

The Erotic Etudes

Opus VI

by

E. L. van Hine

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CONTENTS

The Erotic Études - Opus VI	1
Étude I - Ludwig (I)	3
Étude II – Christel	13
Étude III - Dr. Carus	18
Étude IV - To Heidelberg (Rosen I)	25
Étude V – Goette	31
Étude VI – Abed	36
Étude VII – Pucci	39
Étude VIII – Friedrich	46
Étude IX - Ludwig (II)	51
Étude X - Dr. Carus (II)	61
Étude XI - On the Mulde (Rosen II)	66
Étude XII – Glock	71
Étude XIII - Late Revisions 1851, Liszt	82
Étude XIV – Felix	92
Étude XV – Alysso	101
Étude XVI – Johannes	111
Étude XVII – Susanna	121
Étude XVIII - Johannes (II)	130

The Erotic Etudes

Opus VI

Étude I

Ludwig (I)

The world changed, the night we met. I was a regular at Coffé Baum, though there was no telling when I would disappear from the table on one of my obscure missions, when inspiration struck me, and I was never questioned on these disappearances. That night, I was at the penultimate moment when my glass was empty, and I hesitated before calling the taverner once again, because I felt an increasing urge to bolt for the evening. Emil had captivated the group with another story I had heard too many times at school, and I was fading into that ennui which tempted me to return once again to my heap of uncompleted work.

And the door opened, letting in a breath of late winter air and shaking the rain off his hat, he came in. I turned on impulse to look, and my breath was arrested by his smoldering gaze, which he turned immediately in my direction, and I cast my eyes down, blushing.

As I feared, Emil had witnessed the brief exchange of glances, and called out his pet name for me. “Skulander, invite him over – don’t you know who that is?”

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

“What?” I stuttered, all eloquence swallowed by the embarrassment of staring too frankly at a stranger. “No - who?”

“That’s Schuncke - the best klavier virtuoso in Germany!” he whispered fiercely, probably hoping the youth would hear him.

Nicola, always most garrulous when drunk, shouted from our table: “You there - the pretty blond!” And since he was the only one to have just entered the room, Schuncke turned toward the voice. “Let us offer you a drink at our table. Pianist, aren’t you?” Nicola persisted.

He smiled, and came over. Oh, when he smiled. And looked at me. “You’re Schumann, right? The composer? You’re the one I came to see.” His voice was low-pitched, the diction, a hint of Schwäbisch, but distinctly High German. I nodded, blushing all over once again, and he had his hand out long before I came back to myself adequately to shake it. “They said I would find you here most nights. If I came late.”

“It is definitely late!” Nicola cut in, leapt up, and pulled over a seat for him between us. Schuncke sat and with deliberate care, pulled his gloves from his hands. His hands...

He smiled gratefully as Nicola, playing host, set a stein of pils before him, and he took it up in his impossibly long fingers. He quickly became occupied answering a round of questions from the overly-informed Nicola about his latest concert tour.

a * s * c * h

“Do you remember?”

I spoke into the silence that followed the intensity of our passion, "Do you remember? the first night you walked into the Coffé Baum?"

Ludwig laughed briefly, low. "You couldn't stop looking at my hands." He held his hand out, and I stroked it lightly, sighing.

"So - beautiful..." I whispered, and his hand crept, seemingly of its own accord, up the side of my face as he leaned toward me. "And now, could you stand me again so soon?" he laughed again, and placed his mouth on my own. He was never sated, and despite my weariness, I would not refuse him: but he did not await an answer.

I was seized in his facile hands, enslaved to his hungry mouth... but after a brief attempt to arouse me once again, and failing, he leapt up, without a stitch on, and throwing on his robe, announced "There is one thing that revives you faster than a bottle of red wine," and sat down at the piano. And I knew what he would play: what he always played when I was coy or tired...

"Shh! Not so loud, the Hartsteins will have fits," I protested, and he objected, not losing the rhythm of the Toccata as he prattled.

"Oh, I would say they have had one round of fits already. You groaned like a dying sow when you came!" he said, and settled into the cadenza, drowning out my half-formed objection.

And as he played, I drifted into a waking dream of his marvelous white hands, his beautiful face, the magnificent energy with which he attacked everything he did... and sooner than I had expected, ended the piece with perfect execution (considering the full darkness in the room,) and with no less energy, pounced as I lay outstretched on the bed, seizing me in

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

both hands as though I were a new composition, and said, "That should have fixed you, I daresay..." And I knew nothing more but the taste of his hot mouth once again upon my somewhat more enthusiastic organ.

"That was not the groan of a dying sow," I rebuked him, as we shared the smoldering taste of my last cigar between us. His breath caught painfully when he inhaled, and he shuddered with a deep cough. I knew that cough - Julius lay abed all winter with that cough. It was consumption. I said nothing, but grew quiet as the spasm passed, tempted once again to remind him not to smoke. But how could I? If it were the consumption, there was little to be done, and one cigar more or less would mean nothing.

Ludwig. The very image of Friedrich Schiller in life... tall, slender and blond, the curls falling to his shoulders in graceful waves. What enamored me of him more than anything, was watching him play, with the studied aggressiveness of a man certain of his virtuosity. The first night he played for me, he performed the first piano sonata of Chopin. As he completed the final chord, glanced up to see the look upon my face, and in one fluid movement reached over with his left hand to caress my face, and kissed me.

"You are the ideal audience," he murmured. "Do you want to hear some more, or do you have something else in mind?" Suddenly shy of the attention and of the unexpected kiss, I did not reply, and in the silence, he laughed quietly and took my hands, placing them on his shoulders, his next kiss lingering upon my lips.

"I see you're the shy type," he said conversationally, popping my jacket buttons open one by one. I arrested his hand, holding it for a moment, attracted by the sheer lean musculature that

could produce such beauty from the piano. "Play something else, first." He took a breath, and turned, repositioning himself at the keyboard.

"Very well, then. Shall I play something by you?" Without waiting for answer, Ludwig dashed flawlessly through the Opus 1 variations, and before I knew it, he finished, resting those beautiful white hands upon the keys, and gazed once again into my face.

"All right then. What now?"

"I wish to be the ideal audience," I replied, and rose, taking him by the hand.

We undressed one another slowly, interrupting one another with more and more passionate kisses. My heart was beating fast, as I slipped his shirt from his shoulders, revealing his hairless chest, the hollow of his belly... and he whispered hoarsely as he reached the top button of my trousers, "Let me taste you, first," freeing my already-aroused organ from my clothes. He knelt, grasping it tightly and guided it into his open mouth.

I gasped, and sunk my fingers into his blond curls, steadying myself against the onrush of sensation as my new lover swallowed me whole. For long moments, I could neither think nor speak, as I rapidly approached an unavoidable climax from the pressure of his insistent mouth, and pressed my hand against his shoulder to let him know. But he knew...

"My God," I groaned as my climax escaped me, and I shuddered from head to foot. The shuddering subsided, and Ludwig stood, smiling a wet smile.

"Fast, but good," he remarked. "Like a Mendelssohn concerto,"

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

and placed a salty kiss on my mouth.

I found my way, shakily, to the bed and lay down, before realizing that he had left the room. He called from the kitchen "Do you have any wine?" and I replied "Icebox." He emerged with the single bottle of Weißherbst I had put there the previous day.

"Icebox, my my. You are quite the aristocrat," he commented, as he twisted out the cork, and plopped down next to me on the bed.

"My mother told me it is not worth having wine without an icebox. She had it sent."

"Wise woman," he said, setting down the glasses on the headboard. "Am I pouring for two?" and I nodded. We drank in silence for several minutes.

"Ludwig," I started reluctantly, placing a tentative hand upon his shoulder, "There's something I would like to ask you to do."

"That is what is so cute about you. You are so bold when you write, and so shy in person. What would you like me to do? Play the violin now?" He had taken a position lying on his side, still half dressed in his linen trousers, and gestured with the now-empty wineglass.

"I want you to fuck me," I said. "You don't have -" but before I could continue he had leaned down and silenced me with his mouth.

"I'd love to. Just one more glass of wine. And have you any lubricant? Salad oil? Butter?" Then he rose, and wandered back into the kitchen to search.

"No salad oil. I have lots of butter...but how about mineral oil?"

It's in the cabinet there."

"A little more seemly," he remarked, bringing the bottle back in with him. "Curious you'd have this right at hand..." he smirked, unbuttoning his trousers, and knelt at my side.

"My god, what is that?" I pointed at his penis, frightened by its size.

"Oh, nothing special. Change your mind?"

"No - " I replied reluctantly. "But be careful."

"I have done this before." He saw the look that passed my face. "Ah, no worries. Cousins only, virgins both, pure and disease free." As he rubbed the oil on himself he grew completely erect. "Now if I'd used butter, I would be utterly delicious toasted," he joked. I lay panting slightly as I watched him prepare himself for me.

And he was careful, teasing me open gently with his fingers; despite this I let out a gasp upon first entry, and he halted and withdrew immediately. "Are you all right?"

"Nervous," I answered, tight-lipped. "Don't stop. Don't stop now."

Very slowly, very gradually then, he proceeded, until I opened my eyes and the look of strain on my face, passed. "You can open your eyes now. I'm in." I had not realized that I had closed my eyes and held my breath. "Now we can wait a bit."

By degrees, I relaxed, feeling a constant but no longer uncomfortable pressure from his delicate, gradual entry. And as though some affirmative signal passed between us that I was only slightly aware of he began at first still quite gently, to pull back and thrust, each time with more force, until he had established a regular rhythm.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

By the rise of tension on his face, and the increasing pace, I could sense his approaching climax, which distracted me momentarily from the impending pressure of my own, when like a seizure it overcame me in a spasmodic wave which engulfed Ludwig moments later, and wracked his climax from him in several bursts. I was breathless.

He withdrew carefully and we collapsed in one another's arms. He spoke close in my ear, "I did it, didn't I?"

"Yes, yes, yes, you did it, my God..." he reached up then, with his mercifully long arms, and retrieved the wine bottle, and poured what was left into our glasses, offering a toast to success.

Much later, I woke to a distant sound, and got out of bed and went to the door. It was Ludwig down the hall in the toilet, coughing. It seemed to go on, and on, and a familiar anxiety awoke in me, an anxiety I had felt for so many years for Julius. It seemed his coughing would never stop. After a time, I could not bear listening, and returned in dread to the bedroom. The joy of our mutual pleasure, the erotic discovery we had made in one another, was marred by this moment in the dark hallway. Before he returned to bed, I wiped away the tears that had slipped down my face during the horrid spasm of his fit. He had not told me, but he hadn't needed to. I knew that Ludwig was sick.

Oh, that year. Was it even a year? The marvel of our love, the endless hours at the piano, the inspiration that arose in me, because of him...

I began a larger piano work, a series of intricate variations for which I had no title, except the numeric designations I, II, III... I had just composed IX when he arrived back in Leipzig from a brief tour in Prague, and teased the manuscript out from under

my pen. "And what is this?"

"Études. Variations, like in the ABEGG, but more structured." My hands yearned toward the manuscript, unfinished, vulnerable, but Ludwig would not surrender it.

"Here, let me." With the sight-reading ability of true genius, he took the first reading at almost full tempo, and I was amazed. "Starts off easily enough..." and he turned to II. "Ah..." and he leaned in, concentrating. As always, my pleasure was provoked by watching him play, sitting at his left hand. I caught the inkwell slipping along the edge of the piano from the vibration of his playing, and closed it carefully, and sat, listening in silence, as he played the first nine Études for the very first time.

"I know what you should call these," he announced when he got to the end of the manuscript. "The Symphonic Études. These are studies for a symphonic movement. I can hear it in the left hand."

Symphonic Études. I mulled that over. Rather grand for a solo piano work, I thought. But to be so called by the best virtuoso in the country... perhaps the idea has merit!

"The Symphonic Études. Has anyone ever called anything by that name? I don't want it to be ridiculous up against Bach's or Schubert's or -"

"I'll look into that. But I think you should consider it, nonetheless. Amazing how much inner voice you achieve with those arpeggios... and you, with ink all over your lip, what do you do, bite your pen?" He leaned forward from the piano bench and put a kiss over the purported ink blots. "Mmm, tastes like India ink. Must be."

No longer shy of him, having achieved comfort in our

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

relationship, I did not hesitate to drag him away from the piano and into the bedroom, setting the inkwell down at last.

“What do you think? This is the first time you’ve seen the place in daylight since we got it!” While he was away, I had arranged for our things to be moved into new lodgings nearer to the Gewandthaus, where I was now giving lessons half time. Now that he had returned, we would have a party to celebrate not only our new home but our new endeavour, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. I had a large number of critical reviews stored up which I had not submitted to the *Leipziger Musikalische Zeitung*, because I feared the editor’s hand restraining my opinion of the New Germans, as they called them. Advertising is all it was. I would not advertise, not even my own compositions! Leave that to the competitors, if they dared.

“It will do,” he said briefly, embracing me. We made love, half on the bed, half on the new Persian carpet, and began to plan for the inauguration of the *Zeitschrift*.

Everything was hurried that year. In the small hours of the moist, cold night, when Ludwig slipped out of bed for his regular fit of coughing, I could sense that our time together was short, and growing shorter.

Étude II

Christel

"She's looking at you." Emil nudged me in the ribs.

"No, she isn't. Leave me be." I picked up my stein and held it to my lips. It was empty. I set it down.

"There! She's looking again. Smile at her!"

"Stop it!" I pushed his arm away without looking up.

"I will do what you aren't willing to then," he declared, and stood up, weaving slightly. We had both had much too much beer, and it became obvious when doing such ambitious actions as standing and walking across the biergarten floor. Emil staggered and approached the bar where the waitress stood, shyly smiling back at him.

To my shock and annoyance, he dragged her by the arm back to the table and motioned for her to sit.

"Her name is Christel," he announced loudly. "This is my friend Schumann, He's a pianist."

I took the girl's extended hand, and felt the smooth palm

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

as it gently touched my own. "And I write music. Though I have only one opus published as yet."

"That is very interesting," she said, her voice soft and high. "I love piano."

"See, Robert? I told you she was a music enthusiast! I'll leave you too alone." And before I could object, Emil had disappeared through the doorway and left me blushing at the table with the waitress, Christel, who sat upon my invitation.

"Actually I have to get back," she said apologetically. "Can I get anything more for you to drink Herr Schubert?"

"Oh my god, no! I am Schumann! *Schubert* was a great composer! I will never achieve what he did." She stood, then, and leaned toward me.

"I don't believe that for a minute," she said, and before I could utter another word, she placed a light kiss on my mouth and turned, her voice dropping. "Perhaps you would be interested to see me when I finish here? I get through at 11." And I nodded, once again confused at the quick pace of her offer. There could be no mistaking it - could there?

It was afternoon when I left the biergarten, slightly dizzy and drunk, and went back to my rooms to sleep it off. I woke suddenly. It was full dark then, and scrambled for my watch to find out if I was late. I mustn't be late! And my watch told me there was plenty of time still, and it did not need to be wound. I wound it tight once again, compulsively.

I tramped off to the bath with a change of clothes and washed up, rinsing my mouth to obscure the taste of stale beer and schnitzel. I walked to the biergarten to pick up Christel, and forced myself to keep a sedate pace along the way, so that I

would not arrive too early and appear overeager.

As I approached a slender arm slipped through mine and I turned. "I asked them if I could go early. I knew you'd be here," and she reached up and pulled at my collar, pulling my head down to meet her lips.

"My dear," I gasped, drawing away.

"What's wrong? I thought you wanted me." She drew back, frowning.

"I do. I do - I am just --" I wrung my hands, suddenly confused.

"Oh! This is your first time!" she exclaimed, suddenly delighted. I blushed again, grateful for the darkness around us. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," I replied, embarrassed.

"Is it far to your rooms?"

"No, half a mile..."

"Perfect. Shall we go?" she seized my arm once again. "I hope you have a piano there. You'll play for me, won't you? After?"

"After?"

"After you've had your first woman!" she said cheerfully, and twining my fingers between hers, she dragged me forward down the street.

I had no time to think. After we had trudged up the stairs I was a bit breathless, which always worried me, because I feared that I was coming down with consumption whenever I became short of breath. But the fact was that Christel was far more energetic,

and had led me on a very fast walk, as soon as she knew we were headed down the Mainzstraße. I barely got the door closed when I turned and saw that she had already unbuttoned her blouse. "Come here," she called, loosening her camisole. "Help me."

I felt an utter fool. I had no knowledge of women's things! But she wriggled out of the slip and brassiere almost as soon as I had touched them, and she turned, grasping my hands and placing them on her now naked breasts. My breath caught in my throat. "Kiss me, silly," she commanded, and I hastened to obey. As we were kissing, she had somehow managed to unbutton her skirt as well, she guided my hands down her back to her now naked bottom. I was beside myself with desire, and the arousal was clouding my mind. Fortunately Christel seemed quite in command, and led me to the bed, where her gentle hands pressed down on me, and worked my buttons free. Once she had freed me from my clothes, I closed my eyes, concentrating on the sensation of her quick fingers exploring my body.

"Oh, I see you are all ready!" she exclaimed as she pulled down my now unbuttoned trousers, and she joined me on the bed.

I was at a complete loss for what to do, so I leaned over her and kissed her once again, and as I did, she writhed against me, took my hand, and pressed it between her thighs, and I felt a hot wetness which excited me even further. I moved my fingers back and forth, and she moaned, writhing more fervently. "Please, take me now," she said, and placing her hand on my rigid erection, guided it between her legs. And I obeyed. The sensation of entering her was almost an unbearable tightness, and I pulled away, briefly, to collect myself. She sat up abruptly. "What is it, what's wrong?"

"I was afraid I would explode immediately." I explained, embarrassed, my face burning hot.

"No worries, We could always try again if you do. Come on now. You'll get used to it." She was urging me, and I could not resist, and knelt, this time slowly pressing forward as my erection gained entry into her hot interior. Oh god, what a feeling. My breath quickened in me, and the girl moaned as I gradually thrust all the way in. I did not explode, then, but managed to establish a regular rhythm as I got used to the sensation of her tight loins around my flesh. But soon I felt the pressure inside building up, even as her hands against my back urged me onward, until a climax tore from me like the burst of a sudden storm overhead, and the girl cried out, briefly.

I collapsed suddenly, panting, in her arms. She patted me, soothing, cooing some nonsense into my ear that I did not understand, and I realized she was speaking another language I did not know. I pulled myself up and balanced on my elbows, and withdrew carefully, then lay back on my side. "What tongue is that?" I asked.

"Oh, it's my own little language," she said. "I made it up." She smiled sweetly "Will you play piano for me now, or shall we go again?"

Étude III

Dr. Carus

It was late. I had stayed up practicing the Schöne Müllerin, drinking wine, and after Frau Carus had stopped singing I had two cigars with Dr. Carus and he talked about his youth and going to university to study medicine in Leipzig. He seemed wistful, and drank much more than usual, which I found surprising. I always considered him very abstemious.

He spoke of his regrets about not studying music more seriously. "But you must understand, my dear boy, that once a man undertakes a medical study, there is no time for anything else. The laboratories.... you never escape from the laboratories, all the studies in chemistry... and then the cadavers...." He wandered onto some private thoughts of his own, falling silent, and we smoked in silence for a time. He routinely asked me to play piano for Frau Carus because his own playing was not good enough for the pieces she wished to sing. His violin was considerably better, and so he limited himself to violin, when he played at all. He maintained that Schubert's work was almost all beyond him.

