

# MOSAIC

BY

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CHAPMAN & HALL'S  
CENTENARY YEAR

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**W**HEN I wrote "Tents of Israel" I had no idea that other chronicles would follow, independent of each other, but dealing with the same families: "A Deputy Was King", and now "Mosaic." I should not have been able to write "Mosaic" as I wanted it without making some very minor alterations in the family-tree as it already existed in "Tents of Israel." A few of the dates are different, one or two names. Once or twice a death became necessary which had been omitted from the earlier stories, and I have taken the liberty of giving somebody's son to somebody else. I wish I could have remained exactly faithful to the original tree, but queer, even absurd, things happen in one's brain during the working-out of a family saga, and occasionally one loses too much by keeping stubbornly to a date or a fact.

I am making this statement so that readers may realise that the small inconsistencies are deliberate and not careless.

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PART I  
FIRST MEETINGS



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## CHAPTER I

### I

**E**LSA RAKONITZ always said that nothing was so important as the first meeting. She meant, of course, the first meeting between any young girl and any young gentleman whom the young girl might marry, later on. Her standard of first meetings was on a high level, because of her parents' romantic encounter. And later on, when she described how she herself had first met Albrecht Rakonitz, the air about her at once tingled and grew rose-pink and scandalous, and you had a sensation as though a whiskered chin—fair whiskers, and very handsome—were pressed to her dimpling bare shoulder . . .

Old Great-grandfather Bettelheim of Dantzig was in the amber trade, and that was why he often came to Vienna, because the Turks used a great deal of amber, not only for their tasbils, which were a sort of rosary with long tassels, but also because amber mouthpieces to their hookahs and pipes were supposed to be a specific against infection from the plague. Most of these mouthpieces were made in Vienna and sold to Constantinople; and Sigismund Rakonitz and Leon Czelovar were merchants of amber. It seems queer to think that Dantzig, so far and so frostily north, could be hauled by a long invisible chain of gleaming amber into constant familiarity with Constantinople down by the Bosphorus; but these families were tough and hale and resilient, and many of them lived to be more than a hundred, so perhaps it did not matter to them, anticipating such a generous span of life, that a journey should take weeks instead of days. Anyhow Vienna was midway, and a good place to linger. Old Bettelheim often left his sixteenth-century

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house on the quay near the Dantzig Fish-market, and jogged down south to Vienna, and enjoyed much warm mellow talk with Sigismund ; talk that knotted and swirled and yet remained for ever static, like the grain of dark polished wood seen in a dim room. Enveloped by hospitality from the women of the household, but ignoring them, they discussed trade and prices, and the situation in Egypt, and how much better was Joppe, the Dantzig local brew of beer, than that poor stuff to be got in Sigismund's favourite Bierhalle on the Stefansplatz ; and they would puff at their pipes in front of the big stuffy porcelain stove ; and slowly, from out of the inner pocket of his great-coat, old Bettelheim produced a bottle of Krambambuli, the famous liqueur of Dantzig, very seriously reciting :

*“Trink Wasser wie das liebe Vieh  
Und denk' es ist Krambambu-lee—”*

### II

The door opened, and Leon Czelovar strode in.

Leon was Sigismund Rakonitz' partner, but being so much his junior, was frequently sent trading to Constantinople or Cairo or Trieste, instead of remaining all the time in Vienna ; and so it happened that old Bettelheim had not yet met young Czelovar. “What ?” he exclaimed to Sigismund, “You have a handsome partner, and old enough to marry, and not yet married, and I have several pretty daughters ! And I tell you, I am not anxious that they shall marry amber carriers. At Dantzig there is nothing else.” And forthwith he asked Leon to visit him.

Leon said he was not yet in a position to marry, which was hardly true ; but old Bettelheim, though large and lusty, with a strong beard, was no beauty ; and you could never tell, when a man was so quickly affable, and offered you his pretty daughters, all seven if you wanted them . . . One must be prudent !

“Well, but there is no force ; just come and pay us a visit. You know I am not a poor man. And then, if you like, you can go away again.”

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But Leon did not choose to go for two years.

