

# The monster

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## *THE MONSTER*

Arishima Ikuma

Translated by Maya Mortimer

In Paris the hot season starts with the closing of the Spring Salon. Social life carries on for a little longer at Longchamps where the racing crowd await the Grand Prix; but once this is over, the summer exodus begins.

Since the start of May I had been receiving letters from a small mountain-hotel in Switzerland. A friend of mine was employed there as a manager for the summer season. "Come by all means", he wrote. June settled in and the dream of fresh peaks made me eager to leave Paris for a two-month summer holiday in Switzerland.

My friend was Japanese, an agreeable jolly man, and the grandson of some elder statesman of the Restoration period. Though well-born and a graduate, he did various menial jobs in Switzerland straight after university out of sheer desire for adventure. He started as a dishwashing boy at the hotel and sometimes helped the peasants to gather hay. In winter, he went skating and skiing with the local lads. No one, he wrote to me, was as intimate with the lower classes of Europe as himself, and this seemed indeed to be the case.

Still, I was curious to see a man like Ishiyama as a hotel manager—to see him, as it were, on his baptism of fire in the new job. With this in mind, I started my journey to the little hotel in the mountains.

After a whole night in an overheated train, I awoke to see the morning mist lifting from the wooded hills below. The white expanse of Lake Geneva was still envelopped in sleep. The sight of water refreshed my dulled senses in an instant. I saw gulls flying low. Slowly, the rails were approaching the water level; but before we touched the shore, the lake disappeared once again behind what looked like huge columns blackened by fire. We had arrived at a station between two bridges. This was Lausanne, hardly to be called a city by Parisian standards.

Even the passengers who were not stopping at Lausanne got out on the platform to wash their faces and have a cup of coffee. The sound of laughter at some joke finally dispelled the last remnants of my sleep.

The train is now passing between vine-covered hills. The lake sparkles in the morning sun, distant fields and villages fill our bedazzled eyes. Slowly, the Savoy range rises from the water, and straight across there is Evian, famous for its mineral sources and its grandiose baths with the frescoes of Bernard. Right up to an altitude of some thousand meters the slope is covered with pleasant hotels and villas, but all this passes by in a wink. So does Vevey, marked by the steps of Rousseau. Montreux rises out of a battlefield of daffodils and Byron's Chillon comes near and is gone. Gradually, hedged in by the pale blue walls of two mountain ranges, the lake narrows down and we seem to head straight into the gleaming snow-capped peaks of the Dents-du-Midi. Then abruptly, in less than a second, the train has passed through a gorge and the lake is gone.

Until it reaches the tunnel of the Simplon Pass, the rails follow the course of the clear Rhone, the narrow, deep valley leading to Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. High above, the eternal glaciers rise and fall like waves, while, in their varied shades of blue and white and pink, the jagged peaks soar into the sky. On the other side lies Italy and its ripening olives.

But I got down at Bex, a station in full view of the snowy Dents-du-Midi. On the left, the Bex torrent tumbles down from Les Diablerets to meet the Rhone. There I changed for Glion. For an hour or so, the train winds its way painstakingly up a slope so steep that the carriages have to be pulled by steel ropes. Among the rustling leaves, we hear the refreshing sound of running waters. Sometimes we see the Dents-du-Midi on the right and Les Diablerets on the left, sometimes the other way round. On our way we pass several villages, looking deserted but surely filled with villas and hotels, even if the hotels rather look like family houses. I stepped out at Glion and went in search of my friend's hotel.

On the slope below, I could see a little church with its bell-tower topped by an iron cross and, above the cross, a carved weathercock. The church was half hidden by a new chalet which turned out to be the place I was looking for. That it should be a chalet was unsurprising: it was a traditional wooden building with a sloping roof and a balcony all around it. Some of these chalets are richly decorated with painted ornaments under the eaves and look very elegant, but this one was brand-new and of a cheaper build. A maid was standing at the front door.

“Is Monsieur Ishiyama in?” I asked her.

“Monsieur Ishiyama?” she replied, somewhat flustered and lifted a bare red elbow to rub her sweating forehead.

“If this is the Diablerets Hotel, a Japanese manager must be working here. Am I right?”

“Ah, Monsieur, do you mean Ishi?”

Ishi, of course, a stone; what an apt name for a place like this, I thought, trying not to laugh. At this, “Mr Stone” himself came running out with the beaming face of a Japanese who sees a fellow-countryman after what must have seemed an eternity. The sight of me apparently acted like a balm after an excessive exposure to a culture of vintage wines, frosty winters and cattle raising.

“Sorry for not meeting you earlier. Here, you see, we start preparing lunch as soon as we’ve finished with breakfast; I work from five o’clock in the morning till ten in the evening without a moment’s rest.” He did, however, take a break from work to show me my room.