He looked much younger than he must be - a little too thin, not a trace of grey in his hair or mustache. Perhaps it was the

French in him, the French don't age quite as rapidly as we do. "Ah, you don't know how lucky you are, to have the possibility of something less dreary than medicine... that is why I left the gorier work to my colleagues and went into the exploration of the psyche."

I nodded, keeping my thoughts to myself. Carus had something on his mind, though I was not sure what. He would usually get to the theme, if I maintained a discreet silence. "Do you plan to stay with the law?" he asked me, quite directly.

"Well - that is what my mother would like," I equivocated. "I am not sure as yet."

"It would be a shame to waste your musical abilities, my boy, a shame. Even for a more distinguished career... how different my life would be if I had stayed with music, and not sacrificed myself to medicine, and wiping up after imbeciles and madmen..." He fell silent briefly and then said, "I am embarking on a new research study. Would you like to hear about it?"

And I nodded, engrossed in thoughts provoked by his last comments. At least, I had one ally in my pursuit of music, if I chose it. But as yet, I had not decided.

"I have begun research on the history of sexual deviancy, and the influence of the social order." I peered through the smoke at Dr. C and said nothing. "It is my theory, controversial as it may be, that what is considered deviant intimate behavior is actually a more normal biologic functioning of man as a species, and that it is social conditions that constrain us to strict roles of heterosexual function. I have observed this amongst my patients... once they are removed from the constraint of their careers and families, in the hospital, they display much more overt sexual behavior to one another. And so I theorize that this may be more normal than otherwise..." he trailed off.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Are you going to publish this?" I asked, appalled and trying not to show it.

He smiled. "Not this year!" he laughed, a bit hollowly. "As I say, this is quite controversial."

"Not to mention against the law."

"That, too..." he took a longer draw on his wine, and looked down into the bottom of his now empty glass. I realized from the pallor of his face, that Dr. Carus was drunk. "Who knows, maybe it will never be published," he forged on, "but at least I will have done something original in the quest for the truth about the human psyche. I better go to bed."

I stood as he left the room, a slight stagger in his walk, and sat again to finish my cigar.

The Schloß was quiet - it had to be well after midnight, but I had not heard the church bell chime. I had spent enough time at Colditz so that the bell had faded into the background of my consciousness and rarely surfaced until I had lost track of the time and listened for it.

I stepped out to the front door and into the summer night. It was considerably warmer outside, and immediately, sweat sprang to my forehead. I listened to the night. The patients in the Schloß must all be either sleeping or quiet in their dark rooms, safe from the beating summer heat behind the thick stone walls, trapped in the isolation of madness. And as always, when I stayed here I thought about what it would be like to be confined to one of those cells, let out once a day to wander in the courtyard, sitting with Dr. Carus for one of his probing interviews, "And have you ever been attracted to boys of your own age?"

I chuckled quietly. I understood, perhaps better than Dr. Carus did, his fascination with the passions of his patients. I understood, too, why he would linger long after Frau C had retired, smoking in the parlor with me, meandering from one topic to another until he arrived at the one he wished to discuss... for he had once, after one of my more severe episodes in Leipzig, spent some hours questioning me about my dreams and fantasies, writing everything down in excruciating detail, and that horrible night, pursued by dreams of both death and desire, I had told him everything; and when he asked about my intimate relations I told him about my affair with Rosen in Heidelberg, which ended rather messily when he became engaged.

We had not discussed it since; and several months passed, after which he invited me to come to Colditz for my holiday and to practice Schubert's newest publications with Frau Carus. I had been here a week already. I half-expected some approach from Dr. Carus, following several evenings of lingering looks.

I took a short walk to the clock tower, where I confirmed in the moonlight that it was hard by 1 a.m., retraced my steps to the guest room and undressed, pulling on a dressing gown in the chill of the stone chamber. I marvelled at the chill that pervaded the Schloß even in high summer, and pulled up a quilt to stop the shivering as I climbed into my bed.

The clock struck 1. As usual, after retiring, my mind grew full of thoughts of the beautiful Frau Carus, her graceful neck and white shoulders bare in the revealing dress she often wore in the evenings when she sang. Now in pregnancy, she had retreated to less daring costumes, but the memory of her in that gown lingered. The forbidden woman, the source of my hidden desires. I prayed that while Dr. C undoubtedly fantasized about me lying in bed with his now-confined wife in the quiet

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

summer nights, he did not guess how many hours I spent fantasizing about her.

The door creaked open, and I was suddenly wide awake. "My dear boy, are you still awake?" Dr. Carus whispered as he crept carefully into the room in almost total darkness.

"Yes." So, it was to be tonight. I sat up and reached for the match, and lighted a candle. Dr. Carus, now in a thin dressing gown, blinked owlishly in the sudden candlelight, a furious blush on his cheeks.

"Oh!" he cried. "You didn't have to..."

"What is it?" I asked, and noted the reticence that overcame him now that the room was no longer dark. I realized that I was still half-aroused by my interrupted fantasies, and that I had almost expected to see her materialize in the doorway when I heard the door creak. He made it the rest of the way across the room and sat down next to me on the bed. A long moment passed.

"I - I couldn't sleep. I...I was... thinking about you."

I found a curious reversal from the night in Leipzig where I lay in anguish and fever in my bed and the professional, confident Carus had sat at my bedside, much as he did now, carefully writing down all of the twisted fears that fled from me into his medical history. His professionalism had fled him, tonight, and I could feel the movement of his hands chafing one another in the shadow, the sharp outline of his profile cast against the wall. My breath was quick: and I knew then, exactly what he was feeling, and I reached out a hand to place on his, to still his nerves.

"You were thinking about me..." I prompted him. From the

encouragement of my touch he turned, and with an almost desperate movement, leaned over me and put his mouth upon mine. The strong tang of cigars and wine was on his lips, as it must be on mine, and he exhaled heavily.

“Oh god, how long I have thought of doing that...” he whispered fiercely, and kissed me again, gripping my shoulders hard in his hands, and did not let me go for what seemed several minutes. Then he sat up, as though to gather himself. My pulse had begun to race.

“I hope that I had not... I thought perhaps you might...” he said, and I reached out to him. The passion trapped within him had leapt into me, and a bolt of sudden desire flooded me, and I threw off the suddenly suffocating quilt. I guided his hand, and heard him sigh as he grasped my now throbbing erection. “Ah, god,” he murmured, and once again pressed his mouth against mine as he began stroke me. “Is this what you want?” he whispered.

“I want your mouth,” I replied, somewhat breathless, and as I spoke, he slid along the bed and took me into in his mouth. I closed my eyes, and found myself thinking of Rosen then, his delicate tongue teasing me until I felt I should scream or explode... and here was Dr. Carus, the psychiatrist, kneeling between my thighs, teasing me senseless with his exploring tongue.

“Oh god,” I gasped, as I felt the first peak of my climax approaching. His fingers clenched down on the base of my aching organ then, as his strokes grew more rapid and intense.

“Oh... god” my vision faded then, and all of my mind was concentrated on the movements of his mouth... and then came

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

the spasm of my climax against his throat, and I felt him swallow once, and again, holding me in an iron grip. He sat up, wiping his lips delicately, as though tasting a mouthful of wine.

“My dear boy,” he murmured. “Delicious, you are absolutely delicious.” Then he kissed me, with the flavor of my semen mixed with the taste of the cigars and the wine on his mouth.

Étude IV

To Heidelberg (Rosen I)

There were so many things I never asked Rosen before leaving Leipzig, because I did not dare. I told myself that there are things not written in letters, and to a degree, this is very true; however, there would have been a way to ask him whether he still wanted me. And so, as the last miles wore away on my journey to Heidelberg, I found myself more and more anxious, profoundly worried that he had changed his mind about letting me stay with him for the last two months of the university term.

I began to consider alternatives. My mother had a cousin in Heidelberg named Gustav, and as a precaution, I had taken his address and sent him a letter, ostensibly so that I could pay him a visit. In the event things went awry with Rosen, I could retreat to Gustav's house. If he didn't live too far from the University.

The carriage road followed the river, and I dreamed, waking, of walking there with Rosen. Ah, to see him again! My worry dissolved in the fond memories of the camaraderie we had shared as children; playing along the Mulde, catching frogs, and teasing the girls in Latin class when they lisped through their declensions.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

He was waiting for me at the station, and embraced me warmly as I debarked from the carriage, mouth full of a thousand questions. He looked older, wearier, worn down, perhaps, by the strain of overstudy. Rosen was a perfectionist, and determined to be the most studious in everything he did. He had little patience for music or socializing. In many ways, we were complete opposites. But the look in his eyes told me I had not erred in my plan, and that he was truly happy that I was joining him. Leipzig had not been kind to me, and I had poured all of my dissatisfactions out in a year's worth of letters to him. His invitation was a godsend.

It took little more than an hour for me to get situated: I had brought very little, thinking to spend the generous advance my mother had sent me on new clothes, books, and pens.

"I suppose you want to meet him right away?" he said offhand, once I had unpacked my single trunk.

"Him?"

"Thibeaux!" Rosen replied. "Isn't he your entire reason for coming?"

My face must have betrayed my shock, and I shook my head. "No, Gisbert. I came because of you. And because I couldn't stand Leipzig and Emil another month!" I put my arms around him, and he put his head against my shoulder.

"Lord, I've missed you," he whispered.

And we went out for a quick dinner at the café closest to the University, and then to Thibeaux's for tea.

I was shy of the professor, who would be teaching my law seminars for the remainder of the term, but he was perfectly

affable. The inevitable lull occurred after the niceties were exchanged, and Dr. Thibeaux peered at me over his glasses, then said, "Herr Rosen tells me that you are a virtuoso. I have a fine Flügel in the library if you would be so kind as to play for us." I blushed, furiously, and cast a look of reproach at Rosen, who avoided my gaze. I resisted for a time, but in fact I was happy to be invited, because I had just come from a rousing success at some concerts in Zwickau and hoped to repeat that success in Heidelberg.

And for my new professor and my dear friend, I played Moscheles' Alexander variations, which I had perfected during my months of lessons with Wieck in Leipzig. Rosen clapped wildly after a passably good performance, and I smiled. Thibeaux shook my hand.

"My God, Robert, you have been practicing! You are twice as good as ever I heard you before!" Rosen enthused. And I blushed again.

"I am truly sorry that I did not invite my colleagues to hear you, Herr Schumann," Dr. Thibeaux enthused. "I won't make that mistake again, and I hope you will play here again soon!" He stood, signalling that our visit was ending. He smiled briefly. "Frau Thibeaux will be returning any moment and I would not want to have to explain why I am not preparing for tomorrow's lectures!" We hurried out into the warm spring night, and I grasped Rosen's arm as we made our way back to my new home with Rosen in the Marienstrasse.

I couldn't practice, because it was too late. So instead, I opened a bottle of wine. Rosen had none, so I finished it myself, and staggered to bed at midnight.

The clock in the belltower of the Dom struck the hour, and it

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

seemed the very sound struck me to full wakefulness. Distantly, I heard the mournful shriek of a cat, perhaps fleeing an owl. Whatever dream I had been caught within, fled entirely, leaving me shivering, overcome with an unnamed fear, and tears began to run freely down my face. An unformed dread had pooled in my belly, and was working its way into my chest. I was unable to breathe.

I felt along the edge of the table for the matches and the candle, and lighted it. The feeble flickering of the light in the draft of the room gave an eerie cast to my shadow as I crouched in the bed, a sudden noise at the door startled me, and I nearly cried out. It was Rosen.

“Robert - what's wrong? I woke and thought I heard you crying. You are crying!”

I put my hands over my face, embarrassed. “You shouldn't see me like this, Gisbert. Go back to bed.”

“No, I don't think I should. I remember how you got after your father.” He came into the room then, setting down his own candle, and sat next to me on the bed, putting his arm around my shoulder, pulling me to him. I collapsed against him, and no longer able to hold back, sobbed loudly as he patted my back, comforting me as a father would a small child who had awakened from a bad dream.

“It was a nightmare, wasn't it?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, yes, it must have been.”

“Travelling never agreed with you. We should not have gone out. You should have rested here instead. You're too excitable for so much exertion,” he murmured, smoothing my hair. Under his ministrations, the tight pain in my chest eased, and

my tears, at last, stopped. At his urging, I lay back down, and he climbed into the bed with me, in his dressing gown, and I drifted off in the comfort of his arms. I woke to feel the pressure of his lips on mine, and waking, returned his kiss with some force.

“Do you feel better?” he asked.

“Yes, I like this, too,” I replied, and resumed kissing him. One of the candles had guttered, leaving one feeble light flickering behind us.

“I’m sorry,” he said, pulling away slightly. “With you lying there so peacefully, I couldn’t resist. You are just so beautiful when you sleep.”

“Don’t be sorry, Gisbert,” I replied, “It’s fine. You are so good to me. Do you want me now?” He did not reply, but I felt him nod in the intensifying darkness.

I moved the cover aside, grasping with a seeking hand for his growing erection, and when I touched it, pushing the cotton gown aside with my fingers. He sighed, reached for me with his hands, stroking my hair as I moved down to take his penis in my mouth.

It was a brief, but intense, encounter. Rosen thrashed as his climax built and I held him firmly, squeezing out his ejaculation and drinking it down. He moaned loudly as he came. His breath caught in his throat and he lay panting for some minutes, and spoke, but his words were incoherent. I stretched out next to him, still aroused, but soon relaxed, and placed a gentle kiss on his cheek.

It had been several years since we had last been intimate, but before my Abitur, Rosen and I had an almost exclusive, and

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

very secretive, relationship. I had cooled on him when my mother encouraged me to spend more time with Emil Flechsig, and to go to Leipzig under his supervision. But despite what either my mother, or Rosen, thought, my relationship with Emil was only very briefly sexual, before I found other, more willing companions. But I had always felt more attached to Rosen, perhaps because of his profound, caring nature and tenderness. And this had not changed at all in the intervening two years.

I began to drift into sleep, and just as I did I heard Rosen say very quietly, "thank you, Robert. I love you very much."

Etude V

Goette

I was already quite drunk. Flechsig and I had fought, and I intended not to return to our rooms to encounter him again. The hour was late, and there was, as yet, nowhere to go. Toepken lived with his family, and the two other classmates still drinking with me that night had wives at home, one already with child.

It was too late to call upon Reuter, and far too late for Glock, who had endured my late night visits more than once when I was in some sort of panic or had a stomachache during the night. What would Glock say if I woke him up, disturbing him before his morning rounds, because of another argument with Flechsig? That would not do.

But... there was one idea that had occurred to me repeatedly in the last few nights, I had stored somewhere before all of those glasses of wine, in the form of a shy invitation by the newest member of our circle, Goette. We had met in the Coffé Baum, and talked at length about Chopin, the latest sensation, who was at that time giving a concert at the Gewandthaus. Goette said, "Don't you think that he's very dashing, the way he plays the piano?" and I found myself regarding him curiously, as he smiled at me.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Well, yes he is," I admitted. "But one is more taken by what he is playing than what he looks like while playing it, wouldn't you say?"

"Oh, I don't know..." he murmured. "I would be interested in seeing what you look like when you're playing," he added, and touched my hand lightly.

"Would you?" I replied, grasping the proffered hand in my own, with a quick glance around to see if the exchange had been noticed, and my pulse quickened. But I did not go with him that night, and excused myself with embarrassment, promising him that we would meet another time, and we shared a brief embrace and a shy kiss at the door. He slipped a note into my hand with his address, and said, "Perhaps another night you would have some time..."

Yes, there was Goette. He lived alone; his rooms were close, near the bridge, just outside of the Altstadt. I wished my remaining companions a brief good night, and left, my destination now clear.

He came at the second knock, donning his robe even as he opened the door. "Ah, Schumann!" he greeted me, and took my hand. "Come in."

"I am sorry, I hope it isn't too late...I brought wine," I said, and raised the parcel in my hand. He ushered me in, truly pleased to see me.

"I thought perhaps you weren't going to show up," he said, clearing a place for the bottles on the little table in his parlor. "Sit, sit."

"You were asleep," I objected.

"No, no, not asleep. Studying. I always study in bed...." he blushed, smiling. "I know, it's a bad habit."

"I study in bed too... but I don't usually undress for it," I remarked, noting his dressing gown. Goette was a lanky youth, perhaps a year younger than I; but brilliant in his studies, and very devoted. He hurried to get glasses, and returned. "It's chilled," I added, reaching for the corkscrew in his hand. We sat, and I poured.

"To music! Prosit!" I touched my glass to his.

"To music!" he replied. "Oh I am glad that you came. I was somewhat afraid I disinterested you..."

"Oh - no!" I put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, pushing the collar away to caress the warm flesh beneath, and leaned forward, placing a kiss on his mouth. "Things have just been, a bit difficult of late. In fact," I went on, embarrassment making my words come slow, "I came in part to ask if I might stay. At least - for tonight."

"I would like that. A lot."

I looked down, into my wine glass, avoiding his eyes. "Flechsigs and I aren't getting along."

"Oh. Well you are welcome here, any time," and he caught my hand, caressing it tenderly.

"Thank you," I said, and refilled our glasses.

I drained mine quickly, set down our glasses, and pulled him toward me for a more languid, deeper kiss, pulling him down atop me on the sofa. A sharp ache of desire coursed through me then, and through his gown I could feel the pressure of his

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

arousal, and pulled up the cloth to caress the bare flesh of his thighs and buttocks, and he began to move against me, his mouth open against mine, his hissing breath quickening. He rose, first pulling off first his robe, then the dressing gown, exposing him, kneeling over me, now completely naked and erect.

I put my hands on his hips and pulled him toward me, and took his hard organ into my mouth. He moaned, and thrust eagerly into my throat, and I grasped him firmly to keep from choking on him. His excitement was palpable, and his hands gripped my shoulders as he shuddered and thrust against my restraining grip. I teased him with my tongue, which excited him further, and I sensed his climax was fast approaching. His nails dug into my neck.

At the penultimate moment, I squeezed hard and then released my hand, and with one powerful thrust he came, his hot fluid came surging into my mouth and throat, and the hands on my shoulders relaxed. "Ah, god," he sighed, and lay back on the sofa between my knees, in that muzzy relaxation that follows orgasm.

I refilled our glasses, and we drank in the ensuing quiet.

Overheated, I drew off my jacket, unbuttoned my shirt, and stood. Goette reached out, and tugged at my belt, unfastening my trousers. "Perhaps now it's your turn?" and he opened the buttons on my trousers and worked them down my legs. I was still half-aroused by our previous play, and his grasping hand woke me to erection. As he stroked me he said, in a casual way, "Perhaps you would like to fuck me with this?" I nodded as he continued to work my penis with his hand, and reached with the other for a small bottle of lotion, and smeared some of it along the shaft.

"Right here?" I asked.

"Yes, right here," and he stood up. I turned him then, bending him over the back of the sofa, and entered him with a single swift thrust, holding him down with one arm. He shuddered as I penetrated him. With the pent-up desire of weeks, I thrust into him repeatedly, and could feel the responsive spasm within his bowels. I could not hold back; with an increasing pace, I battered his insides, and gradually, the explosive climax that had been so long lurking, rose up within me. My climax came over me in a series of savage thrusts. I withdrew, releasing him from my hold, and stood back, panting.

We were both slimy with lotion and semen, and Goette grabbed a tea towel and dabbed me with it, and then himself. "You brought me off again..." he sighed.

"I hope I didn't hurt you..." I replied.

