GOLD ELSIE

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GOLD ELSIE

FROM THE GERMAN
OF

E. MARLITT
AUTHOR OF "THE OLD MAM'SELLE'S SECRET."

BY
MRS. A. L. WISTER.

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GOLD ELSIE

CHAPTER I.

It had been snowing all day long,—so steadily that the roofs and window-sills were covered deep with spotless white cushions. And now the early twilight fell, bringing with it a wild gust of wind that raged among the falling snow-flakes like some bird of prey among a flock of peaceful doves.

Although the weather was such that the comfort-loving inhabitants of any small town would hardly have sent their dogs out of doors, not to mention venturing their own worthy persons, yet there was little difference to be seen in the size of the crowd that usually frequents the streets of the large Capital, B——, between the hours of six and seven in the evening. The gas lamps were an excellent substitute for those heavenly lights which would not make their appearance. Carriages were whirling around corners in such tempestuous haste that many a pedestrian rescued life and limb only by a sudden leap aside, while curses both

loud and deep were hurled after the coachmen enveloped in their comfortable furs, and the elegant coaches which contained behind their glass doors charmingly dressed women, whose lovely flower-crowned heads, as they peeped from among masses of muslin and tulle, certainly had no suspicion of the fire and brimstone called down upon them. In the warm atmosphere, behind the huge shop windows, elaborately curled and frizzed wax heads, surrounded by blond and black scalps, stared out upon the passers-by. Smiling shopmen displayed their fascinating merchandise, and withered old flower-sellers stood among their fresh-blooming bouquets, which exhaled beauty and fragrance beneath the light of the lamps that shed a brilliant glare upon the slippery pavement and upon the flood of human life streaming by, revealing the pinched, blue features and the desperately uncomfortable movements of all, old and young.

But stay,—not of all! A female figure has just entered one of the principal streets from a narrow by-way. A small threadbare cloak closely envelopes her slender form, and a worn old muff is pressed against her breast, confining the ends of a black lace veil, behind which two girlish eyes are glowing with the sunlight of early youth. They look out joyously into the whistling snow-storm, rest lovingly upon the half-open rosebuds and dark purple violets behind the glass panes of the shop windows, and only veil their light beneath their long dark lashes when sharp hail-stones mingle with the driving snow-flakes.

Whoever has listened while childish fingers, or sometimes fingers no longer childish, confidently begin upon the piano a well-known melody, which goes bravely on for a few bars, then is arrested by a frightful discord followed by a wild grasping after every key on the instrument except the correct ones, while the patient teacher sits by, ceasing to attempt to evoke order out of chaos by the usual steady marking of the time, wearily waiting until the panting melody is seized again and carried on with lightning rapidity through several easy bars as over some level plain,—whoever has thus had his ears stretched upon the rack, can understand the delight with which this young girl, who has just given two music lessons in a large school, offers her hot cheek to the wind as to an energetic comrade, whose mighty roar can breathe wondrous melodies through the pipes of an organ or over the strings of an Æolian harp.

Thus she passes lightly and swiftly through the storm and crowd; and I do not for an instant doubt that if I should present her now upon this slippery pavement to the gentle reader as Fräulein Elizabeth Ferber, she would with a lovely smile make him as graceful a courtesy as though they both stood in a ballroom. But this introduction cannot take place,—and we really do not need it, for I forthwith intend to relate to the reader my heroine's antecedents.

Baron Wolf von Gnadewitz was the last scion of a famous house whose remote ancestry could be traced back into the dubious twilight which even pre-

ceded that golden age when the travelling merchant, journeying through some sequestered pass, was forced to surrender his costly stuffs and wares to a knightly banner and shining steel-clad troup of retainers as often as to the buff-coated highway adventurer. From those illustrious times there had been handed down, in the crest of the Gnadewitzes a wheel, upon which one of these same noble ancestors had breathed out his knightly soul in consequence of having spilt rather too much ignoble trading-blood in one of the above-mentioned assaults upon his merchant prey.

Baron von Gnadewitz, the last of his race, was chamberlain in the service of the Prince Royal of X——, and possessor of various orders and large estates, as well as of those peculiarities of character and disposition which were, in his estimation, befitting the high-born, and which he was accustomed to designate as "distinguished," because all common men, bound by work-a-day moral considerations, and compelled by the stern necessities of life, lose all taste for the inimitable grace and elegance of vice.

Baron Wolf von Gnadewitz was as fond of pomp and show as his grandfather, who had forsaken the old castle Gnadeck upon a mountain in Thuringia, the cradle of his line, and had built him in the valley below a perfect fairy palace in the Italian style. The grandson allowed the old castle to fall into decay, while he enlarged and improved the modern mansion considerably. Yes, it seemed as though he entertained not the smallest doubt but that his latest descendant would be found occupying this favourite palace at the day of judgment, for the old castle was quite dismantled in order that the vast chambers of the new abode might be thoroughly furnished. But he reckoned without his host. Wolf von Gnadewitz had a son, 'tis true,—a son who, at twenty years of age, was so complete and thorough a Gnadewitz that the illustrious image of his ancestor who had perished upon the wheel paled before him. This promising youth one day, upon the occasion of the great autumn hunt in the forest, struck one of his whippers-in a fearful blow upon the head with the loaded handle of his hunting-whip—a fearful blow, but a perfectly just punishment, as every one of the guests invited to the hunt declared, for the man had stepped upon the paw of a favourite hound so clumsily as to render the animal entirely useless for a whole day. And thus it happened that, a short time afterward, Hans von Gnadewitz was to be found not only upon the boughs of the genealogical tree in the hall of the new castle, but suspended by a rope around his neck to a bough of one of the actual trees in the forest. The beaten whipper-in expiated the deed upon the scaffold, but that could not bring the last of the Gnadewitzes to life again, for he was dead,—irrevocably dead, the physicians said; and the long tale of robber-knights, wild excesses, hunting orgies, and horse-racing came to an end.

After this terrible catastrophe, Wolf von Gnadewitz left the castle in the val-

ley, and indeed that part of the country, and dwelt upon one of his many estates in Silesia. He took into his house to nurse him a young female relative, the last survivor of one of the collateral branches of his house. This young relative proved to be a girl of angelic beauty, at sight of whom the old baron entirely forgot the object for which he had invited her beneath his roof, and at last determined to clothe his sixty years in a wedding-garment. To his exceeding indignation, however, he now learned that there might come a time, even to a Gnadewitz, when he could no longer be regarded as a desirable *parti*, and he fell into a violent rage when his young relative confessed that, in utter forgetfulness of her lofty lineage, she had given her heart to a bourgeois officer, the son of one of his foresters.

The young man possessed no worldly gear, only his sword and a remarkably fine manly person; but he was rich in mind, accomplished, amiable in disposition, and of stainless character. When Wolf von Gnadewitz, in consequence of Marie's confession, turned her from his doors, young Ferber carried her home with delight as his wife, and for the first ten years of their married life would not have exchanged his lot with that of any king on earth. Still less would he have made such an exchange in the eleventh year, for that was the eventful 1848; but with it came fierce struggles for him, and an entire alteration in his circumstances. He was obliged to decide between two duties. One had been inculcated while he was in his cradle by his father, and ran thus: "Love your neighbour, and especially your German brother, as yourself;" the other, which he had in later years imposed upon himself, commanded him to draw the sword in his master's interest. In this strife the teachings of his childhood conquered entirely. Ferber refused to draw the sword upon his brethren; but his refusal cost him his commission, and with it all assured means of subsistence. He retired from the army, and soon afterward, in consequence of a severe cold, was stretched upon a sick-bed, which he left only after years of disheartening weakness. He then moved with his family to B——, where he obtained quite a lucrative situation as bookkeeper in an extensive mercantile establishment. It was high time, for his wife's small property had been lost shortly before by the failure of a bank, and the remittances of money which came to the distressed family from time to time from Ferber's elder and only brother, a forester in Thuringia, were all that kept them from extreme poverty.

Unluckily this good fortune was of short duration. Ferber's chief was a pietist of the most severe description, and spared no one in his zeal for proselytism. His efforts to convert Ferber to his own narrow dogmas were met by such quiet but decided resistance, that the pious spirit of the saintly Herr Hagen was seized with holy horror. Remorse at the thought of affording protection and subsistence to such an avowed free-thinker, gave him no peace by night or by day, until he had freed himself from such a burden of guilt, by a note of dismissal,

which banished the tainted sheep from his fold.

About the same time Wolf von Gnadewitz went home to his ancestors, and as during his earthly career he had strictly conformed to the Gnadewitz custom of leaving no insult, fancied or otherwise: unavenged, no worthier conclusion to his life could be found than the will which he drew up with his own hands shortly before he descended into the narrow chamber of lead which was to contain for all futurity his noble bones.

This manly document, which constituted sole heir to his large estates a distant relative of his wife's, concluded with the following codicil:

"In consideration of the undeniable claim which she has upon my property, I bequeath to Anna Marie Ferber, born von Gnadewitz, the castle of Gnadeck in the mountains in Thuringia. Anna Marie Ferber will understand my benevolent intention in her behalf in leaving to her a mansion crowded with memories of the noble race to which she once belonged. In full remembrance and consideration of the good fortune and many blessings which have always hovered above this ancient pile, I hold it entirely superfluous to increase my legacy further. But if Anna Marie Ferber, blind to the value of my gift, should wish to sell or exchange it in any way, her right to it must be abdicated in favour of the orphan asylum of L——."

And thus, with the utterance of a biting satire, Wolf von Gnadewitz betook himself to his funeral bed of state. Ferber and his wife had indeed never seen the old castle, but it was notoriously a crumbling heap of ruins, which the hand of improvement had not touched for fifty years, and which, when the modern abode in the valley was completed, had been stripped of furniture, tapestries, and, in the case of the main building, even of the metallic roofing.

Since that time the ponderous oaken door of the principal entrance had remained closed, and the dusty, rusty bolts and bars had never once been withdrawn. The huge forest trees which were growing before it spread abroad their mighty branches, and drooped them among the thick brushwood at their feet, so that the deserted castle lay behind the green impenetrable wall like a coffined mummy.

The lucky heir, who was greatly annoyed by seeing so large a part of his woodland possessions in stranger hands, would gladly have purchased the old castle at a high price, but the cunning clause at the conclusion of the codicil forbade any such transaction.

Frau Ferber laid the copy of the will which had been sent her, and upon which there dropped from her eyes a few tears of regret, upon her husband's desk, and then took up her work,—some delicate embroidery,—with redoubled, almost feverish industry. In spite of his exertions Ferber had been unable to procure another situation, and was now doing his best to maintain his family by

translating, a labour but poorly paid, and even by copying law papers, while his wife eked out their scanty means by the proceeds of her needle, which she plied night and day.

But dark as were the heavens above the struggling pair, one star rose quietly among the black clouds and seemed not unlikely to indemnify them by its radiance for all the storms with which fickle fortune had overwhelmed them. A presentiment of this gentle light which was to beam upon his gloomy path possessed Ferber when he stood for the first time beside the cradle of his first-born, a daughter, and gazed into the lovely eyes which smiled upon him from the baby face. All Frau Ferber's friends had been unanimously of opinion that the little girl was a charming creature, a wonderfully gifted child; indeed, they had declared it did not look in the least like an ordinary baby, did not appear to belong to the class of miserable little wretches, who, red as lobsters, seem determined to scream their way through the world; but,—here they had broken off; and it was intimated that were it not for fear of the sneers of their liege lords, and the utterly prosaic tendencies of the nineteenth century, they should certainly suspect that some benevolent fairy had been at work in this case.

They contended as to who should be so far favoured as to hold the little creature at the baptismal font, and should show the deepest tenderness for the little god-daughter, declaring that the day of her baptism could never be effaced from their remembrance; but this demand upon their memories was altogether too great, for when Ferber fell into difficulties, selfishness passed its finger over the recorded day, and no trace of it remained in their minds.

This change, which little Elizabeth experienced in the ninth year of her existence, disturbed her not at all. Her probable fairy protectress had, in addition to other rich gifts, endowed her in her cradle with an invincible joyousness of temperament and great force of will; so she took from her mother's hand her scanty evening meal as gratefully and gaily as she had once received the inexhaustible delicacies presented to her by admiring god-parents; and when on Christmas-eve the room was adorned only by a poor little Christmas-tree hung with a few apples and gilded nuts, the child did not seem to remember the time when friends had crowded around to deck its boughs with all imaginable toys.

Ferber educated his daughter himself. She never attended a school of any kind, an omission in her training which cannot, unfortunately, in the present age, be regarded as anything but an advantage, when we see how many young girls leave school with far more knowledge upon some subjects than is at all desirable or pleasing to the anxious mother, who strives at home to preserve unsoiled her child's purity of mind and heart, and often does not dream how her tender care is made of no avail by the taint which one impure nature in the school will communicate, and which may perhaps colour an entire after-life.

Elizabeth's pliant mind was finely developed beneath the control of her gifted parents. Thoroughly to understand the study which occupied her, and to appropriate its results in such a manner as to make them inalienably her own were duties which she most conscientiously fulfilled. But she gave herself to the study of music with an ardor that inspires a human being only when engaged in a pursuit felt to be especially his own. She soon far outstripped her mother, who was her instructress, and as when a child she would often leave her playthings if she saw a cloud upon her father's brow, to sit on his knee and divert him with some tale of wonder, thus, as a girl, she would charm away the demon of gloom from her father's mind by strange and delicious melodies which lay like pearls in the depths of her soul, until she brought them to light for the first time for his relief and enjoyment. And this was not the only blessing springing from her rare talent for music. The exquisite touch upon the piano, in the garret in which the family lived, attracted the attention of several of the more aristocratic inhabitants of the house, and Elizabeth soon had two or three pupils in music, and had lately been employed in a large school as teacher of the piano, thus sensibly increasing the means of subsistence of the family.

Here let us resume the thread of our story, and we shall not shrink, I hope, from the trouble that we must take in following our heroine through the wet streets upon this stormy evening to her home and her parents.

CHAPTER II.

Even during the long walk through the streets, alternately straight and crooked, gloomy and bright, Elizabeth enjoyed in imagination the delicious sensation of comfort that the sight of the cosey room at home always caused her. There sat her father at his writing-table with its little study-lamp, ready to raise his pale face with a smile when Elizabeth entered. He would take his pen, which had been travelling so busily over the paper for hours, in his left hand, and with his right draw his daughter down beside him to kiss her forehead. Her mother, who, with her work-basket at her feet, usually sat close beside her husband that she might share the light of his study-lamp, would welcome her with tender loving eyes, and point to Elizabeth's slippers, which her care had placed by the stove to warm. Upon the stove apples would be roasting with a cheering hiss, and in the warm corner beside it was the sofa-table, where the tea-kettle would be singing

merrily above its spirit-lamp, whose weak, blue light illumined the regiment of tin soldiers, which her only brother, Ernst, a child six years of age, was busily drilling.

Elizabeth mounted to the fourth story before she reached the dark, narrow passage which led to her father's rooms. Here she hastily took off her bonnet and placed upon her lovely fair hair a boy's cap, trimmed with fur, which she drew from under her cloak. Then she entered the room, where little Ernst ran toward her with a shout of joy.

But this evening the light shone from the sofa-table in the usually dark corner by the stove, while the writing-table was left neglected in the gloom. Her father sat upon the sofa, with his arm around her mother's waist; there was a joyous light upon the countenances of both, and, although her mother had evidently been weeping, Elizabeth instantly perceived that her tears had been tears of joy. She stood still upon the threshold of the door in great astonishment, and must have presented a most comical appearance with the child's cap surmounting her amazed countenance, for both father and mother laughed aloud. Elizabeth gaily joined in their laughter, and placed the fur cap upon her little brother's dark curls.

"There, my darling," she said, tenderly taking his rosy face between her hands and kissing it, "that is yours; and there is still something left to help on your housekeeping, mother dear," she continued, with a happy smile, as she handed her mother four shining thalers. "They gave me my first five thalers of salary at school to-day."

"But, Elsbeth," said her mother, with the tears in her eyes, as she drew her down to kiss her, "Ernst's last year's cap is still quite respectable, and you needed a pair of warm winter gloves much more."

"I, mother? just feel my hands; although I have been in the street for an hour almost, they are as warm as if I had been holding them before the fire. No; new gloves would be a most superfluous luxury. Our boy is growing taller and stouter, and his cap has not kept pace with him; so I consider the cap a necessary expense."

"Ah, you good sister!" cried the child with delight; "even the little baron on the first story has not such a charming cap as this. How fine it will look when I go hunting, hey, papa?"

"Hunting!" laughed Elizabeth; "are you going to shoot the unfortunate sparrows in the Thiergarten?"

"Oh, what a miserable guesser you are, Madam Elsie!" the boy rejoined, gleefully. "In the Thiergarten, indeed!" he added, more seriously; "that would be pretty sport. No, in the forest,—the real forest,—where the deer and hares are so thick that you don't even have to take aim when you want to shoot them."