“Sorry, it’s a bit small, but the place is full. Provided you do your painting in the open air, you should be able to put up with this for a little while. In a day or two, I might be able to fix you with a better room.”

The room was, indeed, small. Under my window, water was cascading into a basin from which the cattle drink. I could also see the belltower and the churchyard.

“I like this fountain”, I said. Meanwhile, I had leaned out and discovered the huge bulk of Les Diablerets right in front of me. I stared at it. A huge and deep valley, hidden behind the thick treetops, ran between us and the mountain. I felt as if I were at the very heart of the mountain, far away from all human habitation.

“You must get up early, take your lunch along with you and walk. You’ll enjoy it, I’m sure. I can easily find you a guide. By the way, I talked about you to an American painter who’s been staying with us for some time. He’s eager to meet you, so I’ll introduce you later.”

He sat on my bed and started telling me about the walks he took to neighbouring villages and hamlets at times when visitors were scarce. Though accurate enough, his descriptions came across as a meaningless list of names, but he chatted on and on: “This place is made for a painter like you, the views are superb; but you won’t believe me if I simply tell you about it, so I’ll let you walk around and see for yourself; there’s a lot of pleasure in store for a newcomer to this place”, and so on and so forth. In

Tokyo, I remember, he had been an avid reader of newspapers, taking two or three every day. At the time Japanese politics was all he cared for, but now, no longer able to discuss Japanese news with me, his expatriate status seemed to vex him. There was a touch of resentment in his voice, as well as in his ceaseless nodding and gesticulating.

“Well, once you get into the Alps, you can’t avoid hearing this sort of rhapsody”, he said laughing and turned the subject to our schooldays and to common friends. This seemed to put him in a better mood and our conversation suddenly loosened up. “Luckily, there’ll be plenty of time to continue our chat; I’ve seen so many interesting things since I came here; maybe this evening...”

“That’ll be fine. Thanks for everything ... but tell me: did you come up via Marseille?”

“No, via *Gènes*.” (he meant Genoa).

“Quite a long time since we last met, isn’t it? We didn’t see much of each other even before we left Japan.”

“Umm”. For some strange reason, we found this conversation funny and we parted with laughter. At the door he turned back saying: “By the way, you won’t mind company at your table?”

“Not at all. Better than dining alone, I’m sure.”

“I’ll put you together with an Italian couple and a German lady.”

“I’m ready to try the experiment.”

I started unpacking. My suitcase, packed by my Parisian landlady, was filled with freshly laundered clothes which I dumped into a drawer. I was beginning to feel lonely and I looked forward to the evening. The mountain air was cleansing my lungs of the city smoke and I felt cold. Finally, lunch was announced by the bell above the entrance. I heard the sound of steps going to the dining room. The shrill, excited voices of children rang in the corridor. I washed my face hurriedly and went down. When I entered the dining room, everybody was already seated. In the left corner, there was a table reserved for the children. About seven or eight of them, dressed mostly in bright red or blue, were gathered around a snow-white tablecloth, their blond hair wet with perspiration, eyes as blue as blue grapes. Some of them looked like dolls, others had apple-red cheeks, but all of them seemed amazed at my appearance when “Mr Ishi” led me to my table. And it wasn’t only the children who looked surprised. Life there is monotonous and the coming of a single man among so many numerous families invariably creates a sensation. A single woman would be stared at

in the same way, especially by men. With all eyes fixed on me, I sat down at a table right in the centre of the room.

The others were already there. Opposite me there was the German lady, a good forty-year old with piercing eyes, an aquiline nose and a bronzed complexion. To my right and left were the two Italian guests: an elegant-looking matron with a shiny comb in her dark hair and a slender, pale, aristocratic-looking youth, the kind they would call *un bellissimo giovane*. He was the only young person among us and, as I guessed at a glance, the matron's son.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting. I've just arrived"—I said by way of greeting. I had barely time to unfold my napkin before the waitress arrived, having finished her round of the other tables. She carried an oval tray with green salad and cold fish.

"So you must be the Japanese gentleman we were waiting for"—said the German lady helping herself from the tray. I admired her skill in performing two operations at the same time—filling her plate and making conversation.

"That's right. I've just arrived from Paris. A long journey."

"Paris? Beautiful city. I'm German, but I adore Paris."

"Really? I thought that foreign ladies found Paris quite unpleasant."

"It's because I've lived a long time in the orient as well. It was only when I came back that I could appreciate the beauty of our European capitals, Paris included."

"The orient, you say? Where exactly?"

"Penang. My husband was a coffee importer at the time."