"Hurt me?" he laughed. "I wish I would get hurt like that more often. Ah, god..." he repeated, pulling me down by the arm to sit next to him, and sought my mouth again with his own. "You've done that before."

"Only a few times," I demurred, embarrassed. We finished that bottle of wine, and the next, our hands entwined. After that, drunk, barely able to stand, we found his bed, and passed out in one another's arms.

Étude VI

Abed

My attention was drawn to the slight feeling of warm fingers resting on my shoulder, and gradually moving toward my arm, and down, drifting lazily, pleasantly along the back of my arm, around my elbow, slowly moving, off my arm and over the bone of my hip and downward. As it paused, I turned, stirring slightly at the movement of the hand, my head turning, seeking, toward his face...

And woke. I was alone, now fully awake, slightly confused, and half-aroused by the dream of Gisbert's caressing hand on my naked flesh. The sense of a presence next to me in my bed, persisted, faintly but definitely, and I sighed, as the dream of him faded into a less perfect memory, and once again a pang of sadness struck me with the force of a blow beneath my ribs, followed rapidly by a pounding headache caused by excessive drinking the night before.

The sun was high. I had overslept, again. With no one to wake me or prepare the coffee, I felt adrift, aimless, and unwilling to wake with the rising sun, as I did at other times when I had a roommate or companion. There was no one now: Emil, who had practically driven me out of Leipzig with his scorn; Reuter, who

had tended me during my last months of depression before leaving Leipzig, and now resituated in Nürnberg with a new practice and no time even for letters; and now this latest, Gisbert, who had asked me to find a new accommodation after my return from Italy.

It was an unhappy reunion. He would not come with me, despite my begging, and securing enough money for his passage to Milan; and this, I could not quite comprehend. And before leaving, he also refused my advances, even though we would not see one another for two months. And so I felt justified, while away, to explore the entertainments that were offered me. But fleeing into the stressful months of my lonesome Italian holiday would not cure the pain in my chest. I rose, barely able to find my clothes and pull them on before an early fall chill touched my bare skin and caused me to shiver from head to toe. Somehow, the chill set off an even deeper, more profound sadness, and I collapsed back onto my pillow, weeping.

My timing was unfortunate. Lying half dressed, trousers around my knees, face wet with weeping, I was ill prepared for the housekeeper, who had already managed to catch me abed twice in a single week. Perhaps thinking me ill, she did not pause at the door as she usually did but hurried to my side, and placed a hand on my shoulder.

“Herr Schumann, what is wrong?” she asked, her voice little more than a whisper. The hand on my shoulder, which drifted down my arm, with the uncanny caress I had felt in my dream, caused me to startle, and I turned toward the hand, which reached over and touched the tears on my cheek, as though to staunch them. I looked up at the face, which frowned down at me in my misery.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Nothing, Frau Stenzl. Feeling sorry for myself. Too hard to get dressed in the morning," I laughed wryly at my disheveled, undressed condition.

"Nonsense!" she said, and reached with either hand for my collar, and I caught them before she managed to fasten the buttons.

"No, please. I'd rather just lie here as I am."

"Certainly not!" she objected, and exerted some force to pull away from my grasp, but another idea had been introduced by the brief caress on my shoulder, and I tugged her toward me, and she lost her balance, but not before I had placed a solid kiss upon her mouth. She sat back up, blushing. "I suppose I deserved that, for coming into the bedroom of a man who is undressed." She straightened up then, and rose, casting a doubtful look upon me. "Herr Schumann, I think it's time you got dressed." And she turned and retreated to the kitchen, closing the door modestly behind her.

With a sigh, I put myself together, smoothed out my wrinkles, found my cigarette case and frock coat, and prepared to meet the day.

Étude VII

Pucci

For whatever reason – perhaps it was the lack of light in the room – I found it easier to copy the score in the biergarten, on the ground floor of the hotel. Slightly self-conscious with ink and paper in hand, I retreated to the farthest corner, a large stein of pils at my elbow. There was a motif that was nagging at me, after that night at the theater. The impossible had happened, and they staged the first act of “Leonore”, renamed “Fidelio”, in rehearsal. I was busy recalling the haunting Aria at the climax of the piece, which only really rests in me when I have it written down, when I felt eyes upon me, and I looked up.

Across the table, I met the regard of a young man, probably no older than I, and possibly less. He smiled when I looked up at him, and I gestured for him to sit. Impolite to take up an entire table as the evening was reaching its peak.

“Evening, Herr van Beethoven,” he quipped in German, waving a finger at my manuscript.

“You’re right on one account, this is Beethoven. But I’m just copying it down. Why did you say that?” Something about him captured my curiosity, and I put down the pen.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

He laughed easily. "You. Your hair every which way like that, and – you're obviously not Italian!"

"And you?"

"Oh – I am!" he laughed. "Buy me a beer, Herr van Beethoven." He drew his chair closer. "You are quite good looking."

I blushed, but despite my embarrassment, I waved the barmaid over. "He would like a – what? Pils?"

"Of course," he replied brightly, smiling. "You are!" he protested.

"I am what?"

"You are quite good looking."

"Well, so are you," I replied briefly, and sipped on my forgotten pils.

The barmaid returned. She said, in German, "Is this one bothering you?" And I shook my head. We drank for a few moments in silence.

"So who are you?" I asked at last.

"Schiavo," he replied, wiping his lips after a deep draft. "Good, this. And you?"

"Schnabel," I replied without hesitation. It had occurred to me, as soon as the barmaid asked her somewhat curt question, that the youth was a prostitute. Better, then, that I use a name I could afford to have repeated, and could not be traced.

"Well, Schnabel, you're here on your holidays, is that so?"

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Perhaps you would like an hour of entertainment on your holidays. When we've finished the beer, of course." He smiled winningly.

"With you?" I hid my amusement by raising my glass. But his regard was difficult to turn from. "Perhaps when we have finished two beers."

"Two, then," he nodded. "So, Herr van Schnabel, why are you writing down something of Beethoven? Is it all in your brain then?"

"Yes, exactly," I replied. "I write it down to get it out of my brain where I can see it. And consider it. I heard it at the theater last night."

"I was at the theater last night too," he said.

"You were? The Camerata?"

He nodded. "Something about Spain, and two lovers, and they take the man away."

"Florestan."

"Yes!" he laughed. "That's the name. And Leonore. But I'm not quite bright enough to recall the music as you can."

"This is the last aria in the act," I explained. "Come, hope, let not your last star be clouded by despair," I pointed at the bar.

"I'm sorry Herr van Schnabel, I can't read music. I hope that does not cause you to change your plans."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

The barmaid arrived with the second round of drinks, and took away our empty steins. "No, no," I said. "I am curious though - what caused you to attend the theater last night?"

"Oh - well I go where I am asked. I was asked to accompany a gentleman."

"And this is not considered embarrassing?" I was mildly shocked.

"Oh no. He is a rather important gentleman. No one would dare to criticize him."

"I see..." I didn't see at all. Confused, I summoned from my memory the next bar of the aria, and dipped my pen in the inkwell, while Schiavo observed all with what appeared to be rapt attention.

"You write that so quickly! How do you do that? All those little squiggles and things, and it's so neat!" he remarked.

"They're called notes," I snorted. Despite my patronizing tone, I found myself mightily flattered by the youth, who was studying the paper before him as though it contained a profound secret which he must unravel.

I picked up my stein - and it was empty. I could ill afford another round for both of us. "That's our two beers," I concluded, and capped my inkwell.

"Shall we to your room? Are you staying here, Herr van Schnabel?"

"Yes - yes I'm staying here. Listen, I have no money for --"

"Money?" he drew back as though I had slapped him. "I don't

want money! I want to spend the night with a nice looking German!" he seized my arm. I left the money for the beer on the table, and let Schiavo drag me out of the biergarten and up the stairs.

Once we were behind the closed door, Schiavo reached his arm around my shoulder in the darkness and drew me down to an open-mouthed kiss. I stood a half head taller than him. I straightened then. "How old are you?" I asked.

He laughed quietly in the darkness. "Does that matter?"

"Maybe."

"Sixteen. Do you want to talk or do you want to fuck?"

I turned then, and fumbled my way to the bed, sat, and lighted the candle. "Here's the light, come here then," and the dark youth approached, stripping off his frock coat and shirt in a quick gesture, dropping them on the floor. He came to me, and unfastened my coat, pushing it from my shoulders. I seized his arms, and kissed him, and he pushed me down on the bed, pressing his body intently against my own as his tongue pushed between my lips., I ran my hands down his shoulders – the flesh of his back was smooth as satin – and felt a familiar ache of desire build within me.

His hand worked my belt free and opened my trousers, plucking the buttons open deftly, and my breath quickened as his fingers found what they sought. He sat up then, and I pulled my trousers down.

"Ah, a quick one," he remarked, stroking my growing erection. "And how old are you?"

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Nineteen in June," I replied, my breath short. If he maintained that intent stroking, I would climax in moments; but he did not, and we embraced once again.

"I forget how quick young men are," he said quietly into my ear. "Old men are so hard to excite..." and he chuckled, grasping me once again.

"Wait," I stopped him, "I want you naked too," and the youth complied, stripping his trousers off in a quick motion and lay back on the bed.

"Here I am," he said, stretching his arms out. He was likewise, fully aroused, but before I could move he twisted around beneath me and put his head between my knees. "Have you ever tried the sixty-nine? It is an exercise in concentration. I do you, while you do me," and he put his mouth on my aching penis. I stretched out over him and likewise, took his penis into my own mouth, holding it much as he was holding my own.

It was certainly an exercise in concentration; for Schiavo's sexual skills were considerable. First he nibbled delicately, and darted with his tongue, and it was all I could do to hold him in my mouth while he teased me, and it was not long before my climax exploded under his expert manipulation. It was not until I had recovered from my own orgasm that I was able to concentrate adequately to bring him to his own climax, which was somewhat more slow emerging, but at last, he came, with a satisfied gasp, and I lay back on the bed. He jumped up and facing back in the same direction, nestled into my shoulder. "Not such a bad performance, considering you hadn't done it before..." and I drew back.

"How do you know I --"

"I can tell. It's something you have to practice," he placed a tender, salty kiss on my lips. "No matter. I could tell I pleased you, though. Didn't I?"

"Yes, yes... but that is your profession, isn't it?"

"What?" he laughed, and sat up, the laugh catching in his throat until he coughed. When he recovered, he started laughing again.

"That is your profession, though..." I said, now puzzled.

"No it's not!" he fell back on the bed, wildly amused, still laughing.

"But you said - you had been to the theater with a gentleman..."

"Yes. He was my father!"

"Your father?"

"Yes, have you ever heard of Guiseppe Pucci?"

"Pucci, he's--" I stuttered.

"He's my father," he said. "I'm his youngest son, Giacomo Schiavo Pucci."

"But if --"

"Why did I make you buy me beer? Because I wanted you to buy me beer. I liked it."

I was grateful for the poor light in the room, because I must have blushed from head to foot. And nestled comfortably in my arms, the sixteen year old son of the most powerful noble in Milan placed an affectionate kiss on my cheek.

Étude VVI

Friedrich

At last, I had found a competent pianist with whom to play the F minor Fantasie: Friedrich Toepken, also a law student. We spent most of Sunday afternoon closeted, getting our timing right, after a week at our own individual practice -- and the result was gratifying. But my hands were growing tired, and the increasing in my errors told me it was time to stop. Toepken was obviously better practiced than I, because he betrayed no fatigue, so after I struck the last chord I laid my right hand on his left and shook my head.

"Please, Friedrich...I think that's enough for one day. Or one week!" He frowned and looked up at me.

"Tired already? Ah, too bad. But it's still afternoon. What shall we do, then?"

I had a ready answer: my local biergarten. He followed me down the stairs and out into the late afternoon. Heidelberg was bustling with tourists still shopping and taking in the sights along the Schloßbrücke. We avoided the press with some difficulty, and found some shaded outdoor seats, where we could sit and watch the river and the crowds from a certain remove.

“Ah – good to have something to occupy me on a Sunday, since my studies are done,” Toepken sighed. I found myself studying him a bit more closely.

“What is this? Something to occupy you?”

“Ah yes, I am suffering from loneliness. I had a girl during the entire last term. She adored how I played, so I didn't stint on practice!” he smiled modestly. “You may have noticed I am well practiced... she would sit tirelessly by the hour while I played.” He sighed again, and raised a hand for the barmaid to refill his glass, catching my rapid glance. “No worries, Schumann, I'll pay. I know you are on a small allowance. Now, let's get to the more serious business of drinking.” And he quaffed deeply on his freshly drawn pils.

After he finished another round with more speed than even I could manage, Toepken spoke again. “I suppose it's no trouble for you, with the curls and blue eyes and all...”

I lowered my eyes.

“What then?” he asked, surprised, growing more garrulous by the minute.

“Rather afraid of them actually. Unless I am good and high,” I admitted.

“Whatever for?” he roared. “Look there, even now that barmaid is giving you a lingering stare.” I did not follow his pointing finger. “You could probably have any one you wanted. I'm just a lump.”

“With excellent four hands technique!” I reassured him.

“Well – there is that,” he admitted with a wry smile. “But now be honest, you have certainly had at least a few.”

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Less than a few! Of girls, that is."

He glanced up quickly. "Oh," he blushed slightly.

"Two girls exactly," I recounted, "four boys of my own age, and one psychiatrist."

"A what?"

"You know - a doctor of the mind," I smiled tightly. "A friend of my family from my hometown."

"Was he helping your mind?" he chuckled.

"I don't think so. Are you very disgusted?"

"Nooo..." he replied... "I just never..."

"One gets lonely," I temporized.

"One certainly does."

"Then if you are ever lonely.." I trailed off, hiding my expression behind my glass, which I emptied in the next gulp. Toepken did not answer, but waved again for another round.

Some time later, when full dark had closed the terrasse, after we were driven by the evening chill indoors, Toepken, good as his word, settled our bill, and we staggered out, arms around each others' shoulders to steady ourselves.

I turned in the direction of my rooms, and Toepken did not break away. He said "Did you really mean what you said..."

I ruffled his hair. "Of course I did. Are you coming up, or are you going to try to find your way home in your condition? You can certainly stay."

"I'll come up."

I made coffee, black and strong, and the activity cleared my head somewhat. It was clear Toepken was still troubled, perhaps heartbroken over the loss of his girl. He did not explain what had happened to her, nor why she had left him. I brought a large mug of the brew into the sitting room, where Toepken had collapsed on the sofa, and as he loosened his schal and unbuttoned his coat, I handed the mug to him. He held it steady with both hands, and sipped. "My head will be three sizes larger tomorrow, I imagine."

"Just drink that, you will feel better right away." I was already on a second cup and feeling the onset of Knill, the high that emerges at the edge of true drunkenness. But Toepken had not been as careful with his quantities and looked green on his edges. I helped finish divesting his frock coat and shoes, and his head lolled back. I leaned over him to steady his cup and he said "Well, what of it?"

"What of what?" I was truly confused.

"This fucking boys your own age thing," he blurted, and threw out a gesture with his free hand. "You're the experienced one, show me what to do."

I blushed with embarrassment. I could not think he was being serious; but perhaps severely dejected, and most definitely lonely.

"Friedrich..." I began to reply, and he gripped my collar, pulling me toward him, his grasp powerful. A pianist's hands. I tried to set down his mug without spilling it, but some of the hot liquid splashed onto the table as he pulled me down on top of him. He put his lips on my own.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

I pulled away, and sat up, and as I did I looked down into his face. He was weeping, with a dismay fueled by extreme drunkenness.

"You are very drunk, Friedrich," I said quietly.

"Yes. But drunkenness has done nothing for my lust. That has not been dulled. I can't see straight, and I could probably not walk. There is probably only one thing I can do."

"I don't think that it's the right situation to be --" I started to say, but he cut me off.

"What better situation?" His sadness was affecting my mood. He was desperately distracted, and it was clear that drink intensified his depression rather than alleviated it, as it did in my case.

"I think I better put you to bed," I said, making up my mind. I pulled him to his feet and unbuttoned his pants, and pulled them down his legs. He stepped unsteadily out of them, and I towed him to the bedroom, where he half-sat, half-fell, into my bed. I pulled the duvet over him, and took the candle back out to the sitting room, where I sopped up the spilled coffee with a rag, and finished my own cup.

Presently, I heard a soft snoring from the other room, picked up my candle, and returned to the bed, undressed quietly, and slipped in next to Toepken, who was now deeply asleep. As he sensed my presence in the bed, he turned and reached his arm around me in a sleeping embrace. I did not push it off, but neither did I return it. I knew that, if he were dreaming, it was not about me. Presently, I, too, slept.

Étude IX

Ludwig (II)

It was a small dinner party, by Voigt standards. Herr Voigt was well known lawyer in Leipzig, and his young wife Henriette was at the center of the cultural and musical life of the city. It was through Ludwig that I was introduced to the Voigts and their circle, and as a result, had regular opportunities to perform four-hands piano with Ludwig at their soirées.

I had not practiced four-hands regularly since Toepken had graduated from Heidelberg, and I found it helped me to concentrate when I was unable to compose; writing the *Études* was troubling me. I worked on my second sonata during this time, but that also troubled me. And so it was, that Ludwig and I were once again asked to play two of our well-practiced Schubert four-hands duets at the Voigts after a lush dinner one Saturday in June, shortly after Ludwig's concert trip to Wien.

Ludwig was animated throughout dinner, as he usually was when he anticipated playing. Unlike myself, he had a thorough and passionate love for performing. The only one who compared with Ludwig in his lust to perform, was Liszt – and they resembled one another in many ways. Ludwig told some amusing stories about Wien – he often billed himself as “Louis

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

Schuncke" and did so on this concert engagement, because he knew it would keep the Viennese nobles away from him. They detested the French; and for his own part, he preferred to play for those who appreciated him, rather than people who appeared at public concerts to show off their best gowns and jewelry.

At last dinner ended, and we took our places together on the bench. As we sat, I on the left hand, Ludwig brushed his hand surreptitiously along my thigh and leaned toward me, and whispered in my ear, "tonight." That was another odd element of Ludwig's personality; whereas I often felt very drained after performing, he often returned from concerts in a high passion; our lovemaking was often very intense when he came to me after a concert. I found that the thought of anything other than the music before me - distracted me; and it was fortunate that I knew these pieces as well as I did; because Ludwig had just distracted me utterly, and I held his hand a moment before we began, so that I could once again focus my attention upon the piece.

The performance went well; I could sense Ludwig's high tension throughout, and several times he rushed me on the allegro so that I was at pains to keep up; but this was typical of him, and the more animated he became, the more aggressive his playing. It was over quickly, and I was relieved, and sweating a bit, so I took my coffee out to the verandah, while Ludwig went at Frau Voigt's request to help her serve the guests another tray of coffee. When I had cooled down, I lighted a cigar and settled down next to Wieck, who was sitting in his usual corner chair, puffing heavily, and glaring at no one in particular. I smoked with him quietly for a few minutes before attempting to venture a discussion. I was considering querying him on his opinion of our performance. I was always just slightly nervous playing with Wieck in the room, though he had ceased teaching me

years before; I valued his opinion still, and feared his criticism.

But before I had a chance to work up to a topic with Wieck, Ludwig reappeared at my elbow, and to my surprise, pulled me up and out of my seat with some urgency.

"Lieber, please, come now," he said in a low voice, and I followed him, out into the hall and to the alcove where the guests had stowed their coats. And to my surprise, he dragged me further into the alcove between the coats!