Then he was sent North on business to Königsberg; and went out early one morning with the fishing-fleet, which kept close along the shore, dredging with their nets in the shallow water for lumps of dull amber sunk in the sand and among the boulders. He enjoyed the experience, and was not sorry when they drifted further and further west, without turning home; till at last, near Dantzic at ebb-tide, they saw the searchers wading out from the shore with nets at the end of slender poles; some of them kneeling in groups, just where the straight waves broke in a white wriggle of foam, to pick out the amber entangled in shining heaps of sea-weed. And Czelovar felt suddenly drowsy, and gave orders that as it was late he would sleep the night in the port of Dantzic. And so they slid contentedly up the Estuary, till they saw the red and brown walls and towers and water-gates of the town, steep roofs and pointed gables piled up one behind the other as though still shouldering off a fourteenth-century invasion from the Poles. At one of the houses on the quay called "Am Brausenden Wasser," because that was where the little Radaune rushes noisily into the Mottlau, he saw a maiden in spread skirts like a convolvulus flower, watering flowers that also looked like convolvulus, though they might have been rockets or azaleas or sea-thrift for all that Leon knew. For the little garden scrambled up at such an angle from the quay that he had to lean right back to see her through a thin striped tangle of masts and ropes; and she, serious about her watering, did not see him at all . . . Which was right and proper, because a young maiden—Aunt Elsa, in this chronicle, always reminiscently spoke of her mother as a maiden, perhaps because she was a *Mädchen* and modest—a young maiden, then, should, if possible, be unconscious that she is the heroine of a romantic first meeting, although this makes it so much more difficult to prepare for it effectively. And Aunt Elsa, instructing Freda, her second daughter, before a visit to Aunt Amélie in San Remo for the express purpose of meeting that charming Signor Drago, got quite flurried between the desire that Freda should be natural and unaware of the approach of eligible man, and at the same time be doing exactly



what eligible man, in the person of Signor Drago, might require of a prospective wife. Shelling peas, for instance. . . .

But certainly Hermina Bettelheim, the youngest and prettiest of the seven daughters of the amber merchant, could not have had any idea that Leon Czelovar from Vienna was gazing and gazing up at her, as he lay along the bottom of his boat, sailing slowly up the river into the port of Dantzic. She went on watering, bending and rising again; dark hair parted and lying in a smooth backward slant down her brow and cheek and neck before it was reprov'd and coiled; sprigged muslin jacket and skirt in a wide bell to hide her slenderness.

. . . . Leon was enchanted. "That one, and no other!" he declared. He married her, and they had three children: Elsa and Konrad and Anatol. They lived in Vienna; and when Elsa was only five years old, you could already have seen her enjoying life at the ball given in the great yellow drawing-room to celebrate the wedding of Josef Rakonitz—a beautiful, spacious room with a parquet floor, overlooking the Danube. And all the dandies of the family were assembled, which was appropriate, because from this marriage Franz was to be born, the most nonchalant Viennese dandy of them all.

Elsa was wearing a little net frock with flounces, the colour of primroses, a white shining stripe in it, and yellow dots on the stripe. It was the fashion then to carry bouquets in silver holders, and handkerchiefs with tiny centres and a fall of long lace, elegantly held from the middle; and once, when all the ladies and gentlemen were resting and fanning after the last polka and before the next waltz, the little minx deliberately strutted right across the bare parquet floor, carrying her handkerchief high in the air and drooping from the wrist, in exaggeration of what was *à la mode*. And when they saw the baby, they all laughed and cheered; and the gentlemen, delighted, lifted her high on their shoulders, and higher than their shoulders, above their heads, and teased her; and Elsa chuckled and protested and accepted the shower of kisses, pretending deliciously that she was too shy to be kissed—shy, after that exhibition! It would be shocking to relate how often Elsa Czelovar, aged five, promised her hand in marriage, during that wedding-party.

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### III

Yet more than anyone else in the world, she loved her brother Konrad.

Konrad—she was emphatic over this—Konrad must not meet the nice, quiet, not-too-pretty but well-endowed young girl whom he was to marry, unless she, Elsa, personally arranged it for him. It was very important, you see, because she herself, when she was nineteen, became engaged to Albrecht Rakonitz, of London—but you must not miss hearing Aunt Elsa tell this story, later on, in her own words: telling it to Val, her cousin Haidée's daughter, not to her own daughters, Mélanie or Freda or Gisela or Pearl, because these odd little girls would always shuffle their feet and look embarrassed when confronted by the stark fact that their good father had fallen in love with their dear mother.

