

Echoes

Danielle Steel



About the Book

The summer of 1915 was a time of prosperity and unease for the Wittgenstein family, and for their eldest daughter Beata it was also a time of awakening. By the glimmering waters of Lake Geneva, the quiet Jewish beauty met a young French officer and fell in love. Knowing that her parents would never accept her marriage to a Catholic, Beata followed her heart - and as the two built a new life together, Beata's past would stay with her in ways she could never have predicted.

As the years pass, Beata must watch in horror as Europe is once again engulfed in war, threatening her life and family - even her daughter Amadea, who has taken the vows of a Carmelite nun. But Amadea is forced into hiding and as family and friends are swept away without a trace, she begins a harrowing journey of survival. Taking on daring missions behind enemy lines, she finds a man who will help her discover her place in an unbreakable chain between generations... between her lost family and her future.

An intricate tapestry of a mother's love, a daughter's courage, and the unwavering faith that sustained them - even in history's darkest hour.

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraphs

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Read an Extract from *A Perfect Life*

About the Author

Also by Danielle Steel

Copyright

DANIELLE STEEL

ECHOES

To my beloved children, who are
so infinitely precious to me, each
of them so special:

Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Nick, Sam,
Victoria, Vanessa, Maxx, and Zara.

May the echoes of your past, present,
and future always be kind and gentle.

With all my love,
Mommy
d.s.

“It’s a wonder I haven’t abandoned
all my ideals. They seem so absurd and
impractical. Yet I cling to them because
I still believe, in spite of everything,
that people are truly good at heart.”

—Anne Frank

“Whoever saves one life, saves a
world entire.”

—Talmud

1

IT WAS A lazy summer afternoon as Beata Wittgenstein strolled along the shores of Lake Geneva with her parents. The sun was hot and the air still, and as she walked pensively behind them, the birds and insects were making a tremendous racket. Beata and her younger sister Brigitte had come to Geneva with their mother for the summer. Beata had just turned twenty, and her sister was three years younger. It had been thirteen months since the Great War had begun the previous summer, and this year her father had wanted them out of Germany for their holiday. It was late August 1915, and he had just spent a month there with them. Both of her brothers were in the army and had managed to get leave to join them for a week. Horst was twenty-three and a lieutenant at divisional headquarters in Munich. Ulm was a captain in the 105th Infantry Regiment, part of the Thirtieth Division, attached to the Fourth Army. He had just turned twenty-seven during the week he spent with them in Geneva.

It had been nothing short of a miracle to get the entire family together. With the war seeming to devour all the young men in Germany, Beata worried constantly now about her brothers, as did their mother. Her father kept telling her that it would be over soon, but what Beata heard when she listened to her father and brothers talk was very different. The men were far more aware of the bleak times ahead than were the women. Her mother never spoke of

the war to her, and Brigitte was far more upset that there were hardly any handsome young men to flirt with. Ever since she had been a little girl, all Brigitte had ever talked about was getting married. She had recently fallen in love with one of Horst's friends from university, and Beata had a strong suspicion that her beautiful younger sister would be getting engaged that winter.

Beata had no such interests or intentions. She had always been the quiet one, studious and far more serious, and she was much more interested in her studies than in finding a young man. Her father always said she was the perfect daughter. Their only moment of dissent had been when she had insisted she wanted to go to university like her brothers, which her father said was foolish. Although he himself was serious and scholarly, he didn't think that that degree of education was necessary for a woman. He told her he felt sure that in a short time she would be married and tending to a husband and children. She didn't need to go to university, and he hadn't allowed it.

Beata's brothers and their friends were a lively lot, and her sister was pretty and flirtatious. Beata had always felt different from them, set apart by her quiet ways and passion for education. In a perfect world, she would have loved to be a teacher, but when she said it, her siblings always laughed at her. Brigitte said that only poor girls became schoolteachers or governesses, and her brothers added that only ugly ones even thought about it. They loved to tease her, although Beata was neither poor nor ugly. Her father owned and ran one of the most important banks in Cologne, where they lived. They had a large handsome house in the Fitzengraben district, and her mother Monika was well known in Cologne, not only for her beauty but for her elegant clothes and jewelry. Like Beata, she was a quiet woman. Monika had married Jacob Wittgenstein when she

was seventeen, and had been happy with him in the twenty-eight years since then.

