Introrupted

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Summary

Brigitta is interrupted during a pivotal conversation and the course of history is changed. A slight AU...

Notes

So I wrote this last night. Its based on a series of prompts I read long ago where you “slip” something into or out of a story. In this case, I slipped the Captain into the scene just a touch sooner and viola! instant AU that changes the course of the story. Plus I always wanted to see a scene where the Captain found out what Little Miss Elsa said the night of the party.

I’m not really sure I succeeded but this fandom is just so much fun I came back for more.
"Children I'm so glad to see you." Maria beamed at the familiar faces, truly grateful that her worst fears of the children's rejection upon her return hadn't come true. A second chance for her. A chance to find out where and who she was supposed to be.

"We missed you!"
"I missed you too."
"Kurt, how are you?"
"Hungry." Some things never change.
"Gretl, what happened to your finger?"
"It got caught!"
"Caught in what?", Maria asked as she placed a kiss on the bandage.
"Friedrich's teeth."

Noticing the oldest daughter's smile wasn't quite making it up to her eyes Maria turned to her and said,"Leisel, you all right?"
"Just fair."
"Any telegrams been delivered here lately?"
"None at all, but I'm learning to accept it... I'll be glad when school begins."

And some things never stay the same. A first heartache, Maria thought. She and Liesel would have to spend some time together soon for a talk. But before that there were other conversations to be had. Drawing a breath and projecting confidence she wasn't feeling she stopped walking.

"Oh Leisel, you can't use school to escape your problems. You have to face them! Oh, I have so much to tell you." I ran away because I'm afraid I'm in love with your father...probably shouldn't lead with that, she thought.

"We have things to tell you too."
"I'm sure you do."

"The most important thing is that..." Brigitta trailed off and looked up at the steps onto the terrace. “Oh Father look Fräulein Maria has come back from the abbey!” seven times over rang in her ears.

"Good evening."

Oh.

Maria almost dropped the little girls hands, certain she would need to place her hands over her heart to help it start beating again. Nights on her knees in prayer till they bruised and hours agonizing over her return and its consequences, all her plans shattered by only his voice.
“Good evening Captain,” she said softly, pleased that she had managed to sound calm and not at all as though she might bolt for the abbey.

He clapped his hands together startling her out of her escape scenario.

“Alright, everyone inside go and get your dinner.” The “except you Fräulein” remained unspoken but clearly heard.

The stampede cleared and once again the two of them were left alone. Beginning as staring and rapidly melting into gazing. Her words to the Reverend Mother echoed in her ears, “...sometimes we would look at each other, oh Mother I could hardly breathe...”. The air seemed heavy and still as if it too were holding its breath waiting to see what might happen next. Maria found she had trouble drawing it in, her lungs felt sluggish. He seemed so cool and unaffected to her.

He was not.

He was a man in his forties who had commanded sailors into battle with courage and distinction—and he was clutching the railing of his own terrace.

She had returned. For the children? For the Reverend Mother? For him? Why now? Most of all why? The questions with no answers tumbled in his mind and he simply blurted the first that came to mind.

"You left without saying goodbye...even to the children." He felt safer making her a exit seem more of a blow to them. He'd told himself repeatedly that he was disappointed in the loss of a governess with staying power, nothing more. Liar. He brushed his hands against his lapel pocket and felt the paper of her letter crinkle reassuringly. Unable to part with last physical evidence of the joy and laughter that she had brought with her. Afraid that if he threw it away the spell would be broken and things would return to the way they were before, cursed.

"Well it was wrong of me. Forgive me?"

"Why did you?" He murmured, unable to help himself ask the question he most wanted too.

"I...well you see...it was the night of...but it started before that, oh! This was much less complicated in front of the Reverend Mother. Honestly Captain, I'm not sure this is the time or place for this discussion..." She tailed off again looking anxiously past him.

The children, Herr Detweiler, or worse yet the baroness might be wondering where they were. She, no they, needed to have this conversation but the here and now of a terrace with no privacy seemed foolish. Surely he could see that she was desperate for an ending to this. Her confidence was failing her at the worst possible moment.

He turned to look behind him trying to see what it was she might be looking for. No one and nothing. She was visibly uncomfortable, wringing her hands, but he couldn't seem to stop himself. He took a step toward her, then three. Slowly, stopping a few steps from the landing.

"You've never been afraid to speak your mind to me Fräulein," he chuckled. A picture of her swaddled in her hideous abbey issued nightgown defiantly asking for material flashed thru his mind causing his smile to widen.

"I, uh we, would have understood if you had missed the abbey. The children and I. But you seemed...content. To leave and say nothing... were you protecting them? Did they..."

"Oh no! No they would never, well not after that first day." She gave a half smile at that. She’d
checked her pockets for days after though she would never admit it.

"Was it, were they too much to handle, the staff were unkind, or someone from the party? Max perhaps?" he pressed. He needed an answer.

"No, it wasn't any of those reasons. Do you really not... I had thought we were both...well clearly I've imagined or you've forgotten," she huffed.

"Enlighten me then," he interrupted. What could he have forgotten? The whistle fiasco, the truthfully angry words by the lake, the weekly meetings that turned into cozy conversations far afield from the subject of his children, or was it singing to her in a crowded room? How damn inconvenient finding himself drawn to her was, peeking around corners to watch her with his children?

How he had woken, gasping and twisted in his sheets with her name on his lips?

He had forgotten nothing.

His irritated tone had clearly gotten her hackles up as she was mumbling under her breath at him. He wasn't catching it all but he found himself amused. A smirk tugging at his lips. He shoved his hands in his pockets and leant against the stone pillar at the bottom of the steps, rather enjoying the show.

"...all that worry...look for your life?...Men do you know...I guess the Baroness was right to try and warn me..." She was pacing now in tight little circles in front of him.

The mention of the Baroness caught his complete attention and his smile dropped. He reached out a hand and gently held her arm to still her pacing. She startled but his eyes insisted on holding hers in place.

"The Baroness warned you?" He asked curiously.

She nodded. "At the party, after the children had performed and I went to change for dinner...could have used a bit of help there," she glanced at him pointedly. She thought he might have looked sheepish for a second or two. “Anyway she... she offered to help me find a suitable dress and then pointed out that I had, well, blushed while we danced.”

She was blushing now in front of him but he wisely kept quiet on the matter.

He’d enjoyed it. The dance they had shared. How his pride had swelled when she blushed. How delectable she had felt in his arms as their hands slipped and stroked in the intricate dance. She turned and walked towards the lake and he let his fingers glide down her sleeve as he released her.

Was she embarrassed he wondered? That she had been caught out dancing with her employer, a man, and she was to become a nun? Perhaps they had broken a rule and she felt she needed to leave and confess. But she said that Elsa had “warned” her. He followed after her.

“You said she warned you. What else did she say?”

