



LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN
THE SELECTED STORIES OF STEFAN ZWEIG

Now I have only you left in the world; only you,
who do not know me.

Stefan Zweig

LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN
THE SELECTED STORIES OF STEFAN ZWEIG

Stefan Zweig

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| THE BURNING SECRET | 1 |
| THE GOVERNESS..... | 61 |
| LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN | 75 |
| MOONBEAM ALLEY | 109 |
| THE INVISIBLE COLLECTION | 126 |
| BUCHMENDEL | 138 |
| LEPORELLA | 164 |
| THE ROYAL GAME | 195 |

THE BURNING SECRET

A PARTNER

THE engine gave a hoarse shriek as the express drew up at Semmering station. A moment of silence followed, during which the carriages rested in the translucent mountain air. The train belched forth a traveller or two and swallowed down a couple of fresh arrivals. Peppery exclamations shuttlecocked to and fro. Again the locomotive uttered a raucous cry as it started off, dragging a dark serpent behind it, to disappear into the tunnel's maw. A healing peace once more pervaded the landscape, and the windswept atmosphere was good to breathe.

One of the men who had stepped out of the train was young, and of agreeable aspect. He was stylishly dressed and debonair, with an elasticity of gait which brought him to the cabstand well in advance of the other passengers. He engaged the solitary vehicle, and was conveyed without haste to the hotel he had selected. Spring was in the air. A few white clouds, glinting and glowing in the sky, such clouds as are seen only in the months of May and June, seemed to be playing at catch-as-catch-can in the blue, only to hide themselves from the observer's eye behind the scaling mountains, there to embrace and flee, to wave a lily-white hand, as it were, then to melt away into nothingness, reappear, and finally to settle down as night-caps on the neighbouring hills.

A restless, insurgent wind rustled among the lean and rain-drenched trees, so that their limbs groaned, and thousands of water-drops were scattered on the ground. Chill currents of snow-laden air descended from the peaks, until one caught one's breath in the keen, sharp atmosphere. The heavens and the earth were both in a yeasty ferment of impatience. The cab rattled along to the accompaniment of the leisurely trot of the horses and the silvery tinkle of the bells with which the harness was adorned.

On arriving at the hotel the young man's first move was to consult the list of guests. Not a name that he knew was to be found!

"What the devil have I come here for?" he communed. "No office could be worse than this lonesome place with not a soul for company. Obviously I am too early in the season or too late. My vacations never seem to strike it lucky. Not a creature of my acquaintance among the whole bally lot of them. At least one or two women might have graced the list, so that I could have whiled away my one short week in a mild flirtation."

The youth, a scion of the minor Austrian nobility and employeem the Treasury, had decided to give himself this week's holiday, not because he was in need of a rest but because his colleagues were off on a jaunt and he did not see why he should not follow their example. Though by no means lacking in philosophical capacity, Baron Otto von Sternfeldt was essentially of a sociable disposition, and was popular in the circles he frequented. He found solitude irksome, soon tired of his own company, and avoided every occasion for being alone since he felt scant inclination to get to know himself better. If his talents were to flourish, the warmth of his heart to glow into a flame, and his natural high spirits to find vent, he needed constantly to rub shoulders with men and women. By himself he felt cold and lifeless like a match unlighted in a box.

He now wandered aimlessly about in the empty lounge, disconsolately fingering the papers and magazines; then he tried the music-room and strummed a waltz on the piano, but his fingers were stiff and clumsy, refusing to impart the necessary swing and rhythm to the tune. Utterly depressed, he threw himself into an easy-chair and stared out of the window. The evening was drawing in, and grey mist-wreaths lurked among the pines. For a full hour, he remained drearily watching the gathering shadows. Then he decided to go into the dining-room.

Very few tables were laid; and he cast a hasty glance at the persons sitting over their meal. Not a friend or an acquaintance to be seen! Ah, yes, over there was a face he knew—but it was merely that of a professional trainer to whom he gave a nod. Women there were

none; not a sign of anything worth the attention of a charming young gentleman on pleasure bent. His vexation swelled into impatience.