This is how the conversation started. I must admit that Europeans are good at small talk, whatever class they belong to. The elderly Italian lady cut in too, asking me if I had ever been to Italy. As we went on talking, I gathered that she and her son were nobles from Bologna. The son was second-lieutenant in the cavalry brigade, had contracted pleurisy last winter and been quite ill for some time. He was the only child of his widowed mother, and she had vowed never to leave his side. This was their fourth month in the mountains, she said, but they would shortly leave for the seaside.

"The mountain is refreshing, but our seaside resorts are opening up right now."

“Go back to your place”, snapped the German lady to a little girl by her side. “Maman!” moaned the girl disappointedly and left. She must have come unnoticed from the children’s table to inspect the Japanese guest.

The meal was nearly over and some guests were already leaving the room. Plates were piled up and the room was filled with the tinkling of china and silverware while the fragrant scent of coffee lingered in the air. Heavy after a hearty meal, some people were looking for shady nooks for their afternoon naps. I went to the door facing the garden and saw flowerbeds with plants wilting in the sun. Beyond, alongside the road, there was a slope dappled with red poppies, but these too looked dim through the dust lifted by occasional gusts of breeze. Young, cheerful-looking holidaymakers were passing by laughing and waving their *Alpenstocks*.

Children were romping about in the dust and I was about to sit down under a shady tree to observe them when I saw Ishi coming to me with a gray-clad gentleman—no doubt, the American painter. He looked a rather agreeable fellow. I learned that he was living in Lausanne, a town he found full of good motifs for paintings; he had done very few landscapes so far, he said, for he was not too fond of places like this, with towering mountains and nothing else to see. “You did well to leave Paris”, he said, “there’s no city in the world I dislike more.”

“Well then, what are the places you like?”

“Florence, Siena, that kind of place.”

“I left Italy for Paris. I found Italy good for sightseeing, but I couldn’t get used to their way of life. Paris was the first place where I felt at home.”

To judge from his works, he struck me as a pretty unsociable man, for he preferred rustic settings, of the kind where one would expect to meet a hermit. I found them quite interesting, but most of them were only rough sketches.

This is how, gradually, I came to know all the other guests. A hotel in a tourist resort is not unlike a huge family house. Everything is done collectively: living under the same roof, eating, playing games; there are various village feasts when one can meet people, make friends and dance. The daily newspapers came up regularly and I tried to make sense out of texts that were often too abstruse for me to understand. I tried to use my intuition and bind remote clues into a coherent whole, but sometimes it just didn’t work. I remember those frustrating moments when despite all my efforts, I couldn’t make head nor tail out of a passage, and it was

infuriating to think that the dullest housewife around here would understand it easily.

A few days passed and the day of departure came for our couple of aristocrats from Bologna, mother and son. There was an impressive gathering of ladies to see off the dashing young lieutenant. These were mostly Anglo-American misses and Scandinavian beauties who seem to have a soft spot for Italian men. It is, perhaps, that special kind of courteous insolence in their dealing with the other sex that constitutes the appeal of Italian males, but their legendary reputation must also play a part in it. These young men are, after all, the descendants of the poets who loved Beatrice and Laura, of artists who sculpted the Madonna and painted Santa Cecilia; their tongue is said to be "the tongue of angels" and they come from cities filled with *chiese* and *palazzi*. This glorious aura must certainly act like a bait and is bound to seduce women.

With a cold, victorious smile on his face, the lieutenant exchanged courteous farewells with his female worshippers and shook many hands, while his mother kept thanking everyone and receiving bouquets. It is on such occasions, with people arriving and departing and crowds in the entrance hall, that the summery atmosphere of the holiday season is most deeply felt.

With their departure, our meals became a lonely affair. I was also getting bored with the German lady and her memories of Penang and its coffee plantations. But on the second day, Ishi came to announce the arrival of an old couple from Zurich.

"Their name is Pestalozzi. A funny name, isn't it?"

"Pestalozzi? Haven't you heard of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi? He was a famous Swiss of Italian origin. But I forget; you never had time for anything but moaning over Japan and its problems."

Ishi, a down-to-earth realist indifferent to dead celebrities, shrugged off my teasing remark with an expression saying "there you go again" and replied:

"He must be some painter."

"Oh dear, no. I even think that there is a Pestalozzi Educational Centre in Tokyo. He was an educator. One of the greatest educators of our times."

"If you say so."

"If I say so? Oh, never mind. I see you haven't got a clue."

"You could try to be more precise."



“I don’t know all that much about him, but I do expect everybody to have at least a faint notion about the man. Your ‘if you say so’ is a pretty drab answer.”