"Ludwig, what the hell is going on?" I muttered, but before I had finished the sentence he had placed his mouth on mine and drew me into a tight, passionate embrace. He did not let me go for long moments. From the pressure of hips against my own I could feel his arousal.

He paused just long enough to let me catch my breath and said, "Let's go home."

"Why now? Because you're all worked up? What brought this on? Are you all right?" He tried once again to silence me with his mouth, but I put up a hand to stop him. "Ludwig, what is it?"

"I just want to go home. Sometimes I get this way after I play." He ran his fingers gently through my curls and caressed my neck. "Playing with you like that was so - so nice. I want to play some more."

"What about Frau Voigt? She will be offended that her pianists vanished on her. Particularly you. She was most anxious to hear you, since you have become so famous of late." At the mention of Frau Voigt his expression darkened.

"That is a pity," he said, without compassion. "Tell her your malaria has flared up. Just - tell her. I'll wait out here."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

I cast a backward look at him, crouching in the alcove, as I went through the hallway and back to the party, on a mission now to find Henriette Voigt. I was torn between asking her if she knew what was wrong with Ludwig, and following his instructions; and erred on the side of discretion.

“Oh, where is Herr Schuncke?” she sang out as she spotted me. “You two were just the best, I was going to ask him to play your Toccata before we serve the cake.”

“I'm very sorry Frau Voigt, but I am feeling rather faint. I think the evening chill and exertion has come on me rather hard.” I lowered my eyes, trying to invoke the shaking weakness of the winter's illness once again.

“Yes, yes, you do look pale. How sad.”

“I will of course need Ludwig to see me safely home, I hope you understand.”

“Think nothing of it!” she declared, and waving one of the servants over, handed the tray she had been carrying to the woman, and followed me up. “Let me see you off!”

I turned and placed a hand on her arm. “No, no, please. Stay with your guests, please give them our regrets. We will come again soon!” Gracious and pleasant, Frau Voigt did not insist, and I was left free to return to the hall and my cowering companion.

“All set now, we can go. My God, Ludwig, that was incredibly rude,” I said, when we had left the house and started down the street.

He tugged at my arm with a burst of urgency, now that we were free. “Walk a bit faster Robert, if you will.”

"I still would like to know what this is about. It's not about being all aroused by me at the piano!" I insisted. But Ludwig would say nothing, despite my further entreaties.

When we arrived home, he immediately opened a bottle of wine and poured a large draft for himself. At his gesture I nodded and he poured for me as well. We drank briefly in silence. I unwrapped my schal and frock coat and tossed them on the chair.

"All right, here I am, all yours. Take me," I announced, and he turned to me, wine glass in hand, and began kissing me with the unrestrained passion he had shown in the Voigt's hall, and this time I did not pull away. There was something desperate in Ludwig which I did not as yet understand; but it had something to do with me, and perhaps with the party. In due course I would discover what, but I must now let passion take its course. Ludwig stripped off his clothes as though maddened, and I noted that he was still fully aroused.

"Have you been hard all this time since the kiss in the hall?" I gasped, and he nodded silently, his mouth now urgent upon mine.

"Well then, do you want to take me?" I said, between kisses, and he nodded again, his passion had somehow made him mute. I broke away then, trembling from the force and violence that seemed to be building up in him, and finished removing my trousers. My heart was pounding fiercely, overcome by his own fierceness.

If he were to take me immediately, it would hurt badly; but Ludwig had not lost his mind. In our months together, he had developed a method by which he could adequately prepare me for penetration, and he did so now. He was nothing if not

methodical, and eased first one then another finger into me to loosen me up to receive him. But he wasted no time, and asked no questions, for as soon as he had worked three well oiled fingers smoothly in, he knelt and with a firm pressure, entered me, and I let out a small gasp, as much in pleasure as relief.

I was glad of his caution, for earlier, I had been considering refusing him if he appeared too violent. Though the prospect of his violence had aroused in me an ache - a want I had not felt in other, calmer times. However, as soon as caution had been observed and he was inside me, the fierceness of his desire returned, and soon he was thrusting hard, with an abandon he had rarely shown before; and I heard the sound of my own moans escaping me as though they were someone else's. By one wild thrust of my lover, my climax came quickly - and explosive as a cannon burst, and I felt the wetness of my own semen splatter across my thighs. Ludwig was abandoned to his own passion, however, and did not slow, and several more waves of intense pleasure overcame me before he withdrew suddenly and ejaculated on the sheet. He collapsed suddenly, falling down against the pillow and closing his eyes. I lay back and a little away from him, so that we could cool down from our intense exertion.

"Oh god," he said in a small voice. "Oh god, I love you so... it almost hurts." His eyes remained closed, but his restless hand reached forward and, finding my arm, caressed it lightly. "I love you so, Robert, oh god."

"What a mess we are," I commented matter-of-factly, embarrassed by the intensity of his words.

"Leave it, leave it," he murmured, his eyes remaining closed. "I'll change the bed in a bit." When at length he opened his eyes, I gazed at him soberly, and he met my gaze.

"So, if we aren't wiping up now... would you mind explaining what happened at Frau Voigt's tonight?" I held my breath just slightly. I had no idea what had affected him, but something clearly had.

"Please, don't be upset," he said, and a tear escaped his eye, and he raised his hand to wipe it away.

"Whatever it is, I won't be upset," I promised, now definitely fearful.

He sniffed a bit, and went on. "After we played. Henriette asked me to the pantry to help with the coffee because her servant was making the cake."

"Yes..."

He gazed at me with a look both bewildered and tormented. "Well - she, she made a pass at me!"

"What do you mean, made a pass at you?"

"She tried to kiss me! Put her arms around me and - if I weren't so tall she would have succeeded! She settled for taking my hand and placing it in her bosom!"

"So what did you do?" I strained to keep a laugh of astonishment from breaking out of my mouth.

"I withdrew it, obviously!"

"And?"

"And what?"

"So what did she say?"

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"She said that she loved me and wanted to take me upstairs right then!"

"With her husband in the parlor with twenty guests, and coffee boiling?" I was more amused than outraged.

"Yes!" The look of pain on his face passed into a sort of astonishment. "I concluded she had gone mad."

"I hope you had the good sense not to say so."

"No, I said that I respected her, but also her husband and her marriage, and that it would be impossible."

"I hope that was enough."

"No, dammit, it wasn't enough! She wanted some declaration!"

"From you?"

"Yes. She insisted! She would not let me go! She said 'but have you no feelings for me?' with that look of pitiful appeal... you know how she looks..." He wiped another tear away with the back of his hand and fumbled amongst the ruin of his clothes for his handkerchief. After blowing his nose, he folded the handkerchief neatly, and began to dab, absently, at the drying semen on my leg. He was clearly agitated. I waited.

"And I had to tell her the truth, Robert. I fear you will disapprove."

"What would I disapprove?" I said with a rising alarm.

"I said that you are my only love, and will be until I die," he declared.

I reached for him, and placed a tender kiss on his trembling lip.

His eyes welled up with a fierceness that filled me with longing for him, even as I lay in a tingling state of gratification – that look drew my passion for him out of me as though it were a tangible thing.

“I do not disapprove,” I said, placing another kiss on his mouth. “I think Frau Voigt knows that we are lovers. She just doesn't take it seriously, that's all.”

“She obviously does not take her husband seriously if she thinks I would make love to her in the sitting room while her husband entertains guests in the parlor! And her hands on me – oh Robert, it was all I could do not to recoil.”

I had to refrain from chuckling. Poor Henriette, in her attraction to Ludwig, had failed to notice his sexual revulsion for women. Whenever they flirted with him or made eyes at him, he would often turn away with embarrassment and confusion, which was universally misunderstood as shyness. But it was not shyness; and I knew this. Ludwig was never shy. A life on the concert stage, from the age of nine, had inured him to the public. This quirk, however, was almost always overlooked, which made women try even harder to gain his attention, and they would flock to the best seats at his concerts so as to get nearer to the beautiful blond virtuoso. What envy must Henriette Voigt be feeling for me, who had won his heart?

“And so,” I said taking his hand tenderly, “this is what caused you such a frenzy of desire in the hall?”

“Yes. Though I don't know why.” He leaned back then, setting down his handkerchief at last – I had been about to bat it out of his hand, but his restless fingers almost never ceased in some activity or other, even when he was at rest. And he began,

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

almost unconsciously, to move his left hand against his thigh as though practicing a scale, and I watched it as he spoke again. "You don't dislike women as I do, do you, Robert?"

"No - I like them nearly as much as men." His eyes widened slightly. "I said nearly. I have never loved anyone the way I love you, Ludwig."

"Would you marry and leave me?" he said in a small voice.

"No."

"You sound sure."

"I am sure." We held each other for a long time before sleep came.

I was sure, because not only was I intent at that time upon never being married, but I was also quite certain that Ludwig would not live very much longer; and that I would not love another as long as he lived. And I was right.

Etude X

Dr. Carus (II)

I woke immediately to the sound of a slipper scraping on the threshold; and my heart began immediately to race in my chest, for it meant that my secret lover was returning once again to my bed.

I felt his hand upon my shoulder and turned toward him as he took me in his arms. "My dear boy" he whispered gently, and enveloped me in kisses so soft, so tender, that I found myself believing that I was being caressed by a woman. Such was my fantasy, but it was no woman, it was the bespectacled Dr. Carus, who by day tended the madmen in Schloß Colditz -- my one-time physician who had drawn from me my secret desires, first as my psychiatrist, and then as my lover. It was during the spring and summer of 1827, after the loss of both my father and sister.

We never spoke of it by day; and no incidental movement or gesture ever betrayed the intimacy that grew between us in darkness. It was as though two realities prevailed by alternations; one of them in sunlight, and the other, in candlelight and shadow, and the two did not meet except in the deep privacy of my fantasy; not even as our eyes met during the

course of meals, or in conversations. No word was spoken to indicate this profound change in our relation. And yet, I was keenly aware of him at all moments, and waited with quivering anticipation for the sound that now came, and the flicker of a candle in the doorframe that announced his stealthy arrival.

Little was said, even then, but the language of desire seemed eloquent enough. This affair, these assignments, marked the earnest beginning of an erotic adventure that had only barely begun in my childhood dalliance with Rosen in Zwickau. Here, it reached an intensity of passion and pleasure for which I did not find words for many years, and which could express itself only in the interplay of voices on the keyboard; and later, more completely, between the piano and orchestra in that first concerto. It seemed then, that he was the orchestra and I the piano, if I were to wax romantic about it. But this grew, over the course of the many weeks of my stay at Colditz, the bittersweet sadness of my grief, interspersed with horror when I beheld the prisoners in the Schloß, and the warm evenings of music with Dr. Carus and his beautiful songstress wife, about whom I fantasized as strongly as I felt when I held her husband in my arms by night and felt his mouth upon my own. It was as though my desire was provoked by the image of the woman and the body of the man, in a curious, complex combination. This, however, I did not question.

This night, I could tell immediately, was different. Dr. Carus came to me that night, as he had several nights previous, and his embrace, as ever, was as tender and careful as it had been the first night, and perhaps, just the slightest bit tentative as he held my finger to his lips in an unspoken question - "*Do you want me tonight?*" that kiss asked, tentatively, shyly, and I reached with that hand and pulled him down bodily upon me, my arousal already evident as it throbbed against his slight form in the thin dressing gown.

"My - my dear boy," he stuttered slightly, pushing my hair back with his fingers and gazing at me for a long moment... "There is something I wish to try, if you are willing, and if not, I would not ask again..."

I was impatient with his inquiry - I wanted only for him to take me, not to ask, not to discuss, but to do as he willed, but he waited, in his tentative way... until I said, "Yes. Ask." I whispered, barely able to reply, and I squirmed beneath him.

"I wish to - to penetrate you, to sodomize you..." he stopped, as though shocked by the words he had uttered, and I could hear the silence as he held his breath.

"Yes," I whispered again, more quietly.

"I promise it will not hurt in any ---"

"Yes" I whispered, fiercely, almost crying out - I was desperate to stop him, and yet to urge him on, to do what he must do, what I must do. Isn't this what I had wanted, what I had waited for? How many months - years, had I waited for Rosen to whisper that into my ear, to make the suggestion I had dared not make, as we lay fearful in one another's arms in the quiet woods? And here, the moment had arrived, that I had both dreamt and dreaded, and I nearly cried out once again as I felt his mouth upon my aching organ and the gentle movement of his fingers as he explored me with an almost excruciating slowness, like the mesmerizing movement of a bow across the bridge of the cello, causing the lowest string to set in motion, just below the range of hearing and strengthens into a suddenly audible note, the feeling of tangible pleasure that arose from his probing, provoking an involuntary moan of arousal from my throat. He did not stop; he knew that sound, which meant "Yes."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

He made love to me with an agonizing slowness. It would seem he had to discover the very depth of me with his fingers before allowing himself entry, and for this, ultimately, I was grateful, for I felt nothing but a fierce and hungry pleasure when at length he seized my legs, and pulled my knees over his shoulders, straightening up to enter me at long last. And he spoke, asking me some question to reassure himself that all was well and that he offered no discomfort, and I could say nothing but hiss in reply, "Yes, yes, yes..." until he filled me with himself with a murmur of joy and relief. Interminably later, I seemed to awaken to the increasing violence of his thrusts, and the building up of a powerful tension within me such as I had never felt before, and had never been released. I felt a moment of fear for the intensity of the desire that accompanied it, the desire that focused entirely upon the need for him to continue, harder, and faster - and I reached my hands out to pull him into me, as though it would draw him more forcefully toward the resolution of that tension which I could no longer stand -- and the unendurable climax broke over me like an ocean wave, and I let out one brief cry before it drowned me. The force of it overtook me with a spasm that very nearly dislodged him in mid-thrust -- and I felt, for once, the fierce pressure of his hands holding me down as he impaled me once again with the power of the desire that drove him. I shuddered uncontrollably, and lay still.

He withdrew, quietly, and from somewhere beyond, I became vaguely aware of his industrious hands, and a soft cloth that soaked up the semen that had spilled between our bodies. And tenderly, following that moment of fierce rapine, his hands returned to caress my face, and bring me back gradually to consciousness, and I grew aware once again of the room, the bed, and the man who lay beside me.

He offered me the gentlest of kisses, and once again, I felt the

soft lips of a woman upon my own, and he whispered kindly to me, "Are you well? Did you enjoy that?"

"Yes... yes," I whispered, as I had whispered already a hundred times that night. And then, with a gush of unstoppable tears, I cried, "I love you."

"Yes," he echoed. "As I have always loved you."

Étude XI

On the Mulde (Rosen II)

Escaping... across the Kornmarkt, down through the Hauptmarkt, past the Dom St. Marien, and out onto the high road that led across the Zwickauer Mulde, we ran until we were breathless, and had to slow down, and take a more leisurely pace in the broiling heat. School had finally ended. Gisbert had completed his Abitur, and was already making plans to start university at Heidelberg. But that was in the future: for now, there were the two of us, and the summer stretched open before us as we sought the cool waters of the Mulde.

Gisbert, longer of leg, reached the river before me, and heedless, on the open bank, stripped off his clothes and waded in, gasping. I sat, more circumspect, watching him. He rose from the water and turned. "Robert, come in!"

"Just get naked right in the open?" I argued.

"There's no one here!" he cried. "Come on!" Reluctantly, casting nervous glances through the trees, I stripped off my school clothes down to my underwear. Gisbert glared at me, disgusted. I waded in, shocked briefly by the cold water, then swam toward him.

"Afraid Marian is going to come walking with her aunt and catch you with your privates on display?" he laughed, and spit a mouthful of water at me, catching the side of my face. I filled my mouth and spat back at him, but with worse aim.

"No - my mother. She thinks I'll get sick from the silliest things..." I said, somewhat hurt by his comment, and felt suddenly chilled. "I better get out."

"No!" he objected shrilly. "Come swim for a bit. I promise your mother won't come."

"Ha! You couldn't." But I did not get out of the water right away; I swam with my friend into the deeper part of the river. I tried to draw him away from the bridge that led east toward Reinsdorf. I feared discovery, not particularly by my mother, but by anyone who knew my parents and would tell them, since we were so well-known. Gisbert, however, was completely carefree, and cavorted naked in the water, despite my reserve, and delighted in dunking me and trying to race me from the rocks toward the shore, but there was too little area in which to have a race between the rocks here. I grew tired quickly, and quit shortly thereafter.

He followed me out. "Now what are you going to do? Your underwear are all soaked through." He grinned at me. "Didn't think of that, did you?"

He had me there. I picked up my pants and shirt, and gathered up my shoes, with the socks carefully tucked into them. "Let's go a bit further along here. Then I can lay my things out to dry." We walked between the trees, Gisbert still completely naked, into the shadows and greater privacy. There, we found a small clear area with large oaks, and a patch of sunlight nearby. I took one final nervous glance for intruders, stripped off my soaked

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

underwear, laid them out in the sunlight, and retreated to the shadow of the nearby tree, to find a soft place to sit and wait, piling up my clothes behind my head as a makeshift pillow.

Gisbert came up next to me and sat alongside. "You're all dry, why aren't you getting dressed?" I asked him.

"It's hot," he replied, settling down and putting his pile of clothes behind his own head.

"It's not that hot," I answered.

"Well, also, I didn't want you to be uncomfortable sitting here naked with me all dressed."

"Oh. Well, it's all right. I don't mind," I answered. "Or maybe you just like lying around with no clothes on."

He laughed. "Maybe I do! Or maybe just with you." I gazed up at him curiously. Gisbert was a very serious student; and it was only the joy at passing his Abitur and the completion of Gymnasium that brought out the carefree person before me; or so it seemed. Only a week before he was studying uninterruptedly for his examinations, and had no time for a game of chess or even to listen to me play a new piano piece. The serious Gisbert was now gone, and he was unwinding from the great effort. I was very aware of the nearness of his naked body, and when he pushed himself up on one elbow to lean toward me I flinched, slightly. "Robert, are you embarrassed for me to look at you?"

"A little," I admitted.

"Look at me. I'm not embarrassed. And you shouldn't be. I like your body." He touched my shoulder lightly. I looked over at him. Gisbert was very thin, thinner than I was after a winter of

influenza, and his elbows, shoulders, and hipbones stuck sharply from his skin at angles. He gazed at my body frankly. "But you did look stupid in your wet underwear. You look much better naked." He ran his hand down from my shoulder to my elbow and leaned toward me and I thought he would say something to me, but he did not. Instead he put his mouth on mine, lips slightly parted. My heart seemed to stop, and I froze. He leaned back. "Robert?"

"What?"

"Do you mind? If I kissed you?"

"No," I murmured, suddenly hoarse. "No, I don't mind." He kissed me again, this time harder, and I returned his kiss. I could feel his arm come around me and embrace me as we kissed, and he began to stroke my back lightly.

"Do you like this?" he queried.

"Don't talk, Gisbert," I said. We lay like this for some time, his gentle hand upon my back, stroking me, as though soothing me, while we kissed. By slow degrees, it seemed, our embrace became more passionate, and he was atop me, caressing me in that gentle way while we kissed. Some time later he moved slightly away, and we sat up. The sun was lowering, casting shadows over us, and the air had become noticeably cooler.

He turned so that I could see his face, and there were tears in his eyes, and streaks running down his cheeks. He was weeping.

"What's wrong?" I asked, putting a hand on his arm.

"That was the first time we kissed. The first time we really kissed. I have wanted to do that for five years. I don't know why I waited so long."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Hm, me too. Well, maybe four." I was blushing, my face burning hot.

