

# *Following the Phoenix*

by  
Meriol Trevor

*Letzenstein Chronicles*  
*Book II*



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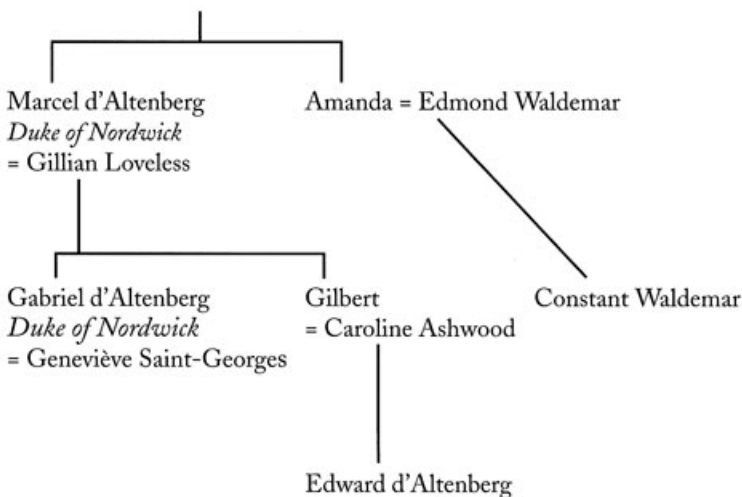
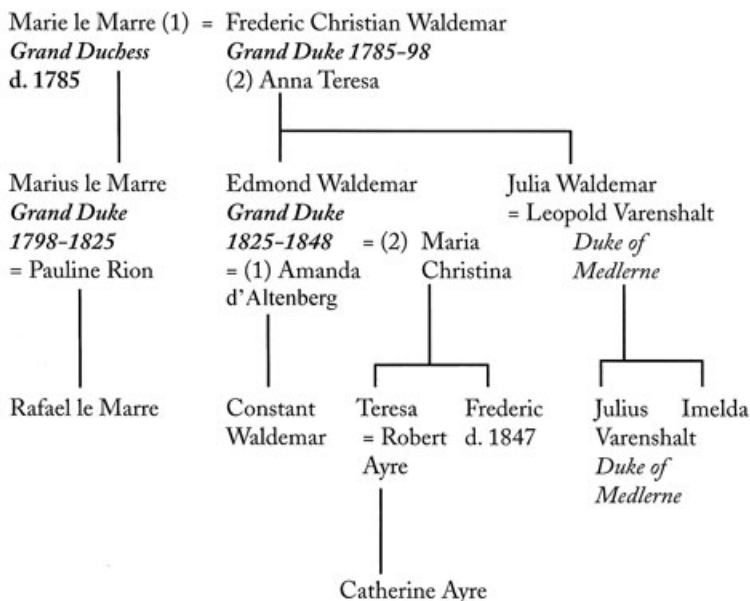
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*For Felicia Line  
Hoping she will write stories herself one day*



# FAMILY TREE OF THE GRAND DUKES OF LETZENSTEIN



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# 1. Something Happens on Sunday

PAUL STOOD at the window looking into the street, although there was nothing to see except the respectable houses opposite, tall houses with tall windows like the one where he was staying with Mr. Winthrop, in Paris. It was Sunday, February 13, 1848, and a grey cold afternoon.

“Nothing ever happens on Sunday,” thought Paul gloomily.

Mr. Winthrop belonged to a small religious sect and this morning he had taken Paul to a prayer meeting with an English family but he was not taking him to tea there because he had fidgeted during the long prayers. Paul did not mind being left behind at all; in fact, he was waiting for Uncle Winthrop to go.

Paul called him uncle because he was married to his aunt, the sister of his mother; the Winthrops lived in London and Joseph Winthrop was in Paris arranging contracts for his engineering firm with the companies building a new railway. That was how he had found Paul, who, after his father died six months ago, had stayed on with three artist friends in an attic. Mr. Winthrop considered it his duty, now that Paul was an orphan, to take charge of his upbringing. Paul did not like the idea at all, but he could not do anything about it, because he was only just fourteen.

Downstairs at last came Joseph Winthrop, stocky, stiff and upright, looking almost choked by his high white collar and carrying a tall black hat in one clean pudgy hand.

“Learn your texts, Paul, before I return,” he said.

There was a Bible open on the table with a list of texts beside it. Paul had already looked them up and they all seemed to be directed at him, about obeying your elders and so on.

“Yes, Uncle Joseph,” he said meekly.

But as soon as Mr. Winthrop’s stately figure was out of sight, Paul ran upstairs to his little bedroom and dragged out from under his bed his father’s battered old valise. It contained brushes, paints, crayons, drawing paper, and even engraving tools although Louis Cardomel’s illustrations had usually been engraved from his drawings by other craftsmen. He had earned his living by illustrating books and doing portraits, although he would have liked to paint the sort of big scenes in oil which were then popular.

Paul selected some crayons and a drawing block; he dared not launch into painting, although with any luck he had several hours of solitude ahead. Because it was cold upstairs and there was a stove in the dreary sitting room of the lodgings, he went down again, put the Bible carefully on one side and settled down at the table to draw. He sat with his back to the stove, so that he could look out of the window, in case Mr. Winthrop came home early. He had a cardboard folder into which he could slip his work if he was interrupted.