At dinner yellow electric lights shone from the domed ceiling and the large windows were opened, letting in the fresh breeze which made the floral table decorations flutter and rustle. After the tiring exertions of the day, the dining room was a delight.

The Pestalozzi pair arrived punctually and were given the empty seats of the departed Italians. My first surprise came from the looks of Mrs Pestalozzi, a lady who wore a bandage over her right ear. Her face was purple-red as if scorched by fire, with no eyebrows and eyelashes left at all. Mr Pestalozzi, a kind man at a first glance, was a white-haired gentleman with a few gaps in his teeth. The presence of mature ladies at my table was nothing new, but this one seemed to be a little retarded as well. That, at least, was the impression given by her vacuous stare, not unlike that of a blind person who gazes at the world without seeing it; and also, by her cackling laughter, which had a sad, lonely, self-disparaging ring while some kind of a sardonic grin would appear on her ugly face.

Nevertheless, being people of the world, they too were skilled in table-talk. Their conversation unfolded placidly about the *Lago di Como* and the *Lago Maggiore* from which they were just returning, their eyes still bedazzled by the magnificence of the Italian lakes. It was especially the old gentleman who showed a passion for natural beauty. He then turned to the motive of their voyage:

“In a moment of inattention, our younger son spilled a basin of boiling water over my wife’s head and scorched her face. As you see, my poor wife has been disfigured. Nevertheless, we are deeply thankful to Our Lord for allowing us this brief holiday. In fact, we praise the Lord for my wife’s disfigurement. We’ve been travelling ever since she came out of hospital. Although her ear and her eyes have been affected by this accident, He deigned not to leave us without a gift of consolation.”

“Thanks be to God ...”—the wife chimed in with a singsong voice.

“We have two sons and a daughter who’ll be nineteen this year. She’ll soon be joining us here.”

The mention of this daughter, obviously sorely missed and long-awaited, was made in a hushed tone, like someone placing a precious pearl in its cotton wrapping.

In the following two days, I became increasingly aware of the respect the couple inspired in other people. Yet the more the couple was surrounded with kindness and concern, the more we were all struck by their modesty. This modesty seemed, indeed, quite out of place: both spoke four languages fluently; on top of that, the husband was a keen antiquarian and a bibliophile, a trait reflected in his archaic speech. In Zurich, he was president of a famous art club. I myself had already visited this club during a short stay in Zurich and seen its collection of paintings which was stored in a villa on a hill, clearly visible from the Zurich lakeshore. I still remember seeing Böcklin's *Gartenlaube* there.

One day, I ventured to ask:

"Is there any family connection between you and the famous Pestalozzi, the educator?"

He laughed. "He was my grandfather", he said, "and I am much too insignificant a grandson for such a great man."

This answer prompted an immediate sympathy in me and from then on, I would often seek the old man's company. In time, he told me many things about the famous "educator of the nation" and his school in Yverdon.

"As you know, he had planned to base his method on Rousseau's *Emile*. That book was his Bible. Another basic source was Rousseau's *Lettres de la Montagne*, where there is a famous passage on Christ. Later on, this very passage must have had a considerable influence on Rénan's *Life of Christ*. Christ was, in short, my grandfather's main inspiration. Christ was a warm, pure, generous and compassionate man, and there was also a certain elegance about him. He was not a killjoy and nor did he himself spurn amusement. He presided over weddings, enjoyed the company of women, played with children, liked perfume, accepted the invitations of rich people. There was something warm, gentle and serene in his moral precepts. He was a benevolent, amiable man of the world, though he could also fall into terrible bursts of anger. He was an average human being, but even the fact that he was not infallible only makes him more endearing ... You may think that I am only saying this to extoll my grandfather's wisdom. In his childhood, my grandfather was too timid to play with the other children, a trifle could send him into fits of deadly panic and cowardice would afflict him throughout his life. He was fond of silence and of life indoors. Believe me, he was as sensitive as a woman! Yet from the time he built his famous *Neuhof* house in Brugg, up till his

death at the age of eighty-one, he would commute between Brugg, Burgdorf, Stans and Yverdon, always fighting with his nervous condition. His new school system was, in fact, founded on a great act of will. Or rather, his was an act of love. The power of love was the very basis of his educational programme.”

The old man went on like this for a while, praising the work, the projects and the indomitable character of the great Pestalozzi. Finally, as if to remind me that the same blood ran in his veins as well, he added:

“As my own parents felt it in their lifetime, so does my grandfather’s glory still shine on me and my wife and my family.”

This veneration for his grandfather struck me as quite extraordinary.