The marriage had been arranged by their respective families, and was a good one. At the time their union had been the merger of two considerable fortunes, and Jacob had enlarged theirs impressively since then. He ran the bank with an iron fist and was almost clairvoyant about the banking business. Not only was their future secure, but so were those of their heirs. Everything about the Wittgensteins was solid. The only unpredictable element in their life now was the same one worrying everyone these days. The war was a great concern to them, particularly to Monika, with two sons in the army. The time they had shared in Switzerland had been a comforting respite, for the parents as well as the children.

Ordinarily, they spent their summers in Germany, at the seashore, but this year Jacob had wanted to get them all out of Germany for July and August. He had even spoken to one of the commanding generals whom he knew well, and gently asked the enormous favor of having both of his sons on leave and able to join them. The general had quietly arranged it. The Wittgensteins were that great rarity, a Jewish family that enjoyed not only great wealth but also enormous power. Beata was aware of it but paid little attention to her family's importance. She was far more interested in her studies. And although Brigitte sometimes fretted over the constraints their orthodoxy put on them, Beata, in her own quiet way, was deeply religious, which pleased her father. As a young man, he had shocked his own family by saying that he wanted to be a rabbi. His father had talked sense into him, and at the appropriate time, he had joined the family bank, along with his father, brothers, uncles, and grandfather before them. Theirs was a family steeped in tradition, and although Jacob's father had a great respect for the rabbinical life, he had no

intention of sacrificing his son to it. And like the obedient son he was, Jacob went to work at the bank, and married shortly thereafter. At fifty, he was five years older than Beata's mother.

The entire family agreed that the decision to summer in Switzerland this year had been a good one. The Wittgensteins had many friends here, and Jacob and Monika had attended a number of parties, as had their children. Jacob knew everyone in the Swiss banking community and had gone to Lausanne and Zurich to see friends in those cities as well. Whenever possible, they took the girls with them. While Horst and Ulm were there, they spent as much time as they could enjoying their company. Ulm was leaving for the front when he got back, and Horst was stationed at divisional headquarters in Munich, which he seemed to find vastly amusing. In spite of the serious upbringing he'd had, Horst was something of a playboy. He and Brigitte had much more in common with each other than either of them did with Beata.

As she fell behind the others, walking slowly along the lake, her oldest brother Ulm hung back and fell into step beside her. He was always protective of her, perhaps because he was seven years older. Beata knew he respected her gentle nature and loving ways.

"What are you thinking about, Bea? You look awfully serious walking along by yourself. Why don't you join us?"

Her mother and sister were far ahead by then, talking about fashion and the men Brigitte had found handsome at the previous week's parties. The men in the family were talking about the only subjects that interested them—which these days were the war and banking. After the war, Ulm was going back to work at the bank again, as he had for four years before. Their father said that Horst was going to have to stop playing, become serious, and join them. Horst had promised that as soon as the war was over, he would.

He was only twenty-two when war was declared the year before, and he had assured his father that when the war was over, he'd be ready. And Jacob had said several times recently that it was time for Ulm to get married. The one thing Jacob expected of his children, or anyone in his immediate circle actually, was that they obey him. He expected that of his wife as well, and she had never disappointed him. Nor had his children, with the exception of Horst, who had been dragging his feet about working when he went into the army. The last thing on Horst's mind at the moment was marriage. In fact, the only one interested in that prospect was Brigitte. Beata hadn't met a man who had swept her off her feet yet. Although she thought that many of her parents' friends' sons were handsome, many of the young ones seemed silly, and the older ones frightened her a bit and often seemed too somber. She was in no hurry to be married. Beata often said that if she married anyone, she hoped he would be a scholar, and not necessarily a banker. There was no way she could say that to her father, although she had confessed it to her mother and sister many times. Brigitte said that sounded boring. The handsome young friend of Horst's she had her eye on was as frivolous as she was, and from an equally important banking family. Jacob was intending to meet with the boy's father in September to discuss it, although Brigitte didn't know that. But so far, no suitor had emerged for Beata, nor did she really want one. She rarely spoke to anyone at parties. She went dutifully with her parents, wearing the dresses her mother chose for her. She was always polite to their hosts, and immensely relieved when it was time to go home. Unlike Brigitte, who had to be dragged away, complaining that it had been far too early to leave the party, and why did her family have to be so dull and boring. Horst was in complete agreement with her, and always had been. Beata and Ulm were the serious ones.

