, he bit my hand. Little brute! I rapped him on the head with my free hand but he wouldn't release his teeth.

Now Marie spoke and her voice was strangely wistful. 'Aaleigha, you were going to tell me about the man you dreamed of on St. Agnes's Eve, your future husband.'

'Was I?' said Aaleigha carelessly, 'really, there's nothing to tell. He had a big nose and dark hair. I was glad when I woke up.'

'Oh,' said Marie, 'I was hoping you'd dream of someone better.'

'Who?' said Aaleigha, tugging at the wool that bound my cousin's hands.

'Johann?'

'Oh no,' said Marie, 'of course not.' Then she added, 'but what about Malois?'

Aaleigha looked over at Marie and laughed. 'Well, Malois would have to get rid of that ridiculous moustache. Besides, he's besotted with his *Rotparadiesvogel*.'

I began to wonder if Marie's paid companion should be speaking like this about her employer's son. But Aaleigha had always spoken her own mind.

'Do be quiet,' Aaleigha added now to the kitten, who had started mewling in my arms.

'Perhaps he's hungry,' Marie said.

'Aren't we all?' Aaleigha replied, taking him from me and departing in search of the kitchen. The moment she was gone, I reached for my discarded knapsack. Inside it, a cut-glass vial which caught the light as I brought it out. Its liquid was ruby-coloured and half of it was already gone.

A little later, Aaleigha's returning footsteps sounded down the corridor. Quickly, I drank some of the opium tincture, that you had given me, von Hohenberg and threw the vial back into my knapsack which I kicked beneath the chair's brocaded fringe. Just in time. Aaleigha entered the parlour, setting down plates of toasted bread and pickled mackerel.

'The axe is just there if you want to spread the butter,' she said, grinning.

'No, it's fine the way you've done it,' I said as globules of butter sank through holes in the bread. It was only afterwards that I noticed that the bread had left a moist, sweaty sheen on the plate beneath. Like an opium sheen.

That night, alone in bed, I just couldn't sleep. It was too hot and the air was too close. The oak bedstead above me was too high and broad and the mattress

beneath me, too solid and hard. Then, too, the linen sheets were stiff and the bolster down the middle of the bed equally unyielding. Once or twice, in a half-dozing panic, I clutched hold of it, only to kick it away. Nor was the sound of the waterfall outside conducive to sleep. It was nothing like the soothing murmur of the ocean. Instead, von Hohenberg, it was a sort of frenzied lash, a tormenting madness I could still hear even as I finally slipped into sleep.

I dreamed then of the pine branches I'd chopped. They were crackling alight, arching, writhing, blazing until they became my mother, shaking down her hair, gleaming red from the flames. She held out her arms to me, embraced me, laughing as I became entangled in her loosened braids. My mother, with the scent of pine trees in her hair - and no sign of the little brother, born and died in a single moment, who had taken her away from me.

Even in my dream, my eyes stung with tears.

But when I opened them, there I was, reaching again for the shutter, the bolster kicked clean onto the floor. And the heat! Still that same oppressive heat which had soaked my nightshirt through with sweat. So instead of closing the shutter, I yanked it open wider and began to gasp for air.

But even with the shutters and windows wide open, there wasn't a breath to be had. No air, no rustling from the pines. Instead, all I could hear was the incessant rush of the waterfall, which – *mein Gott!* - ran down the very side of the inn and then the steep rocks far into the valley.

A few days later, I guided Marie through the valley, past caves and clusters of rock. Together, we picked our way across the sand then I steered her between bits of broken bottle rubbed smooth by the water and past a shallow cleft filled with crows' feathers and the perfect skeleton of a minnow. Finally, we reached the Palfnersee lake. I helped her to sit down on a rock so that she could dangle

her feet in the water.

'We'll have to be careful,' I said. At that, she shivered. Her pale flesh goose-bumped and her veins began to stick out. But when she grew used to the feel of the water, I eased her into it.

'Lean forwards,' I said and as she did so, I placed my hand beneath her chin. The brown flannel and then the white frill of her petticoat grew dark in the water.

'Trust me,' I said, 'kick your feet back.'

As she did so and with my hand still beneath her chin, she floated.

'See how light you are,' I said.

'I'm a Triton,' she replied.

The wet cloth clung to her thighs. And how very white and cold her feet looked, kicking in the water.

Later, when it grew dark and the beams of moons and stars were scattered across the water, I thought of Marie's mermaids, their passage lit by thousands of tiny lamps.

As we travelled back into the village, there were still a few lights gleaming from its windows. Then, as we approached the waterfall at the side of our inn, its mass of white water shone out in the moonlight. I wanted to describe how it looked to Marie but its roar was too loud. Besides, though the waterfall was glorious to behold, I soon began to feel that the sight of it yielded pain, not pleasure.

37
Marie

It's the morning of my eighteenth birthday. And today, Doctor Franz, I want to talk to you about Bad Gastein. Do you know it? The little town in the mountains with the spa waters, the waterfall? Doctor Herr Bernhard told me to be careful of that waterfall. He said that a patient of his, a general in the army who had overworked his brain with military tactics, once came to Bad Gastein. He stayed at Straubinger's too and his room was right next to the waterfall. He believed that whatever melody entered his head when he first awoke was taken up by the torrent and carried on incessantly throughout the day. It almost drove him mad, he said.