One evening, I went down the slope on a thickly wooded trail; I passed through meadows with cows and sheep grazing the high grass which was waving softly in the breeze. I followed the course of a thin, half dried-up stream and found myself at the edge of a cliff overlooking the snow-capped peaks of the Dents-du-Midi. The sight of the mountain and of the glittering river at its foot prompted me to sit down and sketch the view. From the valley at the foot of Les Diablerets, a soft mist was rising in the sunset. At an almost furious speed, the mist flew in my direction, envelopped the cliff and then rose up above me, gradually, until it became one with the clouds in the sky. I was lost in rapture at this fascinating phenomenon of high altitudes until I heard a woman’s voice behind me:

“You seem to be enjoying your work today.”

I turned my head and saw Mrs Pestalozzi. Beside her stood a young woman holding a little parasol against the setting sun.

“Oh yes, quite so ... But how did you get here?”

“There’s a log hut further down, I think it’s a watermill. We’re just on our way back. Our daughter has arrived, so let me introduce you ... This is my daughter. She has already heard about you ... Monsieur ...”

An air of maidenly innocence shone in the young woman’s bony, intelligent yet somewhat melancholy face—an impression enhanced by her pale blue dress and pink parasol; yet her flat chest and the ungainly Pestalozzi nose added a note of coarseness to her features, as if recalling some peasant ancestry. I shouldered my sketching kit and we returned to the village on a lamplit path. On our way back, Mademoiselle Tilde took no part in the conversation except to let out an occasional meaningless schoolgirlish giggle—clearly, she was not listening at all. I also became aware of the tacit signs of affection between the two women, those likely to

emerge in close-knit families: a sort of elusive intimacy which shrinks from the attention of a casual observer, as if a single tactless remark might harm a love so obviously unable to withstand the harsh winds and waves of life. From that evening onwards, Mademoiselle Tilde became the fifth at our dining table.

Within a few days, I became increasingly aware of something lacking in the three Pestalozzis, of a void which made communication difficult. Was it the girl? I wondered sometimes. Or again, I suspected that some tragic event might have withered her in her prime, for she did look prematurely old. There was no trace of coldness in them, but there was something desultory in their dealings with other people. Perhaps because of their religious convictions or for some other mysterious reason, they kept, eagerly yet ineffectively, concealing their strong family pride and awareness of social status under a cover of virtue, and would even go as far as to refrain from showing affection for one another in public. On the whole, there was a servile air in their excessive humility. I got the impression that all they had inherited from their ancestor was his tender heart, but that this heritage had also drained them of hope for any spiritual progress of their own.

In the meantime, however, Mademoiselle Tilde was becoming rather popular. Her goodness and amiability were praised by everybody. She mixed easily in both female and male company, yet kept her distance at the same time, as she was obviously unable to form strong attachments. Observing her, I was reminded of a young tree growing in inclement soil, unable to strike root, likely to come down in the first storm.

One day, I felt suddenly bold enough to address Mrs Pestalozzi with a question:

“You’ve been very unfortunate, haven’t you? Such a terrible accident. It must have affected Mademoiselle Tilde too. She seems so worried about you.”

“Oh no, she’s not. Human hearts are tougher than you think.”

“But nature is also just, isn’t it? Surely, your grandfather-in-law must have thought so. Provided there is faith and love, humans can rescue each other, or at least console each other in times of woe. Thanks to Gertrud, Lienhard was redeemed, wasn’t he?” (*Lienhard und Gertrud* is Pestalozzi’s famous moralistic novel, in which Gertrud figures as Lienhard’s virtuous wife.)

“Is God just?”

Nearby, both husband and daughter pretended not to hear her desperate question. But I noticed that they suddenly seemed rather anxious.

At that, suddenly, I gave up. The heavy atmosphere hovering over the three would have to remain unexplained, I said to myself. To have such a grandfather must be like wearing a heavy top-hat all the time, he's a headache, I thought. It was nothing by way of an explanation, but I decided to leave it at that.

I stayed there for less than a month; in no mood for painting, all I felt like doing was to observe the customs of that mountainous canton, which I did exhaustively. I visited the so-called *pensions* for young girls, saw the summer-solstice festival and the torchlight procession on the eve of the Confederation Day, watched Vaudois women at work in trousers, went to funerals and covered miles on foot sketching all these scenes. The rest of my time was spent in writing letters home.

A family from Milan came to stay at a chalet nearby. In his youth, the father had travelled all over the world and seen Japan as well. One day, he told me this story:

"I know a lot of things about Japan that you don't. I was there before the Meiji era. I have no idea of how things are now, but believe you me, that place was quite uncivilized in my time. One day, I stopped at an inn in Yokohama. Under my window, a row started between a fishmonger and a factory worker. The fishmonger had a long cane and landed a blow on the worker's head; suddenly, the worker grasped the other chap by his topknot and started pulling at it with all his might, until the scalp gave way and was neatly peeled off the skull. Blood gushed out and covered the man's face. I filled a bucketfull of water from my washbasin and poured it over the two fighters. Then people came and separated them ... The thought of it still makes me sick."