“ . . . Na, then, Mamma and I, and Mamma's friend, that was Leopoldina Ritt—we said we would all go down by steamer on the Rhine, quietly, to Karlsruhe and back, before we joined Papa and the others at Ischl. That will be a little trip, Mamma said. I was nineteen, and—yes—I did look very nice. I wore pale grey foulard with little bunches of pink and lilac flowers on it, and when the steamer came along at Biebrich it was already full, and the people had all gone down to have a meal, but left bags and parcels and rugs on their chairs. So I, not idle, picked out the best chairs, and lifted everything off them and took them to my mother and to Fräulein Ritt. And there was a gentleman on the gangway watching me do all this. He was not going on the boat, but to England . . . but just as the steamer is leaving, he jumps on, and he comes to my mother, and he says: “Frau Czelovar, I do not know if you will remember me; I met you at the Josef Rakonitz ball in Vienna a great many years ago.” My mother, always polite, says: “Yes, certainly, I remember you,” and afterwards to me: “But why does he not tell me so before, but only when he sees me with my pretty daughter?” And he asks for permission that he will travel with us on our trip. He is over on business from England, and he asks us to forgive his travelling suit. But

why ask? For it was a very good suit of check, made by a London tailor; and so we talked together, and we talked, and he said he had lifted me in his arms—but that I denied, though it was true, and I had pulled his whiskers, first one and then the uzzer—but a child is without shame! When we reached Karlsruhe, instead of getting off and going back to England, he stayed, and we saw the sights, and he said to my mother: “I tell you what, Frau Czelovar, if you will give me permission I would very much like to come back with you the same whole way!” And I must say—yes—I found him very nice, but very nice indeed, and he asked me if I would like to live in England, and I, a little bit coquette, knowing the time was not yet, replied: “That is a matter for Fate!” And when we got back to Wiesbaden he asks my mother again, but this time for permission that he marries me, and my mother cries and cries and she says: “No, that I will not do, to give my only daughter to a man who lives in England!” Although of course the Czelovars and the Rakonitzes, both families, have always known each other vell, but not this one, this Albrecht. But she sends a telegram to my father, already in Ischl, and my father replies, also by telegram: ‘What is for the happiness of my only daughter is for my happiness, too.’”

And here, sentimentally overcome, Elsa always broke off and dabbed at her eyes. For she had been devoted to her father, and telegrams were expensive then, and she thought it such a beautiful message for him to have sent, with not one word of anger.

That generation easily slipped into the present tense, when they told their farthest memories. Not at once, but directly they became absorbed.

## IV

Many of Albrecht's relations were already at home in London: Anastasia and her husband Paul had fled there from Paris at the time of the 1870 siege; and Sigismund and Clementina with their children had left Vienna behind, and joined them at about the same time; and they were all living in big important houses in Holland Park. But one's husband's family

is not quite one's own; and Elsa's soul clamoured to be surrounded by affectionate, genial, rather slippery-minded Czelovars, surprisingly frugal with their money, but bounteous in their dealings on the gossip market.

Anastasia Rakonitz, especially, was a little overpowering, with her magnificent despotism; and Elsa planned how nice it would be if Konrad were living just round the corner, to fight her battles, if need be, and laugh with her in secret, though in fun, mind you, and not in disloyalty, over some of the Rakonitz extravagances. Konrad, then, must undoubtedly marry, and at once, for he was such a "*Gigerl*," which is the Viennese for fop, that except by a good wife there was no hope of attaching him permanently to London. He must marry where there was a nice firm dowry; Leon Czelovar had not succeeded very well in business, and Elsa's household never approached the opulence of Anastasia's. A quiet, gentle, contented young girl—so Elsa patted her brother's future into shape; and it was not at all necessary that she should be witty; the family gatherings were already sharply spangled with wit; Konrad's wife would do much better not to enter into competition, but to be helpful over the refreshments, the goose-liver sandwiches, the Schnecken stuffed with raisins, the Crème-düten, the coffee, offered on those sociable family evenings first at one house and then at another, after the gentlemen had finished playing their whist and skat. "I should wish her to be orderly," Elsa decided, filling in the details of her conception. "Not too much a blonde, because that is conspicuous, and not too much a brunette, because they are bad-tempered; thrifty, although she will have plenty of money of her own, which will become Konrad's; obedient, amiable, industrious . . . ." and willing to look up to her sister-in-law with an admiration incapable of rivalry. In other words, an asset, and not a nuisance.

It was cruel enough irony that Elsa, in thus plumply determining the personality of her future sister-in-law, should, all unaware, have been describing the four good girls who were one by one to be born to herself. For what is pleasant in a favourite brother's young wife is not always equally desirable in a daughter. Lest Konrad, an impetuous lover of women,

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should do anything so rash as choose a wife for himself, Elsa mentally selected Miss Amalia Fingelsbühler, of Kensington Palace Gardens, whose parents were rich enough to make it not at all a certainty that they would permit the advances of Konrad Czelovar, and who was herself plain enough to make it even less of a certainty from Konrad's point of view.