"I should like to hear what your uncle would say to this view of the noble

chase," said his father with a smile, taking up a letter from the table and handing it to Elizabeth.

"Read this, my child," said he; "it is from your 'forester uncle,' as you call him, in Thuringia."

Elizabeth glanced over the first few lines, and then read aloud:

"The prince, who sometimes prefers a dish of bacon and sauerkraut at my table to the best efforts of his French cook in the castle of L——, passed several hours with me at my lodge yesterday. He was very condescending, and informed me that he purposed employing an assistant forester, or rather forester's clerk, for he saw that my duties were too onerous. I seized upon my opportunity,—the game was within shot, and if I missed I had nothing to lose but a couple of charges fired into the air; now was my time.

"So I told him how the jade, fortune, had played the very devil with you for this many a year, and how, in spite of your fine talents and acquirements, poverty had knocked at your door. My old master knew well what I was driving at, for I spoke, as I always do, in good German. Thus far in my life every one has understood what I had to say. It is only the fops and fools of his court who fawn around him, who would persuade him that good, honest German is too coarse for royal ears, and that he must always be addressed in French. Well, my old master said that he would like to offer you this situation as forester's clerk, because he thought that with regard to myself,—and here he said a couple of things that you need not hear, but which delighted me,—old fellow as I am,—quite as much as when in old times, upon examination-day, the schoolmaster used to say, 'Carl, you have done yourself credit to-day.' Well, his highness has commissioned me to write to you, and he will arrange matters. Three hundred and fifty thalers salary, and your fuel. Now think it over; it is not so poor an offer, and the green forest is a thousand times pleasanter than your confounded attics, where the neighbours' cats are forever squalling, and where your eyes are blinded by the smoke of a million chimneys.

"You must not think that I am one of those wheedling, parasitical fellows who use their master's favour to benefit all their own kith and kin. No; I can tell you that if you were not what you are, that is, if you were not really talented and well educated, I would bite my tongue out before I would recommend you to my master; and, on the other side, I should always try to secure in his service such an honest, capable fellow as yourself. No offence; you know I always like a plain statement of a plain case.

"But there is another matter to be considered. You ought to live with me, and it could be very easily arranged if you were a bachelor, whom four walls would content, with a chest for his solitary wardrobe. But, unfortunately, there is no possible room in my lonely old rat's-hole of a forest-lodge for an entire family.

It is in rather a tumble-down condition, and has needed a doctor for some time, but I suppose the authorities will do nothing for it until the old balconies come crumbling about my ears. The nearest village is half a league, and the nearest town a league from the lodge; you cannot possibly walk these distances every day, in the miserable weather that we have here sometimes.

”Now old Sabina, my housekeeper, who was born in the nearest village, has made a wild suggestion which I herewith impart to you. Old castle Gnadeck, the deceased Baron Gnadewitz’s brilliant legacy to you, is, as I have told you, situated at about a rifle’s shot distance from the lodge. Well, Sabina says that when she was a strong hearty girl,—which, by the way, must have been something beyond a quarter of a century ago,—she was a chambermaid in the Gnadewitz household. Then the new castle was not entirely furnished, and did not suffice to contain the crowd of guests yearly invited to the great hunt. And so part of the building connecting the two principal wings of the old castle was somewhat repaired and furnished. Sabina had to make and air the beds and attend to the rooms, to her great terror, and no wonder,—her old brain is perfectly crammed with all sorts of witch and ghost stories,—for the rest she is a most respectable person, and rules my household with a steady rein.

”She maintains most firmly that this part of the castle cannot be in a crumbling condition, for it was then in an excellent state of preservation, and would, she is sure, afford a capital shelter for you and yours. May be she is right; but are your children bold enough to brave the ghostly inhabitants that are said to haunt those old walls?

”You know how vexed I was about your worthless legacy, and that I have never once been able, since the death of the sainted Wolf von Gnadewitz, to induce myself to visit the old ruin. But after hearing Sabina’s tale yesterday afternoon, I made one of my men climb a tree which stood upon the only spot which could give you a glimpse into the robber’s nest, and he declared that everything had fallen into decay there. And this morning I have been to the authorities in the town, but they would not give me the keys of the castle without special permission from your wife, and made, besides, as much fuss about it as if the treasures of Golconda lay hid in the mouldy old rooms. None of those who placed the seals upon the doors could tell me what sort of a place it was, for they never entered it, under the impression that the ceiling might fall and dash out their prudent brains, but contented themselves with placing a dozen official seals as large as your hand upon the principal entrance door. I should very much like to investigate matters with you, so pray decide quickly and start with your family as soon as possible.”

Here Elizabeth dropped the letter and looked with sparkling eyes at her father.

”Well, how have you decided, father dear?” she asked hastily.

”Ah,” he replied gravely, ”it is quite a hard task to tell you our resolution, for I see by your face that you would not for the world exchange this gay populous city for the loneliness and quiet of the Thuringian forest. Still, you must know that my application to the Prince of L—— for the place in question lies sealed in that envelope. However, it is only reasonable that your wishes should be consulted in some degree, and we can be induced to leave you here in case——”

”Ah, no; if Elizabeth will not go I would rather stay here, too,” interrupted the little boy, clinging anxiously to his sister.

”Never fear, my darling,” she said to him with a laugh; ”I shall find a place in the carriage, and if I could not, you know I am as bold as a soldier, and can run like a hare. My longing for the greenwood, which has been the fairy-land of my imagination ever since I was a very little child, shall be my compass, and I shall get along bravely. What will papa do when, some evening, a weary way-worn traveller, with ragged shoes and empty pockets, prays for admission at the gate of the old castle?”

”Ah, then, indeed, we must admit you,” said her father, smiling, ”if we would not draw down upon our crumbling roof the hostility of all good spirits who protect courage and innocence. But you will have to pass by the old castle if you wish to find us, and knock at some modest peasant hut in the valley, for the ruined old pile will scarcely afford us an asylum.”

”I am afraid not, indeed,” said his wife. ”We shall work our way laboriously through wild hedges and thick underbrush, like the unfortunate suitors of the Sleeping Beauty, to find at last——”

”Poetry itself!” cried Elizabeth. ”Why, the first delicious bloom will be brushed from our woodland life if we cannot live in the old castle! Certainly there must be four sound walls and a whole roof in some one of its old towers, and with heads to plan and strong willing hands to execute, the rest can be very easily arranged. We will stop up cracks with moss, nail boards over doorways that have lost their doors, and paper our four walls ourselves; we can cover the worm-eaten floors with homemade straw mats; declare war to the death upon the gray-coated, four-footed little thieves who would invade our larder, and soon banish all cobwebs by a good broom skilfully wielded.”

With glowing looks, quite carried away by her dreams of the future home in the fresh green forest, she went to the piano and opened it. It was an old, worn-out instrument, whose hoarse, weak tones harmonized perfectly with its shabby exterior; but, nevertheless, beneath Elizabeth’s fingers Mendelssohn’s song, ”Through the dark green Forest,” rang deliciously through the little room.

Her parents sat quietly listening. Little Ernst dropped asleep. Without, the howling of the storm was lulled, but the snow was driving noiselessly past the

uncurtained window in huge flakes. The opposite chimneys, no longer smoking, had put on thick white night-caps, and looked stiffly and coldly, like peevish old age, into the little attic room, which enclosed, in the midst of the snow-storm, a perfect spring of joy and gaiety within its four walls.

CHAPTER III.

Whitsuntide! A word that will thrill with its magic the human soul as long as trees burst into leaf, larks soar trilling aloft, and clear spring skies laugh above us. A word which can awaken an echo of spring in hearts encrusted with selfishness and greed of gain, chilled by the snows of age, or deadened by grief and care.

Whitsuntide is at hand. A gentle breeze flutters over the Thuringian mountains, and brushes from their brows the last remains of the snow which whirls mistily into the air and leaves its old abiding-place in the guise of luminous spring clouds. Freed from their wintry garments, the mountains deck their rugged brows with wreaths of young strawberry vines and bilberries. In the valley below, the rippling trout-stream is flowing forth from the dark forest directly across the flower-strewn meadow.

The lonely saw-mill is clacking merrily, while its low thatched roof shines white with the fallen blossoms of the sheltering fruit trees.

Before the windows of the scattered huts of the wood-cutters and of the villagers many an accomplished bullfinch was singing in his little cage the airs which were the fruits of a course of instruction in high art, daring the winter in the hot, close room of his master. And his brothers in the forest were trilling wilder but far sweeter lays, for their little throats inhaled the clear air of freedom.

Where, a few weeks before, the melted snow had foamed down from the mountain tops in a bed created by its own torrent, beautiful moss was now weaving a soft carpet, that would soon quite conceal the scarred breast of the mountain, while here and there, through the thick green the silver thread of some little stream glittered in the sunlight.

Upon the highway running through a charming valley of the Thuringian forest the Ferbers were travelling, in a well-packed carriage, toward their new home. It was very early in the morning; the bell from a distant church-tower had just tolled the hour of three, wherefore only the shabby old sign-post by the roadside and a herd of stately stags were permitted the sight of a happy face that

looked upon this lovely forest for the first time.

Elizabeth leaned far out of the window of the dark carriage, and inhaled deep draughts of the invigorating air, which she maintained had already cleared away from her eyes and lungs all the dust of the city. Ferber sat opposite, sunk in thought. He too was refreshed by the beauty and tender grace of the forest; but he was more deeply moved by the delight in the eyes of his child, who was so susceptible to the charms of nature and so unspeakably grateful for the change in their circumstances. How busy her hands had been since the Royal answer to Ferber's application for the new office had been received! There had been much to do. She had shared faithfully in all the cares which their departure from the city brought upon her parents. It is true the prince had sent his new official a considerable sum of money for travelling expenses, and the forester uncle, too, had shown his usual generosity; but with the greatest economy it did not suffice, and therefore Elizabeth had employed every hour which she usually had for recreation in sewing for a large ready-made linen establishment,—occupying herself thus with her needle for many a night, after her unsuspecting parents were sleeping soundly.

There had been one bitter experience amid all the busy hurry, which had cost the young girl many tears. She had seen her dear piano borne off upon the shoulders of two strong men to its new possessor. It had to be sold for a few thalers, because it was old and frail,—too frail to be transported to the new home. Ah, it had been so true a friend to the family! Its thin, quavering voice had sounded in Elizabeth's ears tender and dear as the voice of her mother. And now, probably, unfeeling children would thrum upon its venerable keys, and tease the old instrument to speak more strongly, until it should be mute forever. But this sorrow was past, and lay behind her, with much beside which she had sacrificed and endured silently; and as she sat looking out into the morning twilight, with eyes sparkling with delight,—eyes that seemed to read behind the misty veil of the dawn all kinds of brilliant prophecies for the future,—who could have discerned in that figure, glowing with the elasticity of youth, one trace of the fatigue of the last busy weeks?

For another half hour the travellers drove along the smooth, level highway, and then turned aside into the thick forest by a well-kept carriage-road. The sun was just rising in the eastern sky, and shot his rays upon the earth in splendid amazement at the diamonds with which she had adorned herself during his absence. In the night a heavy shower had come up, much rain had fallen, and the large drops were still hanging upon twig and leaf, falling pattering upon the roof of the carriage whenever the postillion touched one of the overarching boughs with his whip. What a glorious forest! From the thick underbrush at their feet the trees reared their colossal trunks, and above, their boughs intertwined in

a fraternal embrace as though determined to defend their peaceful, quiet home from light and air as from two deadly enemies. Only here and there a slender, green-tinted sunbeam would slip from bough to bough down upon the feathery grass and the little strawberry-blossoms, sprinkled everywhere like snow-flakes, even laying their little white heads impertinently upon the road.

After a short drive the wood grew less dense, and soon the retired Lodge appeared in the midst of a meadow in the heart of the forest. The postillion sounded his horn. A tremendous barking of dogs was heard; and with a loud whirr a large flock of doves soared, terrified, into the air from the pointed gable of the house.

A man in a hunting uniform was standing at the open door,—a gigantic figure, with a huge beard that almost covered his breast. He shaded his eyes with his hands as he looked keenly at the approaching carriage, but suddenly running down the steps, he tore open the door, and threw his arms around Ferber, as the latter sprang out. For one instant the brothers stood in a close embrace; then the forester gently released the slender figure of the younger, and, holding him by the shoulder at arm's length, gazed searchingly into his pale worn countenance.

"Poor Adolph!" he said at last, and his deep voice trembled with emotion. "Has fate brought you to this? But wait awhile, we will have you sound and well again; it is not too late. A thousand welcomes to you! And now let us stick together until the last great trumpet call, when we shall not be asked whether we will stay together or not."

He tried to master his emotion, and helped his sister-in-law and little Ernst, whom he embraced and kissed, to descend from the carriage.

"Well," said he, "you must have been knocked up at an early hour, I must say, and that's hardly the thing for women."

"What can you be thinking of, uncle?" cried Elizabeth. "We are no slug-a-beds, and know exactly how the sun looks when he says good morning to the world."

"Halloa!" cried the forester with a laugh of surprise. "Who is that quarrelling with me in the corner of the carriage? Come out instantly, little one."

"I, little? Well, sir, you will be finely surprised when I do get out and you see what a tall, stately maiden I am!"

With these words Elizabeth sprang down from the high carriage and stood on tiptoe, drawing herself up to her full height beside him. But although her slender, graceful figure was something above middle size, she seemed at this moment like a pretty king-bird measuring itself with an eagle.

"Look," she said, in a rather disappointed tone, "I am nearly up to your shoulder, and that is more than tall enough for a respectable girl."

Her uncle, holding himself as erect as possible, looked down upon her with

a roguish smile of great self-satisfaction for a moment, then suddenly picked her up in his arms as though she had been a feather, and amid the laughter of the others carried her into the house, calling in a voice of thunder—

"Sabina, Sabina, come here, and I will show you how the wrens look in B——."

He put his terrified burden down in the hall as gently and carefully as though he were handling some brittle plaything, took her head tenderly between his large hands, kissed her forehead again and again, and said, "That such a queen of Liliput, such a moonshine elf, should dream of being as large as her tall uncle! But, forest fairy as you are, you know all about the sun, for your head is covered with its beams."

As she was carried into the house upon her uncle's arm the girl's hat had fallen from her head, revealing a mass of fair hair, the golden colour of which was all the more remarkable as her delicately pencilled eyebrows and long lashes were coal black.

In the mean while an old woman entered from a side door, and at the head of the first flight of stairs several boyish faces appeared, which, however, vanished as soon as they found themselves perceived by the forester. "Oh, you need not run away," he cried, laughing. "I have seen you peeping. They are my assistants," he turned to his brother; "the fellows are as curious as sparrows, and to-day I really cannot blame them," and he glanced archly at Elizabeth, who, standing aside, was binding her loosened braids around her head. Then he took the old woman by the hand and presented her, with an air of comical solemnity: "Fräulein Sabina Holzin, Minister of the Interior to the Forest Lodge, High Constable in all stable and farm affairs, and to every one therein concerned, and, lastly, absolute monarch in the kitchen department. While she is putting the dinner on the table do just as she tells you, and all will go well with you; but, if she begins with her stock of old proverbs and ghost stories, get out of her way as quickly as possible, for there is no end to them. And now,"—he turned to the smiling old woman, who was a miracle of ugliness, and who yet prepossessed all in her favour by her honest eyes, by an expression of roguery and fun that lighted up her face, and especially by the spotless cleanliness of her attire,—"now bring us as quickly as you can whatever pantry and cellar will afford: I know you baked our Whitsuntide cakes earlier than usual, that our travellers might have something to refresh them after their fatigue."

With these words he opened the door opposite to the one from the kitchen through which the old woman disappeared, and showed his guests into a large apartment with bow-windows. But Elizabeth lingered behind, looking through the door which led into the court-yard, for, between the white picket fences which shut in the feathered tribes on each side of the enclosure, she saw gay

beds of flowers, while three or four late-blossoming apple trees stretched their rosy bloom-laden branches over one corner of the space. The garden was large, climbing a short distance up the mountain side by terraces, and even enclosing within its realm a beautiful group of old beeches, outlying members of the forest. While Elizabeth, entranced, stood thus in the hall, the door of a side wing of the house opened and a young girl stepped out into the court-yard. She was strikingly beautiful, although her figure was rather diminutive, a defect for which nature had seemed to wish to indemnify her by gifting her with a pair of large eyes that glowed like dazzling black suns. Her abundant dark hair was arranged evidently with an eye to coquettish effect, and several charmingly curled locks had escaped just above the pale forehead. Her dress, too, although of simple material, betrayed in its arrangement the greatest care, and the observer could not but suspect that the skirt was so artistically looped not merely that the hem might be kept from the dust, but also with an eye to the neat little boot which it revealed, and which certainly was not made to be hidden beneath the heavy woollen stuff of the dress.