“Have you had fun in Geneva?” Ulm asked Beata quietly. He was the only one who made a serious effort to speak to her, and find out what she was thinking. Horst and Brigitte were far too busy playing and having fun to spend time on more erudite subjects with their sister.

“Yes, I have.” Beata smiled shyly up at him. Even though he was her brother, Beata was always dazzled by how handsome he was, and how kind. He was a gentle person, and looked exactly like their father. Ulm was tall and blond and athletic, as Jacob had been in his youth. Ulm had blue eyes and features that often confused people, because he didn’t look Jewish. Everyone knew they were, of course, and in the social world of Cologne, they were accepted in even the most aristocratic circles. Several of the Hohenlohes, and Thurn und Thaxis were childhood friends of their father’s. The Wittgensteins were so established and so respected that all doors were open to them. But Jacob had also made it clear to all his children that when the time came for them to marry, the spouses they brought home would be Jewish. It was not even a subject for discussion; nor would any of them even think to question it. They were accepted for who and what they were, and there were many eligible young men and women in their own circles for the Wittgenstein children to choose from. When the time came for them to marry, they would marry one of them.

Ulm and Beata didn’t even look remotely related as they walked along the lake. Her brothers and sister looked exactly like their father, they were all tall blonds with blue eyes and fine features. Beata looked like their mother, in total contrast to them. Beata Wittgenstein was a tiny, frail-looking, delicate brunette, with raven-dark hair and skin the color of porcelain. The only feature she shared with the others was enormous blue eyes, although hers were darker than her brothers’ or Brigitte’s. Her mother’s eyes were

dark brown, but other than that minor difference, Beata was the image of her mother, which secretly delighted her father. He was still so much in love with his wife after nearly twenty-nine years that just seeing Beata smile at him reminded him of when her mother was the same age in the early years of their marriage, and the similarity never failed to touch his heart. As a result, he had an enormous soft spot for Beata, and Brigitte frequently complained that Beata was his favorite. He let her do whatever she wanted. But what Beata wanted was harmless. Brigitte's plans were considerably racier than her older sister's. Beata was content to stay home and read or study, in fact, she preferred it. The only time her father had actually gotten annoyed with her was on one occasion when Jacob found her reading a King James version of the Bible.

"What is that about?" he asked with a stern expression, as he saw what she was reading. She had been sixteen at the time and was fascinated by it. She had read quite a lot of the Old Testament before that.

"It's interesting, Papa. The stories are wonderful, and so many things in it are exactly what we believe." She preferred the New Testament to the Old. Her father found it less than amusing and had taken it away from her.

He didn't want his daughter reading a Christian Bible, and he had complained about it to her mother, and suggested that Monika keep a closer eye on what she was reading. In fact, Beata read everything she could get her hands on, including Aristotle and Plato. She was a voracious reader and loved the Greek philosophers. Even her father had to admit that if she had been a man, she would have been an extraordinary scholar. What he wanted for her now, as he did for Ulm and even for the other two sometime soon, was for her to get married. He was beginning to fear that she would become spinsterish and too serious if she waited much longer. He had a few ideas

he wanted to explore in that vein that winter, but the war had disrupted everything. So many men were serving in the army, and many young people they knew had been killed in the past year. The uncertainty of the future was deeply disturbing.