"A great deal," reflected Elsa, now already a matron of one year's importance, and with a meritorious prospect, that summer of 1881, of Mélanie before Christmas, "A great deal depends on the first meeting."

It never occurred to her swift dragon-fly brain, which flitted and then alighted on a convention and thought it a flower, that a first meeting, in truth, existed only as a preliminary to a second meeting, and a third and a fourth. To her, it was an isolated symbol of romance and sudden passion, only later to be tempered with decorum. To her, it stood entirely detached from subsequent marriage and household and children, which were human, ordinary things like breathing and sleep, laughter and quarrelling, and birth, and the baking of Pflaumentorte. Indeed, Elsa's generation were unaware that their absorption in these comfortable matters of everyday significance, spread over many years, presented, in their accumulation, a pageant which was good romance, after its fashion. As for the more dangerous shape and bones of romance, they did not even suspect its existence: "*Ach wass*, romance mit bones!" . . . But because the sternly practical aspect of courtship was looped and garlanded with facile decoration, flutter of roses, ripple of the waltz and silver of the moon, sighs and serenades in plenty, they were to devote their lives to a delusion that the era of their girlhood was the true romantic era, lost to-day . . . lost to-day . . . Yes, yes, it is a pity!

## V

So Elsa coaxed Albrecht Rakonitz into a summer holiday at Ostend, which then had a dashing reputation, and was a favourite resort of the Rakonitzes. They had often gone there, sometimes one and sometimes another branch of the family, and

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sometimes several together, ever since Anastasia's first visit in 1867, when her small son, Bertrand, was taken to learn dancing at the Casino; and Truda, an attentive baby of four, sat by with her *bonne*, watching the steps . . . till quite suddenly she startled everyone, on Grossvater Sigismund's sixtieth birthday party, when she was told to come and curtsey nicely to the wealthy old Fürst von Heldenstein, by lifting, instead, her minute skirts to show even more of the frilled pantalettes below, and gravely dancing the Highland Schottische. She made quite a conquest of the old man, who presented her with a lace parasol from Paris, that had a silver filigree handle set with real turquoises . . . "Much too good!" said Truda's mother, Anastasia, taking possession of it, for safety, and impulsively giving it away as a present to Uncle Max's "tiger's" little brother, who arrived one day with a message and without an umbrella and complained that he had no boots. . . .

All this helped to prove that Ostend had already been inlaid with successful enterprise; so Elsa easily persuaded the Fingelsbühlers that it was the one spot in the world where they would like to spend August, to put roses in their daughter's cheeks. Elsa's mouth was pursed in the endeavour not to let it break into prematurely triumphant smiles, thinking of Konrad, who was famous, and even better than sea-air, at bringing roses into a maiden's cheeks. He was dawdling in Vienna. She wrote to him, insisting that he should come to Ostend in August, and see her there: "For you must miss your sister, isn't it, when you have only the one?"

Unluckily for Elsa, unluckily for her whole life's contentment, the Paris branch of the family—Lena Rakonitz, who was married to Jules Michel—had decided quite independently of the Albrecht Rakonitzes, that they too would spend their August holiday at Ostend. Their youngest little girl, Letti, was pale and needed the freshening breezes; moreover, both their daughters were invited to be bridesmaids at a wedding in Brussels a little later, and it would be very convenient.

"I hear from Anastasia," said Lena Michel to her husband, "that Elsa and Albrecht are going to Ostend as well, so we will be a happy party . . ."

## CHAPTER II

### I

**M**ISS FINGELSBÜHLER was arranged with embroidery in the salon window of Elsa's rooms in Ostend. Elsa herself was at the piano, rattling the waltz out of Johann Strauss's "Vogelhändler." . . . She meant only to be playing a very soft accompaniment to the flowering of true love and faithful hearts, for though Amalia was still on the verge of meeting Konrad, there was no doubt but that hers would prove a faithful heart . . . A transparent bosom would have revealed it, fluttering like a dove perched on a sky-blue pin-cushion. Elsa could not restrain her vivacity at the prospect of such a sweet sister-in-law; she stressed the rhythm of her waltz with more and more emphasis, nodding her head and shoulders jauntily in time to the beat. Miss Fingelsbühler would have preferred something softer and tenderer.