And how strange it was to have to hide his work! Paul had lived all his life with artists and wanted to be one himself; but Uncle Joseph thought all art was wicked.

“But *why*?” Paul had asked, once.

“It is making a pretence,” said Uncle Joseph solemnly. “It is telling a lie. It lends itself to the making of images and idolatry. What is more, artists lead irregular, immoral lives. I wish you to have no more to do with them.”

And he had forbidden Paul to go back even to visit Léopold, Sam and Yves, whose carefree haphazard life he had shared, sleeping on a mattress on the landing, with the concierge’s cat curled up against his neck.

Léopold was a burly pipe-smoking Belgian, Sam was an American who was always painting the best (and biggest) picture of the year, and Yves, the youngest of the three, came from Brittany, which he seemed to think quite different from France. But Paul’s father had come from a little state between France and the west German countries, called Letzenstein. It had been part of the Holy Roman empire, but from the eighteenth century had had its own Grand Duke, and was now more or less independent. Paul had never been there; he had lived either in England or France.

Paul had been happy enough in Chelsea with his mother, who had died about a year before his father, but he dreaded going to live with the Winthrops in Finsbury, in their solid dark house with its heavy furniture, and having to go into business instead of becoming an artist.

What was more, he knew his father had not intended such a life for him. During his last illness Louis Cardomel had said to his son: “I do not want you to go to the Winthrops, Paul. When I was last in Letzenstein I met an old friend, Rafael le Marre, and I asked him, if



anything happened to me, to be your guardian. He is an artist too, a bit younger than me—I suppose he must be a year or two over thirty now. We met first in Rome, long ago. He promised to look after you. It's true he hasn't answered my last letters, but he travels a lot and may have missed them. Stay on in Paris till he comes.

But weeks had gone by, months, and Rafael le Marre had not come. Now, not only was Joseph Winthrop's work in Paris coming to an end, but people were beginning to talk of unrest in the city and the threat of revolution. The old king, Louis Philippe and his government were unpopular. Mr. Winthrop felt that the sooner they got back to England the better.

Paul became absorbed in his drawing. He was illustrating *Robinson Crusoe*, which he had bought from a schoolfellow and was reading in secret. Pictures involved only one (or at most two) human figures but plenty of rocks and palms, which Paul found easier to draw. While he worked he was almost on that island, feeling the dazzling sun, hearing the waves break on the sandy shore.

But in Paris, in February, the afternoon began to grow dusk all too soon. Looking up, he could see the lamplighter at the corner of the street. He dared not ask the landlady for a lamp, so he went over to the window again and stared out.

Paul was a slender boy, rather pale in the face, with brown eyes set in black lashes which contrasted with the much lighter brown of his soft straight hair. His black suit was getting a little tight for him and his black cravat, because it had been his father's, was rather big and floppy.

He was watching the lamplighter with his long wand, when he saw a stranger stop to speak to him. It was a tall thin man in a long black cloak, with a big broad-brimmed black hat on the back of his head, and a long black stick on which he was leaning.

Presently the lamplighter went on and the man in the cloak came down the street, looking at the numbers of the houses. He walked awkwardly, pushing at the ground with his stick, but not exactly limping. To Paul's surprise he stopped in front of the lodging house. Then he caught sight of the boy standing in the window, waved his hand and came up the steps.

Paul ran to the front door and opened it.

"You must be Paul—Louis Cardomel's son," said the stranger. "Léopold told me I'd find you here."

He spoke in French and Paul answered gladly in that familiar paternal language. "Yes, yes, I am Paul Cardomel. But you, Monsieur, who are you?"

He had guessed already the answer he got.

"I am Rafael le Marre. I am sorry to be so late in coming, Paul. Your father told you about me?"

"Yes, he said you would be my guardian," said Paul. "Why didn't you answer his letters?"

"I did not get them, Paul. I am sorry indeed not to have seen Louis once more before he died. Let me come in and explain."

Paul shut the front door and they went into the sitting room. Rafael le Marre threw off his cloak and emerged looking thinner than ever. Then he flung his hat on one chair and folded himself up into another and sat looking at Paul. He had a long narrow face and very bright blue eyes, set rather close each side of a straight thin nose. It was an odd face, Paul thought.

"*Holà!* What's this? Drawing? Robinson Crusoe, eh?" said Rafael. He held up the paper and then leant towards the window to see it better. "Not bad," he remarked. "But poor old Robinson's elbow comes too high up, doesn't it?"

"I'm not good at figures," Paul admitted. "I was just doing it for fun. But I do want to be a proper artist, like my father."

Rafael picked up a crayon and drew Robinson Crusoe on the back of Paul's drawing, with a few quick, bold lines.

"I wish I could do it like that," said Paul enviously.

"Practice," said Rafael. "You will, in time. But not if you try to draw in the dark."

"Madame is *stingy*," said Paul, and used the English word.

"English! I too can speak English," said Rafael le Marre in that language. "My accent, however, is not good."

It was not, and he reverted to French to ask Paul about Mr. Winthrop, whose name he could not pronounce. "Vin-trop?" he said. "Almost Cointreau."

At the name of the liqueur Paul giggled. "He doesn't believe in drinking wine, so you must not call him that, Monsieur le Marre."

"And you must not call me Monsieur, if we are to be friends," said Rafael. "Raf is what most people call me."

At that moment the door opened and Madame came in carrying the lamp. She nearly dropped it when she saw a strange man sitting