Her father thought that Beata would do well with a man who was older than she was. He wanted a mature man for Beata, a man who could appreciate her intellect and share her interests. He wasn't opposed to that idea for Brigitte either, who could use a strong hand to control her. Although he loved all his children, he was extremely proud of his oldest daughter. He considered himself a man of wisdom and compassion. He was the kind of person others never hesitated to turn to. Beata had a deep love and respect for him, as she did for her mother, although she secretly admitted to the others that their mother was easier to talk to, and a little less daunting than their father. Their father was as serious as Beata, and often disapproved of his younger daughter's frivolity.

"I wish you didn't have to go back to the war," Beata said sadly, as she chatted with Ulm while they continued walking. The others had turned back, and now she and Ulm were far ahead of them, instead of straggling behind.

"I hate to go back too, but I think it will be over soon." He smiled at her reassuringly. He didn't believe that, but it was the sort of thing one said to women. Or at least he did. "I should be able to get leave again at Christmas." She nodded, thinking that it seemed a lifetime away, and unable to bear the thought of how awful it would be if something happened to him. More than she ever told him, she adored him. She loved Horst too, but he seemed more like a silly younger brother than an older one. He loved to tease her, and he always made her laugh. What she and Ulm shared was different. They continued to chat pleasantly all the way back to the hotel, and that night they shared a final dinner

before the boys left the next day. As always, Horst amused them endlessly with his imitations of everyone they'd met, and his outrageous stories about their friends.

All three of the men left the next day, and the three women stayed for the last three weeks of their holiday in Geneva. Jacob wanted them to stay in Switzerland as long as possible, although Brigitte was beginning to get bored. But Beata and her mother were perfectly content to be there. Brigitte and her mother went shopping one afternoon, and Beata said she would stay at the hotel, as she had a headache. In truth, she didn't, but she found it tiresome shopping with them. Brigitte always tried on everything in the shops, ordered dresses, hats, and shoes. Impressed by her good taste and keen fashion sense, their mother always indulged her. And after they exhausted the dressmakers and cobblers and milliners and the shops that made exquisite gloves, they would make the rounds of the jewelers. Beata knew they wouldn't be home until dinner, and she was content to sit in the sun, reading in the garden on her own.

After lunch, she went down to the lake and walked along the same path they had taken every day since they'd been there. It was a trifle cooler than the day before, and she was wearing a white silk dress, a hat to shield her from the sun, and a pale blue shawl the color of her eyes, draped over her shoulders. She was humming to herself as she strolled along. Most of the hotel guests were at lunch, or in town, and she had the path to herself, as she walked with her head down, thinking about her brothers. She heard a sound behind her suddenly, looked up, and was startled when she saw a tall young man who walked briskly past her on the path, and smiled as he did so. He was heading in the same direction, and she was so surprised as he brushed by her that she took a rapid step to the side, stumbled, and turned her ankle. It smarted for a minute but didn't seem

serious, as he quickly reached a hand out and caught her before she fell.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you, and certainly didn't mean to knock you over." He looked instantly apologetic and concerned, and Beata noted that he was astonishingly handsome. Tall, fair, with eyes the color of her own, and long powerful arms and athletic shoulders. He kept a firm grasp on her arm as he spoke to her. She realized her hat was slightly askew from their encounter. She straightened it, while secretly glancing at him. He looked a little bit older than her older brother. He was wearing white slacks and a dark blue blazer, a navy tie, and a very good-looking straw hat that made him look somewhat rakish.

"Thank you, I'm fine. It was silly of me. I didn't hear you in time to get out of your way."

"Or see me, until I nearly knocked you down. I'm afraid it was a deplorable performance on my part. Are you all right? How's your ankle?" He looked sympathetic and kind.

"It's fine. You caught me before I did any real damage to it." He had spoken to her in French, and she responded in the same language. She had learned French at school and polished it diligently since then. Her father had also insisted that they learn English, and he thought they should speak Italian and Spanish as well. Beata had studied both but never really perfected either. Her English was passable, but her French was fluent.

"Would you like to sit down for a moment?" He pointed to a bench near them, with a peaceful view of the lake, and he seemed reluctant to let go of her arm. He acted as though he was afraid she would fall over if he let go of his firm grip on her, and she smiled at him.