She had in her hand a bowl full of grain, and threw a handful upon the stones at her feet. A great noise ensued; the doves fluttered down from the roof, the fowls left their roosts and nests with loud cacklings, and the watch-dog felt it his duty to assist in the universal clamour by barking loudly.

Elizabeth was astonished. It is true, her uncle had been married, but he never had any children, as she knew; who then was this young girl, of whom no mention had been made in his letter? She descended the steps that led to the court-yard, and approached the stranger: ”Do you live at the Lodge?” she asked, kindly.

The black eyes were riveted searchingly upon her for one moment, with a look of unmistakable surprise, then an expression of annoyance flitted across her delicate lips, which closed more tightly than before; the eyelids fell over the glittering eyes, and she turned silently away, as though entirely unconscious of the presence or address of any one, and continued feeding the fowls with the grain.

Just then Sabina passed through the hall with the coffee-tray. She beckoned confidentially to Elizabeth, who stood amazed, and, when she drew near, bade her follow her into the house, saying: ”Come, child, you can do nothing with her.”

In the sitting-room, Elizabeth found all as comfortable and happy as if they had lived together for years. Her mother was sitting in a large arm-chair, which the forester had pushed near a window that commanded a lovely view down one of the vistas of the forest. A large striped cat had sprung confidingly into her lap, where it was purring with satisfaction beneath the small hand that was gently stroking it. And for little Ernst, the four walls of the room were a perfect museum

of all imaginable curiosities. He had climbed into one chair after another, and was then standing in speechless admiration before a glass case containing a gorgeous collection of butterflies. The two men were seated, side by side, upon the lounge, in deep consultation concerning the future abode of the family, and, as Elizabeth entered, she heard her uncle say, "Well, if the old ruin on the mountain cannot afford you shelter, you must stay here with me. I can move my writing-table and all my other matters out of your way for awhile, and then I will besiege the authorities in the town until they consent to add another story to the right wing of my old house."

Elizabeth took off her travelling cloak, and assisted old Sabina to set the table. The first shadow had fallen upon the enjoyment that had filled her soul. Never before had any advance of hers been met with unkindness. That she owed this exemption from the ill humour of others to her beauty, the charm of her manner, and the childlike purity of her nature, which exercised an unconscious influence upon all around her, had never occurred to her. She had taken it for granted that she should experience only kindness from all, since she was conscious of meaning well by all the world. Her disappointment at the repulse was all the greater, because the sight of a young girl of about her own age had caused her such surprise and joy; and the beautiful face of the stranger had interested her deeply. The studied arrangement of the girl's dress had not struck her, as she herself had never yet known the desire of heightening her attractions by the aids of the toilet. Her father and mother had always assured her that no time spent in the cultivation of mind and heart was lost, and that if they were what they should be, her exterior could never be unattractive, whatever might be the form with which nature had endowed her.

The thoughtful expression of Elizabeth's face did not escape her mother's notice. She called her to her, and her daughter began an account of the meeting; but at the first words the forester turned towards her. A deep wrinkle appeared between his bushy eyebrows, and made his face dark and gloomy.

"Indeed," he said, "have you seen her already? Well, then, let me tell you who and what she is. I took her into my house some years ago, that she might assist Sabina in her housekeeping. She is a distant relative of my deceased wife, and has no parents, brothers nor sisters. I wished to do good, but I have provided myself with a perpetual scourge,—although I do not deserve it. She had not been here a month before I discovered that she had not a single healthy thought in her entire composition; she is a mass of exaggerated ideas and inconceivable arrogance. I had half a mind to send her back to the place she came from, but Sabina, who has still less cause than I to love her, entreated me not to do it. Why, I cannot tell, for the girl gave her a great deal of trouble, and was insolent. I did all I could to tame her haughty spirit by giving her regular duties to perform, and

for awhile matters went on pretty well. But about a year ago a certain Baroness Lessen came to live over at Lindhof,—that is the name of the former Gnadewitz property, which the heir-at-law sold to a Herr von Walde. The possessor himself, who has neither wife nor child, is a kind of antiquary, travels a great deal, and leaves his only sister under the charge of the aforesaid baroness, more's the pity, for she turns everything upside down. Years ago, when I used to hear great piety spoken of, all my veneration was excited, and I wished at least to take my cap off; but now, when I hear of such things, I clench my fist and pull my hat down over my eyes, for the world has greatly changed. The Baroness Lessen belongs to those pious souls who grow cruel, hard, and narrow-minded out of what they call pure fear of the Lord; who persecute a fellow-creature who does not cast his eyes down hypocritically, but lifts them to heaven where God dwells, as persistently as a hound hunts down game. This is the herd to which my excellent niece belongs; there could not be a better soil for all the weeds that her brain generates, and all sorts of annoyances are the consequence. She made acquaintance with a lady's-maid over there, and spent all her leisure time with her. At first I was content enough, until all at once she began with her plans,—for our conversion, as she calls it. Sabina was a miserable sinner, because she would not leave off work, at least ten times a day, to pray; the poor old thing, who never misses church every Sunday at Lindhof, even through wind and rain, and often with rheumatism racking her old bones, and who has lived a faithful, laborious life, infinitely more religious than sixty years of idleness spent upon her knees. And then my fine moralist attacked me; but there she found her match, and contented herself with a single effort. Then I forbade all intercourse with Lindhof; but my prohibition was of little use, for whenever my back is turned she takes occasion to slip over there. Of course, there can be no question of any gratitude towards me; I have no bond of union with her as her guardian, and that makes my task of guiding and guarding her doubly difficult. God only knows what insane idea has taken possession of her now, but for two months she has been perfectly dumb, not only here at home, but everywhere. For that space of time not a single word has passed her lips. Neither sternness nor gentle entreaty produces the slightest effect upon her. She attends to her duties just as she used to do, eats and drinks like every one else, and is not one whit less vain or wise in her own conceit. But because she grew pale, and did not look very well, I consulted a physician, who had formerly known her, with regard to her health. He assured me that her physical health was excellent, and advised that she should be treated with gentle firmness, as the minds of several of her family had previously been somewhat affected. He said, too, that she would grow tired of her entire silence, and would begin talking some fine day like a magpie. I am content to wait; but in the mean time it is a sore trial to me. All my life I have longed to have happy faces around me, and would rather

eat bread and salt with cheerful people than the costliest dainties with morose companions. Come, my Fair one with the golden locks," he concluded, stroking Elizabeth's head with his huge hand, "push your mother's arm-chair up to the table, tie a napkin round the neck of that little rogue who is staring his eyes out at my case of rifles, and let us breakfast together, for you all need repose, and must rest your weary limbs after your long journey. After dinner we must begin to think of Castle Gnadeck; but first strengthen your eyes with a little sleep, lest they should be dazzled by the splendour which will flash upon them up there."

After breakfast, while her father and mother were asleep and little Ernst was dreaming in a large bed of the wonders of the forest-lodge, Elizabeth unpacked in the upper room, which her uncle had resigned to her, all that was necessary for the coming night. She would not for the world have gone to sleep. She went repeatedly to the window and looked across to the wooded mountain which arose behind the lodge. There, above the tops of the trees, she could see a black streak, which stood out distinctly against the clear blue sky. That was, as old Sabina said, an ancient iron flag-staff upon the roof of Castle Gnadeck, from which in times long gone by the proud banner of the Gnadewitzes had flouted the air. Was there behind those trees the asylum for which she longed, where her parents might rest their feet, weary with long wandering upon foreign soil?

And then her eyes sought the court-yard below, but the dumb girl did not appear again. She had not come to breakfast, and seemed to wish to avoid all intercourse with the guests at the lodge. For this Elizabeth was very sorry. Although her uncle's account had not been promising, a youthful spirit is not quick to resign its illusions, and would rather be undeceived by the bursting of its gay bubble than admonished by the experience of age. The beautiful girl, who could so determinedly conceal her secret behind closed lips, became doubly interesting to her, and she exhausted herself in conjectures as to the cause of this silence.

CHAPTER IV.

After a most cheerful dinner, Sabina brought from the cupboard a pipe, which she filled and handed with a match to the forester.

"What are you thinking of, Sabina?" he said, rejecting it with a comical air of displeased surprise. "Do you think I could find it in my heart to sit here and smoke a quiet pipe while Elsie's little feet are dancing with impatience to run up

the mountain, and she is longing to poke her little nose into the magic castle? No, I think we had better start at once upon our voyage of discovery."

All were soon ready. The forester gave his arm to his sister-in-law, and they started off through the court and garden. After they had gone a little way, they were joined by a mason from the neighbouring village, whom the forester had sent for that he might be at hand if necessary.

They walked up the mountain by a tolerably steep and narrow path through the thick forest, but this path gradually broadened, and at last led to a small open space, on one side of which arose what seemed like a tall gray rock.

"Here I have the pleasure," said the forester to his brother, with a sarcastic smile, "of revealing to you the estate of the lamented Baron von Gnadewitz in all its grandeur."

They were standing before a lofty wall, which looked like one solid block of granite. They could see nothing of any buildings that might be behind it, because the surrounding forest was too thick and close to allow of a sufficiently distant point of observation. The forester led the way along the wall, at the base of which thick underbrush was growing, until he reached a large oaken door with an iron grating in the upper half of it. Here he had had the matted growth of underbrush cleared away, and he now produced a bunch of large keys which had been handed over to Frau Ferber as she had passed through L—— the day before.

The utmost exertions of the three men were necessary before the rusty locks and bars would move, but at last the door creaked, or rather crashed upon its hinges, and a thick cloud of dust floated up into the air. The explorers entered and found themselves in a court-yard bounded on three sides by buildings. Opposite them was the imposing front of the castle, with a flight of broad stone steps, and a clumsy iron balustrade, leading to the entrance door upon the first story. Running from each side of the main building were gloomy colonnades, whose granite pillars and arches seemed to defy the tooth of time. In the centre of the court-yard a group of old chestnut trees stretched their aged boughs above a huge basin, in the midst of which couched four stone lions with wide open jaws. Formerly four powerful streams of water must have poured through them from the bowels of the earth, filling the entire basin; but now there was only a small stream trickling through the threatening teeth of one of the monsters, sufficing to sprinkle with moisture the grass and weeds growing in the cracks of the stone basin, and, by its low, mournful ripple, giving a faint suggestion of life in this wilderness. The outer walls of the structure and the colonnades were all that could be regarded without terror in this space. The window frames, from which every pane of glass had been broken, showed the sad desolation within. In some rooms the ceilings had already fallen in; in others, the joists were bent as though the lightest touch might send them crashing down. Even the stone steps seemed

half hanging in the air,—some mossy fragments had already become detached from them, and had rolled into the centre of the court-yard.

”We can do nothing here,” said Ferber. ”Let us go on.”

Through a deep, dark portal they entered another court-yard, which, although much larger than the first, by its striking irregularity produced an impression of far greater desolation. Here, a dreary, crumbling pile of masonry projected far out, and formed a dark corner never visited by a sunbeam; there, a clumsy tower shot into the air, throwing a deep shadow upon the wing at its back. An old elder bush, leading a straggling existence in one corner, with its leaves covered with fallen crumbs of mortar, and some dry grasses between the stones of the pavement, made the scene yet more desolate. No noise disturbed the deathlike silence reigning here. Even the jackdaws soaring in the air above ceased their chatter, and the echoes of the footsteps upon the stone pavement had a ghostly sound.

”Yes, those old knights,” said Ferber, almost appalled at the sight of the desolation around him, ”have heaped up these piles of granite, and thought that this cradle of their race would proclaim the splendour of their name through all coming centuries. Each has altered and arranged his inheritance after his own taste and convenience, as we see from these different kinds of architecture, and lived as if there were no end to it all.”

”And yet each lodged here but for a little space,” interrupted the forester, ”and paid his landlord, the earth, for his lodging with his own crumbling bones,—now turned to dust. But let us go on. Brr—rr!—it makes me shiver. Death everywhere,—nothing but death!”

”Do you call that death, uncle?” suddenly exclaimed Elizabeth, who had hitherto been awed and silent, pointing, as she spoke, through a door which was half concealed by an interposing column. There, behind a grating, fresh sunny green was shining, and young climbing roses leaned their blossoms against the iron bars.

Elizabeth ran towards the door, and, exerting all her strength, pushed it open. The space upon which she entered had probably been the former flower-garden, but such a name could scarcely be applied to the tangled wilderness of green, where not even the narrowest vestige of a path could be discerned, and where here and there only the mutilated remains of a statue appeared among the mass of shrubs, bushes, and parasitical plants. A wild grape-vine had climbed to the upper story of the building, and taken firm hold there of the window-sills,—its green branches and wreaths falling thence like a shower upon the wild roses and lilac bushes beneath. And in this secluded, blooming spot of ground, a buzzing and humming were heard, as if Spring had assembled here her entire host of winged insects. Countless butterflies fluttered over the flowers, and

golden beetles were running glittering across the broad fern leaves at Elizabeth's feet. And above this little world of bloom and busy life several fruit trees and magnificent lindens waved their leafy crests, while upon a slight elevation were seen the remains of what had once been a pavilion.

The garden was surrounded upon three sides by buildings; the square was completed by a high, green wall, which had been constructed of earth, like a dam, and above which the trees of the forest waved a greeting to their neighbours within. Here were also the same signs of decay,—tolerably well preserved outer walls,—complete ruin within. Only one building of two stories, connecting two high wings, attracted attention from its closed appearance. The light did not shine through it, as through its doorless and windowless companions; its flat roof, finished in front and at the back by a heavy stone balustrade, must have bidden defiance to time and tempest, as had also the gray window-panes which peeped out here and there from the tangled growth of vines that covered everything. The forester measured it with a keen glance, and declared that this must be Sabina's famous building,—possibly the interior might not be in as crumbling a condition as the rest of the castle,—only he could not understand how they were to get into the old swallow's nest. Certainly, the rank growth around the base of the walls would have obscured all trace of steps or door, even were there any such entrance. They determined, therefore, to venture up into one of the large side wings by a worn but tolerably secure flight of stone steps, and thus attempt to arrive at the interior of the connecting building. They succeeded in gaining ingress to the tall wing, although they could keep their footing only by clinging to the uneven walls. They first entered a large saloon which had the blue sky for a ceiling, and whose only decoration was a few green bushes growing through its walls. Remnants of galleries, worm-eaten joists, and various fragments of frescoed ceiling were heaped up in piles, over which the explorers had to scramble as best they might. Then followed a long suite of rooms in the same utterly desolate condition. Upon some of the walls fragments of family portraits were still hanging, upon which, strangely and comically enough, only an eye, or, perhaps, a pair of delicate folded hands, or a mail-clad, theatrically-posed leg, was yet distinctly to be traced. At length they reached the last apartment, and stood before a high-arched doorway which had evidently been bricked up.

"Aha!" said Ferber, "here they intended to cut off this building from the universal desolation. I think that before we venture any further upon this break-neck expedition it would be well to knock out these stones."

His proposal was at once favourably received, and the mason began his task; he soon penetrated into a recess in the wall, which he assured them was double at this spot. The other two men lent their assistance, and a thick oaken door was revealed behind the masonry that they cleared away. This door was

not locked, and yielded readily to the mason's strong arm. They entered an entirely dark, close room. One slender sunbeam, straying through a crack showed them where to find a window; the bolt of the shutter, rusty from long disuse, resisted for some time the strength of the forester, and the trees upon the outside opposed an additional obstacle to their exertions. At last the shutter yielded with a crash; the golden-green sunlight streamed in through a high bow-window and disclosed an apartment not broad, but very deep, the walls of which were hung with Gobelin tapestry. Upon each of the four corners of the ceiling were painted the arms of the Gnadewitzes. To the surprise of all, this room was entirely furnished as a sleeping apartment. Two canopied beds, with hangings dingy with age, that occupied the two long walls of the room, were all made up; the pillows were covered with fine linen cases, and the silken coverlid still preserved its colour and texture. Everything that could conduce to the comfort of an aristocratic occupant was here, buried, indeed, beneath a mass of dust, but in a state of excellent preservation. Beyond this apartment, and opening into it, was another much larger, with two windows; it was also completely furnished, although in antique style, and evidently with furniture hunted up from various other rooms for the purpose. An antique writing-table, its top most artistically inlaid and resting upon strangely carved claw feet, harmonized but poorly with the more modern form of the crimson sofa; and the gilt frames, in which hung several well-painted hunting pictures, did not accord with the silver mountings of the huge mirror. Nevertheless, nothing was wanting that could complete the solid comfort of the room. A thick, though somewhat faded carpet was laid upon the floor, and a large antique timepiece stood beneath the mirror. A small boudoir, also furnished, and from which a door led to a vestibule and a flight of steps, opened from the larger apartment. Behind these rooms were three others of a similar size, with windows looking upon the garden; one of these, containing two beds and pine furniture, was evidently intended for the servants.

"Well done!" cried the forester with a smile of satisfaction; "here is an establishment that exceeds the wildest flights of our modest fancy. If the sainted Gnadewitz could see us now he would turn in his leaden coffin. All this we owe, I suppose, to the neglect of a housekeeper or to the forgetfulness of some childish, old steward."