Sternfeldt belonged to the category of those whose face is a fortune; one took a liking to him at first sight. He was always eager for new experiences, fresh adventures; he was never taken off his guard, because he kept perpetually on the alert to seize the skirts of happy chance; Cupid stood ready at his elbow to give him a hint at the first approach of amorous possibilities; he looked at every woman, be she the wife of a friend or the chambermaid who opened his bedroom door for him, with a searching eye which seemed to unclothe her. It is customary to call such men "Women hunters," and there is much penetrating wisdom in the appellation, for they actually do possess many of the instincts of the huntsman, passionately stalking their prey, enjoying the excitement of bringing the quarry to bay, and revelling in the spiritual cruelty of the kill. They are perpetually ambushed for the spring, and refuse to give up the chase until the game is theirs. Passion swamps their whole being; not the passion of a lover, but the passion of a gambler, which is cool, calculating, and dangerous. Some continue thus their whole life long, persistent adventurers in the field of "love," persons whose days are divided into countless petty and lustful episodes—a significant glance in passing, a suggestive smile, a touch of the knee to a neighbour at table—and the year is made up of hundreds of such days wherein sensuality is the main ingredient.

That evening, the baron found no one to take a hand in his favourite sport; and there is nothing so exasperating to the temper of a gamester as to sit with the cards in his hand awaiting the arrival of a partner. Otto asked the waiter to bring him a newspaper. His eyes ran down the columns and over the headlines; but his mind was elsewhere, and he read as though his senses were benumbed by drink.

Then a skirt rustled behind him, and he heard a clear voice say somewhat irritably and with an affectation of culture:

"Mais tais-toi donc, Edgar!"

A tall, finely built woman in a silk dress passed followed by a boy with a pale face and eyes filled with vague curiosity which seemed to caress his companion's form. The couple sat down at a table reserved

for them. Edgar was obviously on his best behaviour, and yet the restlessness in his dark eyes betrayed his real feelings. The lady—and she it was who absorbed the whole of the baron's interest—was well groomed and dressed with taste. She was a type that the young man admired being a not too buxom Jewess just past the prime but not as yet blowzy, a woman still capable of passion, though keeping her natural sensuousness veiled behind an outward decorum. At first he was denied a look into her eyes, for she kept the lids resolutely lowered; but he could contemplate at leisure the arch of her brows meeting delicately over her finely chiselled nose, which, though it betrayed her race, gave a noble grace to a clear-cut and interesting profile. Her hair was as abundant and feminine as the other charms of the flesh, and swept in opulent waves over her head. She possessed the assurance of a woman whose beauty has been the open delight of everyone with whom she has come in contact. Her voice was soft and low as she gave her orders to the waiter and told her son, who was fiddling with his spoon and fork, to remember his manners and to sit still. Seemingly indifferent to what was going on around her she appeared to ignore the baron's cautious scrutiny—though in reality her masked interest in him had been awakened by the fact that he was frankly interested in her.

The cloud upon the young man's spirit had dispersed, and his face was serene. Lines and wrinkles of annoyance were smoothed away, his muscles became taut, the blood flooded his skin and gave it renewed life, his eyes sparkled. Having many a feminine attribute in his nature, he responded to the presence of an attractive woman, as a woman responds to the presence of a man. Sensuous pleasure stretched his energies to the full. The hunter scented the game. His eyes challenged hers to the tourney. But she, though giving him a furtive glance, refused to look him in the face and thus to pick up the gauntlet. It seemed to him, however, that a hint of a smile might be detected flitting around the corners of her mouth. He could not be sure, and this excited him the more. What contented him was the fact that she deliberately avoided his eyes. A good sign, he thought, for it might be interpreted as defiance and at the same time as embarrassment. Besides, her preoccupation with the child was too meticulous, and must undoubtedly be aimed at

the onlooker. Nor was her conversation with the lad quite natural; she seemed, rather, to be talking at her observant neighbour. The forced repose of her manner was, Otto felt, the mark of an initial uneasiness.

His feelings were roused. The hunt was on. He lingered over his meal, staring at the woman incessantly during a full hour until at length he could have drawn every curve of her face, while his eyes had secretly caressed each nook and fold of her splendid body. A heavy shroud of darkness had fallen over the countryside, blotting out the forest whose trees continued to sob as though they were frightened children, for the rainclouds were stretching eager fingers towards them grey and full of menace. Shadows had gathered in the corners of the room, and an oppressive silence hung like a pall upon the groups clustered round the dining-tables. Sternfeldt noticed that the lady's chatter with her son became more and more forced under the burden of this silence, became more and more artificial and soon would have to cease. A test occurred to his mind. He got up, and, walking very slowly, with his eyes glued on the window, he passed close to her without giving her a glance, and disappeared through the doorway. Suddenly he reappeared as if he had forgotten something and had come back to fetch it. She was caught in the trap, for he found that she had been gazing with lively interest at his retreating figure.