Something inside her just wanted to blurt it out. Grab him by the hand and press it against her breastbone so he could feel her heart pounding. This, right here beneath your skin. It happens every time you come into a room, every time you speak, every time you glance my way. Please understand what I am trying so hard not to say. Whether or not she was ready this conversation was happening right now. Maria forced herself to turn around and face him. Face this, whatever the outcome. Deep breath.
“She told me that nothing is more irresistible to a man than a woman who is in love with him,” she stated. Almost as though reciting it from a book, purposefully cutting her heart out of her head lest it lead her astray. She’d said it. And she was still standing though breathing as if she’d run a mile. She looked at his face but he gave away nothing. She had just cut herself open at the heart in front of him and all he could do was watch her. Oh, what if he felt nothing? Or worse yet was hiding pity?

He realized he was just standing there, floored by her painful honesty. He wiggled his fingers in a nervous habit as he watched all her emotions parade across her face. Despite his inability to move he was churning inside, unsure it was possible to feel everything he seemed to be feeling all at once. Confusion, sadness, and hope.

Reigning in his emotions he gathered his iron will and calmly asked, “Was that all?”

“No,” she said as turned to walk a few more steps toward the water. She kept her back to him, not brave enough to say the final words to his face, to continue to watch him remain passive as if her words held no impact. “No, she said that you were in love with me too. But I didn’t want to believe it!,” she exclaimed. “Then she told me that men get over it soon enough, girls like me soon enough.”

He reached for her arm again to spin her around to face him.

“What?,” his tone was low and dangerous. He was suddenly the man she had encountered after capsizing his children. He was oozing barely controlled rage.

Georg was livid. Elsa. How dare she? He had made no promises to her that night or any other before it. Her careless words had caused his children pain and confusion. Had caused an utterly wonderful woman to question her feelings and had shamed her into leaving.

The anger at Elsa allowed him to push away thoughts about the veracity of her statement that he was in love with Maria. There had seemed little use in entertaining thoughts about her after she was gone. She was never meant to stay with them, with him.

Seeing the angry storm brewing in his eyes she tried to diffuse, “I...I told her I’d never done anything to...”

“You don’t have too,” he murmured. He raked his hand thru his hair and rubbed the skin behind his ear.

"And that's why you left."

She nodded. He reached out a hand and ran his thumb across her cheek then yanked it back clenching his fist. He had no right to touch her, but he wanted to. "Maria, you must know that.."

"Fräulein Maria! You've returned." Elsa Schrader glided down the steps, eyes on the confused governess.

"Isn't it wonderful Georg?" She asked as she snaked an arm thru his. He stiffened underneath her touch but she seemed not to have noticed. "The children are hardly able to eat with all the excitement. They were quite lost without you, my dear. And so convenient for you to return now, it will be such a help."

"Uhm, help Baroness?"
"For the wedding of course. Didn't the children tell you? We are to be married," she beamed at the Captain and then turned her smile on Maria.
Chapter 2

My apologies in advance to any charter members of the Baroness Fan Club. I imagined a rather snarky version of her and it’s not pretty.

Chapter Two

The silence stretching between them was unbearable, the blood pounding in his ears was all he could hear. The blood draining from her face was all he could see.

For all that he wanted to reach out and catch it Georg could do nothing as he watched Maria’s heart break.

She had as good as admitted she loved him. Had possibly given up the life she had known and all the plans she had made to see if he might love her. Strangers had given him medals for his bravery, but he had never taken a risk such as she did today and confessed the contents of his heart to someone who might not confess back.

Having to watch her gather her pride in the face of Elsa’s declaration made his chest ache so badly he could scarcely draw breath. In that moment he knew. There was no other blend of euphoric misery that sunk this deep. Love. The last locked places in his heart gave way. It was sudden and shocking and he hadn’t even realized he was falling.

Her words from just a few minutes ago echoed, “...she said that you were in love with me too,” yes, he was. He was drowning in love with her. There was nothing he wouldn’t do for her, to mend her, to show her that no one and nothing would hurt her this much again. Including himself.

Yet he stood before her promised to another. How foolish he had been thinking that Elsa could be a mother to his children, a partner in his life, or the lover in his bed. He was irritated. At himself. At Elsa. Not one to display his emotions he harnessed them instead. As the anger began to seep in again and he clapsed onto it, allowed it to help him focus.

“Elsa,” he whispered as he tried to extricate his arm from her but her grip slithered tighter and her free hand came up to rest on his chest. It was an intimate gesture, calculated to make sure Maria knew he had been claimed. And the look in her wide blue eyes, there were no words for all the things she was saying without a sound. He felt grimy.

"Get off the terrace before you cry, get off the terrace before you cry, go go go," was the broken record Maria heard in her head. It was one thing to know that all her emotions must have been cascading across her face but they didn't have to see the evidence streaking down her cheeks.

Saying a desperate prayer to please let her have this one moment of dignity she took a deep breath and spoke.

"May I wish you every happiness Baroness," she said softly but mercifully her voice was steady. "And you too Captain." Oh, she could feel her eyes begin to well with tears as she said his name.
Determined to exit, she didn't wait for a reply before striding headlong past the happy couple and up the steps toward the house.

"Wait! Please," Georg called out. Before she could even turn around she felt his fingers close over hers.

"You are back to stay?" He murmured, unable to stop his thumb from stroking over her fingers.

"How can you.. I don't know. I don't know anything anymore...," the tears began to spill over and with that she pulled her hand from his and strode into the house.

Georg watched her go, his fingertips still warm from her touch. The tears only helped to confirm to him that her feelings were more than a figment of Elsa’s imagination. But the betrayal in her eyes had almost brought him to his knees. He actually felt himself flinch as came very close to running after her.

One battle at time wins the war. He had to find a way out of this disaster but it wouldn’t happen if he couldn’t focus. He ran a hand thru his hair and rubbed at the back of his neck. A deep breath, squared shoulders. Captain von Trapp mask in place he pushed all thoughts of Maria away.

And then he rounded on Elsa, narrowing his eyes and piercing her with a hard stare.

Reverting to society manners of ignoring the obvious scene occurring in front of her, Elsa walked forward to join him on the steps. Under his heated glare self preservation instincts kicked in and Elsa began her usual patter.

"Well, you must be hungry after all that excitement,” I did hear that cook made wiener schnitzel, your favorite. Won’t it be nice to have the governess back. Although one would think she could have called to..."

"Elsa,” he interrupted sharply. "I want a truthful answer from you. Several in fact. Did you go to Fraulein Maria's room the night of the party and purposefully shame her into leaving us?’' he demanded.

“Well, not...I didn’t really have a plan when I went up. I thought I could suggest something appropriate for her to wear, really Georg, she might have come down in a rag she made of curtains!’’ She snorted. "And I wanted to warn her about her behavior...and frankly yours as well. Dancing outside, with your governess, in full view of the entire party! In front of your impressionable children..."

"How dare you!” Georg barked.

“And inviting her to dinner? Were you so addled by the dance with your servant that you thought no one would notice her presence at our table?” she spat. “Good heavens, between the two of you Franz would have needed extra napkins to blot up the drool.”