"But do you think we ought to keep these things?" asked, in a breath, Frau Ferber and Elizabeth, who had been silent hitherto from wonder.

"Most certainly, my love," said Ferber; "your uncle left you the castle with everything which it contained."

"And little enough it was," growled the forester.

"But in comparison with our expectations a perfect mine of wealth," said Frau Ferber, as she opened a beautiful glass cabinet containing different kinds of

china; ”and if my uncle had actually endowed me with an estate in my young days, when I was full of hope and enthusiasm, I doubt whether it would have made as much impression upon me as does this unexpected discovery, which relieves us all of so much anxiety.”

In the mean time Elizabeth had gone to the window of the first room which they had entered, and was trying to part the boughs and vines which grew so thick and strong all along this side of the building that they formed a barrier through which only a greenish twilight penetrated. ”It is a pity,” she said, as she found that her efforts were vain; ”I should have liked some glimpse of the forest outside.”

”Why, do you think,” said her uncle, ”that I shall allow you to live behind this green screen, which shuts out air as well as light? Rely upon me to take that matter in charge, my little Elsie.”

They next descended the stairs. These, too, were in perfect preservation, and led to a large hall with a huge oaken table in the centre, surrounded by spindled-legged, straight-backed chairs. The floor was of red tiles, and the panels on walls and ceiling were covered with beautiful carving. This large apartment was provided with four windows and two doors opposite to each other; one of these led into the garden, and the other, which was opened with difficulty, into a narrow open court-yard lying between the building-and the outer wall. Here the syringas and hazel bushes were growing everywhere, making an absolute thicket, through which, however, the three men penetrated, and reached a little gate in the outside wall which communicated with the forest without.

”Now,” said Ferber, delighted, ”every obstacle to our living here is removed. This entrance is most valuable. We shall never have to pass through the older court-yards, which are really dangerous places, surrounded as they are by crumbling ruins.”

They made one more tour through their newly found home with an eye to its future arrangement, and the mason was ordered to be upon the spot the next day that he might convert one of the back rooms into a kitchen. Then, after the oaken door leading into the large, ruinous wing had been well bolted and secured, they took their way through the gate in the wall, an undertaking difficult indeed, on account of the thick bushes which opposed their progress, but infinitely preferable to the perilous path by which they had entered.

As the returning party entered the garden of the forest lodge, Sabina came towards them, in great anxiety to learn the results of their expedition, accompanied by little Ernst, who had been entrusted to her care while his mother and sister were away. She had prepared the table with its snowy cloth and shining coffee-service upon a shady knoll under the beech trees, and now clapped her hands with delight upon hearing of all they had found.

"Ah! gracious Powers," she cried, "I hope the Herr Forester understands now that I knew what I was talking about. Yes, yes, all those things were left there and forgotten, and no wonder. As soon as the young lord was buried, old Gnadewitz packed off as quick as he could, and took every servant with him except the old house-steward Silber, and he was childish with age, and besides had enough to do to take care of all that was left in the new castle; it was crowded with furniture and plate, and he had a hard time to keep it all right; so everything was left in the old rooms, and no one knew anything about them. Ah, I've dusted and cleaned everything there often enough, and frightened indeed I was whenever I came to that old clock, for it plays such mournful music when it strikes, it used to sound like something unearthly, when I was all alone at work in the old place. Ah, how time flies, I was young then!"

Then came an hour of rest and comfortable discussion, while they drank their coffee. As Elizabeth had decided that nothing could be more charming than to awaken in their own rooms upon Whit-Sunday morning,—when the ringing of the church-bells in the surrounding villages would come softly echoing through the forest glades,—a view of the matter in which her mother sympathized, they determined to undertake all the necessary repairs and cleaning immediately, that they might occupy the rooms upon the eve of Whit-Sunday, and the forester placed all his men at their disposal.

Sabina had taken up her position upon a grassy bank at a short distance from the table, that she might be at hand if wanted; and that she might not be idle, she had pulled up a couple of handfuls of carrots from the garden and was busily scraping and trimming them. Elizabeth sat down beside her. The old woman gave a sly glance at the delicate white fingers, that contrasted so with her own brown, horny hands, as they picked some carrots up from her lap.

"Don't touch," she said, "that is no work for you,—you will make your fingers yellow."

"What matter for that?" laughed Elizabeth. "I will help you a little, and you shall tell me a story. You were born here, and must know many a tale about the old castle."

"You may be sure of that," replied the old housekeeper. "The village of Lindhof, where I was born, belonged to the Lords von Gnadewitz time out of mind, and you see in such a little place as that every one talks and thinks of the great people who rule over it. Nothing happens of any account in the castle that is not described and handed down from father to son in the village, and, long after the lords and ladies are dust, their stories are told by the village girls and boys.

"Now there was my great-grandmother, whom I remember perfectly, she knew many a thing that would make your hair stand on end; but she had a mon-

strous respect for every one at Gnadeck, and used to bob down my head with her trembling hands whenever a Gnadewitz drove by our cottage,—for I was but a little thing then, and did not know how to make a respectable courtesy. She knew about all the lords who had lived at the old castle for hundreds of years; yes, many a thing that had happened there, that must have outraged God and man.

”Afterwards, when I lived at the new castle, and had to sweep the long gallery where their pictures were all hanging upon the wall,—pictures of people whose very bones had mouldered away,—I often used to stand still before them and wonder to see them looking so like everybody else, when they used to make such a fuss about themselves, as if God Almighty had brought them down to the earth with his own hands. There were not many beauties among the women. I often thought, in my stupid way, that if pretty Lieschen, the most beautiful girl in the village, could only have been painted and hung in such a rich gold frame, with a silken scarf and such quantities of jewels upon her neck and in her hair, and the blackamoor with his silver waiter standing just behind her lovely face and neck, she would have looked a thousand times prettier than the lady who was so ugly, and frowned so with pride and arrogance that two great wrinkles went up to the very roots of her hair. And yet she was the very one that the family was proudest of. She had been a very wealthy countess, but hard and unfeeling as a stone.

”Among the men, there was only one whom I liked to look at. He had a frank, kind, honest face, and a pair of eyes black as sloes; but he had shown how true it is that the good always get the worst of it in this world. All the others had a fine time of it as long as they lived. Many of them had done harm enough in their time, and yet their death-beds were as calm and peaceful as if they had always been just and true; but poor Jost von Gnadewitz had a sad fate. My great-grandmother’s grandmother had known him when she was a very little girl. Then they always called him the wild huntsman, because he never left the forest, but would hunt there from morning until night. In the picture he had on a green coat and a long white feather in his cap, that was most beautiful to see dangling among his coal-black curls. He was kind-hearted, and never harmed a child. While he lived all the villagers prospered, and they wished he might live forever.

”But all of a sudden he left this part of the country, and no one knew, for some time, where he had gone, until one night in a dreadful storm he came back as quietly as he had gone away. But always after that he was a changed man. The people of Lindhof prospered as before, but they saw no more of their master. He dismissed all his servants, and lived alone in his old castle with only one favourite attendant.

”And at last it began to be whispered that he was busy with magic and the black art up there, and no one dared to go near the castle even at high noon, let alone the dark night. But my old great-grandmother was a bold, saucy girl, and used sometimes to pasture her goats right under the walls of the castle courtyard. Well,—once as she was leaning against a tree there, gazing at the high walls, and lost in thoughts concerning all that might be going on behind them, suddenly an arm appeared above them white as snow, and then a face fairer than sun, moon, and stars, my grandmother said, and at last with a sudden spring a young maiden stood upon the top of the broad wall, and, stretching her arms up into the air, cried out something in a strange tongue that my grandmother could not understand, and was just about to leap down into the deep ditch full of water that then entirely surrounded the castle, when Jost appeared behind her, and, putting his arms around her, begged and implored her so that a stone would have melted at such entreaties wrung from a heart full of terror and anguish. And finally he took her up in his arms like a child, and they both disappeared from the wall. But the veil became loosened from the maiden’s head and floated away across the ditch to where my grandmother was standing. It was exquisitely fine, and she carried it home in great glee to her father; but he declared it was woven by the devil, and threw it into the fire, forbidding my grandmother ever to go up the mountain near the castle again.

”Some time after,—certainly a whole year after Jost first shut himself up so closely at Gnadeck,—he came down the mountain very early one morning on horseback; but you would hardly have known him, his face was so haggard and pale, all the paler for the full suit of black that he wore. He rode very slowly, and nodded sadly to every one whom he met; he never came back to this place again; he was slain in battle, and his old servant with him—’twas at the time of the thirty years’ war.”

”And the beautiful girl?” asked Elizabeth.

”Ah, no one ever heard tale or tidings of her again. Jost left a large sealed packet in the town-house at L——, and said that it was his last will, and must be opened whenever news of his death should be received. But a short time after his departure, there was a terrible fire in L——; a great many houses, and even the church and the town-house, were burned to the ground with everything which they contained, and of course the packet was destroyed.

”Before Jost left, the pastor from Lindhof went to see him several times; but the reverend gentleman kept as quiet as a mouse, and, as he was already very old, he soon departed this life, and everything that he knew was buried with him. So no living being knows anything about the strange maiden, nor ever will know till the day of judgment.”

”Oh, never trouble yourself to keep the matter quiet, Sabina,” called the

forester to her from the table, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe. ”Elsie had better get used as soon as possible to the terrible conclusions to your stories. Tell her at once—for you know all about it—how the beautiful maiden one fine day flew up the chimney and away upon a broomstick.”

”No, I don’t believe that, sir, although I know——”

”That the whole country is swarming with such creatures, all ripe for the gallows,” interrupted her master. ”Yes, yes,” he continued, turning to the others, ”Sabina is one of the old Thuringian stock. She has sense enough, and her heart is in the right place; but when there is any question about witchcraft she loses one and forgets the other, and is nearly ready to turn any poor old woman away from the door, just because she has red eyes, without giving her a morsel of food.”

”No, indeed, sir, I’m not quite so bad as that,” the old woman declared with some irritation. ”I give her something to eat; but I always stick my thumbs in the palms of my hands, and never answer one of her questions,—there’s no harm in that!”

Every one laughed at this charm against witches and witchcraft, which the old servant told with the utmost gravity as she arose and emptied the carrot-tops from her apron, that she might prepare the afternoon meal, which was to be eaten earlier than usual, as there was much to do in the old castle before nightfall.

CHAPTER V.

As Elizabeth opened her eyes the next morning, the tall clock in the room below was striking eight, and she started up with the provoking consciousness that she had overslept herself; and it was all owing to a vivid and terrible dream. The golden atmosphere of poetry, which had yesterday hovered around Sabina’s narrative, had become a gloomy cloud in the night, the shadow of which embittered and burdened the first moments of her awakening. She had been flying in deadly terror through the spacious, dreary halls of the old castle, always pursued by Jost. Thick curls were waving wildly above his pale forehead, beneath which his black eyes gleamed upon her, and she had just stretched out her arms in greater terror than she had ever experienced in her life before, to defend herself from him, when she awoke. Her heart was still beating violently, and she thought with a shudder of the wretched girl upon the castle wall, who, pursued, perhaps, as she had been, had sought relief in death, when she was again captured by her

tormentor.

She sprang up and bathed her face in cold water; then she opened her window and looked out into the courtyard. There sat Sabina under a pear tree, busy with her churn. All the feathered crowd of the place stood around, looking impatiently for the crumbs that she threw to them from time to time from a bowl upon the table by her side, while she improved the occasion to rebuke the arrogant and greedy, and to console the oppressed and down-trodden.

When she saw the young girl, she nodded kindly, and called up to her to say that every one in the lodge had been busy up there in the old castle since six o'clock. When Elizabeth reproached her for letting her sleep so long, she assured her that she had done so by the express desire of her mother, who thought that her daughter had overtasked her strength in the last few weeks of excitement and exertion.

Sabina's kind, placid face, and the fresh air of the morning soothed Elizabeth's nerves at once, and brought back her thoughts to the world of reality which was just now opening so brightly before her. She took herself seriously to task that, despite her uncle's fatherly admonition, she had leaned out of the open window until midnight upon the previous night, gazing across the moonlit meadow into the silent forest. But common sense often plays a poor part when opposed to excited fancy. Where it should conduct a rigid examination and discriminate wisely, it suddenly finds itself deserted in the judgment-seat, and must retire in confusion, while the varied and motley spectacle which fancy conjures up proceeds without interruption. Thus Elizabeth's self-reproaches soon vanished before the picture which presented itself to her memory, and still threw around her all the magic of a moonlit night in the forest.

As soon as she had dressed, and drank a tumbler of fresh milk, she hastened up to the castle. The sky was overcast, but only with those light, thin clouds which foretell a fresh although not a sunny, spring day. Therefore the birds' morning concert was of longer duration than usual, and the dew-drops lay as large and full in the cups of the flowers as if their existence for the day were not threatened.

As Elizabeth entered the large gate of the castle, which stood wide open, a huge green mound, piled up by the fountain, met her eye. It was formed of thistle stalks, ferns, and bramble bushes, which had been torn from their home in the garden, and were here bidding farewell to their long, merry life. The path through the arched gateway of the second court-yard to the grating was strewn with green boughs and leaves, as though a joyous marriage train had been passing through the old ruins; and even on the sill of a high window, that showed the remains of coloured glass in the lacework of the stone rosette of its pointed arch, some boughs had been caught as they were carried past, and the trailing end of a wild

vine was coiling its living green lovingly around the stone trefoil of the Holy Trinity, which betrayed unmistakably that the dark, dreary hall within had once been the chapel of the castle.

The garden, where it had yesterday been impossible to take two steps, seemed to Elizabeth entirely changed. A considerable part of it had been cleared, and showed distinct traces of having been tastefully laid out. She could easily proceed along a partially cleared path, across which timid hares and squirrels ran fleetly now and then, until she reached the green rampart which had only been seen from a distance yesterday. At each end of the long, grassy embankment, broad, worn, stone steps led up to a low breastwork, over which one could look out into the forest, and there, where the trees were somewhat thin, through a green vista down into the valley, where the forest lodge, with the white doves dotting its blue-slated roof, was nestling cosily. At the foot of the embankment, just where the broad path terminated, was a little stone basin, into which a strong stream of crystal water flowed through the mouth of a mossy little marble gnome. Two lindens arched their boughs above this gurgling brook, and threw their grateful shade upon the tender forget-me-nots, which grew here in masses in the damp earth and wreathed the little basin with their heavenly blue.

Directly opposite the embankment lay her future habitation, which, with its window-shutters thrown back and the large door on the ground-floor wide open, looked so bright and hospitable to-day that Elizabeth welcomed with joy the thought that she was looking upon her home. Her gaze wandered over the garden, and she thought upon those moments of her childhood when, her little heart full of unconquerable longing, she had lingered behind her parents during some pleasant walk, and, with her face pressed close against the iron grating, had gazed into some strange garden. There she had seen happy children playing carelessly upon the greensward; they could bend down the lovely roses that hung in such clusters, and inhale their fragrance as long as they liked. And what a pleasure it must be to creep under the flower-laden boughs and sit there in the green, just like grown-up people in an arbour! But there was nothing for her then but the look and the longing. No one had ever opened the barred door to the child with the wistful eyes, who would have been only too happy if they would have thrust a few flowers through the grating into her little hands.

While Elizabeth was standing upon the embankment, the forester appeared at one of the upper windows of the dwelling. When he saw her graceful figure leaning against the low breastwork, as, with her beautiful head half turned towards the garden, she seemed sunk in a reverie, his features were illumined by an expression of pleasure and quiet delight.

And Elsie soon found him out, and nodding to him gaily, bounded down the steps towards the house. Little Ernst ran to her in the hall, and she took him

up in her arms.

The assistance which the little boy had afforded had been, according to his own enthusiastic account, invaluable indeed. He had carried bricks for the mason who had been mending the hearth, had helped his mother to shake out the beds, and declared with pride that the lords and ladies upon the woollen hangings looked far handsomer since he had brushed off their dusty faces. He threw his arms around his sister's neck as she carried him up-stairs, assuring her all the way that he liked it a thousand times better here than in B——.

The forester received Elizabeth in the antechamber above. He scarcely gave her time to say good morning to her parents, but conducted her instantly into the gobelin-hung apartment. Ah, what a transformation! The green lattice-work that had obscured the window had vanished. Without, beyond the outer wall, the forest retreated like side-scenes on either side, opening a full view of a distant valley that was to Elizabeth a perfect paradise.

"There is Lindhof," said the forester, pointing to a large building in the Italian style, which lay tolerably near to the foot of the mountain upon which Gnadeck stood. "I have brought you something that will show you every tree upon the mountains over there, and every blade of grass in the meadows of the valley," he continued, as he held an excellent spy-glass before her eyes.

