



The Snows of Yesteryear: Portraits for an Autobiography

Gregor von Rezzori

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Gregor von Rezzori was born in Czernowitz, a onetime provincial capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was later to be absorbed successively into Romania, the USSR, and the Ukraine—a town that was everywhere and nowhere, with a population of astonishing diversity. Growing up after World War I and the collapse of the empire, Rezzori lived in a twilight world suspended between the formalities of the old nineteenth-century order which had shaped his aristocratic parents and the innovations, uncertainties, and raw terror of the new century. The haunted atmosphere of this dying world is beautifully rendered in the pages of *The Snows of Yesteryear*.

The book is a series of portraits—amused, fond, sometimes appalling—of Rezzori's family: his hysterical and histrionic mother, disappointed by marriage, destructively obsessed with her children's health and breeding; his father, a flinty reactionary, whose only real love was hunting; his haughty older sister, fated to die before thirty; his earthy nursemaid, who introduced Rezzori to the power of storytelling and the inevitability of death; and a beloved governess, Bunchy. Telling their stories, Rezzori tells his own, holding his early life to the light like a crystal until it shines for us with a prismatic brilliance.

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