

It is spring in California. Weary of travelling, I have just returned from my last concert tour in the east. The mimosa trees are in full bloom and their luxuriance and fragrance almost makes me feel as if they were welcoming me, as I sit in quiet ecstasy drinking in all the beauty which surrounds me, grateful that I must never leave it again, even though it means resigning from a beloved and loving public.

I had felt that the time had come for me to say farewell to my Town Hall audience to whom I was bound through gratitude and mutual love. Town Hall meant being "at home", singing there was like being among my family and friends. So it is not hard to imagine how it hurt me to think of this farewell. And yet it was what I wanted and I knew it was right. Here I am at home in Santa Barbara.

Life is always full and beautiful, rich and creative. It will never cease to be so for me.

Amidst the intoxicating scent of the mimosas I sit in our patio looking out over the ocean which spreads its blue shimmering carpet at our feet. The mocking bird, who must have a nest in one of our chimneys, sings as if it too is drunk from all this beauty.

Yet at this moment there comes to my ears something even more alluring than that bird song, filled as it is with beauty: from the radio I hear strains of Fidelio under Bruno Walter. Suddenly this music takes possession of me enveloping me in a golden flood of beauty and tearing me out of this paradise into a past in which I drew inspiration not from the divine spring of nature but from a passionate response to the music through which I transcended my individual human limitations and lived and loved and suffered in the personification of another being who for those blissful hours seemed more real than my own self.

Blessed past ! Unlimited in the richness of experience!

Uninhibited abandonment of oneself, unrestrained surrender to life and theatre...

Tears pour from my eyes and in this moment I would exchange all the beauty which surrounds me for one single year of that time when I was young and fired by a fanatic zest for life which could never be tamed... In which I lived and died in my roles, in which I was fool-hardy and perhaps very hard to bear. In which I was a different "I"...

Through the shimmering bridge of this music my thoughts go back - back across sombre chasms and radiant peaks, peaks from which I swung as in a dance...

There were loving hands which sought to lead me but it was not easy.

My mother, kind and always filled with concern.

My father whose deep love I only <sup>fully</sup> came to understand in later years.

My husband gentle and forgiving and always wisely helpful in my stage career, taken from me by an untimely death.

My brother now American as I, always congenial in art and in life a part of my very being.

Friends, dear to me.

And Frances: We share our lives and our interests - and may it be so forever. One cannot call it just "good luck" that I met her. I was guided wisely and kindly - our paths crossed at a time when I most needed her.

Throughout my life I have been conscious of a guiding power and were I not in the depths of my heart a believer, I must looking back, have become so. It seems impossible that one could from a commonplace small town childhood reach the heights of human experience as if born on the soaring wings of victory without the guidance of some higher power...

If as a child I had been able to look clairvoyantly into a crystal ball would I have believed what I saw? I doubt it.

Half absorbed in the music, I see the curtain rising on that distant past and what had faded and was half forgotten becomes vivid before my eyes.

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"But your father's face is very French" remarked the wife of the French Ambassador when she saw a photograph of my father. "But we have no French blood, we are completely German" I answered smiling.

That was in Vienna - many years ago.

When I told my father of this I saw to my astonishment that he was embarrassed. Once my curiosity is aroused I don't rest until it is satisfied. So I gave my father an uncomfortable time - not the first by any means, until he finally made a confession: his ~~grandfather~~ <sup>said to be</sup> grandfather was <sup>a son of</sup> the illegitimate child of the famous French singer Sophie Arnould who has often been called the first "singing actress and who played at the Paris opera in the time of Madame Pompadour.

Had this glowing drop of blood in our family history given <sup>me</sup> the restlessness of the artist? Had it given me the power of creation, the almost fanatical dedication to the theatre, the incomparable blessing of being able to lose myself in the portrayal of other personalities?