And then the grand, solemn mountain domes seemed to approach, their granite peaks, sometimes crowned by a solitary fir, breaking through the forest here and there. Behind these nearest summits towered countless ranges in the blue misty light, and from a distant, dim valley which separated two giant mountains, arose two slender, shadowy gothic towers. A little river, a highway bordered by poplars, and several gay villages enlivened the background of the valley. In front lay Castle Lindhof, surrounded by a park laid out in princely style. Beneath the windows of the castle extended a closely shaven lawn, beset with small, quaintly-shaped beds glowing with all the colours of the rainbow. Thence Elizabeth's eyes soon wandered, and rested delightedly upon the mysterious gloom of an avenue of magnificent lindens, their heavy foliage interlacing above their brown trunks, while here and there drooping boughs swept the ground beneath with their broad leaves. They bordered a little crystal lake, which just now looked melancholy enough amid all its flowery surroundings, for its depths mirrored a cloudy sky. Now and then a swan stretched its white neck curiously among the low-hanging linden boughs, and sent a shower of feathery spray from its wings to sprinkle their old trunks.

Hitherto Elizabeth had allowed the glass to range restlessly hither and thither, but now she attempted to hold it steadily, for she had made a discovery which excited her interest most powerfully.

Under the last trees of the avenue stood a couch. A young lady lay upon it,

her charming head thrown back so that a part of her chestnut curls fell down across the pillow. Beneath the hem of her long white muslin dress, which enveloped her form to the throat, peeped out two tiny feet encased in gold-embroidered satin slippers. She held in her delicate almost transparent hands some auriculas, which she was thoughtlessly twisting and waving to and fro. Her lips alone showed any colouring; the rest of her face was lily-pale; one would almost have doubted its being informed with life had not the blue eyes gleamed so wondrously. But these eyes with their depth of expression were riveted upon the countenance of a man who, sitting opposite, appeared to be reading aloud to her. Elizabeth could not see his face, for his back was turned toward her. He seemed young, tall, and well made, and had a profusion of light-brown hair.

"Is that lovely lady over there the Baroness Lessen?" asked Elizabeth, eagerly.

The forester took the spy-glass. "No," said he, "that is Fräulein von Walde, the sister of the proprietor of Lindhof. You call her charming, and certainly her head is lovely, but she is a cripple; she walks upon crutches."

At this moment Frau Ferber joined them. She too looked through the glass, and thought the countenance of the young lady most beautiful. She was particularly struck with the expression of gentle kindness which, as she said, "transfigured the features."

"Yes," said the forester, "she is kind and benevolent. When I first came here the whole country around was full of her praises. But matters are changed indeed, since the Baroness Lessen has had the control of affairs over there. No more alms are distributed among the poor, unless they are earned by hypocrisy. Woe to the wretch who asks any assistance there! He will be turned away without a penny, if he ventures to hint that he would rather listen to the pastor in the village church on Sundays than go to the castle chapel, where the chaplain of the baroness every week calls down fire and brimstone, and every imaginable pain of hell, upon the heads of the ungodly."

"Certainly such violent measures are poorly fitted to win souls to heaven and inspire people with Christian love," said Frau Ferber.

"They destroy all good, and foster hypocrisy, I tell you!" cried the forester, angrily. "Do they not set an example of it themselves? They are always reading in the Bible of Christian humility, yet every day they grow haughtier and more supercilious. Why, they would actually persuade us that their high-born bodies are moulded of a different clay from those of their poor brothers in Christ. It stands written, 'When thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth;' but no hen ever makes more to-do over her newly-laid egg than these people over their charities. There are perpetual collections, fairs, and lotteries for the poor, and the whole neighbourhood is black-mailed, but when

it comes to taking the money from, where it is plentiest, their own purses,—oh, that's carrying the joke too far, as the saying goes. I know people who have been for twenty years collecting subscriptions from others to found a poor-house. These very people have a yearly income of six thousand thalers, but of course it never occurs to them to add one penny from their own store in aid of their charitable project. They must purchase a reputation for benevolence and Christian self-sacrifice more cheaply than that. Zounds! how it enrages me to see people wearing their piety so pinned upon their sleeves! Over there in the castle a bell is set ringing just so many times a day, that every one in the country around may say, when they hear it, 'They are having prayers at the castle.' The closet, where God has commanded us to shut to the door and kneel in prayer, is altogether too small to suit their taste. And it is not only this trumpet-blowing that outrages me. I hold it to be actually wicked to make such a mere everyday form of the worship of the Holiest. Do you suppose that the maid-servant, with a hot smoothing-iron in her hand, or the cook, who is just putting her roast to the fire, can rejoice in the sound of that bell?"

"It is most certainly a dubious kind of piety," said Frau Ferber, smiling.

"Or even the gracious ladies themselves, who are busy with the last novel or a piquante bit of court scandal—for an interest in all such things is quite consistent with the loftiest piety—do you suppose they are able to divert their thoughts in one instant from worldly affairs and turn them all heavenwards? But these people run in and out of the kingdom of heaven without any thought or preparation, and congratulate themselves upon the honour that they are doing to the Creator."

"And does Herr von Walde sympathize with these reforms of the baroness?" asked Frau Ferber.

"From everything that I can gather from the villagers, I should judge not; but how does that mend the matter? He is probably at this moment prying into the pyramids that he may throw light upon antiquity; how should he know that his cousin here is zealously doing her best to blow out the advancing light of the present? Besides, I dare say he has a crack in his own brain. The prince of L——, who knows him well, wished some years ago to make a match between him and a young person of quality at court, but, as I hear, my gentleman refused the alliance because the fair one's pedigree was not sufficiently long."

"Why, perhaps then he may install as mistress of Lindhof some fair daughter of a fellah, whose ancestors lie among the mummies at Memphis," said Elizabeth, laughing.

"I don't believe he will marry at all," rejoined the forester. "He is no longer young, is too fond of a wandering life, and has never shown any love for women's society. I'll wager my little finger that that fellow there with the book in his hand

thinks just as I do, and already in his inmost soul regards Lindhof and all the other charming estates in Saxony, and God only knows where else, as his own."

"Has he any claims to them?" asked Frau Ferber.

"Most certainly. He is the son of the Baroness Lessen, whose family is the only one in the world related to the brother and sister von Walde. The baroness was first married to a certain Herr von Hollfeld; that young man is the fruit of that marriage, and by the death of his father he came into possession of Odenberg, a large estate on the other side of L——. The fair widow was fully conscious that her freedom must be made available to assist her up at least one step in the ladder of human happiness and perfection, and naturally this could only be attained by a marriage with high rank, wherefore Frau von Hollfeld one day became Baroness Lessen. 'Tis true the baron's name had been made somewhat notorious by several acts on his part which people of common, low-born ideas might call dishonourable; but what matter for that? Was he not a lord chamberlain, and did not the keys of his office unlock many a door for him where St. Peter's would have availed nothing, in spite of the power given to them? However, the baron died after two years of marriage, leaving his widow a little daughter and an enormous amount of debts. I have no doubt she is glad enough to queen it at Lindhof, for I hear that she has no part or parcel in her son's property."

Here a maid from the lodge interrupted them with bucket and broom, giving unmistakable signs that she was about to begin the duties of her office in this apartment. The spy-glass was hastily closed, and while the forester went into the garden to renew his labours there in clearing away the luxuriant green from the lower window-sills, Frau Ferber and Elizabeth busied themselves with dust-cloths and brushes in restoring the furniture of the room to something of its original appearance.

CHAPTER VI.

Whitsuntide was over. The brazen bells had retired into private life, and looked black and silent through the loopholes in the bell-towers, that seemed like the coffins of the melodious life which had so lately streamed forth from them during the holidays. But the bright flower-bells in the forest, hanging loosely on their stalks, could not forget the festival. They had joined in bravely when the air had quivered with the brazen clang, and still rang gently with every breeze that swept

through the underbrush. What did they care that the wood-cutter, his holiday clothes and face all laid aside, tramped past them in his heavy boots, whistling some rude melody! The forest heeded not, but kept up the same mysterious murmur amid its branches like a thousand-voiced whisper of prayer, and the little birds sang as before their matin and vesper hymns in God's praise.

Up in old Castle Gnadeck, as in the forest, the festal spirit of the holidays still reigned, although Ferber had already entered upon the duties of his office, often making unavoidable visits to L——, while Frau Ferber and Elizabeth had, through Sabina, received several large orders from a ready-made linen establishment in L——, and were besides busy every day for some hours in the garden which even in this first year gave promise of abundant fruit and flowers. Notwithstanding this constant industry, there was a holiday air pervading the whole place, arising from the consciousness in the minds of each one of the family that there had come a happy turn in their affairs; they were continually comparing their present with their former situation, and the new and unaccustomed life of the forest had an almost intoxicating effect upon their spirits.

Her parents had given Elizabeth the gobelin room, because there was the finest prospect from its windows, and because the girl when she had first entered it had declared that she liked it best of all. The gloomy door which led into the huge old wing Had been walled up and gave no sign that such a dreary waste lay beyond it. The further end of the room was filled by one of the renovated canopied bedsteads, and by the window stood the antique writing-table, with its quaint inkstand and writing utensils of porcelain, and two vases filled with lovely flowers; while just outside the window, embowered in the topmost branches of a syringa bush, was the canary's cage; its occupant vying with the forest songsters in its shrill trilling with all the envy of some spoiled bravura singer.

While they were arranging the room, and Frau Ferber was every moment bringing in some new piece of furniture to add to it a greater air of comfort and luxury, her husband went to the longest wall, and, stretching his arms across it, banished to the anteroom the lounge that had just been placed there.

"Stay,—this space I appropriate," he said with a smile. Then he brought a large bracket of dark wood and nailed it upon the wall, which was wainscoted neatly to the ceiling on this side. "Here," he continued, as he placed upon the bracket a bust of Beethoven, "this mightiest mortal shall be enthroned alone."

"But that looks so blank and bare," said Frau Ferber.

"Only wait until to-morrow or the day after, and you will, I am sure, admit that my arrangements are not to be despised, and that Elizabeth will have both pleasure and profit from them."

And on the next day, which had been Whitsun-eve, he went to town with the forester. They returned toward evening, but did not enter through the gate in

the garden wall. The great gate was flung wide open, and four strong men bore in a large and shining object through the ruins. Elizabeth was standing near the kitchen window, engaged, for the first time in her new home, in preparing the evening meal, when the men entered the garden with their burden.

She cried out, for it was a piano—a large, square piano, which was immediately borne up stairs and placed in the gobelin room under Beethoven's bust. Elizabeth laughed and wept at the same moment, as she rapturously embraced her father, who had expended his little capital, the proceeds of the sale of their furniture in B——, that he might provide her again with what had been the delight of her life. And then she opened the instrument and a flood of rich melody filled the rooms where the silence of death had reigned for so many years.

The forester had come with her father to enjoy Elizabeth's surprise and delight. He now leaned silently against the wall, as the wondrous sounds flowed forth from beneath the girl's touch. For the first time he heard the true speech of the glowing life that animated the delicate young frame. How thoughtful and inspired was the air of the finely-shaped head which crowned her graceful form, so suggestive of earnest maidenhood! Hitherto only jests and merry repartee had been exchanged between uncle and niece. He often called her his butterfly, because of the airy grace of her motions and her quickness of mind, which never left her at a loss for a reply to his merry attacks; but his favourite name for her was "Gold Elsie," for he maintained that her hair was such perfect gold that he could see it shining and shimmering in the darkest parts of the forest as she approached, and that it heralded her coming to him as the jewel in the giant's shield had once announced his approach to Childe Roland.

When Elizabeth had finished she spread her arms above the instrument as if to embrace it, and, leaning her head upon it, smiled the happiest smile; but her uncle approached her softly, gave her a silent kiss upon the forehead, and departed without a word.

From this time he came up every evening to the old castle. As soon as the last rays of the setting sun had faded from the tree-tops, Elizabeth sat down at the piano. The little family took their places in the large low window-seat, and lost themselves in the fairy world, which was opened to them by the great master whose image looked down from the wall upon the inspired young performer. And then Ferber would think of how Elizabeth had portrayed the free life in the forest when the letter from her uncle had first arrived in B——. 'Tis true no elves or gnomes appeared, but the spirits which the mightiest of the masters of music had imprisoned in sound floated forth from their prison-house on a flood of melody, breathing into the solemn silence around a mysterious life—a life of whose joys and sorrows every sympathetic human soul is conscious, although to genius alone is granted power to embody and reveal them.

One afternoon they were all sitting together at their coffee. The forester had brought his pipe and newspaper, and begged of Elizabeth a cup of the refreshing beverage. He was just about to read aloud an interesting article in his paper, when the bell at the garden gate sounded. To the astonishment of every one, when little Ernst ran to open it, a servant in livery entered and handed Elizabeth a note. It was from the Baroness Lessen. She began by saying much that was flattering with regard to the young girl's masterly performance upon the piano, to which she had listened for the two or three previous evenings while walking in the forest, and concluded by preferring a request that Elizabeth would consent, of course for a stipulated consideration, to come to Castle Lindhof every week and play duets with Fräulein von Walde.

The style of the letter was extremely courteous; nevertheless the forester, after a second perusal of it, threw it angrily upon the table, and said, looking steadily at Elizabeth,—

"I hope you will not consent?"

"And why not, my dear Carl?" asked Ferber in her stead.

"Because Elizabeth is, and always will be, far too good for those people down there!" cried the forester, with some irritation. "But if you choose to see what you have carefully planted, choked up and ruined by poisonous weeds and mildew—why, do it."

"It is certainly true," replied Ferber quietly, "that my child has known until now none other than a parent's care. We have endeavoured most conscientiously, as was our duty, to cherish every germ of good, to foster every plant of tender growth. But we have had no idea of producing a mere hot house flower, and alas for us and for her, if all that we have unweariedly tended and nourished for eighteen years is so loosely planted in the soil that it can be torn thence by the first blast of life! I have educated my daughter to live in the world; she must battle her way among its storms, as we all must. If I should be taken from her to-day, she must herself guide the helm which I have hitherto held for her. If the people in the castle below are not fit associates for her, matters will soon arrange themselves. Either both parties will feel their unsuitability to each other and all intercourse will cease, or everything that offends Elizabeth's principles will pass by her like idle wind, leaving no impression. Why, you yourself never avoid a danger, but rather prove your strength by meeting it bravely."

"But, zounds! I am a man, and can take care of myself!"

"And how do you know that Elizabeth hereafter will possess any support except what she finds in herself, or have any sharer in the responsibility of her actions?"

The forester cast a keen glance at his niece, whose earnest eyes were riveted upon her father's face. He who was to her the embodiment of wisdom and

tenderness was echoing her own ideas, and the expression of her beautiful face showed what she felt.

"Father," she said, "you shall see that you have not been mistaken—that I am not weak. I never could endure the trite image of the ivy and the oak, and shall most certainly not illustrate it in my own person. Be comforted, uncle dear, and let me go down to the castle," she said, smiling archly at the forester, whose forehead showed a deep frown of decided irritation. "If the people there are heartless, don't suppose for one moment that they will make a cannibal of me, and that I shall eat my own heart up. If they try to crush me with supercilious arrogance, my own inner standard of action shall be so high that I can look down in pity upon the harmless arrows of their scorn; and if they are hypocrites, I shall turn with all the more delight to gaze into the sunny face of truth, and be more deeply convinced of the ugliness of their black masks."

"Fairly spoken, oh incomparable Elsie, and incontestably true,—if only these same people would kindly hand you their masks to examine. But you will awake some day to find that what you have believed to be gold is only the merest tinsel."

"No indeed, dear uncle; I will not foolishly allow myself to be imposed upon. Remember, we have had many trials since my childhood; they have not been borne without teaching me some good lessons. Certainly we must all trust somewhat in our own strength, and I shall not despair for a long time, even if upon my first experience of the world I plunge into an abyss of Egyptian darkness, full of frightful monsters. But look, uncle dear, to what your zeal for my soul's welfare has brought you,—your coffee looks as though it could be skated upon, and your meerschaum is at its last gasp."

The forester laughed, although the laugh was not from his heart. And while Elizabeth refilled his cup for him and handed him a lighted match, he said to her: "You must not suppose that my ammunition is exhausted because I say to you, 'Well, well, go and try it.' I look forward to the satisfaction of seeing the courageous chicken come flying back again some day, only too thankful to creep under the sheltering wing of home."

"Aha!" laughed Frau Ferber, "you have no idea of the stern determination in that little head. But let us decide. I advise Elizabeth to pay her respects to the ladies to-morrow."

The next afternoon at about five o'clock Elizabeth descended the mountain. A broad, well-kept path led through the forest, which melted imperceptibly into the park. No gateway separated its carefully-tended grounds, with their clumps of trees and feathery grass, from the wild woods beyond.

