

THE SWING

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Munich, 1889. The time of the Prince Regent. A time between two wars. Bismarck retires from office in 1890. Johann Strauss composes the Emperor's Waltz.

The Lautenschlag family, shaken by financial crises of their own making, lives in a narrow house opposite the glass palace at the Old Botanic Gardens.

Herr Lautenschlag, a taciturn, solitary person is a royal-Bavarian landscape gardener. Madame Lautenschlag, a pianist and Paris-born lady, who has never really managed to learn German, a "housewife by the wrath of God".

Hespera, the eldest, 25, is the quiet resting point of the family - a protective spirit, talisman.

The pretty, 20-year-old Gervaise releases one of her famous trills of laughter; she can imitate people in a way no one else can. Otto, 19, in his final year at school, hates it, dreams of diamond-mines in the Transvaal.

The youngest daughter, known as Mathias, 15, is our main figure. She is not exactly beautiful with her crow-like voice and her dragoon-like way of walking. But her eyes can see. A conductress is what she wants to be.

Not far away the "von Zwingers" reside in their magnificent palace. Prussians! Protestants! He—whom Mathias calls "Kaslaib" (whole cheese)—is a bombastic personality, and Lautenschlag's physician. Of the four daughters and two sons, only Candida frequents the house of the unreliable Lautenschlags next door.

And then, suddenly, the two families find themselves standing in front of each other in the glass palace, like two unequal armies. The flower-show has just opened, Herr Lautenschlag's work.

How Mathias fights for a bicycle; how the attractive but uncanny Monsieur Lhombre promises Gervaise more than he can deliver; how a visit to the von Zwinger's estate in the Isar Valley ends; how, whatever the weather, father Lautenschlag goes on his daily walks through early morning Munich; how Baroness James organizes a "lamb's hop" in her garden room—a ball for the

15- to 19-year-olds; how a big argument about funeral attire makes the walls of the Lautenschlag house shake; and how, for nights on end, the Lautenschlag children run up and down the slopes of the Tegernsee Mountains—on all the scenes of this comedy a constantly changing Munich sky casts its shadows and its light.