My parents were typical ~~and~~ middle class people. My mother and father were both born in Prenzlau - in the German Uckermark. All my relatives were ~~and are~~ good simple people. There is a cousin who had ~~artistic~~ <sup>dramatic</sup> ambitions which were never realized. She is ~~now~~ happily married to a Baltimore physician and is the only relative, aside from my brother, living in America. That she had a leaning toward the stage

and talent for it, is an argument against my imaginative theory for she comes from my mother's side of the family - the "morally stainless" side. Nevertheless I find it much more intriguing to disregard this fact and feel that Sophie Arnould haunts my veins, making me act through the more hectic years of my life in ways which all my other ancestors have would abominated.

I should like to be able to say that even as a child the lure of the stage possessed me and set me apart. Unfortunately that is not the case, I was just an average child with moderate ability in some directions but in no way exceptional. My mother always said that even as a little child I never caused her any trouble. I was quiet and obedient, liked to play in a corner with my dolls, painted pictures by the hour under Papa's instruction, which no one could ever recognize, had a small, pretty voice - but generally speaking was just a "good child"...

Instead of recalling this with pride it makes me uncomfortable to think that I was such a pattern of virtue.

How vividly I remember our home in Perleberg, the city where I was born. My father in connection with his position at the Ritter-schaft Bank ( a bank which dealt chiefly with the feudal estates of the aristocracy) was given a large house belonging to the bank for his personal use and in this we lived. He had a very good position at the bank and we should have been very well off but the continuous illness of my mother, with all the doctor and druggist bills always kept us behind and as far back as I can remember the lack of money played a leading role in our lives. The perpetual illness and worry also undermined the happiness of my parents' marriage. I grew up amidst tears and quarrelling and the realization that money was something evil and indomitable but I also remember well that Papa's wonderful humor always enabled him to win the upper hand and made him forget much

which would have embittered one of a less easy going <sup>disposition</sup> nature. On the other hand the more melancholy nature of my mother made life increasingly difficult for her.

I love to think of my parents as young people. I am especially fond of photographs taken of them when they were first engaged. Both look so handsome and as if made for one another. A melancholy expression plays about my mother's mouth. Hers was a sombre beauty while my father represented the ideal of ~~the~~ that period: he had a definitely romantic look which had probably helped to lead my mother into his arms.

One knows so little of one's parents. One never imagines them as young, as passionate warmblooded beings with faults and charming caprices... Mama used to love to tell of her first love whom she would have married if he had not been killed in the war of 1870. She always cherished his memory and would occasionally say scornfully in Papa's presence: "He was The love of my life". But Papa never took this seriously and used to wink at me with half closed eyes as if he wanted to say: "Don't you believe it..." How I <sup>hope</sup> wish that my parents <sup>could</sup> may have known romance and beauty which all the later differences of opinion could not erase. I often have this thought as I look at their pictures...

Perhaps we were not exactly a thrifty family. Every summer we went for some weeks to the Baltic Sea - God knows why for we had our beautiful garden and a forest of fir trees within a stone's throw. But we had to have our "vacation"...

This was always a wonderful time. I am afraid that it must have been financed by an advance from the Ritterschaft - but we forgot every worry and enjoyed each moment...

Mama had a beautiful contralto voice without any training. The sound of this voice with its galden glow is my first impression of music.

~~By the way~~, I am often asked if I am related to Lili Lehmann. No there was not the slightest connection between us but sometimes I am told by elderly ladies how thrilled they have been by my Isolde which by the way I have never sung and others have insisted I was her daughter. No, Lehmann is just a very common name in Germany like Smith in America. Actually I saw and heard her only once. When I gave my first recital in New York long years ago the box office told me they had a hard time persuading their patrons that I was still alive and not even old, and that this was Lotte not Lili.

Mama lived a very secluded life in Perleberg but when we went on our holidays to Warnemünde on the Baltic she expanded and every evening as she sat in her beach chair singing old folksongs a whole circle would gather around her.