Elizabeth had put on a fresh light muslin dress, and a small, white, round straw hat. Her father walked with her as far as the first meadow, and then she

went bravely on alone. No human being crossed her path during her long walk; it even seemed as though the trees rustled more softly here in the leafy avenues and arcades than in the forest beyond, and as if the birds modulated their notes more gently. She started at the noise of the crunching gravel beneath her tread as she approached the castle, and wondered to find how timid the intense quiet had made her.

At last she reached the principal entrance, and caught sight of a human face. It was a servant, who was busy in an imposing vestibule, but who moved as noiselessly as possible. Upon her request that he would announce her to the baroness, he slipped up the broad staircase fronting the hall door, at the foot of which stood two lofty statues, their white limbs half concealed by the orange trees placed at their bases. He soon returned, and assuring her that she was expected, led the way quickly up the stairs, scarcely touching the steps with the tips of his toes.

Elizabeth followed him with a beating heart. It was not the grandeur around her that oppressed her, it was the sensation of standing all alone in this new untried sphere. The servant conducted her through a long corridor, past the open doors of several apartments, which, furnished with extraordinary splendour, were heaped with such a profusion of elegant trifles that a simple child, unused to such luxury, would have supposed herself in a fancy-shop.

Her guide at last carefully opened a folding-door, and the young girl entered.

Near the windows, opposite Elizabeth, upon a couch lay a lady in apparently great suffering. Her head was resting upon a white pillow, and warm coverings were spread over her entire figure, which, in spite of its wrappings, betrayed decided embonpoint. In her hand was a vinaigrette.

She raised her head slightly, so that Elizabeth could see her face distinctly; it was round and pale, and at first sight by no means unprepossessing. Upon a closer view, the large blue eyes, that glittered beneath light eyelashes and elevated eyebrows as light, looked cold as ice, an expression in nowise softened by the supercilious lines about her mouth and nostrils, and by a broad, rather projecting chin.

"Oh, Fräulein, it is very kind of you to come!" cried the baroness in a weak voice, which nevertheless sounded harsh and cold, as she pointed to a lounge near her, and motioned to Elizabeth, who courtesied politely, to sit down. "I have begged my cousin," she continued, "to arrange matters with you in my room, as I am really too ill to take you to hers."

This reception was certainly courteous, although there was a considerable amount of condescension in the lady's tone and manner.

Elizabeth sat down, and was just about to reply to the question how she

liked Thuringia, when the door was suddenly flung open, and a little girl of about eight years of age ran in, holding in her arms a pretty little dog, struggling and whining piteously.

"Ali is so naughty, mamma, he will not stay with me!" cried the child, breathlessly, as she threw the dog upon the carpet.

"You have probably been teasing the little thing again, my child," said her mother. "But I cannot have you here, Bella; you make so much noise, and I have a headache. Go away to your room."

"Oh, it's so stupid there! Miss Mertens has forbidden me to play with Ali, and gives me those tiresome old fables to learn; I cannot bear them."

"Well, then, stay here; but be perfectly quiet."

The child passed close to Elizabeth with a stare and an examination of her dress from top to toe, and mounted upon an embroidered footstool before the mirror in order the easier to reach a vase of fresh flowers. In a moment the tastefully arranged bouquet was thrown into the wildest disorder by the little fingers, which busied themselves with sticking single flowers into the delicately embroidered eyelet-holes of the muslin curtain. During this operation large drops of the water, in which the flowers had been placed, dropped from the stems upon Elizabeth's dress, and she was obliged to move her chair, as there seemed no likelihood that any stop would be put to the proceeding, either by the little Vandal herself or by her mother's prohibition.

Elizabeth had only had time to move, and to reply to the reiterated question of the baroness, that she already felt very happy and, quite at home in Thuringia, when the lady hastily arose from her reclining posture, and, with an amiable smile upon her lips, nodded towards a large portière, which was drawn noiselessly aside and on the threshold of the door appeared the two young people whom Elizabeth had lately seen through the spy-glass; but how strangely ill-assorted they now seemed to be, as she saw them thus standing together. Herr von Hollfeld, a slender figure of great height, was obliged to bend very much on one side to afford any support to the little hand that rested upon his arm. The sylph-like little figure, which had lain upon the couch in the park, was no taller than a child's. The exquisitely lovely head was sunk between the shoulders, and the crutch in her left hand showed how helpless was her crippled condition.

"Forgive me, dearest Helene," cried the baroness, as the pair entered, "for troubling you to come to me; but, as you see, I am again the poor wretched creature upon whom you are so ready to bestow your angelic pity and kindness. Fräulein Ferber," here she motioned towards Elizabeth, as if presenting her, and the young girl rose, blushing, "has had the kindness to come, in compliance with my note of yesterday."

"And, indeed, I am very grateful to you fordoing so!" said the little lady,

turning towards Elizabeth with a smile of great sweetness, and holding out her hand. Her glance measured the blushing girl before her with an expression of surprise, and then rested upon the heavy golden braids that appeared below the hat. ”Oh, yes,” she said, ”I have already seen your lovely golden hair; yesterday as I was walking in the forest you were leaning over a wall up there at the old castle.”

Elizabeth blushed yet more deeply.

”But because you were there,” continued the little lady, ”I lost the pleasure for which I had clambered up the height, the pleasure of hearing you play, which I had enjoyed on the previous evening. So young and child-like, and yet with such a thorough appreciation of classic music! it seems impossible! You will make me very happy if you will play often with me.”

Something like a shade of displeasure flitted across the features of the baroness, and a close observer might have noticed a scornful contraction of her lips, but it was lost upon Elizabeth, whose attention was entirely absorbed by interest in the unfortunate little lady whose delicate silvery voice seemed to come fresh from the depths of her heart.

In the mean time, Herr von Hollfeld pushed a chair for Fräulein von Walde close to the lounge, and left the room without uttering a word. But as he went out by the door directly opposite to Elizabeth, she could not help noticing that he directed a last long look at her before slowly closing it after him. It disturbed her, for his expression was of so strange a kind that she hurriedly glanced over her dress to see if anything there could have struck him as odd or unsuitable.

For the last few moments Bella had been sitting upon the carpet, playing with the dog. It would have been a charming picture, if the whinings and uneasy movements of the little animal had not betrayed that the child was teasing it. At each loud cry from the dog, Fräulein von Walde started nervously, and the baroness said, mechanically, ”Don’t tease him so, Bella!” At last, however, when the animal uttered a most piteous howl, the mother raised her forefinger threateningly, and said, ”I must call Miss Mertens.”

”Oh,” replied the child contemptuously, ”I don’t care for her! She doesn’t dare to punish me, for you told her she mustn’t.”

At this moment, the portière was gently drawn aside, and a pale, faded gentlewoman appeared. She courtesied to the ladies, and said, timidly: ”The chaplain is waiting for Bella.”

”But I won’t have a lesson to-day!” the little girl cried, taking a ball of worsted from the table and throwing it at the speaker.

”Yes, my child, you must,” said the baroness. ”Go with Miss Mertens, and be a good little girl, Bella.”

Bella, as though the matter affected her no more than it did Ali, who had

retreated behind the sofa, threw herself into an arm-chair and drew her feet up under her. The governess was about to approach her, but at an angry look from the baroness she retired to the door again.

This disgraceful scene would probably have lasted much longer if the baroness had not brought up a *corps de reserve* to her assistance in the shape of a box of bonbons. The child, after she had crammed her mouth and pockets full, left her seat, and, pushing aside the hand which her governess held out to her, ran out of the room.

Elizabeth sat petrified with astonishment. The delicate features of Fräulein von Walde also showed evident disapproval; but she said nothing.

The baroness sank back among her pillows. "These governesses will be my death," she sighed. "If Miss Mertens could only learn how to treat, judiciously, a child of Bella's sensitive, nervous temperament! She never takes into account social position, temperament, and physical constitution. She would model all after the same pattern—the daughter of a grocer or a peer; a finely-strung, sensitive nature, or a robust, rude, day-labourer physique—'tis all the same thing to her. Miss Mertens is a disagreeable, pedantic schoolmistress; her English, too, is detestable. Heaven only knows in what mean little English county she learned her native tongue!"

"But really, dear Amalie," said Fräulein von Walde, "I do not find her English impure," and her voice sounded exquisitely kind and soothing.

"There you come with your never-failing angelic amiability; but, although I do not understand English, I can always hear, in one instant, how much more high-bred your accent is, my dear, when you are talking with her."

Elizabeth inwardly doubted the value of this estimate, and Fräulein von Walde blushed with a deprecating gesture.

But the baroness continued: "And Bella hears it, too; she will not open her lips when her governess speaks English to her, and I cannot blame her in the least; it provokes me excessively when this person blames the child for obstinacy."

Under the influence of her irritation the voice of the baroness, which had at first been very weak and suffering, had grown perceptibly stronger. She suddenly seemed to become aware of this herself, and closed her eyes with an expression of great weariness. "Oh heavens!" she sighed, "my unfortunate nerves are too much for me. I grow excited instead of being kept quiet; these vexations are poison both to my mind and body."

"I would advise you, Amalie, when you are as nervous and weak as you are to-day, to leave Bella without a fear to Miss Mertens' care. I am convinced that nothing can be better for her. While I fully understand your touching anxiety on the child's account, I can confidently assure you that Miss Mertens is far too gentle and cultivated a person to do anything that would not conduce to her

welfare. You look quite worn out," she continued, sympathizingly. "We had better leave you alone; Fräulein Ferber will certainly have the kindness to accompany me to my room."

So saying she arose, and leaning over the baroness imprinted a gentle kiss upon her cheek. Then she laid her hand upon the arm of Elizabeth, whom the baroness dismissed with a gracious nod, and left the apartment.

As they slowly walked through the various corridors, she told Elizabeth that it would be a special delight to her brother, who was so far from her, if she should resume her music. He used to sit alone with her listening to her playing for hours, until a nervous malady that had attacked her had forced her to give up her beloved music for a long time. Now she felt much stronger, and her physician had also given his consent; she would be very diligent, that she might surprise her brother upon his return home. Elizabeth then took leave.

She hastened with winged speed through the park, and along the path which ascended the mountain. In the forest glade just before the open garden gate her parents were awaiting her return, and little Ernst ran lovingly to meet her. What an air of home breathed all around her here! The greeting that she received showed how she had been missed; the canary was singing merrily in his green embowered cage, the garden laughed in beauty, and in the background, under the group of lindens above the cool spring, the snowy table was spread for supper.

The Italian castle with all its splendour, its aristocratic air, and its oppressive silence, only broken by the clamour of a spoiled child, faded behind her like a dream of the night; and when she had imparted her impressions of all that she had seen and heard to her parents, she concluded with the words: "You have taught me, father dear, never to form any settled judgment of others upon a slight acquaintance with them, for such judgment runs a fair chance of being unjust, but what can I do with my unruly fancy? Whenever I think of the two ladies, I see in imagination a lovely young weeping willow, whose elastic graceful branches are the constant sport of a furious tempest."

CHAPTER VII.

From this time Elizabeth went regularly to Lindhof twice a week. The day following her first visit Baroness Lessen had arranged the hours for the lessons in

a very courteous note, and had insisted upon a most generous compensation for Elizabeth's time. These lessons soon proved a source of much enjoyment. Helene von Walde, owing to the absence of all practice for many years, was very deficient in technical knowledge and capacity, and could not be compared at all with Elizabeth; but she played with much feeling, her taste was refined and cultivated, and she was entirely free from the wretched habit, common to most dilettanti, of depreciating whatever lay beyond her reach. Baroness Lessen was never present during the music lessons, and therefore the moments of rest gradually became especially delightful to Elizabeth. At such times a servant usually brought in some light refreshments. Helene leaned back in her armchair, and Elizabeth seated herself upon a cushion at her feet, and listened enchanted to the flute-like silvery voice of the unfortunate lady as she recounted many an experience of the past. The image of the absent brother here played a principal part. She was never weary of telling of his care and thoughtfulness for her, of how, although he was many years her senior, he was continually studying how to gratify and humour her childish whims and peculiarities. She related how he had purchased Lindhof only because, upon a visit which she had formerly made in Thuringia, she had experienced great benefits from the pure Thuringian air; everything showed how dearly he loved her.

One afternoon, when they had been practising unusually long, a servant entering announced a visitor.

"Stay and drink tea with me this afternoon," said Fräulein von Walde to Elizabeth. "My physician is here from L——, and several ladies from the neighbourhood have just arrived; I will send some one up to the castle that your mother may not be anxious about you. My tête-à-tête with the doctor will not last long, and I shall soon be with you again."

And so saying she left the room. Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed before the door opened and Fräulein von Walde entered, leaning upon the arm of a gentleman whom she presented to Elizabeth as Doctor Fels, from L——. He was tall, with an intellectual countenance, and as soon as he heard Elizabeth's name he entered into a lively conversation with her, comically assuring her that his own surprise and horror, as well as that of the entire respectable population of L——, had really known no bounds when it was reported that old Castle Gnadeck had received within its crumbling walls inhabitants of flesh and blood.

Suddenly there was a rustling in the antechamber, and upon the threshold of the door appeared two figures of rather singular exterior. Their great resemblance of feature plainly revealed their relationship as mother and daughter. Both wore dark dresses, which, contrary to the prevailing mode, fell limp and close around them, large scarfs of black woollen stuff, and brown, round straw hats, tied, in the case of the mother, with black ribbon, while the daughter had a

lilac bow beneath her chin.

Helene von Walde received the ladies courteously, presenting them as Frau and Fräulein Lehr, and Elizabeth afterwards learned that, residing in L——, they spent their summers in lodgings in the village of Lindhof.

Immediately after their entrance the Baroness Lessen appeared, leaning upon her son's arm, and accompanied by a gentleman who was addressed by those present as Herr Möhring, the chaplain.

The baroness was dressed in dark silk, but with the greatest elegance, and made a most imposing appearance. She paused for an instant upon the threshold of the door, and seemed to be disagreeably surprised at Elizabeth's presence. She measured her with a haughty look of inquiry, and replied to her courtesy by a scarcely perceptible inclination of the head.

Helene noticed the look, and approaching her said in a soothing whisper, "I kept my little favourite with me to-day—I had already detained her so long."

This excuse did not escape Elizabeth's ear. It offended her, and she would willingly have flown away through the window near which she was standing, had not pride induced her to stay and brave the arrogance of the baroness. The great lady seemed entirely pacified by the explanation of what had occurred without her consent. She put her arm around Helene, stroked her curls tenderly, and said a hundred caressing things to her. Then she requested those present to follow her to the adjoining room, where tea was prepared. She did the honours of the tea-table, and discovered a talent, by no means to be despised, for leading and carrying on the conversation. With admirable tact, she contrived always to make Helene the centre of attention without in the least wounding the self-love of the others.

Elizabeth sat silent between the doctor and Fräulein Lehr. The conversation possessed little interest for her, inasmuch as it related to people and circumstances entirely strange to her. Frau von Lehr had much to say, and seemed perfectly instructed in every matter, private or public, that had taken place during the last few weeks among the people living around Lindhof. She spoke in a peculiarly mournful, suppressed tone of voice, and at the conclusion of the rehearsal of each exciting piece of news cast down her eyes and inclined her head with great apparent humility and resignation, as though she were a lamb suffering for the sins of the world. Now and then she drew forth from a huge reticule which she carried a small bottle of rose-water, with which she moistened her eyes, as they seemed weak with perpetual casting towards heaven.

What a contrast between her and Helene's madonna face, as it leaned against the dark plush of the lounge, reminding Elizabeth more than ever of the water-lily lying dreamily with its snow-white leaves upon the dark surface of the lake! To-day there was a strange glow upon the delicate features. It was not that

all traces of suffering had vanished, but there was a peaceful light of content in her eyes, and a happy smile wreathed the pale lips as often as she took up from her lap the bouquet of rosebuds which Herr von Hollfeld had presented to her when he entered. He sat beside her, and sometimes joined in the conversation. As soon as he opened his lips the ladies were silent, listening with the greatest attention, although his talk was anything but fluent, and, as Elizabeth soon discovered, betrayed not the slightest originality of mind.

He was a very handsome man, of about four and twenty. There was great repose in the finely-cut features, which at first seemed to indicate manliness and strength of character; but any such impression which their regularity might have produced was effaced by a searching glance into his eyes. Those eyes, although they were large and faultless in shape, had no depth whatever, and never lighted up with that meteoric flash which so often reveals the man of intellect, even when he does not speak. Its want can be atoned for by that mild glow which speaks of deep sensibility, and which, although it does not instantly impress us, gradually attracts and enchains us. But there was nothing of this to be discovered in Herr von Hollfeld's fine blue orbs.

This sentence, however, would have been echoed by but few, for it was the present fashion, especially at the court of L——, to regard Herr von Hollfeld as a prodigy, whose silence gave warrant of unfathomable depths of intellect and sensibility,—in which opinion the ladies in and around Lindhof most cordially joined, as was illustrated by the conduct of Frau von Lehr's very stout daughter, who leaned forward, directly across the modestly shrinking Elizabeth, and listened, as if to the enunciation of a new gospel, whenever Herr von Hollfeld opened his lips. And she, too, appeared quite willing to allow her light to shine.