Baron Otto von Sternfeldt was enchanted at the success of his ruse, and waited patiently in the entrance hall. She soon came out of the dining-room holding her boy by the hand, fluttering the pages of some magazines as she passed the big hall table, and showed a few of the illustrations to the little boy. As if by chance, the baron too, approached the table, pretending he wanted to read a paper but in reality that he might get another glimpse into those lustrous eyes, perhaps, even, say a word or two....However, the woman turned abruptly away not deigning to give him so much as a glance. She tapped her son lightly on the shoulder, saying with affectionate decision.

"Viens, Edgar. Au lit!"

A trifle crestfallen, Otto stared after her. He had fully expected to make acquaintance that very night. The postponement was a disappointment. And yet, it must be agreed, the situation was not

lacking in charm. A zest had been added to the adventure. The incident goaded him to enhance desire. He had to admit that a partner had come his way, and he could now play his hand.

FRIENDSHIP

When the baron stepped into the hall next morning, he saw the boy engaged in conversation with the two lift attendants who were showing him the pictures in one of Karl May's juvenile books. Since his mother was not present, it might be inferred that she was still engrossed in the cares of her person. For the first time, Sternfeldt took conscious notice of the child, who appeared to be about twelve years old, underdeveloped, shy, nervous, jerky in his movements, and possessed of a pair of dark, roving eyes. Like so many youngsters of his age, he gave the impression of being scared, as if he had suddenly been roused from sleep and placed in unfamiliar surroundings. He was by no means plain, but his face was still undifferentiated; the struggle between the man that was to be and the child that had been was hardly begun; his features were moulded but not finally set; there was no clear line, no striking silhouette, only a pale and somewhat uncouth mass. In addition, being at the awkward age, his clothes did not seem to belong to him; his thin arms and frail legs were lost in the folds of jacket and trousers; he lacked interest in his appearance.

The lad created a very poor impression. He was constantly getting in the way. At one moment it was the hall-porter who pushed him aside; at another he would be mixed up in the revolving door. The outer world was unfriendly. But he tried to compensate for this by futile and incessant chatter with the hotel servants. When they had time they would endeavour to answer his numerous questions, but would break off as soon as possible and go about their business. The baron contemplated the boy, a compassionate smile curling his lips. Poor child, he examined everything with curiosity, only to be fobbed off with roughness. If another human eye caught his inquisitive look, he would cringe away, unhappy at being observed, miserable that he had been detected in the act of investigating. Sternfeldt was amused; he began to feel his interest

waxing. Then a thought struck him: why not make friends with the lad and utilize this friendship in order to get acquainted with the mother? It was only fear that made the youngster so shy. Well, a fellow could try. Unobtrusively he followed Edgar, who had gone outside and was stroking the soft nose of a cab-horse. Ill-luck dogged him even in this innocent pastime, for the cabby unceremoniously ordered him to leave the beast alone. Ruffled and bored, Edgar was again reduced to standing about with his vacant expression of countenance, not knowing what next to be at.

The baron seized his chance, and said in a jovial voice:

“Well, young man, how do you like this place?”

The boy flushed, and looked up anxiously. He rubbed his hands on the seat of his trousers in his embarrassment. This was his first experience of a gentleman opening conversation with him.

“Very much, thank you,” he answered awkwardly, gulping down the last two words.

“You surprise me. I should say it was a rotten hole, especially for a young man such as you. What on earth can you find to do all day?”

The boy was still too flustered to find a speedy response. How was it possible that this stranger should take notice of a small boy about whom nobody ever bothered? He felt immensely shy and immensely proud likewise of what was happening to him. With an effort he pulled himself together.

“I like reading, and we go for walks. Sometimes we hire a carriage for a drive. I’ve been ill, and Mother brought me here for my health. The doctor said I was to sit about a lot in the sun.”

As he spoke, an accent of self-confidence came into his voice. Children are invariably proud of their illnesses, for they guess that the danger makes them doubly important to their relatives.