We used to sing very much at home just for ourselves - that is inborn in the German people. Their folksongs are an important part of their daily living. When our many problems seemed to cast a haze over the sun, we sang. Papa joined his light, charming tenor with Mama's wonderful cello tone and my brother Fritz and I joined in - to our chorus Papa played an accompaniment on his zither.

Fritz at that time seemed far more gifted than I. He was the one destined for the career of a singer. His tenor voice was beautiful and full of promise and his whole being seemed far more artistic than mine. I was, so to speak, a plain, average child - but even as a boy he had originality and went his own way with obstinacy and imagination. He was never much of a scholar in school but in other things he was always the leader. Everything came to him so easily he neglected his work. He tore through the woods and fields dressed as an Indian and many a good Perlebergan had a real shock when he burst out of the forest with a wild yell and my doll's red wig stuck in his belt as

booty. His report cards were always spiced with comments on his bad conduct while I was always good and had no problems in that respect...

Perhaps just because he did give her more trouble, Fritz was Mama's favorite and he continued to be so through her long life. Although she was the best and kindest of mothers to me I was always just a little conscious of her preference for him. Fortunately there is little of jealousy in my make-up or this might have really hurt me. Actually it didn't and my love for my mother was the dominant factor throughout my life. I adored her above everything and hers was always the strongest influence upon me. For many years I was almost estranged from my father. The many differences of opinion between my parents settled like a dark cloud over the heaven of my childhood and early youth. I took sides violently... Even to-day it hurts me to remember that I never had any perspective on these differences and always unquestioningly and passionately sided with the old Mama, whenever there was any question of "right or wrong"... No one ever asked me to enter into these disputes. Mama leaned on my brother in everything and he was just as much under her influence as I.

Much later we children came to realize that our good father was not always "in the wrong" and that our debt to him was very great. In his last years I came very close to him, I was always his favorite although he never showed his preference as obviously as Mama. But those few years could not atone for the neglect ~~he had~~ received through the long period of my youth. He had much to forgive - but I know that he has forgiven.

Papa had a large and beautiful garden which he loved above everything else. He spent all his spare time working in it and caring for it. He was an early riser (I seem to have inherited from him the impossibility of remaining in bed once the sun has risen) and before his

office opened he had already put in several hours of work in the garden. It was a typical small town garden; the paths lined with box, whole rows of roses which my father loved passionately and knew as well as if each blossom were his own child. Beside a long wall grew dark, juicy cherries which had a tart, fragrant taste; Papa called them "Schattenmorellen". I can still feel the taste of the mellow juice on my lips. We had many fruit trees and long arbors of grape vines. From the quantities of currants which we harvested, Papa made an excellent wine - in summer Mama mixed it with sparkling water <sup>making</sup> which made a very good, mildly intoxicating drink which acquired quite a reputation in our little town.

Our little town! I see it so clearly before me! The way to school <sup>was</sup> down a broad shady avenue lined with chestnut trees, the street cobbled and along it were little stores and a great water mill.

There was a doll store owned by an asthmatic little woman who seemed as tiny as some of her dolls. When she slowly and laboriously turned around amidst <sup>the</sup> lifeless, smiling doll faces she had an almost ghostly quality... This store had a tremendous fascination for me. I could completely lose myself in delight over the negro dolls which I preferred to all the <sup>others.</sup> I would like to know why. Perhaps just because they were so different from the ordinary white checked dolls? It would be interesting to know why negro dolls were never missing from my collection and were always my favorites...

Our town often received exciting visitors: travelling stock companies of the humblest type, - oh and the gypsies! Picturesque, dirty but enchanting and mysterious gypsies whom one never dared approach too closely for perhaps it was true that they stole little children... Repulsive and attractive - ugly yet at the same time beautiful... Black, wild, unkempt hair, dripping with oil, hung down over their ~~shoulders~~ ragged



clothes... White shining teeth in brown faces... I followed their battered wagons - but always at a respectful distance...