"Really, I'm fine." But the prospect of sitting next to him for a moment appealed to her. It wasn't the sort of thing

she normally did, in fact she had never done anything like it, but he was so pleasant and polite and seemed so remorseful over their near-accident that she felt sorry for him. And it appeared harmless to sit and chat with him for a minute before continuing her walk. She had nothing to rush back to the hotel for, she knew that her mother and sister would be gone for hours. She let him lead her to the bench, and he sat down beside her with a respectful distance between them.

“Are you truly all right?” He looked down at her ankle, peering just beneath the hem of her skirt, and was relieved to see that it didn’t appear to be swollen.

“I promise.” She smiled at him.

“I meant to just slip past you and not disturb you. I should have said something or warned you. I was a million miles away, thinking about this damnable war, it’s such an awful thing.” He looked troubled as he said it, and sat back against the bench as she watched him. She had never met anyone even remotely like him. He looked like a handsome prince in a fairy tale, and he was remarkably friendly. There seemed to be no airs or pretensions about him. He looked like one of Ulm’s friends, although he was far better looking.

“You’re not Swiss then?” she asked with interest.

“I’m French,” he said simply, and as he said it, she frowned and said nothing. “Is that awful? My grandfather is Swiss actually, my mother’s father. That’s why I’m here. He died two weeks ago, and I had to come and help settle the estate with my brother and parents. They gave me a leave to do it.” He was remarkably easy and open, without being presumptuous or inappropriately familiar. He seemed very well-bred and aristocratic, and extremely polite.

“No, it’s not awful at all,” she answered honestly, as her eyes looked directly into his. “I’m German.” She half-

expected him to leap from the bench and tell her he hated Germans. They were enemies in the war after all, and she had no idea how he would react to her confession.

“Do you expect me to blame you for the war?” he asked gently, smiling at her. She was a young girl, and incredibly pretty. He thought her truly beautiful, and as he spoke to her, he was touched by her apologetic expression. She seemed like a remarkable young woman, and he was suddenly glad he had nearly knocked her over. “Did you do this? Is this dreadful war your fault, mademoiselle? Should I be angry at you?” he teased her, and she laughed along with him.

“I hope not,” she said, smiling. “Are you in the army?” she inquired. He had mentioned being on leave.

“In the cavalry. I attended the equestrian academy called Saumur.” Beata knew it was where all the aristocrats became officers of the cavalry, which was a most prestigious unit.

“That must be interesting.” She liked horses and had ridden a lot as a young girl. She loved riding with her brothers, particularly Ulm. Horst always went wild and drove his horses into a frenzy, which in turn spooked hers. “My brothers are in the army, too.”

He looked at her pensively for a long moment, lost in her blue eyes, which were darker than his own. He had never seen hair as dark contrasted by skin as white. She looked like a painting sitting there on the bench. “Wouldn’t it be nice if troubles between nations could be resolved as simply as this, two people sitting on a bench on a summer afternoon, looking out at a lake. We could talk things out, and agree, instead of the way things are, with young men dying on battlefields.” What he said made her knit her brows again, he had reminded her of how vulnerable her brothers were.

"It would be nice. My older brother thinks it will be over soon."

"I wish I could agree," he said politely. "I fear that once you put weapons in men's hands, they don't let go of them easily. I think this could go on for years."

"I hope you're wrong," she said quietly.

"So do I," and then he looked embarrassed again. "I've been incredibly rude. I am Antoine de Vallerand." He stood up, bowed, and sat down again. And she smiled as he did.

"I am Beata Wittgenstein." She pronounced the W like a V.

"How is it that you speak such perfect French?" he asked. "Your French is almost flawless, without any accent. In fact, you sound Parisian." He would never have guessed she was German. He was fascinated by her, and it never occurred to him, even once he heard her name, that she was Jewish. Unlike most people of his ilk and milieu, it made no difference to him. He never gave it a thought. All he saw in her was a beautiful intelligent young woman.

"I learned French in school." She smiled at him.