“Elsa, that will be enough! Besides Max wanted...what does it matter,’’ he ran a hand thru his hair in frustration. “You could have let her be.”

"Allowing her to humiliate herself was kinder? She seemed so naive I thought that I might draw her attention to the way she was throwing herself at you!’’ She shot back. “You’re a fool if you think people wouldn’t have talked. I did you a favor.”

"A favor?’” he scoffed.

Gliding past Georg she climbed the remaining stairs and crossed over to the table on the terrace
and plucked up a cigarette. Georg watched her light it impatiently, drumming his fingers on his pant leg.

She patted a perfect blonde curl and regained her composure. Changing tactics she took a drag of her cigarette and bit the end of the holder cocking her hip provocatively.

"Darling, I realize that men will have their little indiscretions..." Elsa simpered at him.

"Not men like me. I'd not do you or her the disservice."

"It was her idea to leave, I was only trying to be helpful," she crossed her arms and blew out a stream of smoke.

"Helping yourself you mean," he snapped. "You will pack your bags this instant and return to Vienna." He was furious. How could she be so flippant? She would marry a man who she believed capable of using another person?

"Oh Georg, be reasonable. I had to do something...everyone could see. She would come into a room and you would, well, not light up exactly...your not the type but... That faraway look you have sometimes would disappear and suddenly you were fully present. And focused on her. You watched her, all the time. Georg, you just ran up the stairs after her as though you'd found her stray shoe at the ball!"

Georg clenched his jaw and stared out at the lake shaking his head a bit to clear the confusion. Had his feelings been so obvious to everyone except himself? Had the children noticed as well? The children. No matter his actions or Elsa’s his children were innocent in all of this and it never seemed to have crossed her mind that she might hurt them as well. The anger swelled again.

"I asked you to marry me three days ago. To be the mother of my children, did you think of them at all when you chased away a person who means so much to them? A person who has done nothing to you?"

"But she's done something to you! Since we arrived I've no idea who you are anymore. The man I knew hardly mentioned his children! You seemed to enjoy the things that I enjoyed. I thought perhaps we could be a good match...but which man are you really? Because I don't think it was the man I knew in Vienna," she said as she shook her head and took another drag.

"Obviously," he snorted. "You believed me to be the worst sort of reprobate, one you had to warn the governess about. The kind who might twist her feelings into something ugly and sordid before I cast her aside!"

"You forget yourself Georg... I knew Agatha well."

"You'll not speak of her," he interrupted sharply. "We'll not drag her memory into this..."

She waved him off in with a plume of smoke, "Your reputation before you met her precedes you."

"Yes," he sighed. "I took other women into my bed before I was married. It's no secret, Elsa. But never an innocent girl. One who has designs on becoming a nun!"

“And that is why you finally asked me? Your “nun” returned to her precious abbey and I was to play the second fiddle!”

“No, of course not,” but he knew it was a lie.

"I really don’t understand Georg. She's just a plain mountain girl, no one and nothing to her name."
She works for you! She needed to face the reality of what she is, just a dalliance. This isn’t a fairytale! She can't possibly be everything you want in a wife."

"No," he murmured, "but she is everything I need." And with that realization the fight seemed to have left him.

Running his hand along the railing of the terrace he gathered his thoughts. It didn’t really matter anymore what had motivated Elsa to Maria’s room. Insulted as he was by Elsa’s opinion of the kind of man he was he had to admit there was truth in her words. He had been a different man in Vienna, a lost man. And while he had brought Elsa to his home with real intentions of asking her to share his life he had known all along his heart wasn’t in it. He had been unkind to her, making her a contingency plan to fill the gap in his life, unable and unwilling to let her get close to him in a meaningful way.

“Elsa,” he sighed. “When two people talk of marriage…”

“Don’t. Don’t say another word,” she paused to stub out her cigarette. “I really don’t think I could bare it. I...I do care for you in my way Georg. I think you're making a mistake, this “thing” with your governess will pass and you will be right where you started. But don’t believe you can start again with me.”

A very confused Max wandered out into the terrace just as a very angry Elsa flounced past him her skirt snapping in time with her attitude. He had obviously heard the last bit of conversation.

"Ahh...," he seemed lost for words as he turned to watch Elsa's retreat. Sending Georg a raised eyebrow he continued, "The children and I went ahead and had dinner. They've gone up to visit with Fraulein Maria. Georg what..."

Georg reached out an arm and clapped his friend on the back. "Max, I promise you and I and a bottle of scotch will all have a long talk but... I need you to take Elsa to the train station, tonight. She will be returning to Vienna."

"Of course, any excuse to drive your car," he said with a half smile that didn't mask his concern over what he had walked into.

Georg started up the steps, taking them two at a time.

"Where are you going?" Max called after him.

"To convince my governess she is the fairytale."

And it had a tad too much schmaltz but I like a little corny fluff every once in awhile. See y'all next chapter if you stick around!
I always thought Maria let our Captain off just a bit too easy...I think she's going to make him sweat a bit. She's one of the few people who could make him squirm...

Chapter Three

An ugly cry, that’s what Sister Margareta would call this. These were no delicate tears that glisten on eyelashes and then fall in a graceful track. She was sure the baroness would cry beautifully...or at least have a handkerchief at the ready, French linen and monogrammed.

Maria was a mess of gut wrenching sobs and hiccuping and splotchy cheeks. Curled into herself on the floor of her room Maria was certain her breastbone had splintered when her heart had broken and that was the reason for the devastating pains she felt where her heart used to be.

Engaged.

To be married.

To her.

Out on the terrace when he had touched her cheek she had felt such hope swell within her. Certain he was going to declare himself, say all the things she had secretly dreamed of hearing him whisper to her, take her in his arms and...never once had Elsa Schrader waltzed in during her imaginings. She reached up to rub at her cheek which was still tingling from his touch. Recalling the look on his face as he had brushed her skin, the same he had worn as he had held her close during the last strains of the Laendler. Always always their eyes seemed to say what they couldn’t bring their mouths to speak.

But perhaps she had read him wrong all along and it was the brush of a goodbye on her cheek after all? Embarrassment flooded over her at the words she had spoken to him. How would she face this? Or him?

Maria shifted on the floor so her back was against the door. She swiped at the tears on her face angrily but still they kept falling. She should have known better, really. Who was she to come back and hope to have any chance with a man such as the Captain? A girl raised in the mountains, with no money, who has spent the last years cloistered in a convent? Elsa Schrader was probably cutting her teeth on society pearls whilst she was learning to muck out a stall!

Deciding that the floor was horribly uncomfortable for a proper crying jag Maria pushed herself to her feet and crossed to the table by the window to retrieve a tissue.

And there he was.