A few days after we had arrived in Bad Gastein, Johann and I were sitting together in Straubinger's parlour on two wooden chests pushed together and covered in cushions. There was no pianoforte here. Outside the window was a courtyard, Johann said, bordered with pine-trees. From outside, too, came the relentless crash of that waterfall.

'The noise!' I said to Johann and I was about to tell him what I just told you, about the general, when, all of a sudden, I felt his fingers round my knee. Then came the soft rasp of his tongue. He was licking my knee. Warm, wet circles. Johann was seventeen and I was fifteen. He shouldn't have been behaving like that. I jerked my knee away, though I also wanted to leave it there, wanted him to do it again.

But all he said was, 'Salty. Must be from when we were bathing yesterday.'

After a moment or two, I replied, 'You promised you'd teach me how to swim.'

'I will,' he said, 'later.'

'It's always later,' I said, reaching down, groping around on the floor for the wicker-basket where I kept my lace-work.

Johann started to shuffle in his seat, complaining that a book was digging into his spine. The next thing I heard was him turning over the pages.

'The Little Mermaid,' he said. Then, reading aloud, 'this voice you must give to me. The best thing you possess I must have for the price of my own draught. My own blood must be mixed with it, that it may become as sharp as a two-edged sword.'

'Holy Mother!' I swore and swore. I'd managed to prick my finger.

Johann stopped reading, tried to take my hand. But I wouldn't let him. Instead, I stuck my finger in my mouth. Which creatures never bleed? Ghosts? Statues? The little mermaid in the story, she kept a statue of a beautiful boy in her garden. Her garden beneath the sea, I mean. She placed a garland of red flowers round his neck and perhaps she tried to will him into life. But despite all her prayers and entreaties, he remained what he was, a statue.

'You're too old for this,' said Johann, abruptly, slamming down the book. He picked up another, rifled through its pages, began to read. It was a strange story. A congregation in a church thought they saw the devil's face, poking through a pane of stained glass. But really it was just a groom, trying to steal a love-token for his mistress, a serving-maid. Ah, how she begged for a little piece of window, 'only a little, like a rose-berry, scarlet on one's breast. Then one were singled out as Our Lady.'

'Our Lady!' said Johann suddenly. 'What she really wanted was a kiss!' He began to shuffle towards me. Now I could feel the warmth of his body, closer, close, much too close. I wriggled away from him to the farthest corner of the chest then became very busy with my lace-work.

'Could you fetch me a pair of scissors?' I said. 'None of this feels right. I think I'm going to have to cut it all out and start again.'

Ah, yes, the Bad Gastein baths. The doctor in attendance began by describing various ingenious contraptions, tubes for the mouth and ears and some strange pedal system for the knees and feet. He assured me these contrivances would help my overall constitution, if not my sight.

'Here you benefit from the spring'sss wonderful mineral'sss. Your body absorb'sss them completely.' (This doctor had a peculiar way of sounding his s's, as if they themselves were comprised of *hisssssing* vapours.)

'But what are they good for?' I said.

'Oh well, the ssspine, the nervesss, the head. For this classsss of malady, it's the besst remedy in the world. But the vapour bath'sss are alssso good for throat ailment'sss. SSSome of our besst sssingers have come here and left again with their voicesss completely resstored.'

'Oh,' I said, 'have you worked here a long time? Do you remember?'

'Who?' said the doctor.

'Do you remember two sisters, singers, coming here? Frau Nachtigall and Frau von Paradis? A very long time ago? Seventeen years ago?'

'That long ago? Sssisster'sss? Sssinger'sss? I'm not sssso ssssure.'

'Oh.'

'Unless - yesssssss, there wasss an older lady and a younger lady sssome year'sss ago, both very anxio'uss for their voices.'

He proceeded to sound my liver, listen to my heart and check the straightness of my shoulders. 'Yess,' he said at last, 'you can enter the bath'sss but only for twenty minutesss, mind! When your finger'sss sstart to get wrinkled then you mussst get out and lie down for an hour, covered in a sssheet.'

When I left the vapour room, I could understand why he hissed his s's. My own ears were singing with the heat and steam. And now I was as sweaty as a stewed pear, my own sweet-sharp stench like cloves and mustard prickling my

nostrils.

The doctor guided me into the baths and then I could feel every pore open up, eager to absorb the mineral warmth. Afterwards, I lay down for an hour or so beneath a light sheet on a small sofa. And oh, how relaxed I felt, how *cherished*. My heart beat slowed as I began to lapse in and out of sleep and then I seemed to feel a larger heartbeat enclosing me, pumping blood into my veins, beating and wombing. Until I emerged from the baths into air so heavy and humid, I had to force my lungs to breathe. Unendurable! It was like when you wake up at night and for a moment or two your limbs are so heavy, you just can't move at all.

In Bad Gastein, Doctor Franz, my bed's eiderdown was a sea of satin, with foaming lace panels that felt like waves against my skin. I stretched out on top of its sunlit warmth.

'How are you enjoying your swimming lessons with Johann?' Aaleigha asked from somewhere over by the window.

'Oh, it's wonderful,' I said, 'that feeling of offering myself up to the experience. Though you can't know what it's like if you keep your eyes open. I keep saying to Johann, shut your eyes and then you'll feel it the way I feel it, moving so swiftly and certainly, so rhythmically through the unfolding world.'