"No, you didn't, or if you did, you are far more clever than I. I learned English in school, or so they say, and I can't speak a word. And my German is absolutely terrible. I don't have your gift. Most French people don't. We speak French and not much else. We assume the whole world will learn French so they can speak to us, and how fortunate that you did. Do you speak English, too?" He somehow suspected that she did. Although they didn't know each other, and he could tell that she was shy, she looked extremely bright and surprisingly at ease. She was amazed herself by how comfortable she was with him. Even though he was a stranger, she felt safe with him.

"I speak English," she admitted, "though not as well as French."

"Do you go to school?" She looked young to him. He was thirty-two, twelve years older than she.

"No. Not anymore. I finished," she answered shyly. "But I read a great deal. I would have liked to go to university, but my father wouldn't let me."

"Why not?" he asked, and then caught himself with a smile. "He thinks you should get married and have babies. You don't need to go to university. Am I correct?"

"Yes, completely." She beamed at him.

"And you don't want to get married?" He was beginning to remind her more and more of Ulm. She felt as though she and Antoine were old friends, and he seemed to feel equally at ease with her. She felt able to be completely honest with him, which was rare for her. She was usually extremely shy with men.

"I don't want to get married unless I fall in love with someone," she said simply, and he nodded.

"That sounds sensible. Do your parents agree with that idea?"

"I'm not sure. Their marriage was arranged for them, and they think that's a good thing. They want my brothers to get married, too."

"How old are your brothers?"

"Twenty-three and twenty-seven. One of them is quite serious, and the other just wants to have fun, and is a bit wild." She smiled cautiously at Antoine.

"Sounds like my brother and I."

"How old is he?"

"Five years younger. He is twenty-seven, like your older brother, and I am a very old man of thirty-two. They've given up hope for me." And until that moment, so had he.

"Which one are you?"

“Which one?” He looked blank for a moment and then understood. “Ah yes, he’s the wild one. I’m the boring one.” And then he caught himself. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to suggest that your older brother is boring. Just serious, I imagine. I’ve always been the responsible one, my brother just isn’t. He’s too busy having fun to even think about being responsible. Maybe he’s right. I’m much quieter than he is.”

“And you’re not married?” she asked with interest. It was the oddest chance meeting. They were asking each other things they would never have dared to inquire about in a ballroom or a drawing room, or at a dinner party. But here, sitting on a bench, looking out at the lake, it seemed perfectly all right to ask him anything she wanted. She was curious about him. There was a lovely, decent feeling about him, in spite of his striking good looks. For all she knew, he was the rakish one and he was lying to her, but it didn’t seem that way. She believed everything he said, and had the feeling he felt the same way about her.

“No, I’m not married,” he said with a look of amusement. “I’ve thought about it once or twice, but I never felt it was the right thing, in spite of a great deal of pressure from my family. Oldest son and all that. I don’t want to make a mistake and marry the wrong woman. I’d rather be alone, so I am.”

“I agree.” She nodded, looking surprisingly determined. At times, she seemed almost childlike to him, and at other times, as she spoke to him, he could see that she had very definite ideas, like about marriage and going to university.

“What would you have studied, if they’d let you go to university?” he asked with interest, and she looked dreamy as she thought about it.

“Philosophy. The ancient Greeks, I think. Religion perhaps, or the philosophy of religion. I read the Bible once

from beginning to end." He looked impressed. She was obviously a brilliant girl, as well as being beautiful, and so very easy to talk to.

"And what did you think? I can't say I've read it, except in snips and bits, and mostly at weddings and funerals. I seem to spend most of my time on horses, and helping my father run our property. I have a lifelong romance with the earth." It was hard to convey to her how much his land and his own turf meant to him. It had been bred into him.

"I think a lot of men do," Beata said quietly. "Where is your family's property?" She was enjoying talking to him and didn't want it to end.

"It's in Dordogne. Horse country. It's near Périgord, near Bordeaux, if that means anything." His eyes lit up just speaking of it, and she could see what it meant to him.

"I've never been there, but it must be beautiful if you love it so much."

"It is," he assured her. "And where do you live in Germany?"

"Cologne."