Then there were youths from Slovakia who came with rat and mouse traps for sale. They were no less rich in dirt than the gypsies but their thin smooth yellow faces were always alight with a friendly grin as they swung their wire instruments of murder before our noses... I don't believe they ever had much luck in our house, - our old cat eyed their contraptions scornfully knowing that they were quite unnecessary in any region where she hunted.

A pretty red cheeked Silesian used to come often with beautiful white linen which she herself had woven. Even when we were very short of money and there was none to spare Mama always bought some little thing as she had an absolute weakness for this linen woman. Perhaps it was her sparkling cleanliness which attracted her - I can still see her shining white teeth and sweet fresh face. It is really strange how vividly I remember her, <sup>for</sup> she was in no way important in my life, just someone who passed quite fleetingly ~~but~~ I could paint her as I see her before me, young and fresh looking - a gay kerchief tied about her head, her cotton dress spotless and stiffly starched, her skirt held out by ~~her~~ numerous rustling white petticoats. White cotton stockings, black slippers somewhat dusty from her long trip for which she always apologized as she dusted them off before coming <sup>into</sup> our modest home which she always did as though she were entering a royal castle...

She never showed how tired she was although it must have been very heavy work ~~trudge~~ <sup>trudge</sup> along ~~from~~ door to door with her bundle on her back. ~~Her beautiful white fragrant linen was always tied up in a large blue linen cover~~ but the light sigh with which she set it down was always accompanied by a radiant smile...

No matter in how bad a humor my mother might be, she was immediately a different person the moment the linen woman appeared. I would like to know why. Mama had no weakness for people, it was not at all her way. Even to-day I remember this woman with a kind of gratitude for she so often made the house ring with Mama's happy laughter where a moment before it had been filled with sighs...

Another character who intrigued me especially was the ragman. He gave us St. John's bread which he kept concealed <sup>in his wagon</sup> among the ~~dirty~~ rags, in exchange for old remnants which we begged from Mama. No food ~~tasted~~ so good to me as that dreadful smelling old St. John's bread...

Then there was always great excitement when the organ grinder toured the streets. His wagon was covered with pictures: it was a kind of forerunner of the movies, a performance with musical accompaniment. The pictures were lurid and showed in sequence a story which could even outdo our horrible "thrillers" in bloodthirstiness. The stories always began with a gruesome murder. Blood was shown flowing in streams over tables and chairs - one saw the pitiful victim, generally a beautiful young woman lying on the ground, dead without the shadow of a doubt, her long luxuriant yellow hair hanging <sup>down</sup> dripping with blood. Then one saw the murderer - there was never any doubt about his identity as his face spoke volumes... In the end one had the satisfaction of seeing him die. Of course he was beheaded and one was given the opportunity of enjoying his mortal fear while admiring the upraised hatchet... After one of these performances I could never sleep. I kept hearing the "director" reciting the story in his heart breaking tones. I still remember the charming beginning of one of these verses: "Robert was a grim murderer. In one night he killed his wife and seven children. All of them he murdered without a single pang."

Often the hoarse voice of the "director" was drowned out by

## Growing Up 11

the organ - but nevertheless it stuck in my memory well enough for me to later on repeat it dramatically for Mama who would reward me with a box on the ears as I had been forbidden to watch these gruesome affairs...

When I think back over these incidents it seems as if centuries must lie between my childhood and the world of to-day and as if I recall the cry of the nightwatchman: "Hark ye people as I tell ye: the hour of ten has struck. Beware of fire, put out your lights, May nothing harm you. Praise God the Lord." only from Wagner's Meistersinger but that is not so, for it sounded through ~~the~~ streets each night throughout my childhood.

What unforgettable romance lay over the small town of the nineteenth century !

My father loved it, my mother hated it.