'That sounds grand,' Aaleigha replied. 'But summer's nearly over,' she said then with a sigh, 'the clouds are quite dark.'

'Ah, don't say that, Aaleigha,' I said. Because, Doctor Franz, it was only the fifteenth of August. Yes, that's right. The Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. Only – there was something else about that date. Ah, what was it? I stretched out against the eiderdown, trying to remember.

Later that day, another swimming lesson with Johann. We swam and then we

rested. My hair had worked its way loose of its knot and felt damp and sticky with salt and sand. And yet I liked the way it felt, liked the shelter of the hollow where we lay. Sheltered, until I said, 'What's that whine in the wind?'

'It's the storm coming,' said Johann, hauling me to my feet. Together we began to pace back round the lake, our arms linked, our heads down so that the wind wouldn't blow sand in our eyes.

Then came the rain. Drops and drops, falling faster and faster. And then I felt the jerk of Johann's arm.

'What's wrong?' I said, leaning into him.

'The water's rising,' he said, and then, a moment later, 'quick! The rocks up ahead, we've got to get to them.' And then we were running, hand in hand, faster than we'd ever run before, until – a sudden flash of white. Lightning. Then came a clap of thunder, loud through the valley, each mountain hollow catching the echo and then again.

Something heavy scratched against my scalp. Johann's old straw hat. His hand, pressing it down on my head. I tried to shake myself free of its weight. And then – except I wasn't sure if I imagined it or not. His lips brushed against my mouth. I stepped back and all at once I was running.. My hand gripped the brim of his hat. Why? To protect myself. From the rain. From him.

I held my other hand out in front of my face. Whenever I stubbed my fingers on a tree, I groped my way round it. And so I made my way back, through the orchard, through the trees, towards the sound of the waterfall. And still the rain kept falling.

All of a sudden, I felt such a sharp pain in my guts, like I was being cut up inside. But soon it settled into a dull cramp, radiating outwards.

Finally, there it was, the flicker of a lantern from the porch of the inn.

Light – dark – light.

Back in our bed-chamber, my insides heaved. But Aaleigha made nothing of it. She whisked my bloody bundle away to boil then returned with some raspberry leaf tea. Oh, your wife used to drink that too, did she, Doctor Franz? But it's vile! Though perhaps that's because I always associate its taste with the ache of my first monthly, there at Bad Gastein.

Of course, I can tell you about it, Doctor Franz, because you're a doctor. The thick, steady flow spilling out of me and into the rags bundled between my legs before it grew thinner, scantier but more clotted. It was all my own doing, this mess. But apart from Aaleigha, who was entirely *necessary*, I didn't want anyone else to know. Not Mamma. Certainly not Johann.

Now Aaleigha stood over me, forcing me to drink. 'No more swimming for you for the time being, Missie,' she said. But I didn't know if she meant because of the storm *rummmbling* away outside or because of what was happening to me, inside.

Rummmble-crasssh! Crasssh! Crasssh!

'Just God moving his furniture,' Aaleigha said and then the village's church bells began to chime. All of a sudden, it came back to me. The fifteenth of August was the anniversary of Johann's mother's death. That must have been why he had acted so strangely. That must have been why he -

I cried out as my innards twisted and stabbed. Aaleigha pressed the rim of the cup more firmly against my mouth.

'Storm's over,' Aaleigha said the following morning, 'and everything looks fresh and bright. How are you, Marie?'

'Better,' I said and I was. Because I had the feeling that in spite of all the pain, I had my own special secret now.

I was about to explain this to Aaleigha when Mamma called through our

open door, 'Do you know where Johann is?' She sounded strained. 'His bed hasn't been slept in.'

My heart sprang up into my throat so I couldn't speak, couldn't even breathe. I shook my head. But as she stepped into the room, the expression on my face must have given something away.

'Have you two had an argument?' she asked.

'N-n-n-o-o-o,' I stammered then stopped. It was too difficult to find the right words for the feeling between us.

'Because, you know, he always finds this time of year difficult. His mother-'

Johann and I both knew that his mother had died in childbirth. So it must be that which had made him run away, the anniversary and memory of his mother's death. At least, that's what I thought as I began to ready myself for Mass. *Let it be that, let it be that, let it be that*, the church bells chimed, *let it be that, let it be that*, an unstoppable silvery onslaught. Ah, let it be that, Doctor Franz, and nothing at all to do with me.

After Mass, Johann still hadn't returned to the inn and so I could not sit and be still or sew. Instead, I wandered to-and-fro, from gate-to-door, from door-to-gate, never minding Aaleigha's chidings and the rumbling threat of another storm. Eventually, I took up a permanent position by the orchard wall, stood there, even when the rain began to fall.

Plash! Plash! Plash!

'JOHANN!' I called, 'where are you?'

I stood there, calling and calling, while the rain soaked into my hair and clothes so that I began to shiver and my teeth to chatter. And then, Doctor Franz, the new storm started up in earnest. The wind *hooooowwled* and stones *rattttttled* and something like slates *claaatttttered* in the courtyard. And then

Aaleigha was there, shouting above the storm, shouting in my face, 'Marie, are you determined to catch your death?'

She half-dragged, half-carried me inside and there I lay down on the chaise. I stretched my arms out above my head, then buried my face in the cushions, sobbing until they were sodden.

Aaleigha touched my shoulder. 'Foolish girl! You know what Johann's like. He'll be back as soon as he's hungry.'