Standing on the terrace in plain site engaged in close and apparently serious conversation with a suitably elegant Elsa, cigarette trailing behind her. And wasn't it just hateful that in this horrible moment she couldn't help but notice how handsome he was. She stepped back from her window and sat down on the bed praying that she hadn't been seen. They made a lovely and aristocratic little vignette down there amongst all the trappings of wealth and privilege. Never had she felt so keenly that she didn't belong. Wasn't wanted. Why did this have to sting so deeply? Would she
feel like this whenever she saw them together? This wretched ache? Or worse yet overwhelming anger. Maria had a bit of a temper but never like this. Simply imagining the Baroness with him made her want to scratch her eyes out and pull all her perfectly coiffed hair until she was bald! This was an unmitigated emotional disaster.

Feeling the anger and irritation creep in at the frustration of it all Maria tried to remember Sister Berthe's advice on maintaining poise and a sense of calm in all situations. She took a deep breath and blew her bangs out of her face.

It hadn't worked when she set a wee corner of the Abbey barn on fire and it wasn't working now.

As she blew her nose she snorted at the thought of the Reverend Mother's fine words of the Lord closing a door and always opening a window. He'd opened a window alright, right onto the man she loved standing with another woman. How ironic.

Yet almost as soon as she'd thought it she regretted it. The Lord had closed one door, but perhaps He was using the lack of open windows to show her that life at the Abbey was truly His will. As usual, she simply needed to learn the hard way that what one wants is not necessarily what is best. A cruel lesson. One which she knew she would feel the bite of for many months to come. Because she wanted him. Wanted a them. Whether or not she returned to the Abbey she would return a different person having left a part of herself behind with the children and the Captain, well, it wouldn't do her any good to dwell on that now. Weeping into her Wiener schnitzel wasn't going to help her situation at all and frankly she'd frighten the children. Despite the heartache, Maria knew she simply wasn’t made for prolonged sorrow and the sooner she plucked herself up the better.

Dabbing away the last of the tear tracks she went into the bathroom to splash some water on her face, carefully avoiding the view from the window. Soon enough she would face the happy couple...

Turning the taps she held her breath to try stop the hiccups. Looking into the mirror as the water dripped down her face she assessed herself. Splotchy. She blew out the breath she had been holding and grabbed a towel. She hiccuped.

Resolving to make her last days here count as much as they could for the children Maria started to feel slightly less self pity, steadier at least. Or you're simply out of tears right now and the dehydration has finally gotten to you. She sighed, pushing her own misery and disappointed feelings aside would be hard for her. She tended to wear all her emotions all the time. Sister Margareta had once told her that she lived "out loud" and she should be proud that she had no artifice in her.

"You can do this," she told the sad girl in her reflection. "You wanted to find the life you were born to live didn't you? So it wasn't what you thought it was going to be. There are still seven people who are counting on you to prepare them for a new mother." And she loved them dearly. Running her fingers thru her hair she crossed over to the wardrobe and found all her dresses, just as she left them. It was touching, truly, that they had not wanted to rid themselves of her memory. Perhaps they had held out hope she would return. Fingering the soft fabrics, and sheepishly patting down any pockets for hidden "gifts", she felt a stab of sadness again. She would have to leave them all soon, permanently.

She rubbed her thumb into her breastbone unconsciously to still hurt blooming again.

"You have to face it. You have to face him..." she murmured.

For heavens sakes, perhaps my expectations were out of line if I can't even call him by his name in
my own head! She had to face reality where the Captain was concerned.

He had chosen another.

He had made her no promises.

He had entertained his children by dancing with the governess and there was nothing more to it for him. He couldn't have known what Elsa had accused him of the night of the party although she hoped he would get a satisfactory explanation from her as to why she would wish to marry a man she thought capable of such callous behavior.

And in his defense he had seemed angry on her behalf when he had heard what the baroness had said the night she left. Truly, he was an honorable man. And that made the situation of trying to stop loving him all the harder.

Maria was jolted out of her little swirl of self pity by a knock on the door. Followed by a few giggles and some very loud "shhushes". Hoping her face had cleared of the evidence of her jag she opened the door to seven hopeful faces. And she knew. Whatever happened between her and the Captain this was worth it. They were worth it.

"We've brought your guitar and luggage," Friedrich announced as he and Kurt held up the aforementioned items with pride.

"Might we come in Fraulein Maria?" inquired Leisel politely gesturing to her brothers and sisters. Maria noticed Leisel seemed wary of her, almost as though she was watching for signs she might leave again. She glanced over at Brigitta and found the same wary look in her eyes as well. It was clear they needed reassurance and they deserved an explanation.

"Oh, of course! Come in and tell me all your news!"

The children happily piled onto her bed and started talking all at once, everyone except for Gretl who remained suspiciously quiet. Maria pushed the door closed and sat down on the bed and tucked the little girl into her lap before she attempted to pick apart the seven different threads of conversation headed her way.

"...it fell over and broke but Frau Schmidt wasn't too mad. Then I built a kite..."

"My parasol got a tear in the frilly part, can you fix it Fraulein Maria?"

"I started the best book the other day you'll have to read it when I've finished so we can talk about it!"

"...invented a new game with strings and rocks and a ball. We accidentally tossed the ball into the lake, but I jumped in and saved it!"

"I found a pattern for a new dress and now that your back perhaps we could look over it together?"

"You should have seen how high I climbed the tree by the stables Fraulein Maria! Would you come and watch me climb up again?"

As Maria was trying to answer everyone in turn Brigitta heard the snick of the doorknob turning and narrowed her eyes to see who it might be. The door opened only a fraction but she caught the glint off her father's ring. He poked his head in for just a moment and held his finger to his lips to keep her from alerting everyone to his presence. Brigitta was sure he was making a show of shutting the door seeing as how he had left it open just a bit. He was most certainly listening in on
them. A clever girl, she knew that people who eavesdrop rarely hear good news... She shook her head and turned her attention back to Fraulein Maria.

"...and I can't wait to take your kite up to the mountain Kurt. Right after we see Louisa's amazing tree climbing demonstration," declared Maria.

"Fraulein Maria?", asked Gretl, subdued. "Why did you leave us? Was it because Marta and I spilled our water colors on you?" The children fell silent, finally the question on all their minds had been asked.

Georg found himself leaning closer into the door, wishing he had grabbed a water glass on his way thru the kitchen. He wondered what she might tell the children, hell, he wondered what he was going to tell the children if she left again. The truth he supposed, it was his fault this time. When he was taking the steps up to her room three at a time he hadn't a thought in his head beyond his need to see her. Talk to her. Touch her.

Finding his children already ensconced on her bed had been a disappointment. Yet the intrusion had given him a minute to collect himself and he was grateful for it. What had he been about to do? Barge into her room and declare his undying love to a woman who was more than likely angry with him. Whom he had hurt, confused, and misunderstood. No, he would need to be patient and let the children have their turn first.

Daring another peek into the room he found the picture of his children surrounding Maria to be a hopeful picture of his future. Their future together. Whatever happened between the two of them as they moved forward this moment was important. The moments she had given his children, drawn them out, taught them to be confident again in themselves and in their father. Those memories where precious. If she left tonight never to return she would have already marked them for the rest of their lives.