It must have been very hard for my father to leave all that had become so dear to him and above all his garden but my mother could only think of getting away from Perleberg. She longed to be in Berlin among her brothers and sisters <sup>was</sup> to whom she ~~felt~~ <sup>loved</sup> very ~~close~~. While the distance from Berlin to Perleberg is ridiculously short, as we had no money for travelling and her relatives had none either, we might as well have lived on two different stars.

We children took the move to Berlin as a most desirable event. We never heard a single complaint from Papa although it must have made his heart bleed to leave all that he loved so dearly... Not only his garden ! He would miss too the evenings with his singing club for choral singing was a great joy to him. Music for him was much more than just an inborn joy in folksongs. He wanted to know classical music which would open new horizons for him. Did he have secret plans

for Fritz in this connection? Had he dreamed of letting Fritz study in the hope that his lovely tenor would lead him to heights of which he scarcely dared to dream? I do not know but it is possible.

My little voice had also scored quite a nice success: I had a solo part in an operetta called Queen Louise. It was given in my school and was my first success with my voice... The teacher even said I should become a singer - and people patted me on the back and smiled and said: "who knows?" and then of course forgot all about it just as I did myself.

My brother, who was six years older than I, didn't really seem to have much ambition for a singing career, so it was no great hardship for him to give up this dream when his voice was ruined through the stupidity of a singing teacher who forced him to sing soprano in the school chorus while his voice was changing. Fritz' plans were much more adventurous: he wanted to go to sea, to make far off expeditions, discover new territories and spend his life on the ocean. No star seemed too high for him but Mama's love and worry about him tied him down... He was forced into a mundane position and found an escape only through writing poetry and indulging in wild escapades of which I as a child was allowed to know nothing...

I was very happy in Berlin, found new friends and even my first love in the blond son of a neighbor. Poems without number poured from my pen. I hopefully sent them to newspapers and amazingly enough one day the Berlin Daily published one of them paying me ten marks for it. Ten marks - the first money I had actually earned all by myself! And it was through my writing not my singing. In school I was considered a very average pupil with one exception: I could write. My charming teacher, Miss Vogel, on whom I had a violent "crush" prophesied for me a future as a writer. No one said much about my vocal talent. My voice was small and not exceptional in any way and I myself got more pleasure

from reciting than from singing. In school we read classical works each taking a different part - and these were the hours I loved most. To be able to change one's being - suddenly to be able to express what another feels and make it one's own, so that it comes from oneself - how fascinating ! My secret, unspoken dream was to become an actress... A singer - Oh yes, perhaps ! If my voice should develop so that I could play roles - yes, in that case. But my voice was so small. Flexible and I believe, of a sweet quality. But where was the strength, the dramatic force which I could bring to life in reciting poems and parts ?

Life was full of complications...

Perhaps the best thing would be to marry. To marry my handsome neighbor who was very much in love with me but who found so much in me to criticize. A student of philology he wanted to become a professor and was deeply horrified by my ignorance. We had many a quarrel when I couldn't tell him when Napoleon was born or the date of the battle of Waterloo... I sat there rebellious and disdainful.

"What difference does it make?" I said arrogantly. "Why is it important for you and me to know when that old Napoleon came into the world ? I don't want to live in the past, I live in the present and will always live for the moment."

Willy looked at me with an expression of helpless in<sup>com</sup>prehension.

"But don't you want to broaden your education ? Do you always want to live <sup>in</sup> just your own narrow interests ? Don't you want to share in what is important to me ?"

I said that all that was important to me was the fact that we loved one another and would marry - in five years when he had a position. Five years ! What were five years to me then? I just tossed them away ~~and~~ ~~ran~~ through them laughing as in a dance...

Not even the

cares of our home life could dim my gaiety for I was so accustomed to unending troubles at home that they had become apart of the daily routine, like an unchanging melody, an unpleasant dissonance which I had learned to overlook...