But I didn't reply. My teeth chattered and I shrank farther into myself. So Aaleigha seized hold of my wrist. After a moment, she let it drop.

'Your pulse is too fast to count,' she said and her hand went to my forehead. But either her hand was too cold or else I was too hot because Aaleigha said I was sick. And then I was back in our bed-chamber again, back in bed with the eiderdown sticking to me as I sweated out my fever. But where was Johann as the doctor bled me and Mamma wept over me and Aaleigha fed me whey and gruel? Because without him, Doctor Franz, I felt like I had never been so weak before, no, not even in the first days of my blindness.

Johann

Sparks of flame make the red wine glow in the green glass bottles high above the counter. Red berries gleam against the sabre-sharp leaves of the holly caught up in the tavern's oak beams. Red and green. Blood on grass, somewhere in a forest, how long ago.

Von Hohenberg bangs a tankard of ale down on the table in front of me. Then he sits on the bench opposite and leans back against the wall. There's an expectant look in his eyes as he waits for me to resume my tale.

When the first storm came to Bad Gastein, the sky grew heavy and the lake where we had been swimming became like a dark mirror. Then too, the mountain's fir trees turned the water to a sad, deep green.

Later, as the storm began to die down, I started to follow after Marie, back towards the village. But somehow I became entangled with a procession that was winding through hills and valleys: girls and women, men and boys dressed in white and carrying bedraggled blue banners. Priests followed after them and a brass band, loud among the quiet mountains. The priests themselves were plainly robed but they carried a statue of Our Lady dressed in blue and gold, her hair scattered about her shoulders.

When I saw the statue, von Hohenberg, I changed my mind. I started to walk away from Bad Gastein. Soon the village, like the procession, began to disappear, houses flickering out, voices fading, even the sound of the waterfall, dying.

I walked and walked and walked, the stream that flowed away from the waterfall keeping me company, twisting and turning beside me. I do remember stopping at one point though. I stood on the bridge to hurl a branch into the

current and then to watch its progress. Sometimes it was impeded by a rock or stone and sometimes it was driven on by the force of the stream. Was this the stream that was once clogged with the blood of martyrs?

Snow began to melt and fall into the water, destroying the purity of its white foam, turning it brownish grey. Then twilight fell among the mountains, darkening the shadows on the water. But the stream was always at my side, so that I followed it right into the heart of the forest. And there beside a pool, I took out the vial of opium that you had given me, von Hohenberg. I squeezed a few drops onto my tongue. Yes – very bitter. Oh no, I'm not blaming *you* for what happened.

What did happen? I'm not even sure myself.

Just – his face in the water; his eyes, peering up at me. You know how the opium always draws him out. But this time, he frightened me and I ran as fast as I could through the forest. But no matter where I went, he kept level with me. Soon I reached the crosses in the forest-clearing. Oh, I don't know, von Hohenberg, I just had some thought that I might be safe. Except that the crosses standing there reminded me of soldiers awaiting orders. My orders.

You remember how I told you that I stole my cousin's sabre many years ago? This time, I had the axe from the parlour of the inn tied up in my bundle. Oh, you know. Just my little habit of taking things. And so I ran my finger down its bare blade. A berry of blood sprang up. I held it to my mouth, savouring the taste of salt and metal. Then too, red holly berries were clustered round the forest gravestones as I walked towards them.

Why, if I were to let it, the very air I breathe would rust the axe I carried – the axe which seemed to have a will of its own as it began to trace over the letters of a gravestone. Not my mother's grave and yet the woman buried there had the

same name: *Marianne*.

But perhaps, von Hohenberg, it was he, himself, who was controlling the axe. My double. For after all, how like me he is, von Hohenberg. Like me, oh, so like me, he has grown taller over the years and more substantial in his crimes. There he was, stretched out across the forest floor, that elusive shadow with my own shape and stature. I watched as he brandished the stolen axe crazily this way and that. How fast he moved in the moonlight. My eyes could barely keep pace with his wavering silhouette.

And then, *mein Gott*, he began to hack at the heads of the statues of the suicide graves.

Do you know what I think? I think he was really Krampus, the devil, and he took for his stick half my stolen axe. For when I awoke the following morning in the green pine-forest, aghast at the desecration of that profane and sacred place, I could only find half the axe's handle, wrung and snapped. It was lying beneath the statue, next to the grave of '*Marianne*'. Himself? Oh, of himself, there was no sign.

When I was fully awake, I began to hurry towards the next village. But by the time I had reached Hallstadt, another storm had started and the rain was falling.

And Hallstadt itself was dreary enough. The houses were oddly irregular, each a few steps or a whole footpath away from the other. And when I stopped for some bread, the baker told me that for three or four months of the year, the sun never fell on the village. And that, as I quickly realised, it grows dark before the day is half over. Imagine that, von Hohenberg, how destitute those people are of sunshine, of light.

And the people of the village, dear God! Small, ugly and all of them more or less deformed. How? Well, humpbacked or with withered arms or swollen

throats. Some looked misshapen from head-to-foot, some, simple, some, toothless. I suppose they were all poor and hungry. Because then, from a cottage whose windows overlooked the churchyard, a ragged child ran out on all fours.

'Go away,' I snapped.

Over on the churchyard wall, two skulls had been left out to bleach in the sun. Enough! I wasn't going to stay in this deathly place any longer. I turned away, towards the place of my birth.