Almost pressing his ear to the door he strained to hear the answers she would give.

"Oh darling of course not," Maria said as she cuddled Gretl closer and sought to pull Marta into her embrace as well. "You mustn't think it was your fault, not for a moment."

"But you left. And you didn't say bye to us," Gretl mumbled into Maria's neck.

"It was wrong of me to leave without a proper goodbye. I'm sorry. I was missing the life I had at the Abbey and I had some important feel, ur, questions to ask the Reverend Mother and I just couldn't wait anymore. But I'm here to stay..." she drew a deep breath. "Well, at least until you return to school or a new governess can be arranged. You'll have the, um, you'll have the wedding to look forward too." She smiled sadly. "You must be looking forward to having a new mother."

"Not at...".

"Yes, of course we are Kurt," Brigitta cut in with a quick glance at the door. She gave her brother a hard stare and glanced at Leisel for help.

Kurt pointedly ignored his sister and simply responded in a louder voice, drowning her out, “Not at all! She can’t catch a ball and she doesn’t seem to like fish much...”.

“She doesn’t know any songs.”

“She wears too much perfume and I always sneeze when I get too close. She doesn’t like to be sneezed on,” Marta whispered.

“Probably never climbed a tree in her whole life!”
“And she doesn’t like us at all... I heard Leonie tell Hannah that she’s sending us to a lovely boring school.”

“You mean a ‘boarding school’, corrected Friedrich with a disgusted sneer at the idea. “Father wouldn’t allow that, would he?”

“Yes, well, father just told us today so we are all getting used to it,” interrupted Leisel diplomatically.

Marta chimed in next, "Can't you stay with us for always Fraulein Maria?"

She cleared her throat of the sadness gathering there.

"Oh my darling, I wish I could but... the baroness and your father will want to start fresh... as a new family." And I would be in the way, in every possible meaning of the word. “I am sure that Leonie must have heard wrong. Your father, even when he was at his saddest after your mother passed, never sent you away. You must remember that the Baroness hasn’t much experience with children and she’ll need lots of advice...” the children giggled at that. “And not the kind of advice you gave me when I first arrived!” she exclaimed, tickling Gretl and Marta.

Clapping her hands together and forcing a smile, "Now that that's all settled let's get ready for bed. It's been a big day, for everyone."

"Could you sing for us?" asked Gretl rubbing at her eyes.

"Of course."

Georg stepped back from the door and crept down the hall to the back steps. He felt heavy, in mind and heart. If Elsa hadn’t already been packing he would have done it for her himself. Boarding school? Did she think he would simply roll over and acquiesce to her every whim? Not bloody likely, he snorted. He had thought a mother, any mother, would be a help to his children. But he could see now that only one woman would do. He walked back to his study trying to find a way to let Maria know, tonight if possible, what was in his head. He wanted the chance to explain, to confess, or to beg her if need be.

After settling the children in and promising Leisel some time for a long talk in the morning Maria found herself standing in the hallway about to return to her room. Her mind still swirling she thought perhaps a walk would help her to sleep. She headed out the door of the terrace and wandered off down by the lake towards the bench by the gazebo.

She had been wrong, alone with her thoughts out here was ten times worse. Everywhere she looked there was the ghost of memory and knowing she would have to leave soon only made them harder to bear. Just the thought of returning to the Abbey, alone again, was enough to bring the tears out.

"Hello."

Oh, no. Alone had been better. Why was he out here? Swiping at her cheeks and trying to feign an air of indifference she turned around on the bench and gave a very calm and steady,

"Good evening Captain, sir." But she was anything but. Seeing him again after the tumultuous events on the terrace was ripping her apart inside. She thought she would be able to handle all this, but she was going to fail just one hundred percent.

“I thought I just might find you here…”
“Hmm, its rather the last place I thought I might find you in. Hence my being here,” Maria muttered the last bit, gesturing to the air around her.

Suddenly she was irritated, with herself and with him. Had he come down alone to dismiss her? Sent by The Soon To Be Baroness Von Trapp to talk to the poor lovelorn governess about curtailing future declarations of love? She would be firm, but kind, professional...if only he didn't walk too closely to her. She was certain that if he smelled half as good as he looked in that suit she would forget her vows completely. Her eyes narrowed with determination and she forced herself to watch him.

Georg swore he could hear the faint sound of the diving bells from a submarine, warning him that he was heading into dangerous waters, possibly to drown in his unrequited love for her. When did you get so maudlin old man? She was clearly feeling something, well, not pleasant towards him. Reminding himself that he had won Agatha’s heart even after she had pitched a vase full of flowers at his head he pressed on. What choice did he have?

“Um, may I?” he asked as he gestured toward the bench.

“It’s your bench, sir.”

Sass, he thought. And found himself attracted to her all the more because of it. Rubbing a hand behind his ear and feeling the sweat start to prickle his back he played for time while he decided what to say next. A hundred tawdry phrases came to mind but in the end, as always with her, he just blurted out his true thoughts.

“Are you angry with me? Wait, don’t answer that... I can see that you are, upset, and I’d like the chance to...”

“I’m angry with myself, sir. For forgetting myself earlier, forgetting who I am. Where I come from.”

"Forgetting yourself?" He snorted, on his feet once again, his nervous energy making sitting an impossibility. "I've never known anyone who was more certain of herself than you."

She watched him pace in front of her. "Well, I'm certain of one thing. I'll not embarrass you or the baroness with a messy scene..." she said sadly, more to the grass then to him. Plucking a green blade between her fingers she started knotting it. "I'll stay only until arrangements can be made for another governess."

"Another governess?,” he shook his head in confusion, he was having trouble following the thread of conversation. "I don't want another governess."

"Well, I suppose that will be up to you and your new wife then. I can’t possibly stay, she wouldn’t want that..."

"Maria, the Baroness and I, we are..."

"You really needn't explain yourself sir,” she interrupted. “I saw you, on the terrace, after my humiliating exit. I could see you talking from my window and I realize the problem my return has caused. What I said to you..." She tossed the knotted grass onto the lawn in frustration.

He walked right in front of the bench and crouched down in front of her to capture her full attention but he didn’t touch her. "Maria, there isn't going to be any baroness."

"There isn't?"
"No," he said standing up and walking a few paces away. “We did have words, as you saw, but they were,” he cleared his throat, “...unpleasant words at best. Maria, I asked her to leave, immediately. What she said to you, in my house, about me...about you. I haven’t been that angry in a long time. I couldn't marry her. I knew as soon as I saw you...my feelings for you...".

She scoffed at his words and he turned to face her. "Just hours ago you were going to marry another woman, I don't understand. If you thought you had feelings for me why would you propose?"

“Maria, I...you left. I didn't find the note, Frau Schmidt did. She found me in my study that next morning and handed it to me...she had the oddest expression on her face.” He ran a hand thru his hair. He felt as though he was on a tightrope, afraid to say the wrong things and cause her to cut the line beneath him.