In the following days, I was gratified with many other interesting anecdotes of this kind. He had a charming son in his mid-teens who told me that he wanted to study art; so I started taking him along on my sketching tours. This made him eager to purchase an oil-painting kit and his parents let him look for one in Lausanne. As they heard that my own departure from Glion was imminent, it was decided that we should leave together.

On my last evening in Glion, Ishiyama and I went on a walk in the dusk and talked about the future. It was not long before we sat, beer mugs in hand, in the *café* opposite the bus stop.

“You know,” he said, “I’ve been here only twice before. Too busy, or else, in no mood to go out. Sometimes, I feel like an idiot ... why am I working here like this?”

“Well, you’ve really stuck it out.”

“Next autumn, I’ll go to Lausanne to finish my report for the Ministry of Trade and Agriculture. As soon as it’s despatched, Paris, here I come! If I stay here any longer, I’ll end by dying from envy of you city-slickers.” His beer went down in great gulps.

“Aaah, the beer of workers, who would ever have imagined how good it is ... This is the first summer I’ve had proper contact with the guests. I started here as a liftboy and sweated cold every time they forced tips into my hand. Lousy job, I tell you. What would my people say if I told them? I feel so ashamed I’ve even stopped writing home.”

And he went on like this until the small hours, telling me about the secrets of running a hotel and all the gory afflictions and humiliations of servant life.

Morning came and I said goodbye to all my acquaintances: the German lady and her daughter, the American painter, the Pestalozzi family and many others. I thanked Ishi especially for taking such good care of me; finally, after a last goodbye to the fountain under my window and to the cows and sheep that I had gazed on every morning, I took the train for Lausanne with the Milanese youth. When we arrived at Bex, Glion had disappeared from our sight. I doubt if I shall ever go back to that remote place.

My stay at Lausanne was almost over when, on the last day, I saw someone running towards me. It was none other than Ishiyama, who had arrived from Glion dragging a single suitcase. He had resigned from his job after a row with the hotel owner and was now charged by our government with an official errand somewhere in Asia Minor. We left Lausanne on the same day, he for the East and I for Yverdon.

Yverdon is situated in the lowlands; as soon as you reach the suburbs, you get to the shore of a swampy lake overgrown with reeds. The town is still renowned for its sulfuric sources, but in the past was even better known for its primary school, the last of many schools founded by Pestalozzi. He himself, however, remained in charge of the school for less than a week. Next to this building, there had been a boarding house for girls. At that time, this small town had been affected by a surprising number of juvenile delinquents of both sexes, whose immorality had even

started infecting the local peasants. But what has become of the great Pestalozzi's project of redemption? The bronze statue by Lanz is to be found in the square called *Place d'armes* and represents an old man speaking to a pair of little children, a boy and a girl, whom he holds in a tender embrace. There he stands for all eternity, an object of pilgrimage for crowds of reverent tourists; but what does he stand for in the eyes of those who see him every day? To the locals he must be little more than a huge lump of bronze. By some unaccountable association of ideas, my thoughts wandered back to Pestalozzi's school with its classrooms so quickly smeared with obscene graffiti, to the listless young people who took such pleasure in defeating his efforts to improve their minds.

After a brief sightseeing tour of Neuchâtel, I left for Zurich. Thus I crossed the language barrier and found myself in the German-speaking part of the country. I reached Zurich by noon. Since I planned to continue my journey till Schaffhausen that same evening, I tried to recall my former visit, roaming through the old town and the new as memory led me on. Turning a corner, I came into the longed-for Goethestrasse. The blue waters of the Lake of Zurich follow the city boundary in much the same way as the Tokyo moat circles around the Imperial compound. It was quite hot for the beginning of September. I still remember the crickets singing in the rows of plane trees.

The Goethestrasse with its crowds in summer clothes, was still bathed in a midsummer atmosphere. Salesgirls were loitering after work in front of their shops. The particular smell that hits the nostrils towards closing time hovered in the air. I remembered the Pestalozzi family; why not pay them a visit, I thought. A few questions and I was on my way.

After a long series of stops in the city centre, the tram made for the suburbs. Gradually, the city gave way to a leafy area of suburban villas and gardens. On the driver's instructions, I got down in front of an old church. "Does Mr Pestalozzi live here?", I asked and was told to follow a hedge which, they said, would lead me to a white-lacquered gate with the inscription "Villa Neuhof". A fairly long walk brought me to a white gate with the inscription VILLA on the left post and NEUHOF on the right. I stood on tiptoe and looked inside. On a slope surrounded by a thickly wooded park, I saw a large, three-storied modern villa. Good, I'm about to meet my Glion friends again, I thought joyfully. I could also make out a flowery meadow and, beyond, a large veranda screened with white muslin curtains.