Then too I was very much occupied with a strange inner conflict: in spite of my love for Willy my heart beat wildly whenever I was near the principal of my school. Everyone in my class had a "crush" on Director Ulrich. We called him Ulli and worshipped him. For me he was the personification of elegance - and even to-day as I visualize him I see before me a slender, elegant, fascinating gentleman who even in later years remained for me the pattern for that ideal of which everyone dreams. Was he really as I remember him? I can see him before me gazing out of the window only half listening to what we were reciting. It was a kind of exquisite torture to feel that he was really scornful of us all. He found us stupid - we knew it and wept and sighed over this humiliation which in sweet self torture we secretly enjoyed.

How many poems I wrote in this sentimental period in which I was in love with love! How many tears I shed, how many sighs escaped me and what audacious dreams I dreamed! That was a time when I loved to sit at the piano singing melancholy songs. Singing quieted me, I could feel my longing and vague passion taking form and substance in sound and melody.

That was my first realization.

With my departure from school a tearful farewell to Ulli and an exchange of oaths of eternal faithfulness with my schoolmates, my parents and I moved again. This time to Lichterfelde, a suburb of Berlin. There we found again a suggestion of a garden, better air and

some possibility for life outdoors which had been denied us in the crowded northern district of Berlin and which I know my father must have detested. Even Mama had had enough of living in dull, dark streets - and so we said good-bye to Berlin.

Willy - the neighbor's son was sad at our parting but I promised love until death. He was serving his year in the army and looked very handsome in his uniform so I was very proud<sup>of</sup> him when he visited me on Sundays and all the neighbors leaned out of their windows filled with curiosity.

I missed school but it was good to be grown up and able to help my mother in the house. Working with a broom and dustcloth was a new sensation for me. Mama did not trust me with the cooking as she knew ~~that~~ I would be too extravagant. The work seemed easier when I sang, so I sang a great deal at this time, folksongs, the latest hits...I had no idea of music but just sang whatever came into my head.

And so I sang myself into the heart of a young woman who lived below us. She took it into her head that I must be trained as a singer. To sing operas - to conquer the world - to marry a prince .... What a future!

But could it be managed? We had no money for studying. I would soon enter a commercial school and take a secretarial course. Then Papa could get a position for me with the Ritterschaft and eventually I would be entitled to a pension, as my good father often repeated with pride and satisfaction. At first he had thought it best for me to become a teacher but I emphatically rejected that idea. I could never have passed the examinations as I was quite hopeless in mathematics and many other subjects. It really seemed ridiculous to me to take the secretarial course as I would marry Willy and have no need for it. That was settled. But Papa was not so certain of this and took the five years of waiting more seri-

ously than I.

"All right" I agreed, "then I will be a secretary for five years but then I shall marry Willy. I will never love anyone but him" - or Ulli, I added to myself.

Now Frau Kuehnen seemed to throw all our plans overboard.

"Secretary" she snorted. "You were not born for that ! You were born for a great career. You must become a singer. I will take you to my uncle, he will give his advice.

Her uncle had a canteen at the Royal Highschool of Music and in this connection seemed to have some influence or at least so Frau Kuehnen said.

She might as well have thrown a bomb into our household.

Papa would hear nothing of it. He wanted a more solid future for his daughter. Mama opposed him with fire and sword. Perhaps her own dreams might be realized through me. Perhaps her own God given voice would bloom in her daughter. And Fritz became my passionate advocate. While his voice had been denied him, his sister would sing and be victorious where he could not be... Three against one ! Papa held his tongue. I followed the advice of my now friend's uncle and went to <sup>Elsa Thiele,</sup> one of the advanced pupils of the Royal Highschool who was just on the verge of a professional career, for an audition.

God bless her - she gave me my first insight into this strange world to which I came to belong with every breath: the world of art, the world of the theatre, the world of illusion where one may change into another being - living another fate, experiencing all the love and hatred of another heart - <sup>which has been</sup> shaping into other lives one's own blessed with a gracious gift: the gift of transformation.