"Were you not charmed with the lovely sermons with which Herr Möhring edified us during the holidays?" she asked, turning to Elizabeth.

"I regret not having heard them," she answered.

"Then you did not attend divine service?"

"Oh, yes! I went with my parents to the village church at Lindhof."

"Indeed!" said the Baroness Lessen, turning for the first time toward Elizabeth, and smiling sarcastically. "And were you greatly edified at the village church at Lindhof?"

"Most truly was I, gracious lady," Elizabeth quietly replied, looking calmly into the contemptuous eyes that were turned upon her. "I was deeply affected by the simple, earnest words of the preacher. His discourse was not delivered in the church, but under the trees outside. When the service was about to begin it was evident that the little church could not contain the crowd of worshippers, and an altar was constructed under God's free sky. Such altars might often be erected."

"Unfortunately, they often are," said Herr Möhring, who until then had spo-

ken little, contenting himself with confirming all Frau von Lehr's remarks by an amiable smile or an assenting nod. Now, however, his broad, shiny face grew purple, and, turning to the baroness, he continued, contemptuously: "Yes, most gracious lady, it is only too true; the old idols are being replaced in the sacred groves, and we shall have druids sacrificing to them beneath the oaken shades."

"Really, that never occurred to me. With the aid of my wildest imagination I should never have dreamed at the time that I was assisting at a heathen sacrifice," rejoined Elizabeth. She smiled, but continued with serious warmth: "It seemed to me, on that glorious spring morning, as the tones of the organ streamed forth from the open doors and windows of the church, and that reverend old man spoke in such devout tones, as it did when I entered the temple of God for the first time in my life."

"You seem to have an excellent memory, Fräulein," Frau von Lehr here remarked: "How old were you at that time, if I may ask?"

"Eleven years old."

"Eleven years old! Oh, heavens! how can such a thing be possible?" cried the lady in holy horror. "How possible with Christian parents! Why, my children were familiar with the house of God from their earliest years, as you can testify, my dear doctor."

"Yes indeed, madame," he replied with great gravity. "I remember that you ascribed the attack of croup, by which you lost your little son at two years of age, to a couple of hours in the cold church."

Elizabeth looked up quite terrified at her neighbour. The doctor had joined in the conversation hitherto only by throwing in a sarcastic word here and there very drily, which amused Elizabeth greatly, inasmuch as he was always met by a reproving glance from the baroness. When the young girl began to speak she had not noticed him any more than had the others, whose entire attention had been occupied with the wretched heathen child, so that no one had observed how he was bursting with inward laughter at the daring replies of the young stranger, and their effect upon those present. His answer appeared thoughtless and cruel to Elizabeth; but he must have known his companions well, for Frau von Lehr was not at all offended, but replied with great unction: "Yes, the Lord took the pious little angel to himself; he was too good for this world;" then, turning to Elizabeth, she said: "And so you were shut out from the Lord's kingdom for the first eleven years of your life?"

"Only from His temple, gracious lady. As a little child I was instructed in the history of Christianity, and with my first thoughts were blended ideas of God's wisdom and love. I cannot remember the time when I did not hear of them from my father; but it is a firm principle of his never to allow very young children to go to church; he says they are entirely incapable of appreciating the

importance and meaning of what they see and hear there; the sermon, which must be entirely beyond their comprehension, wearies them, and they conceive a dislike to the place. My little brother Ernst is seven years old, and has never yet been to church."

"Oh, happy father, who has the courage to frame and execute such plans for his children's culture!" exclaimed Doctor Fels.

"Well, what hinders you from letting your children grow up without care, like mushrooms?" asked the baroness with malice.

"That I can readily tell you in a very few words, most gracious lady. I have six children, and cannot afford to have masters for them at home. My profession prevents me from teaching them myself, and, therefore, I am obliged to send them to the public school and subject them to its laws, which require them to attend church regularly. Just as little can I carry out my views with regard to another subject,—the putting of the Bible into the hands of young children. The Sacred Book, which contains the holy principles that should regulate all our thoughts and actions, and, as such, should be regarded with veneration by the young,—does not belong in their hands at a time when childhood, with rare exceptions, seeks amusement instead of instruction, and is always curious to investigate whatever is forbidden and mysterious. And, therefore, I know,—and any observant teacher will admit,—that children who devote themselves constantly to the perusal of the Bible, for which they are commended by thoughtless parents, do not always search for the text of the last sermon,—but read much else beside,—often meeting with words and expressions which a careful mother would guard them from hearing at home, but whose significance is often made only too clear by their intercourse with other children not so carefully educated, left to the charge of ignorant and vulgar servants. And suppose, even, that they seek explanation of certain words and phrases from their mothers only; an intelligent mother will always know, 'tis true, how to reply to their queries, but she must, most certainly, forbid them the use of many expressions which they find in the Bible,—let us recall to mind the Song of Solomon,—and so the first seeds of doubt and unbelief are sown in the childish mind, which is wanting in the strength that only moral culture and riper understanding can give."

Here the Baroness Lessen arose with a gesture of impatience. Upon her full cheeks, usually so pale, two round, crimson spots had appeared, a sign to all who knew her, of great irritation. Fräulein von Walde, who had been a passive listener to the conversation, also arose, took her cousin's arm, and, leading her to the window, asked whether she would not like to hear a little music from Elizabeth and herself.

This propitiatory proposal was received with a gracious inclination of the head,—the more especially as the baroness did not feel herself quite equal to the

doctor in a war of words; and, as everyone must have seen her indignation, she was quite willing to have it supposed that the beautiful, soothing music was the cause of her refraining from annihilating the impious defamer of her holy zeal, for she was perpetually presenting Bibles to poor children.

She took her seat in a windowed recess, and looked out upon the landscape, upon which the first shadows of approaching evening were falling. Her look was cold and cruel,—an expression often seen in a certain kind of light-blue eye, shaded by white eyelashes. The corners of her mouth were drawn down, a sign of great displeasure, which did not vanish even when Schubert's Erlking, arranged for four hands, was performed in a masterly manner by Helene and Elizabeth. The waves of melody broke against that breast unfelt, as the waves of the ocean upon a rocky shore.

When the last chord died away, the ladies arose from the instrument, and the doctor, who had stood immovably, listening, hastened towards them. His eyes sparkled as he thanked them for a treat which, as he assured them, was richer than any he had enjoyed for years. Here Fräulein von Lehr's face grew scarlet, and her mother cast a malicious glance at the unlucky enthusiast. Had not her daughter the preceding winter played several times in public in L——, for the benefit of some charitable association, and had he not attended every concert? However, the doctor did not appear to notice the storms that he was calling down upon his head. He discussed Schubert's compositions in a manner that manifested refined perception and a thorough knowledge of his subject.

Suddenly there was a harsh clash of chords upon the piano; it seemed as though fingers of bone were belabouring the keys. They looked round with a start. The chaplain was seated at the instrument, with head thrown back and inflated nostrils. He raised his hands for a second attack, and began a beautiful choral, which his horrible playing converted into torture for sensitive ears. Still it might have been endured, when, to Elizabeth's horror, he began to sing in a nasal, snuffling tone;—that was too much. The doctor seized his hat, and bowed to Helene and the baroness, the latter only vouchsafing him a slight wave of the hand in token of dismissal, without turning her face from the window.

An incomparable expression of humour hovered upon the doctor's features. He pressed Elizabeth's hand cordially as he departed, and took leave of the rest with a courteous bow.

As soon as the door closed behind him, the baroness arose with excitement and approached Helene, who was sitting in a corner of the sofa.

"It is intolerable!" she cried, and her sharp voice sounded muffled, as if suppressed anger were choking her, while her searching gaze rested full upon the little lady, who looked up to her almost timidly. "How can you, Helene, here in your own house, hear our rank, our dignity as women,—yes, even our holy of

holies, which we are bound so faithfully to defend,—assailed so grossly without one word of reply?"

"But, dear Amalie, I cannot see."

"You will not see, child, in your inexhaustible patience and long-suffering, that this doctor insults me whenever he can. Well, I must submit to that, for this is not my house, and besides, as a Christian, I would rather endure wrong than resort to retaliation. But this submission must cease when the sacred claims of the Lord are assailed. Here we should strive and struggle, and not grow weary. Is it not actually blasphemous for this man to seize his hat, and, *sans façon*, take his departure from the room while our hearts are being stirred and elevated by the lofty thoughts which the truest form of music, the choral, can alone express?"

She had spoken louder and louder, until she did not perceive that her voice was entirely destroying the effect of a touching phrase, just delivered by the unwearied chaplain, whose efforts had not been intermitted for an instant.

"Ah, you must not blame the doctor for that," said Fräulein von Walde. "His time is precious; most likely he has a patient to see in L——; he was about to leave just before we began to play."

"While that heathenish Erlking was going on, the worthy man entirely forgot his patients," the baroness interrupted contemptuously. "Well, I must submit. Unfortunately, in our degenerate days, the scoffers of our faith have gained the upper hand."

"But, for heaven's sake, Amalie, what do you want me to do? You know only too well that Fels is indispensable to me. He is the only physician who knows how to relieve me when I am in great suffering," cried Helene, and her eyes filled with tears, while her cheeks were suffused with a blush of irritation.

"I thought, Fräulein Helene,"—began Frau von Lehr, who had hitherto sat in her corner silently, and on the watch, like a spider in its web,—"I thought that the welfare of our souls should be our first consideration; care for our poor bodies should, in my estimation, rank second in our view. There are many other skilful physicians in L——, with as great a reputation for learning as Dr. Fels enjoys. Believe me, my dear, it often gives great pain to our Christian friends in L—— to know that a scoffer, an infidel, is admitted to your confidence as your friend and adviser."

"Even if I consented to sacrifice myself so far," replied Helene, "as to employ another physician, I dare not take such a step without first obtaining my brother's consent; and I know that I should meet with determined opposition there, for Rudolph is warmly attached to the doctor, and puts entire confidence in him."

"Yes, more's the pity!" cried the baroness. "I have never been able to comprehend that weakness in Rudolph's character. Doctor Fels imposes upon him utterly with his seeming frankness, which might better be called insolence. Well,

I wash my hands of the affair, only for the future I must decline any visits from the doctor, and entreat you, my dear Helene, to excuse me when he is with you."

Fräulein von Walde made no reply. She arose and looked sadly around the room for an instant, as if missing something. It seemed to Elizabeth that her eyes sought Herr von Hollfeld, who had left the room unperceived a short time before.

The baroness took up her lace shawl, and Frau von Lehr and her daughter prepared for departure. Both paid several compliments to the chaplain, who had finished his performance, and was standing at the piano rubbing his hands with embarrassment; and then all took leave of Helene, who replied to their good-nights in a tone of great exhaustion.

As Elizabeth descended the stairs she saw Herr von Hollfeld standing in a retired, dimly-lighted corridor. During his mother's outbreak of anger he had sat quietly turning over the leaves of a book, never joining in the conversation by word or look. His conduct had disgusted Elizabeth, who had hoped that he would have stood by Helene and silenced his mother by a few serious words. She was still more displeased when she noticed that he was steadily regarding herself while he was apparently occupied with his book. He might easily have seen her displeasure in her face, but he continued to stare most insultingly. She felt herself at last blush deeply beneath his gaze, and she was the more provoked at feeling this, as the same thing had occurred against her will several times before. It was remarkable that she never went home from Castle Lindhof without chancing to meet Herr von Hollfeld either in the hall, upon the stairs, or stepping suddenly from behind a tree in the park. Why these meetings at last became painfully embarrassing to her she could not have explained to herself. She thought no more about it, and usually forgot him entirely before she reached her home.

He was standing now in the dark passage. A black slouched hat was pulled down over his face, and his summer coat had been exchanged for a light cloak. He seemed to be waiting for some one, and as soon as Elizabeth had reached the last stair approached her hastily, as though about to address her.

At the same moment Frau von Lehr and her daughter appeared on the landing above.

"Aha, Herr von Hollfeld," cried the elder lady, "are you going to walk?"

The young man's features, which had seemed to Elizabeth strikingly animated, instantly assumed a quiet expression of entire indifference.

"I have just come in from the garden," he said negligently, "where I have been refreshing myself in the soft night air. Attend Fräulein Ferber home," he said authoritatively to a servant who issued from the servants' room with a lantern, and then with an obeisance to the ladies, he retired.

"How glad I am," said Elizabeth, as an hour later she was sitting at her mother's bedside relating the events of the afternoon, "that to-morrow will be

Sunday. In our dear little simple village church I shall forget all the disagreeable impressions which the last few hours have left upon my mind. I never could have believed that I could have listened to a choral without being moved to aspiration and devotion. But to-day I was really angry, when, amid the clatter of the teacups, and after an hour passed in talk certainly not inspired by love of our neighbour, I suddenly heard those tones which have always been sacred to hours of meditation and serious thought. Behind all this religious zeal there lies hidden boundless arrogance,—that I saw clearly to-day; but if others feel as I do, these people will scarcely make many proselytes. Acknowledge, mother dear, that I am not naturally antagonistic, and yet to-day I felt for the first time in my life an irresistible desire to defy and contradict."

And then she spoke of Herr von Hollfeld and his strange behaviour in the hall, adding that she could not understand what he could possibly have wished to say to her.

"Never mind, we will not puzzle ourselves about that," said Frau Ferber. "If he should ever propose to accompany you on your way home, do not fail to reject such an offer peremptorily. Do you hear, Elizabeth?"

"But, dearest mother, what are you thinking of?" cried the girl with a laugh. "The skies will fall before such a thing happens. If he could allow Frau Lehr and her daughter, who consider themselves persons of distinction, to go home without an escort, he will hardly condescend to notice my insignificant self."

CHAPTER VIII.

About a week after the arrival of his relatives the forester had published an edict in his domicile, which, as he said, had been hailed with joy by his prime minister, and in accordance with which the duty of taking their mid-day meal every Sunday at the Lodge was imposed upon the Ferber family. Those were joyous days for Elizabeth.

Long before the first sound of the church bell they usually set out for church. In her fluttering white dress, her soul filled with the consciousness of youth and happiness, convinced that such a clear, lovely day, must bring joy with it, Elizabeth walked beside her parents, and looked eagerly for the moment when the round gilt ball upon the village church tower at Lindhof emerged from the waves of green in the valley below them; then from the dark and silent for-

est paths to the right and left, groups of church-goers from the different hamlets around would appear and join them with kindly greetings, until, while the bells were ringing, the whole assembly arrived in the meadow just before the church, where the forester was usually awaiting them. He welcomed them from a distance with sparkling eyes and a flourish of his hat in the air. In every movement of his tall figure, in his whole bearing, might be read that inflexible integrity which never bowed to the mighty ones of the earth, that expression of manly power and force of character from which we expect to see quick resolve and bold action result, but which never suggests the tender emotions of a sensitive nature. Elizabeth declared that it was always a touching surprise when a single gentle star beamed forth at night from a sky covered with clouds, and that the sudden look of melting tenderness that occasionally illumined her uncle's frank, determined countenance, affected her in like manner. And she had many an opportunity of observing this change of expression, for she had grown to be the apple of his eye. He had never had any children, and now poured forth all the paternal affection of which his large, warm heart was capable, upon his brother's lovely child, who, he felt with pride, resembled himself in many points of character, although in her they were transfigured by the charm of feminine delicacy and refinement.

And she repaid his affection with the clinging love and filial care of a daughter. She soon discovered how to make many an addition to his domestic comfort, and where Sabina's penetration or capacity were at fault, she effected many an improvement, with so much tact that the old servant was never offended, whilst a new life opened upon her uncle, surrounded by Elizabeth's tender care.

On the return from church, her uncle led Elizabeth by the hand, "just like a little school-girl," as she said, and, indeed, it looked like it. The excellent sermon which they had just heard, furnished matter for abundant conversation and exchange of newly-developed thoughts and sentiments; while the birds twittered and sang as though determined to vindicate their right to speak here, and the golden-green sunshine came quivering through the tops of the trees, flecking their heads as they passed with its transfiguring light.

At the farthest end of the long dim forest aisle, for it was a very narrow path which led from the Lodge to the village of Lindhof, a little point of light indicated the meadow, in the middle of which stood the old house. With every step the picture grew more distinct, until at last they could distinguish Sabina waiting for them at the door, shading her eyes with the corner of her white apron, and retreating into the house when she saw them, that she might take her stand behind the soup tureen, which was smoking upon the table beneath the beeches, where she fulfilled her duty with the air of a general upon a rampart.

But to-day Sabina had prepared a particularly delicious repast, for in the centre of the table was piled a huge crimson pyramid, the first wood-strawberries

of the year, hailed with delight by little Ernst, and by full-grown Elizabeth too. The forester laughed at the enthusiasm of the big and little child, and declared that he had a surprise to offer as well as Sabina,—he would have the horse harnessed and take Elizabeth to L——, where he had a little business to attend to,—a long-promised pleasure. The young girl accepted his proposal with delight.