“You had returned to the Abbey, that's all I knew. I had no hope that you would return,” he sighed. “I had been up all night, after the party. I had planned to talk...well, I don't really know what I had planned. You wanted to be a nun and...I just wanted you. It would have been wrong of me to ask you for more. But I was going to anyway. I was going to beg if necessary."

She stood up from the bench to face him. "The dance...you felt it too?"

"Maria, if you hadn't backed up I'm afraid I would have kissed you. In front of my children, and Elsa, and most of Salzburg. I can't stop myself where you're concerned.”

She felt the sting of tears threaten and she clenched her fists, “Oh, but...She was right. The Baroness. I don't have anything or anyone. I come from nothing,” she knew she sounded hollow and sad. Ashamed that her feelings seemed to be leaking out despite her best efforts she felt her self pity start to turn to anger.

“Men like you don’t marry girls like me, they give you orders at birth," she snapped.

He smirked at her. “Men like me don’t take orders, we give them. That is until sassy women from convents come along and take our whistles and refuse to follow the chain of command. We fall for those women." He took the last few steps forward to close the distance between them and took her hands in his. When she refused to meet his gaze he let go of one hand and gently tilted her chin up with his finger.

“I didn’t get a chance to finish what we started on the terrace. Let me say it now. You have changed my life, melted my heart and then broken it. Maria, you must know that I love you. I haven’t wanted, needed, a woman the way I do you for a very long time."

"But surely you and she, well..." she blushed at her own remark horrified that she had said it aloud, at this moment. He had just told her he loved her...her heart was in so far into her throat she wasn’t sure how she had managed to put her foot in her mouth as well.

Georg scoffed at that. "How could I take another woman into my bed when I was terrified I'd call out your name?" he answered with honesty, watching the blush paint her cheeks and spill down her throat. "I'm trying to do this right...” he murmured under his breath, more to himself than her. Was nothing with this woman ever going to go according to what he planned? He smiled, probably not, and he wouldn’t want it any other way.

"So you admit the rumors about your, umm, colorful past are true?,” she blurted out, clapping a hand over her mouth in shock. Would nothing stop her tongue this night?
"Rumors? What goes on at that Abbey? Well, uh yes, some of them might be true....," he trailed off sheepishly. Maria rolled her eyes and walked a few steps away. He followed her, reaching out for her hand. She turned and allowed him to hold it, feeling the tingle of his touch.

"It's true I, behaved rather badly as a young man, until I met my wife. I loved her, deeply. Since her death there has been no one else." He flattened her palm against his chest, knowing she could feel his heart beating, hammering because of the nearness of her. "You weren't my first love. But I think you might be my last."

She reached up to brush her thumb across his cheek as he had done to her on the terrace, “I love you too.” For a minute they simply looked at one another, feeling the shift between them, friends to lovers. She stepped closer to him and smirked a little as she as she asked, “Can I kiss you now, Captain?”

“I don’t know, can you Fraulein?” he smirked back.

Instead of making a reply she stood on her tiptoes and brushed her lips across his. As she made to step back he caught her around the waist with both hands and pulled her close until their bodies were pressed together. “My turn,” he whispered. He leaned in and kissed her bottom lip running the tip of his tongue along the seam of her mouth. She pressed in closer, letting him lead her into deliciously unfamiliar territory. One kiss merged into another and he felt himself losing control, he pulled away, not wanting to frighten her. But she was having none of that nonsense. Reaching for the knot in his tie Maria tugged until they were once again just a breath away. She smiled at him, reading his mind, “I’m not afraid, Georg. Kiss me”. He slid his hands into her hair and swept her into a desperate kiss, sliding his tongue against hers, teaching her and letting her teach him in turn.

“What was it you said today, about looking for your life? Find it here, with me...with my children,” he kissed her again, softly. ”Marry me?” he whispered against her lips.

“Yes.”

The End.
Epilogue, of sorts

An epilogue with Max and that bottle of scotch Georg promised to split with him after he drove an angry Elsa to the train station.

Georg was standing in the fading light of his study window watching his children merrily chase fireflies. He chuckled to himself as Kurt overreached and stumbled into Friedrich who tripped over Louisa who looked on with disgust at her brothers. Months ago the scene from his window would have appalled him, the chaos and noise sending him for his whistle. His gaze landed on the lovely blonde whispering with his oldest daughter and he watched her turn to look right at him. Like magnets, always feeling the pull of the other. She waved and blew him a kiss. As much as he loved seeing her amongst his children he selfishly wanted her all to himself. She had only been his for less than a day, he frowned. He was pouting but it was his turn, he'd been patient today.

He sighed.

They had decided the night before to drop little hints to the children rather than tell them their news straight away and see how long it would take them to notice. For once, the children and Maria where seated around the breakfast table before him. Entering the dining room he was suddenly struck by the scene before him, how right it seemed, how peaceful he felt about his family's future. A peace he had not felt in years. Instead of trying to play it cool in front of the children and drop subtle hints as planned, he improvised. He simply walked into the room, bade the children good morning, strode over to a wide eyed Maria and kissed her on the mouth, whispering his good morning in her ear. Chaos ensued as he calmly took his seat and picked up the paper, letting the questions and exclamations and whoops of joy surround him.

Hours later he found himself in the library trying to find an engineering volume he had misplaced. So engrossed in his search he hadn’t heard footsteps behind him and gave a rather unmanly little jump when Maria called his name.

“Oh, I didn’t hear you.” He leaned back against the table behind him and crossed his arms, smiling at her. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

She just stood there for a moment, realizing that she had never seen him without his jacket on. The beginnings of stubble on his cheeks, his tie was missing and he had undone a few buttons at the throat. He looked rather earthy to her, tumbled, as though she had caught him undressing. She was endlessly fascinated by him.

“We missed seeing you at lunch and I just…,” she shook her head, deciding whether or not to say what she was feeling. “Its silly really. I just wanted to make sure that all of this was real.” She ran a fingertip down his chest, almost unconsciously. She seemed to be grounding herself. He stood completely still and watched its progression, jaw clenched, his body burning as though she was touching his bare skin.

“It’s all happening, did happen,” Maria corrected. “I’m not dreaming again am I?,“ she asked. She abruptly withdrew her finger as she realized she had reached the bottom of his shirt but she met his eyes without embarrassment.

She never said what he expected her to say or did what he thought she might. It was one of the joys of loving her he supposed, waiting to see what she brought to life next. He brushed the back of his hand against her cheek, “Its real,” he assured her crossing his arms again at the temptation of
her. Lightening the mood he asked, “Now what’s this about dreaming, again? Been having dreams about me then?,” he teased and watched as she flushed deeply but gave him a saucy little smile.

She shook her head at him, “I’ll never tell…” she teased back.

“Oh ho, well then, I won’t tell you about the dreams I had about you.”

“You dreamt about me? Really?” They hadn’t had a chance to talk much about the where and why and how of the start of their feelings for one another and she was more than curious. She wanted to hear it all.