“Yes the sun is most beneficial for a young gentleman in your state of health. You ought to burn to a fine brown. But it’s not good to be sitting about all day. A big boy like you would do better to go for rambles on his own, to be a bit uppish, and to play all kinds of pranks. It seems to me you are too obedient and well behaved. You look like a regular bookworm, always going about with a ponderous tome

tucked under your arm. When I think of the young scamp I was at your age...Why, d'you know, every evening I came home with torn breeches; a terrible pickle I was in. No use for a man to be too good."

In spite of himself Edgar smiled, and on the instant his shyness vanished. He would have loved to respond to the baron's advances, but was afraid of appearing cheeky. How friendly this smartly tailored gentleman was! It was splendid to be talking on equal terms with him. The boy's pleasure in the encounter tied his tongue for very happiness. What would he not have given to find suitable words to continue the conversation! But his thoughts were in a whirl. As luck would have it, the hotel manager's Saint Bernard loped by at this crucial moment. Then it stopped still, came to sniff both boy and man, allowed itself to be patted and fondled.

"D'you like dogs?" the baron inquired abruptly.

"Very much. Grandma has one at her place in Baden, and when we go there on a visit he spends the whole day with me. It's topping. But we're only there in summer."

"I've a couple of dozen dogs on my estate, and maybe I'll give you one, a brown chap with white ears, little more than a puppy, but well trained. How'd you like that?"

The lad blushed with delight.

"Fine!" he exclaimed spontaneously. But then a revulsion of feeling overtook him, and he stuttered bashfully: "But Mother will never agree. She hates dogs about the house, they make so much work."

The baron chuckled, well pleased, for he had at length guided the talk on to the lady who interested him.

"Is your mother very strict?"

Edgar reflected for a moment, looked up at his new friend questioningly as if to see whether the stranger could be trusted, and then answered cautiously:

"No, can't exactly say she's strict. She lets me do anything I like just now because I've been ill. Perhaps she'd let me have a dog..."

"Shall I put in a good word for you?"

"Oh, golly!" cried the boy delightedly. "She'd be sure to agree. What's the dog like? White ears, did you say? Can he beg and retrieve?"

“He can do any and every trick you can think of.”

It was tickling to Otto’s vanity to watch the spark he had kindled in the youngster’s eyes. All trace of shyness disappeared; and the child’s spontaneity, no longer crippled by anxiety and fear, bubbled up like a spring of fresh water. The awkward boy had been replaced by a natural and exuberant creature. If only the mother could prove similar to her son, thought the baron. A score of questions were showered upon him at this instant by the youth.

“What’s it called?”

“Caro.”

“Caro! Caro!”

Edgar seemed to revel in the word, and to be intoxicated with delight at having acquired a friend so unexpectedly. The baron himself was no little surprised at his easy conquest, and decided to strike while the iron was hot. He invited Edgar to go for a stroll, and the lad, who for weeks had hungered after companionship, was in the seventh heaven of delight. He gave free rein to his tongue, responding innocently to his new friend’s subtle questions and assumed interest. It was not long before the baron knew all he needed concerning the family: that Edgar was the only son of a Viennese lawyer belonging to the well-to-do Jewish stratum. Plying the boy with adroit questions, he further learned that the mother was not particularly pleased with their stay in Semmering, that she had grumbled at the lack of society. Moreover, it would appear from the evasive answers given by Edgar that Mother was not particularly fond of Father, so that Sternfeldt surmised the situation to a nicety. He felt almost ashamed of himself for extracting these scraps of information thus easily from his decoy who, unused to finding anyone interested in what he had to say, allowed himself to be inveigled into confidence after confidence. Edgar’s youthful heart beat quick with pride, especially when, in the course of the walk the baron took his arm affectionately. It was an infinite delight for the child to be seen in such company. Soon he forgot his juvenility, and prattled disingenuously as to an equal. His conversation proved him to be a bright lad, somewhat precocious intellectually as is usual with sickly children who pass a large part of their time among elders, and prone to like or to dislike

persons and things to excess. He seemed, so far as his emotional life was concerned, to be unbalanced, feeling either hatred towards or passionate love for objects and individuals. The golden mean did not exist for him and his tender face would at times become contorted with the excess of his emotions. There was something wild and resilient in his mode of expression which coloured his words with fanatical ardour, and his gawkinsness might possibly be explained as an outcome of a painfully repressed anxiety at the violence of his own passions.