The village of St Johann. The old man behind the counter lifted his head as the bell above the door rang and I entered the Heuriger. Though it was late summer, a cool breeze followed me, ruffling my cloak, daubing mist across the window panes. The man sighed and reached for a damp cloth to wipe them clean.

'A cup of coffee, please,' I asked him when he had finished. He began to pour me a cup. And like you always say, von Hohenberg, it's the little things: the wisp of steam curving upwards from the spout of the pot, its whorls and vortices repeated on my fingers as I handed over some coins. They were silver but they looked grey in the half-light.

Like the tired old man in front of me. But perhaps the aroma of coffee loosened something convivial in his brain because now he began to speak.

'You might want to throw another log on the fire,' he said, 'we don't get much sunlight here.'

'It's like Hallstadt then,' I said, walking over to the hearth then throwing a pine branch onto the fire.

'Oh, we're not as bad as that God-forsaken place,' said the old man, flexing his fingers till his knuckle joints cracked. 'Like them, we're without the sun for three months of the year but we do have our very own miracle.'

'I'm not sure I believe in miracles,' I said, approaching the counter, taking a

mouthful of strong, dark coffee. 'What is it?'

'Oh, on Candlemas Eve, the entire village assembles in the church. Then, during the ceremony at nine o'clock, the first ray of sun shoots through a small window let in at the right spot for that purpose.'

'I don't really think it's a miracle, then,' I said as the pine branch crackled and flared. Then the bell rang again and the tavern door swung open. A figure approached us, her slight, womanly form smothered beneath a long cloak. I peered to make out her face. But just at that moment, the sun shone directly into the tavern, blinding me. The light haloed round the figure, rendering her so pale she seemed to shine.

My heart contracted and the blood rushed to my head. For one foolish moment, I allowed myself to believe it was Marie. My cousin, as I'd last seen her, before I kissed her and she ran away. What? I didn't tell you about that? And perhaps I won't, either. Because then this other girl stepped through the light and smiled at me. Christiane.

Though I swear, von Hohenberg, it was the sudden, fancied resemblance to Marie which made her so irresistible. I stepped forwards to greet her.

'You? You here, alone?' she said.

I told her I had parted company with my relatives and that I was not wealthy. But I knew the cure for this was work, hard work, and that was what I was willing to do. After some hesitation, the girl consulted her mother, who agreed to employ me, shelter me and feed me. The first thing I did there, von Hohenberg, was to paint them a new sign for the inn, '*Beneath the Visiting Moon*.' And I found I didn't miss my school at all, the other boys, the masters. Not even my drawing-lessons. I was content making sketches of the tavern's customers when I could.

The only person I did miss was Marie, and sometimes Christiane's smiles

were sufficient consolation. But, von Hohenberg, you always say it yourself, the human heart is a large mansion with many chambers. Would you blame me if someone other than Marie should find temporary residence there? Besides, Christiane was so simple and so good. Perhaps all that was wicked in me leapt towards her for consolation – as if a devil might seek to rest its head on an angel's shoulder.

Marie

Have you ever been sick, Doctor Franz? I mean, really, really sick. Because it seems to me that those great battles which the sick body wages alone at night, against the onslaught of sickness or fever, require as much courage as – I don't know what, surviving vast wastes or barren deserts.

Ah, it's hard to describe it though, those silent, invisible battles and then the sensations of shivering, the fever and headaches. And when I was at Bad Gastein, I couldn't tell which of these belonged to sickness – and which to love. Because I lay in bed, hour after hour, longing for the sound of a stair creaking, or of certain footsteps along a corridor, and all the while knowing that those footsteps would never come, and all the while, my body sick, so sick, whilst my mind concocted new stories about what he was doing, so far away from me.

Slowly, I began to recover. Or, at least, not really recover because my head still ached. But I was out of bed. Out of bed and yet the power of walking seemed to have deserted me. I couldn't even manage the walk up-and-down the orchard after dinner. And though I persevered with the mineral baths, I have to say they didn't make me feel any better. Sometimes, I felt worse than ever. But the doctor in charge persisted in saying that this was an excellent sign, that a slow recovery would be more sure and lasting.

Days passed. Every now and then, to my surprise, would come flashes and gleams of the old health, just as the doctor had predicted and with these came the return of hope. Not only for my renewed health but for Johann. Because, in her distress at his disappearance, Mamma had written to Malois, Papa and Uncle Friedrich. Malois had replied that he would travel the route we had taken in order to search for Johann. And then, one morning in September, a note was delivered to Straubinger's Inn.

'I am safe and well,' Johann wrote, 'and working in a tavern.'

'Hmmm,' said Aaleigha after she read it, 'he must be working in St. Johann. You remember how much he liked the tavern there? And the girl. Though, from his note, I'd say he's about ready to be found.'

'Then we must go and find him,' I said, 'and perhaps we can stay there a few days and wait for Malois.'

But whilst Mamma was happy enough for us to take the open carriage to St. Johann, she was adamant that she wouldn't join us. 'What if Malois or Johann were to arrive here?' she said, 'besides, I need to finish my course of baths.' And nothing Aaleigha or I could say would convince her otherwise.

It was sad to be leaving Bad Gastein. Aaleigha stood upright in the carriage, waving and waving until the little town disappeared, she said, and the roar of the waterfall had died away. But when we entered St. Johann, Doctor Franz, then my heart leapt up so high that I *knew* Johann must be there. Aaleigha jumped down first, then helped me out of the carriage.