"I've been there," he said, looking pleased. "I like Bavaria very much, too. And I've had some lovely times in Berlin."

"That's where my brother Horst wants to live, in Berlin. He can't, of course. He has to go to work for my father after the war, he thinks it's horrible, but he doesn't have any choice. My grandfather and my father and his brothers, and my brother Ulm all work there. It's a bank. I suppose it isn't much fun, but they all seem to like it well enough. I think it would be interesting," she said, and he smiled at her. She was full of bright intelligent ideas, and interest in the world. Antoine was certain, looking at her, and listening to her, that if she had gone to university, or been able to work at the bank, she would have done well. He was still impressed that she had read the Bible as a young girl.

"What do you like to do?" he asked with interest.

"I love to read," she said simply, "and to learn about things. I'd love to be a writer one day, but of course I can't do that either." No man she would marry would tolerate her doing something like that, she would have to take care of him and their children.

"Maybe you will one day. I suppose it all depends on who you marry, or if you do. Do you have sisters as well, or only brothers?"

"I have a younger sister, Brigitte, she's seventeen. She loves going to parties, and dancing and dressing up, she can hardly wait to get married. She always tells me how boring I am," Beata said with an impish grin, which made him want to reach out and hug her, even though they hadn't been properly introduced. He was suddenly so pleased that he had nearly knocked her down. It was beginning to seem like a stroke of good fortune that he had, and he had the feeling that Beata thought so, too.

"My brother thinks I'm very boring. But I must tell you, I find you anything but boring, Beata. I love talking to you."

"I like talking to you." She smiled shyly at him, wondering if she should go back to the hotel. They had been sitting on the bench together by then for quite a long time. Perhaps longer than they should. They sat in silence for a long moment, admiring the lake, and then he turned to her again.

"Would you like me to walk you back to the hotel? Your family might be worried about you."

"My mother took my sister shopping. I don't think they'll be back till dinnertime, but perhaps I should go back," she said responsibly, although she hated to leave.

They both stood up reluctantly, and he inquired how her ankle felt. He was pleased to hear that it didn't bother her, and he offered her his arm, as they walked slowly back

toward the hotel. She tucked her hand into his arm, and they chatted as they strolled, talking about a variety of things. They both agreed that they hated parties generally but loved to dance. He was pleased to hear that she liked horses and had ridden to hounds. They both liked boats and had a passion for the sea. She said she never got seasick, which he found hard to believe. But she confessed that she was afraid of dogs, since she'd been bitten as a small child. And they both agreed that they loved Italy, although he said that he was extremely fond of Germany, too, which wasn't something he could admit openly at the moment. The war, and the fact that their respective countries were currently enemies, seemed of no importance to either of them as they got to know each other. Antoine looked seriously disappointed as they got back to the hotel. He hated leaving her, although he had plans to meet his family for dinner. He would have liked to spend many more hours with her and was clearly lingering, as they stood in front of the hotel, looking at each other.

"Would you like to have tea?" he suggested, and her eyes lit up at the idea.

"That would be very nice, thank you." He led her to the terrace where they were serving tea, and elegant women were sitting together and chatting, or prosperous-looking couples were eating little sandwiches and speaking in hushed tones in French, German, Italian, and English.

They shared a very proper high tea, and finally, unable to drag it out any longer, he walked her into the lobby, and stood looking down at her. She seemed tiny and appeared fragile to him, but in fact after hours of talking to her, he knew that she was spirited and more than capable of defending her ideas. She had strong opinions about many things, and so far he agreed with most of them. And the ones he didn't agree with amused him. There was nothing boring about her. He found her incredibly exciting and

breathtakingly beautiful. All he knew was that he had to see her again.

“Do you suppose your mother would allow you to have lunch with me tomorrow?” He looked hopeful, as he longed to touch her hand but didn’t dare. Even more, he would have loved to touch her face. She had exquisite skin.