“Mmm hmm.” He smiled to himself, the only betrayal of the thoughts swirling through his mind that he allowed. “And someday I might relent and tell you all about them.”

“When?” she asked eagerly, her blue eyes sparkling with innocent interest.

Georg leaned forward until they were only inches apart, breaths mingling, and he watched her eyes dilate. In a low voice he answered, “When I am free to touch you anywhere. Not having to keep my arms crossed for fear of violating the rules only one day into our engagement.”

Promise me you’ll tell?” she whispered, intrigued by whatever it was he was unwilling to confess but had made his eyes darken.

“Yes,” he whispered back.

“Good,” she quipped jauntily as she bounced back a bit from him. “Then I’ll promise to tell you mine and hope I won’t offend your maidenly sensibilities!”

Laughing, she popped onto her tiptoes and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and turned to leave. He reached out, grabbed her hand, pulled her into his embrace and kissed her sassy mouth, letting his passion for her seep out carefully. He had been alone for so long, to suddenly have this woman he loved in his arms felt surreal. A part of him wanted to push. To rush everything and everywhere. The rest of him didn’t want it to be hurried but savored as he discovered her. She daringly deepened the kiss as she licked into his mouth and he groaned in approval. He craved her touch, soaked it up, the soft caresses against his neck and the sting of her nails on his shoulders as he found a sensitive spot behind her ear.

“I had it first! That’s not fair!”

“You set it down, that means you don’t want it anymore! Fair game Kurt!”

Maria pulled back slowly and gave a reluctant smile. “I had better go and arbitrate before the bloodshed starts.” He simply watched her walk towards the door as though she was unaffected by his kisses while his own heart hammered and sweat pooled at the small of his back.

He ghosted his fingertips across his mouth absently at the memory of her. Those stolen minutes in the library had done nothing to help the situation and he had a feeling a thousand more such moments would only scratch the surface.

“Yes,” he called out after a sharp knock on his door pulled him from his thoughts.

"It's only me," said Max, waltzing into the study and draping himself onto a high backed leather chair in a dramatic slump.

"Max! We missed you at dinner. When did you get back?,” Georg asked, crossing over to the
cabinet and searching about for a bottle of scotch and a couple of glasses.

"Oh, half an hour or so, I had a few appointments in town. Congratulations man! You were, uh, very busy while I was away, or so I hear," purred Max, eyebrows wiggling with anticipation.

Georg raised an eyebrow at Max in response but said nothing. He took the seat opposite and simply set the glasses and the full bottle on the table between them. Max picked up the bottle and scrutinized the label before opening it with a little flourish and inhaling deeply.

"I do love rich people...," he sighed as he poured out well more two fingers worth into each tumbler. He handed the Captain a glass and took up his own, swirling it a bit.

“Cheers, “ Max said, tapping his glass against the Captain’s. "Now which of us shall go first, mm? How about me? That way we can save the, uh, more provocative details for last shall we?"

"I'll not be providing details, provocative or otherwise Maximillian," but there was no sting in Georg's tone.

"Oh, if I remember correctly you'll sing like a canary if I can convince you to pour enough of this down your throat," Max took a deep sip and raised his glass in Georg's direction.

"To your lovely governess..."

"Max…,” the Captain started to warn him.

"Ah ah ah, let me finish," he cleared his throat dramatically, "to your lovely governess, may she always help you see the error of your ways."

Georg raised his eyebrow again but crooked a grin at his friend. They took simultaneous sips before Max added under his breath, "Especially as regards a certain outdoor singing festival..."

Georg snorted at his and glanced out the window again to see that the children were gone, probably gathered up for bed. Turning back to his companion he simply sat back and waited. Max never needed convincing to talk. And talk.

"Right then, my evening was ghastly as you well knew it would be. Whilst you were locked in your study, brooding or mooning or writing love sonnets,” he teased as he rolled his eyes in mock disgust. “I was trying to figure out how I was going to squeeze all eleven, eleven trunks and boxes Georg, into the boot of your car. I considered renting a donkey and cart but felt it was the wrong time to ask dear Elsa if she wouldn't mind traveling by hay... She had commandeered all the maids in the house and Frau Schmidt to help her pack,” he chuckled. "Hmm, come to think on it they were all working very fast, and grinning, you don't suppose they wanted to be rid of her do you?"

"Ha! She didn't manage to convince Franz to lend a hand?"

"No, he was hiding in the cellars."

"Really? How on earth did you know that?"

"I ran into him trying to find a place to hide!"

Georg laughed and refilled their glasses. Though he was not proud of his part in Elsa's abrupt departure from his home he couldn't help but laugh at Max. He had a wonderful ability to turn any story into a long suffering tale all about him.

"Finally, Frau Schmidt came down to let me know we could load the car. It was already getting
dark by then you know and I knew we would have to hoof it if we wanted to make the station in
time for the last train. I felt that there was some urgency on your part, and hers, not to be a guest in
this house at breakfast,” he paused to take a sip and enjoy the rare bashful expression on Georg's
face.

"Anyway, as we were stuffing her final pieces of luggage into the car, uh, incidentally one or two
might be missing...one of the lads was having trouble making a few fit and I may have, uh, tossed
them into your bushes... Perhaps we can have them sent along?"

"Max, for heaven sakes!"

"I know I know, anyway... Just as Elsa was coming down the staircase one of the maids raced up
to Frau Schmidt and started whispering rather madly into her ear, for an older woman she surely
can move when she wants too. She gave some sort of elaborate signal and all the doors and rooms
with any view of the lake starting slamming shut...odd wasn't it?"

"Hmmm, oh yes very, uh odd."

"I think we should drink to Frau Schmidt for her quick thinking!” exclaimed Max, giving his
companion a look that said he knew exactly why the order had been given.

They raised their glasses and toasted the good lady, twice for good measure.

"Needless to say we left and she rather blistered my ears all the way into town. All the way.”
Georg started to open his mouth to offer an explanation but Max held up a hand.

"There is nothing you can say about your conversation with the Baroness that hasn't already been
repeated ad nauseum. Reading between the lines I'd say you made the right choice. I heard all
about your "little affair” with that know nothing nun who, according to Elsa, will probably ask
you to make love to her thru a hole in the sheet." Georg choked on a mouthful of scotch.

"On and on. The humiliation of being thrown over for a servant.. How much you'd regret her,
how Fraulein Maria was uncouth and uncivilized and don't get me started on the way she dresses.
Although now that your affections are engaged, perhaps your lady can stop wearing the
curtains?,” Max chuckled at his own cleverness.

"Touché, I'll put it on my list of things to spoil her with."

Max loosened his tie a bit before continuing his tale of woe.

"When we reached the train station I almost wept with relief. But I managed, well three porters
and I managed, to get her 'auf wiedershenen' onto the train and back to Vienna. Elsa can be a
wonderful companion when she wants to be but scorn her and ooh, watch your back Captain. I
did exact a rather hard promise out of her, she won’t say a word about Maria in polite circles. I
assure you. She’s hurt but she isn’t that cruel... Anyway, I had an early appointment today in town
and so decided to stay there instead of drive back."