Eeee-eeee-eeeeie that was the sound of the tavern-sign creaking as we approached it. Aaleigha pushed open the door. And then I – I peered into a – well of darkness to be hit by the tallow smell of candles and a sharp scent of yeast and beer prickling my nose and throat. It felt as if we were swimming in wine, tipsy on its dregs – and on the scent of cheese and bread, smoked fish and sausages, roast beef in gravy.

Aaleigha ordered us each a glass of wine but *eugggggh*, how tart and sour, biting and gnawing. I didn't like it at all.

'It's the Sturm wine,' Aaleigha said, 'it isn't fully fermented.'

'Couldn't we try the Eiswein?'

'Ah, I wish we could, it's so sweet but it's the wrong time of year.'

Then I heard, coming from a long way away, a clear, female voice,

irritating as velvet to my nerves. 'Here, Johann, I'll give you some Hausbrand.' A girl talking to Johann? *My* Johann? ...And what was it Aaleigha had said? *Sturm wine* – storm wine? The storm and Johann's mouth and then his voice coming from a long way away, saying, 'distilled from apricots.' How near he was and yet how far away. He had never been so far away from me before.

But he was there, somewhere in the darkness and then darkness swirled round me and water flooded the inside of my head. I felt a hot, sickly flush shoot through my body and then the floor and ceiling began to trade places. The ground rose up to meet my swoon as down I sank and could not rise up again.

Now all I could feel was the rough grain of the floor's wood against my face. And then, after what seemed like an age, Doctor Franz, I had the sensation of being hoisted up. By Aaleigha, not Johann.

Aaleigha hauled me into a chair and then set about rescuing Johann from the innkeeper's daughter. Once that was accomplished, she brought me another glass of wine and stood over me while I drank it.

'That'll thicken your blood,' she said. But my blood already felt thick and slow, and my limbs were heavy.

'She doesn't look very well,' I heard Johann say.

'She's falling asleep,' Aaleigha replied.

A few hours later, I had recovered enough to find myself being joggled up-and-down or else swaying from side-to-side in a sedan chair. They had borrowed it from the blacksmith. Aaleigha wanted us to go out into the forest she had known as a girl and our superstitious driver wouldn't take us there in the carriage. But the sedan chair was perfect, she said.

Except, oh, Doctor Franz, it was dreadful! The motion of it, swaying, and

the light-shadow-light flicker of leaves made me feel, too helpless, to at the mercy of others. It was like being a very small child again, or - newly blind. And then, their measured *tramp-tramp-tramp* – oh, unendurable, it was like I was being carried off in my own coffin. Sometimes, Doctor Franz, although they were strong, Aaleigha and Johann would pause for a rest and put down their burden (me.) And I can't tell you how humiliating I found this. Then I tried to struggle my way out of the sedan chair, saying I wanted to walk alongside Aaleigha – except she wouldn't let me.

We did stop once, though, when she lit a fire. Then the gathered branches of pine *ru-sss-tt-led*, the burning leaves *c-c-c-ra-ckled* and a faraway bird began calling to its mate. I raised my head to listen and that was when I felt the first drop of rain. Soon our fire began to *hiss-sss-ssss* and smoke. *Cough, cough, cough*, and then Aaleigha was at my side, settling me back into the sedan chair. Whilst I shivered, she and Johann grabbed the chair's poles then marched along. Soon the steady *tramp-tramp-tramp* of their boots quietened as the dry earth succumbed to the falling rain. .

'There's a church up ahead,' Aaleigha said, 'we can shelter there.' And *tramp tramp tramp*, we crossed the porch and she said then, 'It's Saint Cecilia's church. You can light a candle for her if you want, Marie.'

We genuflected and walked towards the stand of votive candles. Beside them, Aaleigha said, was a Madonna and child, worked into black marble relief on the white walls. Then she moved my fingers across the stand. It was splattered with remnants of wax. Aaleigha took my hand back, began to guide my fingers with a taper of light. She whispered that this candle-lighting was for Johann, a way of giving thanks, because he had been lost and we had found him.

'And Saint Cecilia?' I said after a moment or two, turning away from the heat and light and back towards where the air was cool, 'is she shown in the

window?'

'Oh yes,' said Aaleigha, 'she's at her organ but she's a plain little thing, sallow and plump, with brown, crinkly hair. I wonder how she likes having all those damned souls writhing beneath her in the flames.'

'But there's something else there, too,' I said, 'isn't there? Something dark, quivering at the corner of the window?' And that was when I recalled, Doctor Franz, that story Johann had been telling me weeks ago, before he ran away. That story about a congregation that thought they saw a devil's face poking through a pane of stained glass.

Johann

Of course, once Marie and Aaleigha found me, that was it. I had to leave Christiane behind. Was I sorry to do it? Yes – and no. I won't lie to you, von Hohenberg, I felt something for her. But almost as soon as I had left St. Johann, that feeling began to fade.

Now the forest air stroked me with its cool fingers, like Marie used to do. I glanced down at her. We were carrying her in a sedan chair and she was smiling. 'I used to love coming here when I was a child,' I heard Aaleigha say from out in front. And on we marched, past the pine trees and into the odour of rotting leaves and bruised apples.