He laughed quietly, and wiped his face with the back of his hand, and sniffed. "I will be going away next month. And I feel stupid because I waited so long, and I love you." Fresh tears welled in his eyes, and I felt my own heart aching.

"I love you too, Gisbert." He turned to me, eyes shining.

"Maybe you could join me in Heidelberg, then."

I nodded. "If my mother would let me. She wants me to go to Leipzig."

"Perhaps you can convince her." He put his arms around me again. "But in any case, we have no time to lose."

We explored each others bodies with our hands and mouths, clumsily, and with some embarrassment, and I closed my eyes when he knelt between my legs and took my organ in his mouth. The sensation was so intense that I climaxed almost immediately. Gisbert seemed more able to endure, and I eventually succeeded with my hands and mouth, to please him. We lay in each others arms for an hour afterwards, saying little, speaking only with small caresses and tender kisses. It was, for both of us, our first experience of sex.

By the time we were forced out of our idyll by the gathering mosquitoes and flies in the early evening, my clothes had dried, and we emerged from the woods, arms around each others' shoulders, no longer simply friends, but suddenly, lovers.

Étude No. 11

Glock

By the time Glock arrived at his office, I had already wrung my hat shapeless with nervousness. He came in, doffed his own hat and coat, and peered at me through his tiny glasses. "And what is this then? You're never up at eight in the morning, unless sick. Problems sleeping again?"

I gazed up at my friend, and he caught sight of my face, eyes swollen and red from weeping, and said nothing. "Well well, come in. I haven't anyone else to see this morning, so I am at your disposal."

It had taken me days to make a firm enough resolve to see Glock, but after nights of sleeplessness interspersed with uncontrollable weeping, I knew there was only one thing for me to do. I explained to him first about my failed engagement, and about the pain of Ludwig's death. And of course, my mother's. He nodded briefly, and then rose and went to his work table.

"I think it would help in any case for you to have a morphia. You have to have some sleep, and you will in any event feel more relaxed from it." I nodded. I had not come to him for morphia often, so he knew I was not looking only for a drug.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Now," he said, patting the inside of my elbow and twisting a tourniquet on my upper arm, "I think you had better talk to me about what you think is tormenting you, your grief and loss aside."

He inserted the needle into the vein, and tapped the barrel, while I held my breath. It pinched, slightly, and following that, I felt a sudden rush of dizziness as the drug began its work. He helped me to lie down on the sofa, and sat down in his chair, facing me.

I did not know why, but the first thing that came from my mouth was, "Do you know what love is, Heinrich?"

He laughed, quietly. "Well let me see, sometimes I think that is what is left after my wife has finished nagging at me for coming home too late and missing dinner, that results in her remaining interested in having intercourse with me the same night."

"So," I replied, taking him entirely in earnest, "It is to do with sex."

"No - no, I don't think that is what I meant, Robert. Is that what is bothering you?"

"Maybe. Yes. I might have wanted that girl, Ernestine, but it was just not workable. Not at all."

"Why not?"

I struggled to explain. "It is - it is because I didn't feel love. Attracted, yes. Did you know that we were..."

"You weren't!" he registered genuine surprise. "You had her? Before marriage, even? Does the Baron know?"

"Yes, yes. I confessed it all to him. That was why, actually. It just wasn't workable!"

"Because you found you didn't desire her?"

I nodded. Already, I was feeling drowsy from the morphia, and that which had anguished me all night -- the hidden, mysterious pains of my mind -- seemed to lessen, and continue to lessen into unimportance, even as I spoke them aloud. "That is just it! How could that be the same as -- how I felt for Ludwig? Oh, my poor doomed Ludwig!" I sighed, and once again the tears rose to my stinging eyes.

"So -- it was Ludwig you loved. Did you have sex with him too?"

"Yes, of course. Many times."

"And that was good?" I could hear the hint of something in Glock's voice -- disapproval? Disbelief? I did not know, and I ached to question it, the shadow of doubt in him.

"Well -- yes! I would be with him today if he had not become so ill."

"So why did you leave him when he worsened?" he queried.

"We agreed to it. He did not want me to suffer, and being there with him, knowing how I felt about him, would not help him. So he agreed I should go. But I felt terrible about it!"

"All right," Glock sat up straight. "So -- you had a lover you were happy with. You courted the girl, knowing you would lose him. But you were dissatisfied with her so you abandoned her too."

"I did not abandon Ludwig!" I cried.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"All right. But you feel like you did. Do you not? It is obviously distressing you."

"Of course!" I wept, and this time, the tears did not abate, and Glock handed me a large handkerchief and waited for me to blow my nose violently several times before he spoke again.

"But you do not feel badly about abandoning the girl."

"No - not really. I didn't love her. It would not be right."

"You should not have taken her virginity in that case."

"You think I don't know that!" I argued, my voice now querulous.

"Let me ask you something. Perhaps you will consider this intrusive. Have you had more than one relationship of a sexual nature, with men?"

"Yes," I murmured, now subdued.

"How many?"

"I don't know. Perhaps a dozen. Mostly in youth."

"When you were seeing Dr. Carus, did you tell him about any of them?"

I looked carefully at Glock and said nothing for a long minute. "Why did you ask me that just now?"

"Carus was your psychiatrist before you went to Heidelberg to school, was he not?"

"Yes, not in a formal way, but - yes."

"Meaning?"

"He volunteered. As a friend. He did not charge me for it."

"I see. So did you tell him about your homosexual affairs?"

"Yes, I told him."

"And he was not your official doctor then..."

"No."

"What did he advise you?"

"He said it was normal for young men, particularly ones with such dominating mothers."

Glock laughed again, briefly. "That may be true. I hope you don't think that I am asking out of any prurient interest, but did you ever have a relationship with Carus?"

"Whatever do you mean?" I said, rather too loudly.

"Just what I meant. A sexual affair."

I lowered my eyes and said nothing.

"So - you have. Is that why you don't see him for treatment any longer?"

"Yes. In part. Yes - I did have an affair with him, in the spring of 1827. After my father died."

"Isn't he about your father's age?"

"What are you saying?" I cried again.

"Shhh, I don't mean to agitate you, Robert. I just think this is a rather unusual collection of events. Do you think Carus turned you completely toward men?"

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"I wouldn't say so. I have had relations with women, too."

"Oh? How many?"

"Three, if you include Ernestine."

"Hm. A dozen men, and three women. Do you consider yourself promiscuous?"

"I haven't come down with syphilis yet." I felt fiercely defensive.

"That isn't the definition of promiscuous."

"I know," I retorted. "I am just saying."

"My opinion is, that sex impulses are normal. I hope you understand that. And all of what I am asking is to a point."

"So what is your point? Get to it!"

"I have known you for - what, seven years now? You are a very sensitive person, Robert. And it would seem, you are a very impressionable one. I wonder if you would have become so involved with other men if you had not had this relation with Carus. It was quite immoral of him to have pursued you at that age, I might add."

"All right then."

"It would be immoral of me to pursue you, and we are the same age, give or take a year. It is the position of a doctor to be objective. Not to ravish someone he finds vulnerable and attractive."

"He didn't - " I objected.

"He most certainly did!" Glock thundered. "It completely ruins my respect for him, I might add. However, I have long suspected, and I glad you did not deny it."

"Very well."

"Now about Ludwig. What would have happened had he not died, and you and he took up a life together, domestically, as it were?"

"It did not happen."

"It might have done. Did you make any declarations to one another?"

"Damn you, Heinrich."

"So - you did."

I was furious with him, but I could not deny the truth that underlay his question. "I told him I would not love another while he lived."

"Fortunate for you he didn't live very long."

"That is dastardly," I murmured, furious.

"Still very fortunate. What do you think would have happened to you as a composer, if it became known that you were having illegal relations?"

I was silent for a long moment. I had, in fact, thought about that, many times, and pushed it out of my mind every time, during the spring of the previous year. Even while my heart ached at realizing Ludwig's illness, I knew that my declaration of fidelity to him was no lie, since I knew he would not live.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"My life and career would be over," I intoned. "Damn you, Heinrich."

"Do you know what love is, Robert?"

"I hope so. I thought I did."

"Do you think that confiding in and depending upon a professional physician who seduces you at the age of 17 while you are mourning your father, is love?"

"At the time, I thought so," I replied, my voice sounding very far away, in the dream state induced by morphia. "You seem to think otherwise."

"Yes, I do think otherwise."

"Do you think I would be loving you if instead of trying to work out this dilemma with you as a medical man, I seduced you in a morphia dream?"

I did not reply. I wept. The thing I so valued in Glock was his almost uncanny understanding of the odd workings of my thoughts. In addition to being a dedicated follower of my career as a composer, and a steadfast friend, he was always consummately professional, and did not remain at that cold distance so many doctors did, when I appealed to them to help with my arcane emotional problems. Which is why time after time, I returned to Glock.

At length I shook myself back together, dabbed my face with Glock's now-saturated handkerchief, and sat back up.

"No. No. I see what you are saying. However, this is not an easy point of view to take in, all at once. So - do you think there is something desperately wrong with me, for preferring Ludwig to the girl?"

"Maybe not," he replied, noncommittal.

"Then - what are you suggesting?"

"I think I am suggesting - perhaps you haven't really experienced love yet. Or perhaps once. It may be that you loved Ludwig, but he is gone now. Or you loved your mother as well, and are suffering from the loss of them both. But you are still very young."

"Still young. I feel old. I feel as though I am so near to death."

"But you are not. You have just had too many losses for someone so young. My parents both still live. I have lost only a sister, and that was at birth. How many losses have you had?"

"Too many. My parents, both, my sister too, my brother Julius, all of my uncles..."

"And Ludwig."

"And Ludwig." I sighed.

"Don't you think that would affect your interest in others? Or how much you trust them?"

"I am not sure I could love anyone else."

"You say that - today."

"That is all I feel right now. The weight of a gravestone on me. I felt when I had the grave built for Ludwig, that it was my own."

"But it is not. Perhaps it was a monument to a first love." His words echoed strangely in my ears. *A monument to a first love.*

"Do you think anyone would love me, Heinrich?"

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Well – who am I to say? Men are not to my taste. But you seem attractive enough by normal standards. A little red around the eyes," he joked. "A little predisposed to weeping. You will need larger handkerchieves made for you."

I smiled, in spite of my sadness. Oddly enough, despite the painful turn of our discussion, I felt mysteriously relieved, as though the admission of my loves and losses, had dispersed their power over me. Or perhaps it was the morphia. Or a combination of the two. While I ruminated silently, a habit Glock was long used to, he passed me a fresh handkerchief from his drawer and relieved me of the sodden one.

"Heinrich, what would you do if you were me?"

"Ah, the heart of the matter," he replied. "Yes, what would I do. I think that the best thing for you to do is to select a compatible female of suitable background, and marry her. Preferably sooner, rather than later."

"My mother told me before she died, she wanted me to marry Wieck's daughter."

"Ah, Wieck's daughter. The one you said had --"

"A big nose."

"But she seems quite lovely enough in other ways. And she can play your piano pieces. So what would be the problem with that?"

"I think she's more talented than I am," I joked, my humor returning to me by small degrees. "Her father would not approve, either."

"Well – select someone. Someone female. You will not ever fit

into this society by dallying with men, however familiar it might feel, and however comforting. Had Ludwig remained living, and you had not taken up living with him, you might have had a wife, as well as a relationship with him, if that were found suitable to all concerned. I cannot help but think despite your protestations, that you refuse to consider the values of society."

"No - I do value them."

"And I still think, despite all, that you have it in you to love a woman. If you give it a fair chance. Trying to change your sentiments while your lover is dying is from the beginning, a doomed proposition. But now he is gone, and you are unattached and lonely. It is time to find a wife, this time as a serious endeavour."

"Ha, ha, a serious endeavour. Like the magazine. I almost lost the magazine, due to losing Ludwig. I almost lost a lot of things."

"Is the morphia helping you? You seem calmer, by degrees," he commented.

I nodded, but then, I found myself drifting off into a waking dream. I was vaguely aware of Glock closing the blinds, and leaving the room. And for some time, perhaps hours, I found myself drifting, and considering what life might be like, if I undertook to fall in love as a serious endeavour.

Étude XIII

Late Revisions 1851 - Liszt

I found myself unaccountably excited at the presence of my guest. This was the first time I had met Liszt personally, though we had corresponded frequently, and I had reviewed several of his works including the latest Hungarian Rhapsodies. His letters were flattering, intriguing, and his reputation, throughout Europe, enormous. I nurtured a hope I dared not speak about, that he would find me worthwhile to mention to his relatives in Eisenstadt, who were connected intimately with the former employers of Schubert, the Esterházy de Galanthal.

I tried to put this notion out of my mind. It was his grandfather, after all, who had served them. I had no idea if Liszt had such connexions, and to mention it seemed gauche. He was courteous enough to write, and that was good enough for me. He could not be coming to me for a review in my little magazine - I thought. The Empire was far larger than Sachsen, his connections, far wider than I could hope to reach myself, or even with Ludwig's family and influence. I sent a confirmatory letter to him inviting him to meet me at the Coffé Baum, and to have a session in the Gewandthaus after my lessons were concluded, the week of his arrival in June.

To my shock, his letter by return mail asked for hospitality. In my house. No, this must not be. I will be sick. I will have a headache, I will... something... but there was no time to reply. He knew this - he would be arriving at week end and I could not stop him, not even by one of Felix's fast carriages, or by carrier pigeon from the banks. No.

I spent long hours pacing, I arranged for Henriette to send her housekeeper and laundress -- and had everything polished, and did not sleep for two nights, waiting. I had lurid dreams, and reread all of his letters again, and reviewed his manuscripts, and then stalked out to the Coffé Baum and drank champagne until they sent me home in a carriage, nearly unconscious. I was beside myself with anxiety.

And the knock came on the door. By the time it did I was ill, and I am sure I looked it. Nauseous and headachy, and not at all grand enough to entertain him. I was attended by Frau Stenzl, who had come with me from Heidelberg, and she took his card and brought it to me. I held it numbly in my hand. I could not turn him and his baggage away... but had I known what would unfold, I might have done, and ended what little career I had, with more dignity and less desperation -- for there he came.

He took my hand as though seducing it with his restless fingers, and placed a kiss on my cheek - oh, he was not shy, this Hungarian. And reeked of pomade, and sweat, and travel, yet strangely disarrayed, like my father after a long fever. Febrile, avid. Like the impression I had of Wagner when I first met him. And I regretted instantly his presence on my door step, intimidated utterly by his severe beauty, the contemptuous curl of his lip. He regarded me as boldly as a lover would after long acquaintance and longer intimacy, and stared me down in my own hall.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"Schumann!" he ordered, the crackling lisp of his accent catching the name and turning it into a foreign thing. "I hope I am not surprising you. At least, you are dressed. I need a smoke. Come."

And that is how it began. There was something resistless, and irresistible, about all he said and did. He sat idly by, rarely. He smoked constantly, moved constantly -- a narrow, compact wolf of a man, fascinating me with his every movement.

We had a flurry of activity that first night, where he smoked one cigar after the other and filled my ears with news of his concerts and his acquaintances. I ached to take notes on his conversation with me, so that I could remember the endless string of wealthy and important people he knew and whose attention he commanded. It was - glamour.

I soon tired and flagged, but he held me up with the almost ceaseless energy of his charm, and well after midnight proposed the impossible feat of performing my latest published work, for me: the Carnival. I could not say no.

Grabbing my last bottle of chilled Merlot, he poured for himself, drank deeply, and set the glass down on the newly polished Stein I had bought with my latest publication money. I winced. Then, with a volume I did not believe possible, he pounced upon the *Introduccio* so as to make me gasp, and I nearly spluttered up my wine. I sat in a horrified fascination as this virtuoso with his aggressive style, destroyed with exactitude and grace, my greatest work to date, and yet - I could not speak. The not-yet-empty wine glass danced across the top of the instrument and I looked on with horror, imagining it spilling, until he seized it in his rising left hand, gulped down the remainder, and cast the glass into the settee behind him, pausing hardly at all between pieces. I was astonished, I was disgusted. I was - transfixed.

He finished the piece with aplomb, crashing to a conclusion, and my ears buzzed in the silence. I did not move for some time. And to my shock, as if the other insults were not enough, he advanced on me and seized my collar in those same hands, and pressed his lips to mine and broke off, standing back, before I could reply, and returned to sit down. "I do like that. Thank you. I shall make much money on that. Now where are the rest of them? You are hiding them somewhere. Sonatas, concerti..." He cast his eyes around as though to scare a sonata out of the shadows.

"What?" I finally managed to say. I felt stung in a thousand places, as though assailed by bees.

"Your other work."

I chafed my hands. "Herr Liszt..." I began, formally. "Thank you for your interest in my compositions. But I did not know you wanted to perform them..." Quite to the contrary, I had thought he wanted me to perform, or to critique, his.

"Of course I want to perform them. I will make you great. I know just the people. But you have to write, and you have to write with the passion you have in this." He waved his hands at my manuscript as if it were a piece of clothing he had picked out. "I want to provoke that passion, to wrestle it out of you."

I stared at him. "You want to what?" I began to feel quite uncomfortable, as his hawklike, severe visage bore down on me. What would he do? What could I do? I did not know.

"To make you great, Robert. I can call you Robert, after all, we have known one another for some months already..." he smiled toothily and rose, retrieved the wine glass he had tossed (leaving a stain,) and picked it up, filled it, and plopped down

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

on the bench beside me.

With all of the politeness drilled into me by my mother I murmured a thank you for his kind attention and moved to call for Frau Stenzl to come and show him to my very modest and recently dusted guest room, which he would most likely be disgusted by. I was mortified, but flattered, but his hand arrested me by gripping my arm. "Robert."

I stared at his hand. I could not believe this. Was he this rude to detain me by force? I froze as his hand closed upon my arm with a greater violence. My heart pounded with confusion, and no small element of fear. Was he a madman?

He turned, not loosening his hand, and gripped my other arm, nearly touching his forehead to my own as he faced me with an intense look I shall never forget. What would he do? What could I do?

"What?" I cried at last. "What do you want of me?"

"What I want," he said, staring, "is all of you." I stared back, like a rabbit staring at an eagle who holds it in its claws.

"But - why?" I clamored, asking the most idiotic question I could construct.

"Because you are He." He stared into my eyes for long moments. Yes, I decided. He is mad.

"Herr Liszt, please unhand me."

"No."

"No?"

"No. Not until you consent."

I was stopped again. Consent? Consent to what? "Very well," I said, thinking of nothing more to say. "I consent." I had no idea what he was about, and did not care to know, just that he stopped staring in that arrogant way, so that my heart would still. And that he would let me go.

He finally released me. "Good. I knew you would see reason."

He rose, took his wine glass, and took it upon himself to ring the bell for Frau Stenzl. "She is still about? I smell like a cattle barn. First, to the bath. Then we will have time."

He rang, and in due course the weary matron appeared, probably waiting all this time so that she could retire. I was still confused, but momentarily relieved at his retreat. I got up to get ready for bed, for I was now exhausted.