The baron soon won Edgar's confidence. In half an hour he held the child's warm and palpitating heart in his hand. Children are so easily hoaxed, for grown-ups seldom try to ingratiate themselves and when they do they catch the innocents unawares. Sternfeldt merely had to think himself back into his own boyhood, and the puerile conversation immediately seemed the most natural in the world. Edgar, for his part, had by now quite accepted the elder man as a chum, and very soon lost any sense of inferiority. All he was aware of was that he had found a friend—and what a friend! His relatives and friends in Vienna were forgotten, his pals with their squeaky voices, their idiotic chatter, might never have existed! They were submerged beneath this new and unprecedented experience. He had become an intimate of the stranger, his wonderful friend; and he swelled with pride when at parting, he was invited to a further ramble on the morrow. They separated as brothers and this farewell was, perhaps, the most glorious of Edgar's life. Children are so easily hoaxed....

Baron Otto von Sternfeldt grinned as Edgar ran off. An intermediary had been found. The boy would doubtless regale his mother to satiety with every word, every gesture of this amazing encounter. The woman-hunter preened himself upon the subtle compliments he had conveyed through the son to the mother. He had invariably spoken of her as "Your lovely mother"—Edgar would do what was necessary; he, the baron, need make no further advances. The charming unknown would come to him. Not requisite to lift a finger. The baron could muse over the landscape from morning to night, from night till morning...A child's warm hands, he knew, were building a bridge between his heart and the heart of the woman he coveted.

TRIO

As was clearly demonstrated a few hours later, the baron's plan proved highly successful. Intentionally he came rather late to luncheon; and the boy, who was already seated at table, sprang up to greet his new friend with enthusiasm. He plucked his mother's sleeve, whispered a few words in her ear, and drew her attention to the baron with hands and eyes. The lady reproved him for his unseemly behaviour, blushing the while and evidently put out of countenance. Yet she could not help glancing in the young gentleman's direction, and this gave her suitor an opportunity. He bowed respectfully—henceforward they “knew” one another, the necessary introduction had been made. She, in her turn, felt obliged to recognize his civility with a gracious nod, but for the remainder of the meal she kept her eyes glued to her plate. With Edgar it was otherwise. He was constantly spying in the baron's direction, and once even went so far as to address his newly-found friend—for which piece of effrontery his mother reproved him smartly. So soon as luncheon was over, he was ordered to go upstairs and lie down. Edgar begged and prayed to be let off. In the end his mother permitted him to take leave of the baron. The latter spoke a few pleasant words to the lad, and Edgar's eyes glistened with joy. Then, with a nonchalant air, the young man stood up, turned towards the neighbouring table, and, addressing the lady, complimented her upon having so intelligent and jolly a little chap as son, and referred to the pleasant morning he and Edgar had passed in one another's company. Meanwhile the boy stood by, blushing with delight. The baron plied the lady with questions concerning Edgar's health, so that in the end she was compelled to reply. Gradually, as the barriers were broken down, the two elders engaged in a lengthy conversation to which the boy listened entranced. Then Sternfeldt introduced himself formally, mentioning his name and title—to which, it would seem, the lady was not wholly indifferent. Take it all in all, she was most gracious in her manner towards her new acquaintance. Nevertheless, she soon moved to withdraw, excusing herself from further conversation because of her son's delicate health.

The boy entered a lively protest, saying that he was not in the least tired, and was quite prepared to sit up throughout the afternoon and far into the night. But his mother had already proffered her hand to the baron who deferentially bent his head over it and kissed it gallantly.

That night Edgar slept badly. His brain was in a whirl of ecstasy and despair. Something new had suddenly entered his life. For the first time in his experience he had participated in the destinies of fully grown persons. As he swayed between sleep and waking he forgot his own childhood and deemed himself an adult. So far, his existence had not been a particularly happy one, since he was an only child and his health was constantly giving trouble. His parents had been the only target for his affections, and they paid little heed to him. The boy's other companions were the household servants. Thus his feelings had been pent up to bursting point, and at the first chance were likely to overwhelm the object which seemed worthy of a great love. Edgar lay in the dark, happy but puzzled, wishing to laugh aloud and finding the tears streaming down his face. He loved his new friend more deeply than father, mother, or even God Almighty. An intense and passionate longing went up from his heart, and wove a glamour around the image of this fascinating companion.