When we were tired, we stopped to rest whilst Aaleigha lit a fire. A ladybird too anxious to reach her burning offspring fell against my face – a flurry of scarlet and black – then flew away. I threw more leaves onto the fire, and oh it was a glorious sight, the flames shooting up. And Aaleigha had a pile of oily beechnuts on her lap and was roasting one on the end of a stick.

'You and Marie are too young to remember,' she said, glancing across at me, 'but I used to light fires in the woods with Malois and Liesl, strictly forbidden of course and we'd cook, yes, we'd cook any old thing we could find, a potato stolen from a field, some mushrooms, some rye bread if there was nothing better. And the smell, smoke and pine resin, it was atrocious but exquisite. And so,' and now she glanced away, 'I think it's Malois's face I see in the fire.'

Just then a bird began to call and Marie lifted her head to the sound. To the sound or to the sudden falling rain. The fire hissed then died and sent up a mourning wreath of blue smoke. Marie began to cough but Aaleigha reached her before I could. She helped her into the sedan chair then seized the food she'd been cooking. I shrugged, found my knapsack, then grabbed the chair's poles.

Aaleigha took the lead, guiding us towards a church at the edge of the forest. A black fence surrounded it, stark and uncompromising as in a child's drawing.

We left the sedan chair beneath the porch, under the guardianship of cavorting cherubs and hideous gargoyles. We passed through the porch's shadows and into the church. And there – there I saw Marie's face, von Hohenberg, inside the stained glass. Oh, yes, of course, I knew it was Saint Cecilia but somehow it was also Marie, her arms blessing the damned souls writhing in the flames beneath her. And then, at the corner of the window, I'm sure I saw the face of a devil. Except it was moving.

What did I do? Well, von Hohenberg, I reached for the axe, then remembered, of course, it was gone. I glanced over at the two girls lighting candles and then I ran down the aisle towards the door. I followed the path back round the church, shivering as branches of wet leaves caught against me. Then I drew up short at the sight of a man in a broad-brimmed hat peering through the stained glass window. At my approach, he turned towards me.

'Malois,' I said, gulping for air, 'so you're the devil!'

'Johann. What are you talking about?'

'The face in the window that scared the congregation in the story. I was looking at the window and thought that its devil came alive.'

'So you ran out here to confront him?'

'Well, I just ran, but then you're not the devil, are you?' I said, starting to breathe more easily, 'and in the story, besides, it was only a groom who poked his head through the stained glass window.'

'Enough!' said Malois sternly, 'this is all nonsense. I want to light a candle for Liesl and then, since the rain's stopping, I shall take you back to Straubinger's. Mamma's been so worried about you.'

'Marie and Aaleigha are inside the church,' I said, 'they're lighting candles.'

'For Liesl?' said Malois quickly, 'perhaps it will also bring them peace.'

But peace, von Hohenberg, is a word as cool as a drop of rain and as meaningless. Let the girls inside the church, let Malois, be comforted by their holy thoughts. I prefer opium.

Now Malois began picking his way along the sodden path towards the church door. I followed him, careful not to let the wet branches slap against me. Then, in the ever-widening gap from the opening door, I saw Aaleigha's startled eyes spring up. She smiled as Malois picked up Marie and swung her round, so that her boots dislodged a prayer book at the end of a pew.

'Well, Marie,' he said, 'what news do you have for me?'

For a moment she didn't say anything but then, von Hohenberg, the impassive expression on her face fell away like a house of cards.

'Malois,' she said, 'Aaleigha wanted to creep up into the hills without her clothes on after her steam bath.'

'Marie!' said Aaleigha, 'I told you that in confidence.'

'What was that?' said Malois, glancing at Aaleigha so that she dropped her eyes and refused to look at him. 'I don't remember playing that game when we were children.'

'This is a church,' implored Aaleigha.

Malois laughed but Marie's face glazed over.

'Johann,' she called imperiously, as if she could be certain at least of *my* attention, 'where are you? I need you.'

'I'm here,' I said through the open church door so that she took a few uncertain steps towards me. I ran down the aisle to meet her and she whispered in my ear. Then I took her hand in mine and guided her up the spiral staircase that twisted round the altar. When we reached the organ loft, coloured by the

light from the windows, she let my hand drop.

And it was remarkable, von Hohenberg, that whereas before she'd been uncertain, awkward even, now she positively attacked the organ. It bellowed out music all over the church – well, you know I'm not musical, von Hohenberg, but even I could appreciate those mighty tones swelling and surging through that great space.

But all too soon, Aaleigha began calling up, 'Marie-Thérèse von Paradis, how dare you!' I peered down into the church to see Malois lay a remonstrative hand on her lace cuff but she shook him off. 'And you, Johann, you're certainly old enough to know better. Get down here immediately, the pair of you.'

At which, Marie started laughing, rises and swoops echoing round the church. Then she called out, 'We thought you'd need some music for your wedding,' as she played a celebratory chord. But presently, her music began to subside. It was obvious that my faithful but unmusical ears made too poor an audience for her playing. She stopped. She yawned. 'Tell me about the groom and the serving-maid and the lump of stained glass,' she commanded. So I began to tell her what I could recall of that story I had been reading her those many weeks ago.

'I gave her the fragment of stained glass that was my bloodstone, the red blood of my heart and she held it up and smiled.'

'Marie! Johann!' Malois was calling us downstairs.