I went to my bed, still puzzling over his bizarre behavior, when a knock came on the door, and I thought it was the housekeeper, reminding me that I had left a candle burning in the parlor. I got up and went to the door. Again, my arm was gripped, and this time he drew me to himself with such rapidity I did not know to resist, and began to kiss me roughly. I tried to draw away, which intensified his efforts, and I staggered back. To my own disgust, I felt a thrill at this unexpected assault which reminded me uncannily of Ludwig in the heat of his passion. Even the aggression of his piano technique, reminded me of Ludwig. For the crucial moment, I felt my lost lover had materialized in the darkness, and in my exhaustion and confusion, responded to him as though it were he. Liszt did not slow, and drew me toward the bed inexorably, reaching roughly beneath my gown, to free me from it. I had never been assaulted so swiftly or violently, and was passive in his arms as he undressed me, and did not push him away as his hard and powerful arms enclosed me, subduing me. I gasped then, but

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

could not, in my astonishment, struggle. He was atop me, striving to gain purchase on me, grasping with a roughness I had not known in my whole life, and when his hard nails dug into the flesh of my shoulders, the spell broke and I began to struggle. He released me, withdrawing, and sat up.

He withdrew from somewhere, perhaps a pocket of his gown, a cigar, and lighted it from the candle that still burned beside my bed. "So you wish to wrestle first do you?" He inhaled in the darkness, and exhaled, breathing somewhat heavily. He did not offer me the cigar.

"Herr Liszt..."

"Call me Yanosz, it is my Hungarian name," he replied tersely.

"Herr Liszt," I pleaded, ignoring his instruction, and sat up. I was aroused, and that must be obvious to him. "What in god's name are you doing?"

"You consented. I am enjoying your hospitality, and taking you for the trouble." I hoped the candle's shadow obscured my gape of astonishment.

"I - what?"

"You consented. Now are you going to hold still or do you want to struggle some more? I'm going to get sweaty again if I have to hold you down. You are slightly too tall for me."

At last I understood. He thought I was playing some erotic game of domination with him. "Listen to me, I did not consent to anything. You asked for rooms in Leipzig. You have *rooms in Leipzig*. I did not tell you that you could be free with my person."

"Yes you did." His voice was coy, and its tone made it clear, he was not in the least convinced of my sincerity. "Now are you holding still or are you struggling? If you change your mind I might bruise you."

"You are mad!"

"Yes, isn't it fun? Do you want some of this cigar? If not I'll put it out and we can have it later."

I shook my head.

"Now where were we? Oh yes. I believe you had decided to struggle." He rose and let his robe fall to the floor, revealing him both naked and erect, his hair splayed out from him like a Fury's, loosed from its ribbon. He was, in the half-darkness, a virtual double of my Geliebt. And as he approached me once again and I held up my hands to defend, I felt the will to do so flee me, so possessed was I by the spirit of my dead beloved. My pleasure was provoked by this double, as he took me in his mouth and hoisted my knees to immobilize me helpless. I did not beat upon his shoulders... I was slain. My will was one with that of my assailant, and I found his violence reassuring, even when he hurt me, the shock of it was a realization. He withdrew, slightly, when he had drawn my climax from me with his mouth, and reached for a glass that I had not seen placed beside the bed. "You changed your mind I see. No matter." His voice was low, flat, but slightly hoarse. I lay helplessly on the bed, less satisfied than stirred by the thrill of wondering what he would next do, and not knowing what.

He sipped from the glass, offering it to me. I took it, sipping briefly. It was absinthe. My throat burned and I choked.

"Drink some more, it will help you rise more quickly after you're spent." I raised the glass again. Again, choked on the

bitter liquid. He took the glass from me, businesslike. "Now, are you ready for me?"

"What?" Again with my wonderful, stupid questions. I could see he was intent upon taking me, and I knew he had not the patience or caring in him of my beloved, whom I dreamed about nightly. What, then?

"No, you silly naif, you aren't ready," he laughed humorlessly, and knelt between my knees. I felt a cold finger touch, and then enter me, a sudden sensation of burning and fading to warmth, and then, a jolt of pleasure as he smeared some morphia paste liberally with his probing fingers, testing professionally, dabbing some here and there around my now slightly aching scrotum. And where he touched, a tingling heat, a pervading warmth, and a sudden rush of mad and pleased sensation. I sighed both with surprise and pleasure, for I realized, if he would hurt me, I would not feel it. He waited, with the patience of an eagle spying the rabbit far below his aerie, and sipped once again from the glass of absinthe. "This will take a few minutes," he intoned, dabbing the tip of his own organ with the same paste, and when finished, rubbing it into his nostrils. He reached forward and touched the end of my nose, and squeezed the nostrils shut, his fingers still containing a residue of the paste, which where it touched, lighted everything with flame, as it did my nose as I inhaled. I sneezed, violently, and my head buzzed with dizziness.

"Gesundheit," he said quietly. I swooned. Interminably later, however, I felt a movement as a bird of prey swooped upon me, and the claws of his desire bit into the center of pleasure he had created inside me, and while he ravished my body, I disappeared into a curious dream of being carried aloft, a small, helpless rabbit, in the biting claws of an eagle.

Some hours later I stirred, and he lay atop me still, and the numbness induced by the drug had faded definitely. I shifted beneath him to try to get comfortable, to escape from under the weight of his body, and he woke. "How do you feel?" he asked, some slight warmth creeping into his voice.

"Strange, I feel strange..." my voice came from far away still.

"That is how it feels, Robert, to be famous."

Étude RPN

Felix

I shook my head firmly. "No. No I don't want to go to Eisenstadt." Felix was giving me that look, which said he knew more than he was letting on, but was not going to admit it, even if put to torture.

"So - why not? Do I get to know why not or is this just one of your petulant mysteries?"

"Felix, why is 'no' not an answer for you? Isn't 'no' enough?"

"In this case, it is a rather dramatic statement. They are the chief employers of all composers and all orchestra pieces in the Empire. To refuse to accept hospitality at all - is a statement. A rather significant one. I thought you wanted to publish in the Empire."

I gave him a dark look. I could see this was going to be a difficult confrontation. Felix was determined to introduce me to Prince Johan, and I was just as determined to avoid him. My relationship with Liszt, and its difficult aftermath, still stung. What was worse, was the letters I began to receive from Liszt's new protégé, my former acquaintance, Wagner.

My detestation of Liszt's political wranglings grew with each passing year, and my unfortunate liaison with him, so naively entered upon, hung over me like a terrible storm cloud. If I could succumb so facilely to Liszt, what would the most powerful man in the Empire do to me? Oh this, I could not do... Oh. No. Not even under Felix's protection. How could he protect me from the Empire?

I stayed with him a few nights before he convinced me to talk to him about it. I wrote long and maudlin letters to Klara with specious excuses, praising her concerts, promising her my undying love, and spent long hours soaking in his luxurious bath with him and making love in a languid way.

Felix was a Hedonist of the first order. To him, work came first and always, and when work was done, pleasure reigned. I was not so orderly nor so disciplined as to follow this and relied upon him for it, as it were, a spa of sensuality in the sumptuous privacy of his house. He had servants, but they were inconspicuous and respectful.

He had a Flügel in his rooms, and we need never venture beyond the end of the bed to the piano or to the violin, and he composed with violin as often as with piano. And he listened. For hours, he listened, doing nothing but lying still in the bath, while I composed, and lavished an adoring kiss on me when I completed another phrasing of the Symphony. This seemed to be the only way he could draw it out of me, for I was far too panicked by his plan for Wien to do anything, and he was silent on it, completely. I knew nothing for three nights but his tender caresses, his sweet murmuring, his undemanding mouth. And I clung to him, in desire and in fear. Until... until..

"He came to see me, you know."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

Felix looked up over his spectacles and lay down his pen. He was sipping coffee, and writing the bass voicings for his oratorio. To his credit, he did not say 'who?'

"That is why I cannot go. Must not go."

Silence. Watching. I nearly cried out in frustration and tossed my pen at him. "Are you listening Felix? I said Liszt came to me!"

"Yes, I heard that."

"He -" I stopped. I chewed on my pen. I rose and lighted a cigar, just to irritate him.

"Oh not. That." He waved me out of doors, and I left to smoke, pacing on his balcony.

I returned an interminable time later. "You know he fucked me."

He shrugged.

"God damn you Felix have you nothing in you?"

"I know you have had others. I have a wife. You know I lay with her, she has been pregnant a number of times... All this is known..."

"Damn you Felix!" I cried.

He chewed the end of his pen, an unusual gesture for one so consummately calm.

"Did you enjoy him?"

"No! Yes! I don't know!" I hated his calm. I wanted to shatter it. He was more maddening, in his own way, than Glock.

"Maybe you could use another cigar. Or do you want me to give you a treatment?"

It was better than immersion baths, but combined with an immersion bath, it washed from me all the tension and pentup hatred that Liszt had pounded into me and which I could not wipe out. And I felt, in his hands, that he was both making love to me and healing me at the same time. I did not ask where he learned it, nor did I care to know if it was something in the Jewish pharmacopoeia, or in the Kama Sutra, but I grew unaccountably warm and pleasant at the sight of the unassuming apparatus he slipped inside me gently and let fill with mineral water and oil... and I grew still, very very still. He explained that he had learned from his physicians that all disease is introduced by either food or by environment, and that the bane of a sedentary life was a stilled digestion, and this was certainly very true of me. He was more active, being a conductor, and abominably thin, but I did not have his strength of constitution, my eating habits, slovenly. And I, as the female partner, was a rude recipient of sexual attention as I grew past youth... but he had a solution, literally. I lay in his arms for this procedure while he soothed me, and drained the basin away from my sight, while I lay insensible, and for hours later I was aroused, gradually, gradually, as though the sensation of this subtle undercurrent of pleasure were a given, not as much a reward as an expected condition. And upon his return, when I lay far more than ready, he might take me, he might not, as I willed it, and I willed it far too often... it did not matter to him. He cared only for me, selflessly. He would have chafed my broken hand for a week, it did not matter. He never raised his voice.... So why?

"He... drugged me, and took me by force."

"Mmm hmmm... " he replied, noncommittal, stroking my chest,

his violinist's fingers plucking gently at the hairs that he found to pluck, pizzicato, descending the scale to the aching font of my desire, and as I yearned toward his hand, aching, desirous, he would make me come to him, always, always. He knew the politics of submissiveness, the politesse required of someone to whom pleasure is always denied unless selflessly offered -- everything about him was a graceful motion of musical pleasure. An angel of music in the body of a lyre, he forced me by his casualness to a rage of sensual aggression, and I forced myself against his hand, insistent, and he smiled. Merely smiled, and I grew hot from it.

"Do not expect that from me, I am incapable of such play," he murmured, sucking delicately on the end of the fingers of my injured hand, one by one, which he had wept over so bitterly. Felix, do not weep over the hand that does not write but only plays the klavier....

"I don't want that from you... no that is not true... I have dreamt of it many times, in a rage of desire, but never with his face... his contemptuous face, only... yours, Lieber..." I kissed him deeply, longingly, I put myself into his passive arms and begged him to take me, and when he did not, buried my head between his thighs to aggress him into his desire with my mouth. Yet the more relaxed and gentle he became, the more animated did I. He knew how to do this to me as no one did. I was empty, empty, dying to be filled. He had emptied me out already, and I was alight with the need for him. He was languid, and I grew angry...

"I want you! Please."

"I cannot take you by force, Geliebt. That thought is abhorrent." His quiet words shocked me.

"I did not want you to --"

"Yes, you did. You are angry with Liszt for his seduction and you wish me to seduce you this selfsame way. No, no.... no I will not." Tears glistened in his eyes, though he lay ready.

"You are not he!"

"Does it matter?" My voice rose in a parody of lust, to some mad unreasoning cry, but he was quiet and still. "I must... I must... you cannot leave me this way, in need."

"I cannot. Unless you dispel this desire for me to harm you... I must not."

No, as ... as before. I raised his passive hand and placed it on me, to force him to touch me, and it was impossible, impossible. He was inert.

"I am not your attacker," he said pointedly, the resonance in his voice provoking my desire and fear simultaneously.

"No.... no, yes." I was overwhelmed with confusion. To my complete surprise, I lost all desire, and collapsed against him, sobbing wildly. From somewhere beyond my pain, or even conscious thought, I sobbed out the painful tale of Liszt's occupation of my rooms on the Inselstrasse, the nights he intruded upon my passion and twisted it to his taste, while by day filling my ears with obsessive ranting on his plans for his career, and my own, in Wien and Prague and Esterházy. I was helpless... while he drank his way through my wine cellar, modest though it was, read my personal letters to Klara and joked crudely over their sentiments, and even more loudly over her gushing letters to me. He even laughed loudly at one that referred to him, and threw it down on the floor in contempt.

"I think she believes that I will be marrying you rather than she, Robert," he had said. "She hasn't a large enough cock for you I

warrant." I was silent in the face of his vulgar abuse. It was clear that he was jealous of her, but also, from her letters, that she was jealous of him. She knew we had taken up as lovers. What was I then, simply their plaything? This... I detested. A plaything, something for them to use to generate music and pleasure for themselves.

I wept in Felix's arms, my passion fled from me in the pain of what outwelled, bleeding, from my soul. And he murmured into my hair, wordlessly, some music from his own boundlessly compassionate soul, as though he had nothing else in the world to do but hold me and restore me to life.

After an endless time, I lost consciousness and slept, and in my sleep, I wept and cried out, more terrified than when I was a child riding on the high road with my parents from Chemnitz to Zwickau, with the moldering corpses of Napoleon's defeated army piled high and reeking by the roadside. I burrowed into him, a child seeking the unutterable comfort of its mother's breast, and he embraced me chastely, as a mother might. He sang to me then, a wordless lullaby, and after long hours of the night I woke, myself again.

Felix lay awake, and I craved a cigar. I gently disentangled myself from him, and threw on my robe, wondering when I had ever felt so lost, so vulnerable. I could not recall, for it had fled me in the weeping of the night before. I went out, pacing, to the balcony once again and stood half-naked in the pitch darkness, where beyond, the Opernhaus and its gardens were illuminated by gaslights. Beyond their glow was the Berlinerplatz, and the road to my rooms on the Inselstrasse. Too painful to return to, now, in the flush of memory. I would stay a few more days with Felix. I returned to the bedroom, leaving the door slightly open to let in a cool breeze. He had wakened fully now, and lay with the coverlet turned back. He had on his face a curious expression and I stopped, wondering.

"Come here, Lieber," he said in a low, desirous tone, musical and thrilling.

I went to him, curling up next to him in the bed, and his swift hand went round my chin, raising it up to kiss him.

"I want you," he said, simply, his breath on my lips. And kissed me deeply, his mouth parting slightly to allow his tongue to explore my mouth. I grew alight, again, and I said "Yes" in that barely-heard whisper from so long ago, the whisper of my shy acceptance, my coward's response, which I dare not speak aloud.

"I wish to take you," he explained, in the small drama of his desire, "I wish... my dear", holding my fingers to his lips, "to woman you." And a thrill of pleasure ran completely up my spine as he spoke the litany of Eros.

"Yes, yes," I whispered again, as he moved to cover me swiftly with his body, the graceful form which had lain largely passive to my intrusion, now quick, catlike, as he grasped my organ and woke me to readiness.

"I cannot wait, I must have you," he spoke again, this time into my ear, and then his tongue slid into my ear, and only moments later, he had spread me out beneath him and entered me rapidly. Unresisting, I moaned aloud as I accepted him. He had rendered me deliciously helpless. The one thing I craved intensely. I strained back against the flesh inside of me, to draw a greater thrust from him, and this threw off his balance and he slipped free of me. I sighed, awaiting him... awaiting him...

"Ah no matter..." he murmured, and turned me to put me facing from him, on my knees, he moved behind me and I felt one steadying hand upon my hip and again the delightful intrusion that caused me to tremble pleurably, and he grasped

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

me by the hips and thrust swiftly, to which I answered with a lingering moan, and once again, strained to move back against him to receive his full length, and the full measure of his desire, into my womb. "Ah Felix, bitte..." I wanted to say something more, but had become incoherent by the time his practiced body wrought from me my pleasure, and the climax that spilled from me, spattered Felix's silk sheets. For long hours, we lay holding one another once again, in peace, and he kissed me a thousand times, a thousand, thousand times, and with each kiss, a wound was forgotten -- a vulgarity, erased -- a jealousy, eased. After we slept, we made love again in Felix's sumptuous bath, the iniquities of Fame, sealed beyond the door. We did not speak of Eisenstadt again.

Étude XV

Alyssa

The carriage had finally stopped jolting. I was exhausted, weepy, and dejected, and had long since crushed my hat shapeless, smoked all of my cigars, and drunk empty the flask of medicine that Reuter had so thoughtfully provided, which was not enough by half for a trip over the Allgäu. Beautiful, but treacherous, winding, endless. And now, the great city, full of crystal and gaslight, tantalizing to the eye in every way -- the promised land of Music. Why had I come? I sagged, wretched, in the seat, my back aching constantly, no matter how I stretched or sat, and I dared not make the carriage stop again for fear of angering my travel companions further. Silently, I wept, and realized what a terrible mistake I made, coming alone.

I was to meet Alessandro Alyssa, the Italian impresario, and to take an apartment Reuter had in Wien, occupying it until he joined me the following week. I was nervous lest he be delayed, and leave me alone in his empty apartment, which to me was almost worse than having no place to stay and having to pay for an hotel. I held in my hands an advance schedule for the Alte Oper, and an invitation to meet the conductor of the Esterhàzy's Eisenstadt chamber orchestra the following evening. I would be a wreck.

I prayed myself back to the hills of Grimma, beyond the Allgäu, trapped in a foreign land with clipped foreign accents and filled with wealthy, bold-eyed Italian youth and Bayerischen bourgeoisie. I dabbed my eyes surreptitiously. "No no, all is well," I explain. "The smoke from the charcoal burners, makes me quite teary-eyed, I am from the country after all."

Frau Bickenbach tightens her mouth, she knows I am lying, and murmurs in her husband's ear, he shakes his head. *Leave the boy alone, he misses his mother, have some pity for god's sake.* While I appreciate his compassionate glances, I am angered. Nine and twenty and I look a boy still? Will I never be taken seriously? I must get a new hat. Perhaps, grow a mustache. Both.

I alighted from the carriage after twenty hours of Frau Bickenbach's frowns, borne down by the weight of her coldly maternal disapproval, shivering and short of breath in the coal-laden air, straight to Reuter's empty apartment. I do not look back, and take the way on foot, wearily.

Alysson was late. I had the address correct, double-checked it six times, then seven. I waited, took a walk along the storefronts in the Marktplatz, considered buying a gift for Thérèse. No no, conserve - buy the gifts at the end of the journey, after you are paid. After an income is established. But I could not hold back, and entered the most promising of these, keeping an eye on the café at which Alysson was to meet me. I bought a small book of verses, and hurried back to the café, and inscribed a dedication to her, timing it with a small verse of my own, "Von deiner ergebener Robert, abend, 20 Juni, 1838, Wien." I sighed.

When would Alysson come? I began to pen a terse note to leave with the manager before returning to my lodging, when the harried Italian appeared. At last. I picked up my coffee and raised it to him in greeting - there could be no mistaking him. I

hoped I did not still look like a babe at the breast, as the Bickenbachs would have me. I was wearing one of Reuter's more manly hats, and had removed my earring. Not the style in Wien. The mustache would take longer in coming, if at all.

"Is it you? It must be. Who would wear such heavy clothes in summer but someone as ethereal as you!" he gushed. He took my hand, and as I feared, kissed me. I blushed, hoping there were enough Italians around to appreciate that I was not being accosted in public by a lover, but by an insensitive Italian businessman. I tried to pull away in a parody of sexual rejection and repulsion, but he had me by the arms.

I hissed, "You are embarrassing me no end, please stop!" And he dropped his hands. I sat down, agitated, and placed my hat beside my stein. I said nothing for several long moments as he prattled on, heedless of my discomfort.