A fairly narrow path led to a staircase made of square stone-blocks. Above, there was a stately entrance flanked by two round columns. In front of the columns, I saw a beam with the inscription: *Dans l'ordre naturel les hommes sont tous égaux*—Rousseau's words, his ideal of a natural order summed up in one sentence. As usual, I was amused by the European habit of combining architecture with some unrelated precept or thought.

The first to answer my bell ring was Mademoiselle Tilde who, startled at the sight of such an unexpected guest, let out her usual eery laughter. From the drawing room, the old gentleman came too saying "Welcome! What a pity my wife isn't here. She's gone to the thermal baths of Jorat."

This was the first of the series of disappointments in store for me, for the kind old lady had been the one I had most eagerly looked forward to meeting.

"She's certainly impatient to return home. Every time she goes away, she gets worried about the house. On the other hand, she's also worried when she's here, so I made her go for her cure just the same", said Mr Pestalozzi with a sad smile. Mademoiselle Tilde looked at me vacantly, as if engrossed in other thoughts.

Inside, the white curtains shone in the late-afternoon sun and the heat, like that of a Turkish bath, was becoming bearable thanks to the evening breeze. The western sun illuminated a few small, early nineteenth-century oils on the wall opposite the entrance—dark groves pierced by the setting sun, its oblique rays resting on the quiet backs of cows—Troyon's landscapes most probably, not to my taste in any case. All Swiss painters of the period look the same to me: imitators of the Italian Romantic school, illustrators of Manzoni and Leopardi, delighting in darkish landscapes filled with gallant horsemen and peasant girls. Unaware of my lack of interest, my host led me from one picture to another. Shining like a giant wet seal, a black-laquered grand piano stood in a corner; by squeezing oneself laboriously between the bulk of the instrument and the wall, one could just reach a bookcase filled with a great number of old, slightly musty-looking volumes. Most of them were quarter-bound leatherbacks covered with arabesques, some blue, some red, their titles branded in gold. The whole room had that uniformed look given by an owner who sticks to his tastes—a bibliophile who reads romantic literature and nothing else, a collector of paintings always of the same period. My host opened the glass door of the bookcase and, pointing to his collection with a withered finger, said:



“Here I have collected all my grandfather’s writings and the major secondary material on his life and work.”

Though I am not an expert in the Pestalozzi bibliography, I quickly recognized the first edition of *Abendstunde eines Einsiedlers* (published around 1780, if I am not wrong), Pestalozzi’s very first book, written when he was still under the influence of Rousseau; *Ephemeriden*, another early work; the first editions of *Lienhard und Gertrud*, *Christoph und Else* down to the pedantic *Gesetzgebung und Kindermorde* and *Meine Nachforschungen über den Gang der Natur in der Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*. Among other old editions, I saw Pestalozzi’s collected works in eighteen volumes, an edition started eight years after his death and completed sixty years later. On the lower shelf were works by scholars and Pestalozzi-experts: Blochmann, Christopher, Molfe, Seewald and others.

My host opened a drawer and took out a yellowed sheet of paper bearing a copperplate engraving. It was a portrait of Pestalozzi: a long-haired wizard, his big peasant nose stuck up towards the sky. Photography was still unknown at the time, the old man said with a sigh, and opened another drawer. This was filled with letters from Klopstock, Wieland, Herder, Goethe and especially Fichte. There were also many letters written by Pestalozzi himself, but these were especially badly preserved: mould-stained sheets covered with almost illegible, oxidized ink.

We returned to the piano; its top was decorated by a photograph of an old couple between two silver vases. “My parents”, said Mr Pestalozzi. His father, he added, had been an excellent man and a doctor. He died at the age of sixty after a happy married life. His beautiful and learned wife joined her husband in death four days later and they were buried together.

At her father’s command, Mademoiselle Tilde sat at the piano. The notes of Liszt’s *Spinnenlied* started unrolling under her delicate, slender fingers while she performed this difficult piece with the dexterity of a virtuoso. With my eyes half closed, plunged in a daydream by the ghost of music, I felt pervaded with the very soul of that room, as if the room itself were seeing a world woven out of memory. How fitting it was for this room to yearn for the great men of bygone times, for their austere knowledge and quiet wit! Yet these people, together with their lofty names, are still among us; the streams of knowledge they opened up are still flowing and their words still ring in our ears. That they have not spoken in

vain is confirmed by the fact that from one generation to another, we have gradually improved our ways and will continue to improve in the future.