But out on the church porch, Marie demanded the end of the story. I continued, 'she held it up and smiled. She smiled full in my face, lifting her arms to me. Oh, 'I stopped. Because as I peered over the top of the sedan chair, I could see Malois, wringing out the rain from the ends of Aaleigha's wet hair.'

Malois glanced back towards us so that then I busied myself with settling Marie. But still, I saw him take Aaleigha by the hand and lead her just beyond the

churtyard, to the shelter of the encroaching pines. She smiled her crooked smile and lifted her arms around his neck. Then Malois kissed Aaleigha full on the mouth.

'What would you make of your precious brother kissing a servant girl, Marie?' I said.

'Mamma says Aaleigha isn't really our servant anymore. She used to be when she was our nursemaid but now she's a companion,' Marie replied.

'Who's companion, though?' I said, 'yours or Malois's?'

'Mine,' said Marie. Because Aaleigha did not have to carry out domestic duties any more, just keep her company, do a little fancy sewing or knitting and pour the tea. My aunt thought that because Aaleigha was a sensible girl, she could be trusted to chaperone Marie.

I began to whisper the end of the story, 'But what woke us in the morning, when the woods were filling again with shadow, when the fire was out, when we opened our eyes and looked up as if drowned through the rain-sodden trees...'

'Go on,' she said.

'What woke us,' I said reluctantly, 'what woke us was the sound of wolves.'

'Ah no,' said Marie, twisting away from me, 'no, they lived happily ever after.'

'No,' I said and then we were both silent. But now Marie's lips trembled over the uncertain fate of the storybook lovers. But what was it, do you think, von Hohenberg? Her blindness or her youth, that preserved her innocent belief in happy endings? For what happy ending could there be, for any of us?

Keeping level with the sedan chair, Malois rode back with us to the village of St. Johann. As we ventured deeper into the heart of the forest, twilight of the dove gave way to twilight of the nightingale. Now the topmost branches of the pines twined together thickly to form a vaulted architrave. The forest was hushed

like the interior of the church we had just left. And the moon rose up above us, to be cradled by the branches of pine.

Ferns of brilliant green slapped against me and I stumbled, almost jolting Marie out of her sedan chair. Aaleigha and I paused for a moment to lower her gently to the ground. But while I leaned over Marie to reassure her, Aaleigha suddenly marched on ahead.

By the time I'd caught up with her, it was already too late.

The twilight moon had escaped the forest's ensnaring branches. In its wan half-light, a crop of crosses stood out amid the tangled undergrowth. Beside them were statues of angels, stone arms outstretched in mute entreaty. These were the graves of the suicides, who could not be buried on holy ground.

Aaleigha was walking slowly round the forest clearing, leaning over each grave, her eyes growing green and wide as the forest leaves. Because, von Hohenberg, all the statues had been beheaded. And, von Hohenberg, half an axe-handle was lying beside an angel with outstretched wings, its furthestmost feathers touching the space where her head used to be.

Aaleigha turned to Malois. The look of revulsion on her face mirrored his own. 'Wh-who could have done this?' she said.

'What's happening?' Marie asked, wriggling forwards in her sedan chair as if attempting to see what we, her companions, would rather not have seen.

'It's the work of Krampus, the devil,' I heard myself say, 'we must leave this place.'

Marie's face crumpled and for one terrible moment I thought she was going to cry, that shrill wail of our childhood. But no. She just gave a single moan and then fell silent.

'Hush,' said Aaleigha rushing up to her, holding her close, glaring at me. 'There's no such thing. Why, I know a young lady who, with her friends, was

lured to this very forest by an old woman who promised them that if they took off all their clothes, they would be granted a sight of Krampus in person during the celebration of a black mass.'

'What happened?' asked Marie, turning her tear-bright face towards the sound of Aaleigha's voice.

'Well,' said Aaleigha, 'whilst this naïve young lady and her friends, in a complete state of nature, were awaiting the advent of the devil, the sly old woman made off with all their clothes and money-bags.'

'Aaleigha,' said Marie, starting to laugh, 'were you the naïve young lady?'

A smile lurked at the corners of her crooked mouth but Aaleigha didn't reply.

And after her sudden laugh, echoing among the beheaded statues, through the skulking pines, Marie too was quiet. However, as I gazed at the desecration that my axe had wrought, I was filled with great shame. And for the first time in my life, I was glad that Marie was blind. For now she could not see what I had done, and her voice, her eyes, with their blank, uncomprehending statue's stare, could not reproach me.

We four drove into Straubinger's orchard in the open carriage that Malois hired for us at St. Johann. Yes, drove right into the orchard, following the lane of paleness where the moon had fled before us. And, von Hohenberg, there in the branches of the apple trees, was a mistletoe plant with white berries among the green leaves.

Aaleigha looked up. She said something, then glanced across at Malois. But his eyes refused to meet hers. He kept his gaze fixed steadfastly on the path ahead of him and not from shyness either because Malois was not shy. After all, he and Marie were the same. Sometimes you were a rare planet swimming into their

focus and at other times, a decidedly lesser star.

But do you know, von Hohenberg, how this humble plant, this mistletoe managed to reach the heights of the apple tree's branches? No? Well, as I gazed up, I suddenly realised how it had made its ghostly way among the leaves. The released birds from the long ago aviary beat their wings in my memory, scattering mistletoe among the leaves and fruit. And so we rode beneath it and into the uncertainty of our new lives.