“I’m not sure,” Beata said honestly. It was going to be difficult to explain how they met, and the fact that they had spent so much time together, chatting, without a chaperone. But nothing untoward had happened, and he was unfailingly polite and obviously well-born. There was nothing they could object to, except the fact that he was French, which was admittedly inconvenient at the moment. But this was Switzerland, after all. It wasn’t like meeting him at home. And just because their countries were enemies didn’t mean he was a bad man. But she wasn’t sure her mother would see it that way, in fact she was almost positive she wouldn’t, since her brothers were participating in a war against the French and could be killed by them at any moment. Her parents were rigidly patriotic and not necessarily famous for their open minds, as she knew well, and Antoine feared. Beata was also aware that if he presented himself as a suitor, her family would consider him ineligible because he was obviously not Jewish. But worrying about that seemed premature.

“Perhaps your mother and sister would join us for lunch, too?” he asked hopefully. He had no intention of giving up. A war seemed like a small obstacle to him at this point. Beata was too wonderful and magical to lose over something like that.

“I’ll ask them,” Beata said quietly. She was going to do more than ask, she had every intention of fighting like a tiger to see him again, and she was afraid she might have to. Beata knew that in her mother’s eyes, he would have two major strikes against him, his nationality and his faith.

“Should I call your mother and ask her myself?” He looked concerned.

“No, I’ll do it,” she said, shaking her head. They were suddenly allies in an unspoken conspiracy, the continuation of their friendship, or whatever this was. Beata didn’t think he was flirting with her and only hoped that they could be friends. She didn’t dare imagine more.

“May I call you tonight?” he asked, looking nervous, and she gave him her room number. She was sharing the room with Brigitte.

“We’re eating at the hotel tonight.” For once.

“So are we,” he said with a look of surprise. “Maybe we’ll see each other, and I can introduce myself to your mother and sister.” And then he looked worried. “How shall we say we met?” Their chance meeting had been fortuitous, but not entirely decorous. And their long conversation had been unusual, to say the least. Beata laughed at the question. “I’ll just say you knocked me down, and then picked me up.”

“I’m sure she’ll be impressed by that. Will you say I pushed you into the mud, or just that I dropped you into the lake to clean you up after you fell?” Beata laughed like a child at his suggestions, and Antoine looked happier than he had in years. “You really are very silly. You could at least tell her that I caught your arm and kept you from falling, even though I did try to knock you over as I rushed past.” But he no longer regretted it. The minor mishap had served him well. “And you could have the decency to tell your mother that I properly introduced myself.”

“Maybe I will.” For a moment, Beata looked genuinely worried as she looked up at him, somewhat embarrassed by what she was about to suggest. “Do you suppose it would be terrible to tell her you’re Swiss?”

He hesitated and then nodded. He could see that his nationality was a problem for her, or she feared it would be for her mother. What was going to be a much bigger problem was that he was a French nobleman and not Jewish, but Beata would never have said that to him. She was cherishing the illusion that since they were just friends, her mother wouldn't mind that much. What harm was there in making friends with a Christian? Several of her parents' friends were. It was an argument she planned to use if her mother objected to Beata having lunch with him.

"I am a quarter Swiss, after all. I'll just have to remember not to count in front of your mother, or I might say *soixante-dix* instead of *septante*. That would be a bit of a giveaway. But I don't mind if it's easier for you to say I'm Swiss. It's a shame that has to be an issue for any of us these days." The truth was that his own family would be horrified that he was making friends with a German girl and, worse than that, was totally smitten by her. There was no love lost these days between the Germans and the French. But he didn't see why he and Beata should pay a price for it. "Don't worry, we'll work it out," he said gently to her, as she looked up at him with her enormous blue eyes. "It's all right, Beata. I promise. One way or another, we will see each other tomorrow." He was not going to let anything stand between them, and she felt totally protected as she stood looking up at Antoine. They were nearly strangers to each other, and yet she knew that she already trusted him. Something remarkable and wonderful had happened between them that afternoon. "I'll call you tonight," he said softly, as she stepped into the elevator, and turned to smile at him as the elevator operator closed the doors. He was still standing, looking at her, as the doors closed, and she rode upstairs, knowing that in a

single afternoon her whole life had changed. And Antoine was smiling to himself as he left the hotel.