We were sipping our tea when I was suddenly alerted by a strange noise. What kind of barking is this?—I wondered. The noise was coming from the direction of the veranda. Yet it did not sound quite like a dog and it might just as well have been a cow or a pig. They must keep an animal somewhere near, I concluded. I asked to be shown the house. It was so narrowly built that we had to proceed in Indian file with my two hosts opening the way to the first floor with the bedroom of the old couple opening onto a little *boudoir*. Next to this was Mademoiselle Tilde's room. On the second floor there was a study and a storeroom occupied by the eldest son of the house. Both the storeroom and the narrow staircase leading to the attic were packed with miniature models of warships, steamships and trains. The place had the disorderly look of an abandoned factory. Noticing my surprise, my host said smiling: "As you see, our eldest son has turned Neuhof into a workshop. At middle school, he had the reputation of a scatterbrain, with no other interest than handiwork. And since this is the only thing he liked doing, he quickly became an engineer. He is now employed at the hydroelectric plant at Interlaken. But just look at his room. A madman's room, isn't it?" And he opened the door to the study. Except for a few books, the other shelves were crammed with maps and crumpled sheets of paper blotted with numbers; to step in, even on tiptoe, was impossible without crushing the compasses, wooden tablets with diagrams or some other object scattered on the floor.

I had already seen the photograph of the room's occupant in the bedroom of Mademoiselle Tilde. A neurotic's eyes, lips tightly shut, long head, chin covered with fluff—in short, the clever, intuitive, self-confident face of a young genius and an inventor. Indeed, I thought, Neuhof is a real nursery of talents, three, four, maybe more of them living under one roof.

From the second floor, beyond the dark-green treetops, I was offered a grandiose view of Zurich with its blue lake, its high cathedral towers, its slanting roofs bathed in the setting sun. My host pointed to a railway track in front, half hidden among the trees. "This is a new railway line, to be completed next year", he said with a sigh, "What a pity! It will pass through our property and cut our park in half."

We descended to the veranda on the first floor, enclosed in its wrought-iron balustrade. We then passed into an ornate dining-room, entirely covered with dark carved panelling. It was then that I heard again

that strange bellowing cry. Who's barking like this?—I wondered, really intrigued this time. A pig? Impossible. A dog? Certainly not. Maybe an animal I haven't heard yet. A bear?

"What's that noise?" I blurted out, unintentionally.

No answer. "Is it a calf?", I insisted. Once again, Mademoiselle Tilde laughed in her strange way. The sight of her, so young, so pale in that dark cave of a dining room gave my heart a twinge of pity.

"Monsieur, this is Toledo pottery", said her father, pointing to a large purple dish on the wall. The whole room was now echoing with screams. Then, suddenly, the glass-door crashed open. I turned: a black creature—a monkey?—was wringing the door handle and banging its fist on the glass.

"Mon Dieu!", cried Tilde, running to the door to prevent the panes from being shattered. This seemed to redouble the anger of the black creature: it screamed, it wept, clinging to the handle, resisting Tilde's outstretched arms. Mr Pestalozzi ran to her rescue. Out on the veranda, they both continued wrestling with the thing.

The black creature was neither a pig nor a calf. It was a human being with a mane of flaming red hair flying in all directions, one-eyed, no nose to speak of, with a hump that looked like a second head sticking out behind the real one. He was hardly three feet high, a dwarf whose fat, round belly and buttocks had the grotesque look of a teddy-bear. From the corners of a large mouth covered with red sores flowed streams of saliva, and the belching, choking and bellowing coming from his hollow chest were terrifying. With difficulty, the two lifted the midget into a sort of pram and, despite the heat, tucked him tightly into a thick woollen blanket. The creature, exhausted at last, had stopped fighting, letting out only an occasional weak groan; the one eye and white mouth now covered with tufts of red hair, all I could see was a big forehead protruding out of the blanket.

I followed the old gentleman into the living room; on the piano, the score of Liszt's *Spinnenlied* lay open. "Monsieur!", he said, "You have seen our deformed child. And you have seen the unhappiest of all families".

I was so upset that I could not bring myself to sit down again. A hot tear fell on my hand as I took my leave. Without a word, I grabbed my hat and ran out of Neuhof, the house on fire.

I arrived at Schaffhausen in the late evening. For the next three nights I kept dreaming about the monster and fighting with him in a long series of

nightmares. In one of these I saw him attacking Mrs Pestalozzi's face with a burning torch, his face turned into a frightening, malevolent smirk. But little by little my nerves grew calmer and I managed to recover. My nightmares ceased, but the thought of nature's stern decrees will be with me as long as I live.