"I have cancelled the appointment I was to bring you to, for there is someone I must arrange for you to meet. It will take several days. You are not in a hurry I take it?" he exhaled, and with surreptitious skill I do not possess, he beckoned from the thick crowd the barmaid, and ordered his wine.

"And you, another?" I shook my head. I had already had quite enough of him, and would not drink with him to assuage his rude manners. When he turned back again after placing his order he regarded me brightly. "I didn't quite think you would be so handsome. You would be a smash with the ladies of this town. You do bed ladies, I hope..."

I was appalled. In a single motion I rose and threw my napkin on the table, making sure that I had paid for my last round, and turned wordlessly on my heel, forgetting Reuter's hat on the

table. I fled as fast as I could down the Marktplatz until Alysso's sharp hand caught my elbow and I whirled and rounded on him, enraged.

"Don't be so sensitive. I was complimenting your appearance."

"Are you a professional music agent or a procurer?" I snapped, loud enough for anyone to hear. "You had best decide quickly, for I am about to change my plans!"

He colored, ashamed, and let me go. "Roberto, prego..." He wrung his hands. "I have gone about this all wrong, I am sorry. Please accept my apologies."

He looked truly distraught, and I softened. I did not want to endure the carriage ride through the mountains to certain defeat, and have to explain to Reuter why I fled like a rabbit, back home. But neither would I let him handle me so facilely.

I opened my mouth. "Listen to me, Alysso. You are not dealing with Franz Liszt. I am not from this nation, and I am not a plaything for your social entertainments. I am a composer, a publisher, and a critic. I deserve at least that level of personal respect. If you do not have it in you to provide me that courtesy, let us part now and speak no more."

"Of course, Signore Schumann," He bowed, changing his manner completely, to one of almost royal respect. Around me several people glanced at the silk-clad Italian bowing to the nondescript German in the Marktplatz and looked away, murmuring. This, in its way, was almost worse than kissing me.

"For god's sake!" I cried, and led him back to the café. There seemed to be no end to his posturing. There, I discovered Reuter's hat and also, my portfolio, and grew very concerned that I would begin losing things at cafés if I was not extremely careful and disciplined. I sat, glaring at him.

"First off I wish to say..." he began, smiling pleasantly, not the least offended, "that I am glad you passed my little test. I could hardly endure another cock-sucking adventurer from Germany hopping in a carriage to come chasing the ghost of Schubert, and dying in the Hospice of St. Peter because I didn't get to him soon enough to avoid the bathhouses."

I stared at him. "You do this on PURPOSE?" Oh, now I was truly angry. I began to tremble.

"Of course!" he laughed. "This city attracts the weak, the vulnerable, and the highly talented. I have advertisements in every German newspaper, hoping to turn away the most vulnerable with a spank on the bottom before they are ground up and spit out. I owe it to my Emperor and Lord de Galanà to attempt to repair our reputation somewhat. He has even passed a law preventing expatriates and foreigners from doing business here without a partnership with a reputable firm."

"Foreigners? You mean, Germans."

"Yes. I mean Germans."

"So they cannot... what?"

"Get corrupted by our decadent late Hellenic style."

"Well I might as well return home forthwith. For that is exactly what I had intended to do, to reestablish my magazine, here."

"Oh! Well I thought it was to become famous for all of your excellent piano publications," he rejoindered brightly.

I wished, wearily, that his play-within-a-play would end.

"Who is this man you wish me to see?" I asked, rubbing my

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

eyes. The coal-burners were bothering them. The noise, even moreso. At least, the night was growing a bit cooler, and I would soon stop sweating so terribly under my coat.

“He is the grandson of Bach.”

I stopped rubbing my eyes and stared at him. “They... but they are all dead!”

He shook his head firmly. “No, not dead. You know Leopold Mozart, I presume.”

“No, I know no one here but Reuter and the Conservator Fischof. Reuter has a summer home he does not use and I am staying there. Klara is writing to the Censors on my behalf, but I hold little hope of her success with the Metternichs, despite her popularity with them.”

He winced. “That was premature. You might have consulted me first. Most of the censors are in their pay, to skew the favor of businesses here toward their friends and family.”

“It is done. There is nothing I can do about it now,” I replied, disappointed. I hated politics. And politics here were thicker than the score of a Haydn symphony.

“Well, in any case...” he began to reply, and just then the barmaid came with his wine, an entire bottle of an incredibly expensive - French - perhaps, vintage. I regretted my earlier outburst and refusal, for this discussion was becoming vital quickly, and I needed something to drink.

“May I get something now?” I said rather meekly to the girl.

“Of course, Herr von Heine...”

I blushed, remembering that I had given the girl a false name. Alysso was amused, grinning mischievously, but said nothing.

"I am an admirer of his, that is all..." I stammered.

"False names, you must be nervous!" Alysso replied lightly.

"No, I always do this in foreign places. I do not wish to be known."

"Ah. So you use the name of a famous German poet. How very secretive." I nearly scowled at him. "A titled one."

"It is obviously not an Austrian name, which was my point." Why was I explaining to him? Was it illegal to give an assumed name in public to a messenger or a barmaid? Maybe it was. I gulped nervously.

"Herr von -" the girl repeated patiently.

"Pils" I snapped, if only to shut her up from saying the name again.

The girl went away, snapping her apron angrily.

"About the... yes Leopold Mozart, I would like to meet him. Fischof is going to introduce me to some others after the opera on Saturday. But who was it you had in mind? A Bach?"

"Johann Gottfried Bach. Grandson of the composer, and a son of Carl Philippe-Emmanuel."

"He lives in Wien?"

He nodded. "Plays the piano, like you, and I dare say would be a companionable sort to share his tales of his family. He took

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

lessons from Johann Sebastian himself, before his death. A fascinating story at the very least. Use it in your magazine. Make a thousand thaler."

"Yes, perhaps... " I felt appeased, somewhat. He knew where I was going.

"But about this censorship issue? You are saying there is no hope if I do not become an Austrian... this cannot be for the reasons you cite. There has to be another reason."

"No other reason will be forthcoming in this café, Herr von Heine." I blushed furiously at his use of the invented name.

"Would you cut that out?"

He smiled mischievously.

At length, after his wine and my beer were gone, I followed him to his home. With misgivings. And there, I had an uncanny premonition about my brother Eduard, and heard the piercing tone of the funeral horns. I held my head, while he poured the wine, and when he saw me swoon, rushed over to me, to lay a cool hand on my brow. He said gently, "Travel does not agree with you Herr von Heine."

"Schumann will do."

"Will you do?" he equivocated, raising my chin with a gentle hand to gaze at him.

I searched his eyes. "What is this, what is all this infernal play, Alysso?" I could see what he would do, before he did it, and I reached out a hand to capture his before he laid a caress upon me. "I asked you... a question. I am not a whore. Do not treat me as one."

"My my my, you are older than you look." He smiled, undaunted.

"Yes and I am no fun at all. And I have an abominable headache," I muttered, disgusted with myself and him.

"I know you, Roberto. I know... what it is you want. Your engagement, and your woman and your posturing aside."

"That is very percipient of you," I retorted.

"I can protect you here. From them. From the de Galanthàs. You will need it. Johann is a terrible whoremaster of the pretty. He will tear you up, and leave nothing for the crows."

That did intimidate me. Johann - Esterhàzy? The same as Schubert fled from... Oh Schubert, annihilated in the dust. I had an idea what had happened to him now.

"Then protect me. But I am not going to fuck you. I am not a whore!"

"Of course not. You are still somewhat young for even me."

"Young? I am eight and twenty..." I objected, understating my age, bizarrely.

"Young," he intoned.

"Then protect me. I will honor our contract. Keep me away from the..."

"Wolves, Herr von Heine. The wolves in the forest. I believe we understand one another."

He opened a new bottle of wine, and over the bottle, we spent the entire night discussing the hidden, and horrible side, of the

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

music industry in Wien. And at the end of it, he walked me safely back to Reuter's rooms, with a list already in my hand, memorized and later destroyed, which would keep me safe from a great city full of Esterhàzys and Liszts, eager to devour a young, naïve German rabbit, and bid me good night with a slight, chaste embrace at the door.

I did not sleep that night. I wept.

Étude RVG

Johannes

Klara and I had a row. I was indifferent to her petulance, and I grew determined that I would follow Joseph's recommendation to go to his concert in Kiel, where he would play my Second Violin and Klavier sonata with the young man, Brahms.

She was pregnant, she was angry, and she was in a mood to blame. And I was miserable. The invitation was a blessing in every way, and I was sure I could put it right with her, in time, but she despised it when I chased pianists. Despised it. And took it as a horrible insult to her talent, that I would wish for someone else to touch my piece but her. This was always so. And it made me seethe. I am not her property! This I detested about her, the proprietary nature of her lusts, her artistic pride, her sense of place, that she would dictate to the composer who should play him.

I prepared - in stealth. Perhaps she would not heed. She usually let me be, if she knew it would help me compose. If she thought I was straying, or spent excessive time socializing, she would track me like a hound does a rabbit, as though I was her composing slave, until she had me in her jaws, relentlessly quarrelling with me and interrogating me until I either fell to

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

pieces, weeping, or locked myself in my study. I lived and breathed for her concert tours... when I could be peacefully alone with the children.

After endless argument, she insisted she accompany me, and we lit off in a carriage, I with growing misgivings, until we arrived at the concert and were seated in the Parkett, in very prominent seats. People murmured at die Wieck and her little tag-along composer showing up at this undistinguished event.

Truth to tell, he was not a brilliant pianist. Serviceable, yes. It is a hard Sonata. I wrote it in part, in pique, to test Klara's virtuosity against the even greater virtuosity of Joseph at the violin. For no one surpassed him. It is virtually impossible for any but the most sensitive and dedicated virtuoso, to play, since the duet is enwrapped in an intimacy that violin and klavier must share. If they do not do this, if they are not *simpatico*, as Felix and I were, the piece is a war. It is a test of a duo.

Joseph insisted that we dine together, and in deference to his fine intuition, I invited the young Brahms to visit with us in Düsseldorf. We could use a guest pianist for the D minor when Klara was confined again, in any case, and it was my choice to recommend. He was good enough to perform in solo, and he had his love of my compositions in his favor. And he was also, though shy and awkward, beautiful to my eyes. He arrived, promptly, without the protective custody of Joseph, who had to go on to Hamburg.

I did not expect that he would bring his compositions, however, and when he drew them out and placed them on the klavier I grew intrigued. Klara clapped her hands in pleasure at him, since she was sour at me for producing so few compositions for klavier only in recent years, and was showing me her displeasure by her delight in him.

I do not absorb the quality of things all that quickly, when played by an amateur or a youth. I tried instead to listen to the intent within it, and there was much. Much, such as I had found in Ludwig, in Gade, in Bennett, and even moreso in Felix. As I watched him play, I felt a familiar excitement build, and as I sat and drank and smoked with him, I felt the return of a sense of camaraderie I had lost many years before, when Felix died -- a warmth that pervaded me. I sat awake long that night when he stayed with us, sitting up in my dressing gown, smoking, and examining his scores.

Whilst sitting up my study, she came, to my slight shock. She had not done this for ages. She offered me her cheek to kiss, which I dutifully kissed. I loved her, still, after all, if only because she had some lingering respect for my work, for she had done innumerable kindnesses for me when well disposed. And she had given birth to my children, my beloved children. She took my hand and attempted to loose from it his first Sonata, so that she could play it. "Leave it be," I grumbled.

"Robert, do not be tedious. Give it to me. I wish to play it." She stood with her hand out, gown rustling, the scent of gardenia she had just applied to her hair, as a means to soften my attitude to her. To become less cold and withdrawn. And the very act of manipulation, in so doing, made me grow colder.

"Not at this time of night. Leave it be. He will know, he will waken and know we are discussing him, and fiddling with his work. It will unnerve him. Let me study it and go on. I will come to you later if you have a lust on you."

"You impossible man! That is all you think of? Do you not think I have finer sensibilities than this - do you not realize that finally a young man of undiscovered genius has crossed our threshold

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

and represents the hope of the future for all of us? His popularity could restore your own if you played it correctly." She grew flushed and angry, confirming my suspicions.

I regarded her tiredly. The old theme. "He is very young, very slender and very blond too. Do not overlook the most important attributes of a composer, Klara."

She nearly - but not quite - slapped me then, but her hand came up. Her hand - larger than my own when she grew to adulthood. I was a petulant, lethargic and sharp-tongued wife to her moody and punishing husband. All was reversed here, and this, I should have anticipated. She cared nothing for the children, and did not nurture them in any way -- that was for the women we hired to nurse them, those who possessed normal female sentiments. I should have known that was the price of her genius. Her manliness. If these children had any mother, it was these other nurturers -- and when I was not closeted in my private hell, it was me.

"You are base!" she hissed. I picked up the bottle, wordlessly, and drained the last of my champagne into the glass. And raised it to my lips, deliberately, and drank.

Then I spoke. "Yes well, then, best pack me off to an early exile in Paris or Prague, so you may have a new and promising composer, whose work you can perform with greater success rather than my tired experiments with Joseph. Or better, perhaps you could convince Wasiliewski I am far too mad to perform my own symphony next to Beethoven's, as well as an extra programme, and have the position of conductor for yourself. That, you might enjoy."

Since it was inevitable, the slap, when it came, though stinging, was no surprise. I only hoped that little Ludwig did not lurk at

this late hour in the library to react to her. He would not understand that I was simply drawing the poison out of her before it grew so great it could not be contained. I sighed, and a stray tear escaped my eye.

“Do not be so - impossible!” she hissed. “Now - give me the score, damn you. I will have it perfect by the time he wakes.”

“No you will not, and if you tear it I will tell him you did it in a fit of temper.” I raised my own hand now, defending myself against whatever onslaught she intended. She usually was bluffing this level of violence, but she was harder to predict of late, and this Brahms had excited her nearly as much as he excited me. I sympathized with her in this, at least.

By morning, after a night of weary watching, and another bottle of champagne, as well as several more cigars, I had completed my review of his two sonatas, and had made a sheaf of careful notes in my own cryptographic script which, so far, I did not believe Klara had deciphered. I made a rapid copy, and locked it securely in my cabinet. I did not have the energy to copy out one of his sonatas, nor did I have his permission, so I locked them in as well, and lay down for an hour, securing my study with another key I kept in my shoe. I knew she watched. I knew she waited.

She pretended to sleep when I entered the bed, and as usual I went to her and brushed her cheek softly with my lips with a short prayer for peace and the whispered word, ‘Geliebte...’ and her breathing changed. And so... awake. I tried to kiss her mouth but she turned roughly from me.

“You are drunk. You stink of cigars.”

“You never minded THAT when I was thirty,” I sighed, and shortly, sank into a restless sleep, insensible.

I woke, as usual, as dawn rose. An hour of sleep was a great deal of time for me when working, and an ideal rest. I would have two or three of these rests in the course of a work day, as well as dinner breaks, and when distressed, I would waste half a night in sterile rumination in the library, an empty paper and an impotent, uninspired pen in hand. It was at these times I sat and drank champagne, and smoked, until a bare gnawing of Knillität would alleviate my despair.

Often times the children would come to me and I would write something new for Mariechen, since she grew bored easily with what was yesterday's, and never tired of impressing Papa with her ability to read my impossible script. I had long conceived of writing sonatas for each of the girls, and the melodies of these conceptions tickled the back of my brain whenever the trio would come in, shy of their grumbling scion. And despite my welcoming and softness, they listened to their mother and would be shooed off by her imperious declaration, "Don't disturb your father! He is easily distracted! He will not get his work done and we will starve and then where will we be? cast out in the street, at the mercy of the kindness of strangers,"

Do not disturb your father, he will be distracted.

Not by the children, I wasn't distracted! I adored them, but no amount of entreaty would keep them by my side. All I could hold them with were little snippets of music that I would jot off to keep Mariechen in place, staring, and Elise, imitating my curved and dotted hand, in the margin. It amused me, greatly. What must they think I am composing, in this obscure and rapid hand? Mariechen knew -- I could tell by her wise nod. She leaned over my knee and lisped into my ear, "Beauty unencumbered, Papa... Beauty." And I kissed her, holding her close. God would bless her for that, I knew. For she knew.

I went quietly to my study, and as I did, I saw my guest waiting pensively in the entryway. He turned as he saw me, and looked away, seeing I was in dressing gown and slippers.

“Herr Schumann I apologize, I did not know anyone would be up so early,” he murmured.

“I am always up at dawn, it is the curse of my mind. Come, Johanna has certainly made the coffee, she is accustomed to my habits. Let us sit together. Smoke?” I offered him a cigar which he refused. I abstained, mostly because Johanna detested the clouds in the kitchen. I led him to the morning room, and yes, the coffee and brötchen were laid out with a few slabs of cheese, and Johanna had already fled to the laundry. She did not like encountering me at breakfast, in the sour mood I usually exhibit. This morning was no exception.

I sat heavily. The weariness of the night’s work, and the acid taste of Klara’s rejection of me yet again, lay over me like a storm cloud ready to burst. I ached, and my back nagged me. I am falling apart. I am not three and forty... and I am falling apart. I broke to pieces a brötchen and dipped it in honey, and let it soak on my tongue as I poured a coffee. The youth sat, quiet, pensive, seemingly reluctant to do anything, to disturb my composerly thoughts. His awe of me drained me and made me tired.

“Herr Brahms... ” I began, in as soft and welcoming a voice as I could. “Have something to eat. You are welcome here. I am just a man, and not a wealthy one at that. There is no need to cringe.”

The boy blinked at me, uncomprehending. This would be worse than Joseph, worse than Hiller -- worse even, than Nicola. Where had my small fame brought me, that youths would

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

cringe in my presence? I despised this, and it was not my doing that this would be so. It was the abominable mystique of Miss Wieck. It could not be me.

“Herr... Herr... Schumann.... ” he stammered. “I... I just... wanted you to know.... How eagerly I wished to make your acquaintance and play my Sonatas for you as unschooled and unwrought as they are...”

“What? What what what?” I was mystified by his utterance, which jumbled out of his mouth like a mashed arpeggio on the klavier played by my son Ludwig in one of his rages.

“My...” he blushed deeply, his face as red as a cherry.

“Shhh... my dear Herr Brahms.” I wanted so much to touch his dear head, to reassure him, a gesture sure to be misconstrued. I sat, inert, and gripped my coffee mug. “I am not so old that I do not remember what it is like to sit in the presence of someone more accomplished, having played what comes oozing raw out of my soul. Do not be concerned that I will smite you with commentary.”

To my shock, tears stood in the boy’s eyes. This was too much. Too, too much. Did Klara say something to him? If so, I would slap her, despite my oath never to strike a female. Had she done so, she was unworthy of such an oath.

“I... I, I am so... petrified, I cannot speak.”

“There is no need!” I looked at him severely, hoping to shock him out of whatever delusion had caught him. “Have some coffee, I am a normal man, this is a normal house, we are in a normal home in Düsseldorf. For God’s sake man.”

My commentary was not helping. My glare did not make him

tremble less. And to my miserable shock he fell on his knees, his blond head abashed, against my aching knee. Oh god... not this. What is wrong with him? Is he mad? If so I would need Dr. Königswinter to take him in hand, and he was away at Bad Godesberg. I was astonished, and speechless.

Then, he looked up, tears standing in his eyes. Beseeking me. I stared at him, and my face must have been white. My coffee trembled in my hand, and a trickle of honey dripped from my finger where it had lodged, and dotted my trouser leg inches from his clutching hand. I dared not breathe.