"Max, I do appreciate it. You know I do. There is no one else I could have asked," he raked a
hand thru his hair a sullen expression on his face. "It would have been unfair to her, to drag things
out, to pretend something I don’t feel. I am sorry for the trouble I’ve caused you."

Max shrugged, "I feel partly responsible you know. I pushed you two together, all that lovely
money aside, you were both lonely and I...I should have stopped it once I realized. I could see
how you looked at Fräulein Maria, I hadn't seen that look on your face in a very long time." Both
men sat in silence as they remembered the Captain's first wife.

Max cleared his throat. "Think nothing of it. I'm still in your debt and you know it. Now!" Max
clapped his hands and rubbed them together with glee.

"What do I get when I come home from doing my duty for my commanding officer? Surprise! Surprise! You're engaged, to your delightful, beautiful and potentially lucrative, for me of course, governess!"

Max held up his glass in a toast and Georg tapped his in response. Grinning over the rim Max watched as a faint blush covered Georg's cheeks. Flushed, but not from the alcohol if he had to wager a guess. Wayward thoughts more like. Better and better for old Maxie!

"Come now, tell Max every teensie weensie disgusting little detail. And go slowly so I can savor it."

Georg shook his head. "There are no disgusting details. I asked her to marry me and she agreed. The wedding is in eight weeks, I do hope you'll be able to attend," Georg quipped dryly.

"Well, I like the version I made up in my head much better."

"I'll bet you do."

"That was the most utterly unromantic ‘how I got engaged story’ in history and if I didn't know you better I would be fooled by your nonchalance."

Georg held up a hand. "No Max. Some things are meant to be private."

Max waited a moment to see if he would continue but the man was a bloody stone. He poured more scotch into both glasses and then pretended to give up.

"If you won't talk about it then fine. Let's talk about that blueprint for the new submarine Wilhelm sent over, I'd love to take a look at it."

Several drinks later the blueprint was laying over the desk chair, drying in front of an open window having had a bit of drink sloshed over it. Both men had lost ties and jackets and Georg was missing a shoe.

"Max, I love her, you know."

"Yes I know," Max sighed. "You won't stop saying that."

"Let's toast to her," Georg lifted his glass.

"But we've toasted her already, her eyes and her ears, and her voice... I can't feel my face. At our age is it the drink or am I having a stroke?"

Georg leaned in and peered at him with eyes that wouldn't focus. "I don't think it's a stroke. A toast to my bride!"

"Mmm, what's left to toast? Her mouth?," Max giggled.

“She has a lovely mouth...delicious kisses…” the Captain trailed off and Max perked up immediately.

“To delicious kisses then,” and they drank, again.

“She smells so wonderful...she has only to walk into a room and I. Did you know I had a dream about her once,” Georg held up a hand and started silently counting his fingers, “…eight, nine, well more than once, after that puppet performance, a very risque dream…” Georg began to blush
and Max leaned in for the kill.

“Really? Do tell dear Maxie all about it.”

“Well, you see it started out...,” Georg stopped talking when he heard a light knocking on the door.

“Oh for God sakes, he was just getting to the good part! Go away!, Max shouted, falling forward a bit in his chair and catching himself on the table. The empty scotch bottle toppled to the ground.

The door to the study opened and revealed a very austere looking Frau Schmidt and a very curious Maria peeking around her.

Frau Schmidt entered the room and tried to block the worst of the view from the innocent Fraulein’s eyes but she wasn’t having much luck. She could hear the young lady snickering behind her, having obviously assessed the situation for herself.

“I was just coming to see if you and Herr Detweiler would require anything else for the evening, sir. Perhaps some coffee or sandwiches to help absorb the contents of the bottle on the floor?” Maria laughed even harder behind her and she had to admit it was rather funny. Finding the Captain deep in his cups for a celebratory reason was a refreshing change from the dark times after Agathe’s death. She supposed he was due a good time, and knowing what a rascal Herr Detweiler was he was probably mostly responsible.

“Uh, no, well, yes maybe some sandwiches, I mean sandwiches. Yes that would be very nice.”

“Very well then, sir. I’ll just go and see to that.” She turned and winked at Maria leaving her to take her place at the door.

“Ahh,” said Max spying the lady waiting at the door, “Your lovely governess is here to say goodnight to me I presume,” he teased.

“She’s not my governess,” Georg replied, wiggling his eyebrows, but the effect was more comical than lascivious and both men burst out with laughter.

“I hadn’t come to say goodnight actually,” Maria confessed, trying hard not to laugh. “I wanted to tell the Captain that the children and I would be taking a picnic to the mountain tomorrow and he was welcome, both of you are welcome, to come along with us. If your schedules permit of course,” she was trying to remain stoic but the sight of the two of them was ridiculous. “Georg darling, where is your shoe?”

“Oh, that. It’s in the waste basket,” he replied matter of factly.

“Of course, I see. And, uh why might it be in the waste basket?”

Georg dug in his trouser pocket and brandished a crumpled bill in the air, “Max bet me I couldn’t get it into the basket from here. I won,” he grinned proudly at her.

“That’s very nice darling,” Maria said, using the same tone she used when Gretl showed her a piece of her artwork.

“Your very nice too,” slurred the Captain, he was rewarded with an eye roll.

“Herr Detweiler, is there something wrong with your face? I only ask because you keep poking about your cheeks and nose and...”

“I can’t feel it...,” and with that he lurched himself to his feet and reached out a hand to the back of
the chair to steady himself. “I think I’ll just head to bed, Georg won’t give me any details about your engagement anyway...” he took Maria’s hand in his and kissed it gallantly. “My dear, you must call me Max, we are family now after all.”

“Thank you, Max. You must call me Maria.” Max started turned to leave when Maria interrupted him, “Um, Max, aren’t you meant to be our chaperone?”

Max turned to look back at Georg and grinned, “Trust me my dear, I am being a very good chaperone right now,” Georg laughed from his chair.

Max leaned in and whispered into Maria’s ear, “You’re quite safe. I’m not sure he can walk anyway. Best to leave him there to sleep it off. Not what he used to be in the drinking department,” he said, shaking his head sadly at the parties of the past. He patted her on the head and took a step before turning back one last time, “You know my dear, he loves you, so very much. I want to thank you for bringing my friend back. Saved my life more than once...always wanted to return the favor.” Drinking always made him maudlin.

Maria smiled warmly at him and leaned in to whisper conspiratorially to him, “Perhaps tomorrow, if you make it down to breakfast I could give you a few details...”

“Oh, I knew you and I were going to get along famously. Good evening my dear,” he tossed over his shoulder as he toddled down the hallway.

Maria walked into the study and retrieved a blanket from the chest to cover up her now sleeping future husband and dug the shoe out of the waste basket. She bent to press a kiss on his forehead and he murmured, ‘...really delicious kisses.” She shook her head at him and pulled the blanket up.

She turned out the light and shut the door before she burst out laughing.

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