She laid down her needle, sighed several times, and wondered if she had done right in letting Madame Elsa Rakonitz select the frock which flowed around her feet in premeditated billows. Instead of her pink, with the turquoise locket, she might have worn—but what was the good of worrying about it now? Too late. There was a step on the stairs. Agitatedly she pulled forward and then put back again and then pulled forward afresh one of the thin, fair ringlets which hung down her back, as if it had escaped from the rolled erection elaborately decked with cherries and small oak-leaves high above her weak but yearning blue eyes. She had pretty features, but her complexion looked like tiny red scratches, and her feet were large, but covered by the skirt which flowed out from where it was tied in to the figure over the hips, and concentrated again, with more oak-leaves and a large bow of its own striped pink material, presumably just where Miss Fingelsbühler would require to be

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sitting down . . . Elsa had made a mental note of the fact that if possible Konrad must not see Amalia's feet until the wedding-night. He was accustomed to the Viennese cocottes, delicately made and exquisitely finished, with responsive ankles and fastidious wrists. . . .

"*Konrad!*" High cries of astonishment from Elsa. What! She had not expected him until late, but late in the evening! And she and Amalia, her dear, dear little friend Miss Fingelsbühler, were just spending togezzzer a comfortable afternoon quietly alone, playing the piano a little, yes, and embroidering—look, she blushes! We will not ask what she is embroidering, no! It is not fair, as you have interrupted us when we did not expect, isn't it? . . . And indeed, Miss Fingelsbühler was red as a beet, although her needle and silk were embellishing nothing more embarrassing than a table-centre for her mother's silver wedding. But she was helpless in the intrigues of young Madame Rakonitz; and besides, she thought she had never beheld so handsome a rake as this Konrad Czelovar who was bowing over her hand, murmuring compliments . . . She trembled at the touch of his beard. How well his mourning suited him! Although she knew from Elsa that there was more respect than sorrow attached to the recent loss of Uncle Karl, yet the sight of his broad black scarf, so correctly tied and smoothly laid upon his chest, made her yearn tenderly towards him: in spite of his beard, he looked so young to be wearing this sombre apparel. . . . If Elsa had gone back to the piano then and played a sad air, one cannot tell what would have become of Amalia Fingelsbühler's control. She watched Elsa and Konrad kiss each other a great many times, and brooded that she had no brothers and sisters of her own. I am afraid that Amalia must have been a sentimental little goose, for decidedly this was not a moment to remember Baby Heinrich, who had died when he was two. Those long hours of waiting at the window with her embroidery, the excitement closely packed behind the simple lines of her striped pink bodice and white ruching, had left her over-wrought. She began to sob. "Na, na," said Konrad, good-natured but surprised. He patted her cheek with a consoling gesture, but wondering what in the devil's name was the matter with the



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*Schickse* ? Her white powder came off in quantities on his black suède gloves ; Elsa had insisted that she should be lavish with powder ; it was not at all necessary that Konrad Czelovar's wife should use it after marriage, but just this once . . . all those little tiny red scratches were a pity, in such a sweet girl, because Konrad might see the scratches first and the sweetness afterwards.

### II

. . . Presently he went out for a stroll, alone. His excuse was that he had been for a great many hours in the stuffy train. Elsa and Miss Fingelsbühler, who were dressed for an interior setting, could not change quickly enough to accompany him. He stood for a moment, his shallow black bowler held by its wavy brim, letting the serene breeze blow on his bare forehead. There was still some powder splattered on his black suède gloves, so he pulled them off with an exclamation of annoyance. It was all very well for Elsa to prattle about good *partis* and immense dowries and only daughters, but all the same—those feet ! Yes, he *had* seen them. Konrad was an epicure, especially over feet and complexions.

A few clumsy bathing-machines were drawn down into the waves, so that the ladies, for modesty's sake, might have their dips under the caterpillar awnings which sheltered them from eyes like Konrad's. This was stimulating to Viennese naughtiness, and Konrad clapped on his hat again at a debonair angle, pulled his moustaches, and forgot Amalia Fingelsbühler . . . After all, here he was in *la belle* Ostende, surrounded by fashionable ladies and gentlemen on their holiday, and——

Who was this ?

Aunt Elsa always said that nothing was so important as the first meeting.

The Michels had only arrived from Paris that afternoon, but nothing could persuade Berthe to postpone her first rapturous plunge into the ocean waves. Madame Michel insisted that a little later the two girls would have to put on their best clothes and go with her to visit Uncle Albrecht and his wife, Elsa ; his