"I'm certainly not worthy of his friendship," he thought. "A kid like me, barely twelve, all my schooldays before me, sent off to bed long before anyone else thinks of going...What can I ever be to him? What have I to offer him?..."

This torturing sense of inability to show his friend what he felt made Edgar miserable. Before, when he had chummed up with a schoolfellow, he had always been able to show his liking by the gift of a stamp from his album, or some other object dear to a youthful heart. But now things of the sort seemed idiotic, utterly valueless. How could he present such paltry tokens of affections to his new friend? What means could he employ to show his regard? He was tormented by the recognition of his immaturity. How rotten to be nothing more than a kid of twelve! Never had he so yearned to be grown up, to be big and strong, to be a real man.

These uneasy musings were interwoven with premonitions of an

awakening manhood, rosy dreams which passed gradually into the realm of sleep. But even as he slept, a contented smile played about his lips....Tomorrow he would see his friend again....Had they not fixed it up for a walk together?...

At seven he awoke with a start. Had he overslept himself? Quickly he got into his clothes, and ran to bid his mother the customary good morning. She was amazed to find him up so early. Usually it was all she could do to drag him out of his bed and get him washed and dressed in time for breakfast.

Before she could question him as to his unwonted behaviour, he had already bolted from the room. Forgetting all about breakfast, Edgar prowled up and down the lounge till nine eagerly watching the lift, determined not to miss his friend and the promised walk....

At last, a little before ten, Baron Otto von Sternfeldt strolled unconcernedly into the hall. The tryst had long since escaped his memory. But when the boy rushed up to him and passionately recalled the previous day's promise, the baron proved affable, and cordially entered into Edgar's plan, smiling the while at so excessive a demonstration of friendliness. Linking his arm in that of his companion, he sauntered to and fro, quietly but firmly refusing to quit the hall immediately. He seemed to be waiting for someone, and scanned both lift and doors attentively. Of a sudden he stiffened. Edgar's mother sailed towards the twain with a smile of greeting. She fell in with the idea of a walk, and the three set out together.

This was far from being the treat Edgar had expected. He had reckoned upon a *tete-a-tete*, and was sorely disappointed. Biting his lips, the boy slouched sulkily in their wake. The promised walk, he thought, was his own special privilege. It had only been out of kindness that he had introduced his mother to this wonderful friend, but he could not conceive why he should share the baron's friendship with anyone. A dash of jealousy intermingled with his loving adoration. He could not help noticing how attentive and considerate the man was towards this interloper....

As the trio made tracks for the woods, the talk was almost wholly directed towards Edgar. His frail health, his paleness, were commented

upon by the woman with loving anxiety, while the baron insisted upon the sprightly wit and pleasant ways of his "Friend", as it pleased him to call the lad. This created an idea of his own importance in Edgar's mind, contributing to his sense of self-esteem—a dangerous feeling to arouse in a child's heart. Thus flattered, he regained his good humour. Never before had people conceded him any rights. Now he felt he had been given his due. He was allowed to enter into the conversation on equal terms, instead of being told that little boys were to be seen but not heard. Moreover, he spoke of certain wishes he had long been forced to repress, and they were now given serious consideration. What was there to be surprised at that such treatment should make him feel grown up? Childhood with its artless dreams lay behind him, a relic of the past, discarded like a worn-out garment.

The lady invited Sternfeldt to share her table at luncheon. A casual acquaintanceship had ripened into friendship. Our trio was now in full swing, the voices of woman, man, and child mingling harmoniously together.

ATTACK

The hunter began to think that the time had come when he could bring his quarry to bay. A trio was not to his liking. Very pleasant as a temporary convenience doubtless, but it had served its turn and was not the object of his maneuvering. He knew that, as the saying runs, "Two's company, three's none"—that the presence of a third party makes it necessary for Eros to wear a mask, that, except in a duet, loving words lose their tang and the fire of an onslaught is chilled. Throughout their conversation she must never be allowed to forget what he was aiming at. He was sure she had already understood....

It did not seem to Otto at all improbable that his preoccupation with the lady would be crowned with success. She had reached an age when a woman may well regret having remained faithful to a husband she has never loved, an age when her mature beauty craves for one last acknowledgment, when a choice has to be made between the antagonistic forces constituted by motherhood and womanhood.