I whispered to him then, "The children will be in shortly. They will not understand, it will make them wail."

My words shook him sane, at last, and he scrambled to his feet, blushing wildly, and staggering back into a chair.

And as I had prophesied, Ludwig glissandoed across the floor in his socks at triple forte, shouting "Papaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" and launched himself into my arms like a cannonball, and I caught him as I always did, even if it threw me back into the seat and caused my back to spasm. My beloved, the namesake of my beloved. He crooned musically into my collar and snuffled for food at my hand like a hungry hound. I set him aright, and spooned some honey onto a brötchen. He opened his mouth to be fed rather than take it from me. I frowned, and shyly, he smiled, and reached out a timid hand.

Klara would have slapped him.

Beyond this tableau, I looked up from the distraction of my noisily eating son, to find the now withdrawn pianist smiling weakly, his embarrassment fled in the emotional moments of my domesticity. He whispered, "You are a kind man."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

“He is my Papa! He is the best man in the world!” Ludwig shrieked, and pounded both fists upon my chest as though I were a kettle drum. I coughed briefly, and patted his back, and murmured something to him in his warbling language, and he warbled back in exact pitch.

“I believe you, Ludwig,” Brahms politely said, his eyes shining strangely. I never forgot that look.

Étude RVGJ

Susanna

The sight of my shredded manuscript, ruined and cast around the piano like evidence of a crime, broke me. As if I could be broken any further. For I was shaken beyond all endurance, the months she was in Russia, and it made me desperate enough to plan definitely upon the end.

I had been extorted from enough. Hiller had found escape for me in Düsseldorf, with a regular salary, because I needed the salary from the Oratorio and the Lieder – kept on a secret set of books by Charles Lamier -- to go to the rents for Claudia, and the treatment of Susanna. Of this, la Wieck had no knowledge. At least, after her father, the old Wieck, had discovered Claudia, he remained in ignorance of the existence of my first and bastard child who still lived and was mad, and still resided with her mother in Grimma-- in a tiny farmhouse down a twisted road between Grimma and the Schloß Colditz. The view of that pink limed lintel, yawning over the Muldetal, haunted me. And the mad dark eyes that peered at me when I visited there -- with their malevolent intent -- how had I fathered this? How did Claudia endure her, without servants to keep her contained and free from self-harm?

Everything was tied up or locked to keep her from dashing herself unconscious against them. Sometimes, her hands had to be bound to keep her from slashing herself to ribbons. And it pained me greatly to see her. And Claudia, her hair tied back in tight braids, to keep from getting her hair pulled and her flesh torn by the wild girl, regarded me with sober duty when I came, flustered in the extreme, in one of Felix's private carriages, to Grimma.

"Robert you do enough," she said to me, serving me tea and cakes. I watched her soft hands, not the slightest bit changed from when she first embraced me. I was entranced, sobered, and dejected.

Is it her fault that she was not acceptable to my mother and that I let my mother dictate to me my future? Is it her fault she had compassion for me, and sheltered me in her arms during my weeks and weeks of weeping and need, after my father's death? Our mad child, the constant, horrifying memory of the fruit of what kept me alive those days... Was it worth it, that she live in constant and ongoing pain? How could I have a moment of pleasure, knowing this and seeing it? I could not send her to the surgeon for abortion of the baby - it was against her will. Felix said go, a baby is just a body before it is born. And I would not even suggest it. She would not burn in hell, in her God's eyes, for the love she so openly gave to me. And I would not have it. I would pay, whatever it took. I would marry her...

But she would have none of it.

"You endure that woman, for my sake," she said sadly.

"She is not so bad. She does love me. And it is not your fault... it is mine. The flaw is in my own seed, for my son Ludwig is already showing the same violent evidence. Ludwig shrieks. It

is just as my sister was -- just as I might have been had I not held on to you when I might have gone mad instead. Have you tried giving her an instrument to bang upon?"

"I gave her what you sent," she replied mildly. The toy piano. "She makes odd sounds."

"And Herr Dr. Glock, what says he?"

"He says belladonna will settle her. He uses a new technique of mesmerism and herbs. It does calm her for days, sometimes."

"I am told that such children are prodigies. Does she write or draw strangely?"

"Yes oh yes. Music as well, and odd humming."

"Warbling? Like a morning dove cooing, or like a quail?"

"Hm, not like that."

"I wrote a song for Ludwig called the warbling song. He knows it is my rendering in piano of his voice as he sings, as he makes his communication to perhaps beyond, the spirits. Such children are prodigies of a kind I only slightly comprehend."

"As you were, my love." She stroked my cheek fondly, a gesture so gentle that I welcomed it entirely. How could she be so compassionate, after I had condemned her to a farmhouse at the crooked road-end of nowhere? She knew that her caress would, but did not intend to, make me weep. She could not help but call me that, *Geliebt*. She loved me so deeply that she refused to have me sacrifice even one thaler for her, one moment of my career; and so I lived as an ascetic, outwardly tending my sober books, and inwardly churning for the constraints that my own excess put on us both. On us all. I did not deserve such devotion, and never have.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

I spent some time attempting to interest Susanna in sitting with her Papa. She ran in wild circles and threw herself down, heedless of my attention. She tore her pinafore and held it over her head, naked legs kicking. And I looked at her mother in confusion. "She is like this without stop?"

And when I said these words she swooped upon me like a slender duck with a white breast and lighted on me as though on a sea. "You, man, you... touch my face!" she seized my hands and clapped them together repeatedly, and I allowed this, frowning. Then she took my passive hands, wincing slightly as she squeezed the bones of my broken hand, and placed them on her shoulders and shoved downward. "Make me small!" she demanded. She was immensely strong. It intimidated me. I rooted myself to the seat. Claudia stayed quiet, as I did, listening to what might be encoded into her speech.

"Put me in the barn!" she ordered, pointing stentoriously toward the stables, locked securely against her entry.

I shook my head a slight bit.

"Susanna," I spoke quietly, as I would speak to Ludwig. Quietly and musically.

"Suuuuussss" she repeated hypnotically

"Annahhhhhh" I said, catching on to the game.

"Sussss!" she said brightly.

"Bist so suss, Suss."

"Bist! Spisst Pisst!" she glissed. Yes. Very very much like Ludwig.

"Suss, sass, spass.." I hissed. And she repeated back to me again, entirely involved.

"You understand her speech?" Claudia interjected, unable to restrain herself.

The spell of her sonority was broken by the utterance and the once passive and responsive girl jerked as though slapped, and shouted: "Spricht nicht mehr! Geh!" Then coyly, putting her head down on my lap and clutching the lunch napkin that still lay there. "I will be alone with my Papa."

Her passivity with me, or periods of it at least, encouraged me, and things improved each time I saw her, whilst in Dresden. I postponed my suicide repeatedly, knowing that my sudden departure would destroy their lives. Not to mention my other children's lives. I hung on, despite the grim horror of my own despair. I visited them regularly, and it got better.

And then... Hiller's offer. I would sacrifice my time with them, and in exchange could provide her a professional doctor and a nurse full time, and a real home in the town. This, I could not resist. It was for this I turned down the editorship of the *Leipziger Musikalische Zeitung*, and the apparent comfort in Leipzig it would give me. No, no, I must take the better paying position regardless of the separation. Claudia agreed.

It was not as though we were lovers, after all... simply parents. Grieving parents, watching a living death and nurturing within it, a quiet hope of resurrection in the mind of my tormented one.

And two years of frenetic work passed, as Lamier arranged for everything with them, and all was well. I dreamed often of her, learning alphabets and making strange rhymes with her nurses

and her tutors. But like a strike of lightning, Lamier arrived by carriage, and his eyes were creased with care. He had terrible news for me.

“Claudia.”

“Claudia what - she is ill? Dead? The girl stabbed her?” She liked knives, that one.

“No but she does not have long. To have another guardian for her will be more expensive. I have two thousand thaler left of your bonds.”

“Oh god!” I cried. “Consumption?”

He nodded. Oh dear god... like Ludwig, like Julius, like Thérèse. Consumed. I decided quickly. “Klara is gone in Russia. She will be gone two more months. Bring Susanna to me.”

“You are sure?” he looked at me with some shock and suspicion.

“Bring Susanna to me,” I repeated. “Give Claudia everything she needs to be comfortable. Send her to the hospice of St. Augustine in Bern. Or wherever she wishes to be. I will spare the expense of the visit; she will appreciate it. All the morphia she needs until it is done. I did not do this for Ludwig and it has cost me nightmares for a decade. I will not have it in her case. Let her breathe easy until her time comes.”

Charles arranged for Susanna to travel with Glock since he was coming to see me on another matter. And with the miracle of the Eisenbahn between Leipzig and Nürnberg, and another track between Nürnberg and Stuttgart, the journey that once took me two weeks took them five days, and a carriage between Stuttgart and Mannheim brought them to the Eisenbahn which brought her to me in Düsseldorf in less time than I expected.

I had Königswinter's confidence, and he had a private estate on which to house the doctors and tutors, but this was not as yet established. He would charge me nothing for this - it was part of our agreement and at Hiller's express request. What I had done to deserve this wealth brought to bear on my behalf, I could not fathom. I was not in a position to question it. And so Susanna would stay with me in Brühl until Königswinter was ready for me.

I went there to work on the Mass in C -- my final work. After I had given up any hope of writing another opera, my first having failed with the public.

Her attendant was there, but Glock could not stay, and I was dismayed. I woke and went walking, as was my usual habit, and noticed a stealthy movement at the stables. There were no animals housed here. I cracked open the door, loose in the doorjamb, thinking her secure in her bed and under the watchful eye of her attendant.

I heard laughter. It was barely even sunup. I crept in, and lighted a lamp inside the entryway. Definite voices: her coarse uncertain laugh, and a low response -- a male response. "Sussss," the voice said and I trembled and dropped the lamp. Someone had my girl, and I had allowed it, somehow. This would out. This would destroy them and me both! A stranger in Königswinter's loft! The lamp tumbled to the ground and went out, but did not shatter. I picked it up, quaking, as I heard a growl, which made me stop.

I gathered all the strength in me and lighted the lamp again, and hurried up the ladder. What would have happened had I slept? My mind was crowded with thoughts of death and horror. When I got to the top I hardly dared to look. "Suss!" I cried.

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

She lay naked and outstretched on a bed of hay, her riding cloak beneath her, and atop her was a half naked boy no older than her, blond puffy hair disarrayed. He turned with a sort of challenging smirk, which faded when he saw me.

“Get off her!” I shouted, shaking my fist at him.

“Go away.” he shouted back, grasping at her breast, as though to incite me to violence.

I advanced on him, the inevitability of violence crushing me down. I put down the lamp, and grasped him by the shoulders and pulled him off – Luckily for me, he was relatively slight. He did not resist once hands were upon him, and he drew his trousers up and fled.

That left my mad daughter staring up at me with malevolent challenge, her thighs spread.

“Put your hands on me Man.”

“Suss, it is Papa.”

“Put your hands on me Papa I wish it! She lunged at me with the speed of the mad, and grasped my belt buckle pulling with furious strength. “Put your hands on me Man!” she ordered and my balance was lost and I fell down on her, one knee crushed against a beam as I fell.

“Suss!” I cried in agony as her hand worked furiously to free me from my clothes, tearing open my trousers with her claws. Her touch burned my flesh where it met mine, and I finally grasped her shoulders, she raised her legs and kicked at me in anger, not getting the cooperation she desired, and I threw the cloak across her body, holding her close, like a trembling victim of drowning.

"TAKE ME NOT TAKE ME NOT!" were the last coherent words she spoke before her screams began, and continued on relentlessly. I carried her down as she thrashed, almost falling twice, and she was loosed from my grasp and nearly fell from my grasp both times. I must not let her die, I must not let her kill me...or all is lost...

I got down from the loft with a fury kicking inside the cloak, her screams unstaunched. The attendant, a Holländisch matron, came running in purple-faced shock, seeing me carry the girl naked in a cloak, my trousers unfastened and in disarray. "Herr Schumann what? Susanna cease! Give her to me!"

As the girl was taken from my arms I had a fit, and fell unconscious on the ground, and woke up an hour later. I never saw her again. And they never told me why. And I did not ask. Glock refused to speak to me of it, and I had no will to inquire.

And when I returned to Düsseldorf upon Klara's return, my last composition -- the Romances for String -- lay in small pieces around my piano in the study. I sat up all night, and the next day, and the next night, silent, with cigars and champagne. And as dawn rose, I slipped away from Mariechen who was guarding me that morning, offered my silk kerchief it to the toll taker on the bridge, climbed onto the embankment, and committed myself to the water at last.

Étude XVIII

Johannes (II)

I woke again, in agony. The motes of dust seemed to drift in the columns of painful light, and I cried out. My voice was distant, as it always is when I am heavily drugged. I first knew that distance, that remove, when Glock treated me with morphia. And I always detested it in a peculiar and intense way. But this distance was profound, irretrievable, and I wondered if there was any way back to myself, having gone this far in self destruction.

This is what suicide is really like...

I was quite still, but dressed and shaved, when Johannes arrived. I had not seen him, nor Klara, nor anyone, for several months, but for Königswinter and Joseph, whom I found a great comfort. The servant, whose name I did not care to remember, propped my naked feet on a stool as if that somehow would balance me, or perhaps, prevent me from kicking him from concealment. He had a nasty bruise on one shin, and another, I imagine, on his testicles for attempting to undress me. I feared him. I feared all of them, with an unreasoning fear I could not imagine in myself, outside of the Aufstand at Dresden, or my nightmares as a child. My fear made me sob, unpredictably, and

this is what caused Dr. P. to inject me so frequently with morphia, and when done, to feed me dribbling draughts of laudanum. I preferred the slower poison of champagne, which at least it tickles the palate. But that was denied me, even when I desired to have it brought from my own cellar.

I was a prisoner, and daily, plotted my escape on foot across the Severinbrücke to Beuel. Perhaps I could find a spot in the countryside, I mused, perhaps struggle up the cliffs to Bad Godesberg, to the place I last was happy, and imbibe the air of its sublimity, like champagne, before finding shelter and escape within the Rheinland.

I sat, my naked feet on the stool, looking vulnerable. And I felt like a pitiful child, being kept up at night without my shoes on, as punishment for being petulant. Which was, in a way, quite accurate. I had already run down the stairs and out into the open carriageway several times, and so I was confined without shoes, to keep me from escaping.

On my third attempt I brought my second pair of shoes and concealed them out of doors before being led back. Now, I reasoned, my escape plan was perfected in the last detail.

I waited, innocently and listlessly enough, for Johannes. And he came, looking miserable, with letters from Klara, Mariechen, Elise, and Jules. Ah Jules, the quiet one with the knowing countenance. I had watched her grow with fascination, back when I was happy.

Johannes sat, looking quite concentratedly at his hands, while I sat drugged and distant. "Robert..." his voice came low and slowly. And I turned my eyes gradually to him. "This is very disturbing. I have seen you quiet before, but you look... I don't know... elderly."

The Erotic Études - Opus VI

"I am old, Johannes... " I spoke from far beyond me. "I am old in every way. Old in my chest, old in the loins, and old in ideas."

"No!" he denied.

"Even... even my wife will not have me. What is there to live for?" My own voice, petulantly strained, appalled me, and I fell silent.

"No." he denied, more quietly this time.

I fixed an eye on him, and I knew that it was an unkind look, but I was unloosed from politeness. I sighed, and then, I spoke.

"I will die here."

"No!" he cried, this time loudly, and he grasped me bodily, in the way he had the morning of our first meeting, when I believed him infatuated. I should have known, then, that the days of my fascinating youths and bring them to bed had long passed. I was a married man now, and the only fascination I held for anyone was that I was married to a famous pianistin, and not because of myself -- and that I had not, after all, achieved anything of note. I was the shade of La Wieck.

And all of my accomplishments, and all of my pretty precious frilly dances, and all of the bold pedal-laden attacks: I regretted them all. The only thing I did not regret -- the only two things -- I could hold in either hand, metaphorically: the Fugues, which haunted my dreams, and the C major. That was all. That was all. All the rest, could be burned, and I was tempted to tell Johannes this. But I knew it would make him weep, and I knew he would not understand why. I stared at my feet, willing them to independent action. I watched my toes twitch once, then again.

I ached with the single desire to tear into scores and feed them into the grate. My fingers clenched into fists, repeatedly, and I felt a positive pleasure in the clenching. And none of this behavior escaped him. I said nothing.

I dreamed, while he spoke to me of things I no longer had interest in, as though he had not noticed I had died, and that all would be well if I wore this dressing gown. My anger grew as he prattled. At last I told him, "Cease. Please. I have an abominable headache."

He abruptly fell silent, as silent as myself, and I smoked for a time in silence, feeling blessed by his silence. He was usually so infernally talkative! That was my biggest objection to him, his effusiveness, which shattered my peace, and worsened the pounding in my head. Despite the morphia. Despite enormous quantities of morphia.

I could feel what he would say, the words that hung like anchors beneath a great ship, tethering it to its spot. *Are you really mad, or are you simply angry? Will you come home? Will you speak with her again?* And each of these queries echoed into my thoughts. I sighed with frustrated tension. I did not want him here, and I would not say so. So I endured in silence, until he made a quiet comment.

"I have missed you terribly." His words, tenderly rasped in an extreme of emotional stress, made me pause in my rumination, and I turned my eyes to him. For I could have sworn I heard something in his voice...

"You would not have been missing me."

"What did you say, Robert?"

"I said quite distinctly. You would not have been missing me."

“Robert, do stop that. You know she loves you.”

I rounded on him in frank anger, and the drug coursed hot through my throat, leaving me dry with it, impassioned in a way I never allowed myself to be before my retreat from sanity: “She does not, and she never has done. Nor does she love you. She wants you for what she wanted me for: a moment of prestige, a source of new sound, a - servant. And you have become my replacement. It is a hard position, it will take a great deal out of you. You may end up mad, like me.”

He did grasp my collar then, unrelenting, and forced a kiss upon me. By this time I was not surprised, nor particularly interested. I was dull and unresponsive to him. He drew back as though stung on the mouth by a bee.

“What... what is wrong with you?” he gasped, in a low voice, releasing me as though burned.

“I am going to die here, ” I repeated, stubbornly. “I don’t know why they insisted in pulling me from the river. It is most annoying.”

“Robert!” he gasped.

“Johannes! Johannes! Johannes! How do you enjoy your name being invoked every other sentence! Are you in love with my infernal name? You are like my mother in this way!” I snapped at him, for I could not withhold. He cringed, and I hardly regretted it.

“Please do go. I do not want to be responsible for what I might say. Right now... I might say anything.”

He bridled. “No I shall not go! I travelled twenty hours to get

here. I am not going to turn around and limp away because you are angry. I know you are angry, Rob -- I know. So - talk to me about it."

I glared at him, and returned my gaze to my feet. My toes looked ugly and misshapen, freed at last from a miserable life of confinement in shoes, and tumbled out willy-nilly in strange order, bumped and misaligned. I became content in investigating these misshapen things... and briefly forgot what he was talking about.

"Robert!" he cried again, after an uncertain number of minutes.

"Johannes!" I cried. "Johannes!" And after a few more of these, the attendant came and I waved to him urgently to take my visitor away.

I said nothing more. Eventually, a look of strained disbelief on his face, Johannes let the attendant lead him down the hall and toward the stairs, his eyes fixed upon my averted gaze.