At table Elizabeth related the occurrences of the previous evening. Her uncle shook with laughter.

"The doctor's a bold fellow," he said, still laughing; "but 'tis of no use, he has drunk his last cup of tea at Lindhof."

"Impossible, uncle,—it would be outrageous!" cried Elizabeth, earnestly. "Fräulein von Walde would never permit such a thing, she will resist with all her might."

"Well," he said, "I wish we could question the little lady to-day with regard to her sentiments towards the doctor, and you would see. How can a strong will inhabit such a frail dwelling? That imperious woman will soon influence her, and there is none to resist, for 'Heaven is high, and the Czar afar,' as the Russians say. We know, Sabina, that many a strange thing has happened since the rule of the baroness began, eh?"

"Ah, yes indeed, Herr Forester!" replied the old woman, who was just putting a dish upon the table. "When I think of poor Schneider,—she is the widow of a day-labourer in the village," she said, turning to the others; "she always worked hard to make both ends meet, and no one could say a word against her, but she had four children to feed, and lived from hand to mouth. And matters went badly with her last harvest, and she had nothing to give her children to eat, so she was driven to do what was wrong, and took an apron full of potatoes from a splendid field belonging to the castle. But the overseer, Linke, who happened to be standing behind a tree not far off, saw her, sprang out upon her instantly, and knocked her down. Even if he had stopped there 'twould not have been so bad, but he kicked her brutally as she lay upon the ground. I had been to Lindhof, and as I was passing beneath the cherry trees near the village, on my way home, I saw some one lying upon the ground,—it was the poor woman, bleeding profusely, and with not a soul near her. She could not move, so I called some people, who helped me to carry her home. The Herr Forester was absent, but I was sure of his permission, and so I nursed and tended her as well as I could. The people in the village were furious at the overseer,—but what could they do? There was some talk of arresting him, but it all came to nothing. Linke is one of the saints, he is the baroness' right-hand man, turns up his eyes, and does everything in the name of the Lord. It must never get abroad that such a pious man could behave so inhumanly, and so the baroness drove to town every day, and was wonderfully condescending, and, in short, the story was hushed up, and the poor woman,

who has never entirely recovered, had to get along as best she might, for neither she nor her children ever had a bite or a drop from the castle all the while that she was sick. Ah! yes, the overseer and the baroness' old waiting-maid make a hard time of it for the poor people, they keep a close watch to see who misses prayers or chapel over there, and they have been the means of depriving many an honest man of work at the castle."

"Don't say any more about it," said the forester. "I cannot relish my food when I think of these things, and our pleasant Sunday, to which I look forward all the week, must have no other shadows upon it than those cast by the white, fleecy clouds up there."

As soon as the meal was concluded the forester's modest little equipage made its appearance. He handed in Elizabeth, and seated himself by her side. As she nodded a farewell to the others, she glanced up at the house, and started with actual terror at the eyes which were gazing down upon her from a window in the upper story. 'Tis true, the head disappeared instantly, but Elizabeth had time to recognize the mute Bertha, and to convince herself that she was the object of that look of rage and hate, although she could not divine its cause. Until now Bertha had withdrawn herself entirely from all intercourse with the Ferber family. She never appeared when Elizabeth was at the Lodge. She took her Sunday dinner alone in her own room, and the forester allowed her to please herself in the matter. He had no desire to establish any relation between the two girls.

Frau Ferber had once made an attempt to address the unfortunate girl. Her gentle feminine nature could not believe that mere wilfulness was the spring of Bertha's extraordinary behaviour. She suspected the existence of some deeper cause, perhaps of some secret grief, which made her indifferent to her surroundings, or rendered her so irritable that she chose to remain silent rather than be engaged in perpetual strife. A gentle word from her, a kindly advance on her side, would, she hoped, unseal Bertha's lips; but she succeeded no better than Elizabeth had done. She was even so outraged by the girl's manner that she strictly forbade all further attempt at intercourse with her upon Elizabeth's part.

After a charming drive, Elizabeth and her uncle reached their destination.

L—— was certainly a small town, and bore the unmistakable impress of a small town, although the court resided there from the appearance of the first primrose to the fall of the last autumn leaf, and its inhabitants took the greatest pains to adapt themselves, in their social life, to the manners and customs of a large Capital. But the loud, uneasy creaking of the machinery of a most complicated domestic economy could not be drowned by the rustle of the most flowing and elegant crinoline. The honest townsfolk, who left their dwellings, with doors wide open, in perfect safety, to earn their daily bread in the little uneven streets, or in the strips of meadow land between their houses, fell as far short of being

peacocks as did the ducks, that daily delighted to swim in the little brook running directly through the town, of becoming stately swans.

The situation of the place was undeniably delightful. In the centre of a not very spacious valley, nestled at the foot of an eminence whose summit was crowned by the royal castle and domain, it lay buried in the dark, rich green of avenues of lindens, and surrounded in spring by the lovely blossoms of countless orchards.

The forester took Elizabeth to the house of an assessor, one of his friends. She was to wait for him there until he had concluded his business. Although made cordially welcome by the lady of the house, she would gladly have turned round and followed her retreating uncle,—for she found herself, to her vexation, in the midst of a large assemblage of ladies. Her hostess informed her that, in honour of her husband's birthday, she had gotten up a set of tableaux from mythology, to rehearse which was the cause of the present gathering. At the coffee-table, in a pleasantly-furnished apartment, eight or ten ladies were seated, already dressed in mythological costume, and upon the arrival of the stranger, they measured her with glances that seemed to penetrate every plait and fold of her simple attire.

All the goddesses, without exception, had submitted themselves, in their costume, to the sceptre of the royal fair of France, and wore their white robes over abundant crinoline, which was then the fashion, "For," said Ceres, a trig little blonde, upon whose flushed brow a whole harvest was waving, "one looks so forlorn without crinoline;" and how else could her dress have supported the huge bunches of wheat ears and red poppies with which it was adorned? How Dame Ceres had managed this difficulty in her days of splendour was a problem which no one took the pains to solve.

Perhaps the artificial light of the evening would be favourable to the remarkable arrangement of some of the toilets, but now the bright sunlight illuminated and revealed with cruel sincerity every pasted bit of gold-paper, every paper-muslin scarf that should have represented satin, and every basting stitch in the improvised tunics. Several old-fashioned paste shoe-buckles glittered in the girdle of Venus; and the silver crescent upon the forehead of Diana showed the blotting-paper behind it at every movement of the head which it adorned.

The hostess went from one to the other of her guests, exerting herself for the entertainment of all.

"What a shame!" she said, entering the room after a short absence, "Frau Räthin Wolf has sent to say that her Adolph cannot come to-night; he is in bed with a fever. As soon as the note came, I ran across myself to Doctor Fels; but there is no doing anything with that man upon the subject of his children's education. He repeated his former refusal, and so ungraciously, that I am quite outraged. He says that he considers any part in such entertainments with grown-up

people entirely unfit for half-grown boys like his Moritz, who get their heads filled with a sense of their own importance, their minds distracted from their lessons,—and Heaven knows what besides. He told me, most insolently, that he thinks I should have done better this evening to have provided my suffering husband—suffering, indeed, he is as lively as a fish in the sea, except for a touch of rheumatism—with a supper that he liked, than to have worried him with such buffoonery, which will only deprive him of his usual comfort and night's rest, and do no living creature any earthly good."

"How coarse! how rude! He is always pretending to be a connoisseur of art, and doesn't understand it one whit better than my little finger," was heard from one and the other of the ladies.

"Let my experience console you, dear Adele," said Ceres. "Were it not that my husband cannot dispense with his services as a physician, Fels should never darken my doors again. When I had that children's fancy-ball last winter, which was acknowledged to be a great success, he refused my invitation to his children; and what do you think he said to me, when I begged him to allow his little girls to come,—'Does it really give you pleasure to see such monkey-tricks?' I never will forgive him!"

Elizabeth suddenly seemed to see the doctor's intellectual face, with its searching glance, sarcastic smile, and the slightly contemptuous play of its finely-formed lips. She laughed inwardly at his rude replies; but she was struck at the same time by the depressing thought, how hard it is for a man to live up to his convictions.

"But what would you have, Frau Director?" broke in Flora, a delicate, languishing figure with a pretty but very pale face, who had hitherto been entirely occupied in smiling upon her flower-decked reflection in an opposite glass. "He has treated us no better. Two years ago he told my father and mother to their faces, that it was not only folly but want of principle—just think of such a thing!—to allow me to go into society so young, with my constitution. Papa and mamma were furious,—as if they did not know best about their own children! It was well that we all knew what prompted such tender care on his part. His youngest sister was then still unmarried, and, naturally enough, she was by no means pleased to see young girls usurping her place in society. Papa would have dismissed the doctor upon the spot, but mamma depends upon his prescriptions. Well, they paid no attention to his advice, and, as you see, I still live."

The silence of the assemblage confirmed Elizabeth's conviction that the triumph which Flora spoke of was a very doubtful one, and that this delicate creature, with her narrow chest and pallid face, would still have to atone severely for the physician's neglected counsel.

Suddenly a barouche slowly passing down the street attracted the ladies to

the window. Where she was sitting Elizabeth could plainly see the object of the universal curiosity. In the elegant vehicle sat the Baroness Lessen and Fräulein von Walde. The latter had her face turned towards the assessor's house, and she looked as if she were diligently counting the windows of the lower stories. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, always a sign in her of inward agitation. The baroness, on the contrary, was leaning back negligently among the cushions, and appeared to be entirely unconscious of everything around.

"The Lindhof ladies," said Ceres. "But, Heavens! what is the meaning of that? They are entirely ignoring Doctor Fels' windows. There stands the doctor's wife. Ha, ha! what a long face; she tried to bow, but the ladies have no eyes in the backs of their heads."

Elizabeth looked across at the opposite house. A very beautiful woman, with a lovely fair-haired child in her arms, was standing at the window. There certainly was a puzzled look in her pleasant blue eyes, but the delicate oval of her face was not in the least lengthened. Attracted by the movements of the child, who stretched out his little arms towards the fantastic heads at the windows of the assessor's house, she looked across, and, archly smiling, nodded to the ladies, who kissed their hands, and replied to her salutation by all sorts of tender pantomime.

"Strange!" said the hostess; "what could the ladies mean by passing by her house without nodding to her? They never went by without stopping before to-day. Frau Fels would stand on the carriage-step for ever so long, and Fräulein von Walde seemed to like her so much—the baroness, 'tis true, often made a wry face. It certainly is very strange; but we must wait and see what the future will bring forth."

"Herr von Hollfeld must have stayed at Odenberg. He was with the ladies this morning when the carriage passed," said Diana.

"How will Fräulein von Walde endure the separation?" asked Flora, with a sneer.

"Why, is there anything in that quarter?" asked the hostess.

"Don't you know that, child?" cried Ceres. "We can't tell yet what his sentiments are, but beyond all doubt she loves him passionately. In fact, it is almost certain that the love is all on one side; for how can such an unfortunate cripple inspire affection,—and in such a cold nature as Hollfeld's, which has been unmoved by the greatest beauties?"

"Yes, true enough," said Venus, with a glance at the mirror, which Flora, in spite of her emaciation, had entirely monopolized. "But Fräulein von Walde is enormously rich!"

"Oh, he can have the wealth at a cheaper rate," said Flora. "He is said to be heir to the sister and brother too."

"Oh, the brother!" rejoined Venus. "He had better not rely upon his chances there. Herr von Walde is a man in the prime of life, and may marry at any time."

"Nonsense!" cried Ceres, excitedly. "The woman is yet to be born, or rather sent down from heaven, who can touch him. He is haughtiness itself, and has less heart than his cousin. How provoked I used to be at the court-balls, to see him standing in the doorway with his arms crossed as if they were glued together, and looking down so arrogantly upon the crowd. Only when the princess, or one of the royal family, requested him to dance did he stir from the spot, and then he was at no pains to conceal that he cared not a bit for the honour. Well, we know well enough what his requisitions are for the woman at whose feet he will lay the proud name of von Walde—Ancestors! ancestors she must have, and her pedigree must date from Noah's ark."

All laughed, except Elizabeth, who remained very grave. Fräulein von Walde's behaviour had made a deep impression upon her. She was annoyed, and felt that her views of human nature had been lowered. Was such a change possible in the course of a few short hours? The fact just stated by the ladies, that Helene von Walde loved the son of the Baroness Lessen, would have fully explained the influence exercised by the latter to any one of a practical, matter-of-fact nature,—but not to Elizabeth.

The elevating sentiment, described by the poets of all ages and all climes as the truest and most ennobling of which human nature is capable, could not possibly be an incentive to unworthy conduct; and it was equally hard to imagine how Herr von Hollfeld could inspire that sentiment. Here she judged from the one-sided, personal point of view from which we are prone to pass sentence on others; but whether from the instinct of her true womanly nature, or whether she really possessed the clear insight that sees in the lines of the face the clear indications of the soul within and traces them to their source, we cannot say,—certainly, in this case, her judgment of a man with whom she had had scarcely any intercourse was entirely correct.

Herr von Hollfeld was certainly not calculated to personate the ideal of a refined feminine nature. He neither possessed intelligence nor wit, was inordinately vain, and by no means content with the interest excited by his fine person. He was fully aware that most women will forgive defects of person sooner than defects of mind; and therefore he adopted the mask of silence and reserve, behind which the world is so ready to see great intelligence, originality, and strength of character. There was no man living who could boast of being upon intimate terms with Herr von Hollfeld; he was cunning enough to elude every attempt to test the quality of his mind, and avoided all earnest conversation with men, while women, as soon as they perceived the rough shell of his repellant behaviour, were only too ready to cry, "the sweeter the kernel." Herr von Hollfeld understood his

part,—he was moved by secret desires and hopes, which were strengthened by the difficulty attending their attainment. Animated by no lofty aspirations, he was the slave of avarice and sensuality. To make his position a brilliant one from a worldly point of view, he disdained no petty intrigue, and his office as chamberlain at the court of L—— opened the way to many such. He deceived and lied, and was all the more dangerous on account of the frank honest seeming behind which men never suspected the low schemer, or women the vulgar sensualist.

Elizabeth was glad when she saw her uncle turn the corner and approach the house. With a sigh of relief she took her place in the carriage at his side. She took off her hat, and bathed her hot forehead in the fresh, delicious evening breeze that swept gently by. The last rays of the sun were just gilding the trembling leaves of the poplars by the roadside, and there was a rosy light upon the fields of blooming grain; but the forest that enclosed in its bosom Elizabeth's home lay dark and gloomy beyond, as if it had already forgotten the sunny life which had penetrated its inmost recesses so short a time before.

The forester glanced several times at the silent young girl at his side. Suddenly he transferred both reins and whip to one hand, took hold of Elizabeth's chin, and turned her face up to him.

"Come, let me see, Elsie!" he said. "What! why, zounds! you have got two wrinkles there in your forehead as deep as old Sabina's furrows. What has happened? Come, out with it! Something has vexed you, hey?"

"No, uncle, I am not vexed, but pained that you were so right in your estimate of Fräulein von Walde," replied Elizabeth, while a deep blush of emotion covered her face.

"Pained because I was right, or because Fräulein von Walde has acted unworthily?"

"Well, because what you prophesied was evil, and——"

"And therefore it follows that you should be angry with me. He is always the criminal who tells the truth in such a matter. And pray, which of the utterances of my worldly wisdom has been justified by time?"

She told him of Helene's conduct, and of what the ladies had said. The forester smiled meaningly.

"Oh women, women, and those women in especial! They prophesy an immediate marriage if two people only say good morning to each other. But perhaps they are right in this case,—it clears up much to my mind that has hitherto seemed inexplicable to me."

"But, uncle, you cannot believe that any one would sacrifice the best feelings of our nature to such a preference?"

"Many other things have happened, my child, for the sake of such a preference, and although I do not for one moment defend Fräulein von Walde's weak-

ness and submission; still, I shall henceforth judge her more leniently. She succumbs to the power which leads us to forget father and mother for another's sake."

"Ah! that is just what I cannot understand," said Elizabeth, earnestly. "How can any one love a stranger better than father or mother?"

"Hm!" rejoined the forester, touching the horses lightly with his whip, to accelerate their speed. This "hm" was followed by a clearing of his throat, and he changed the subject, for he justly thought, "If that be so, she will never understand my definition of love, although I should speak with the tongues of angels." And he himself?—Far, far in the past lay the time when he had carved the dear name upon the trees, and trained his deep voice to sing love songs; when he had walked miles for a single smile, and had hated as his bitterest enemy the man who dared to regard with favour the object of his adoration. He looked back and rejoiced in that wonderful time, but to paint it with its tempests of excited feeling,—its tears and laughter, its hopes and fears,—was more than he could do.

"Do you see that perpendicular black streak just above the forest there?" he asked, after a long silence, pointing with his whip to the mountain which they were approaching.

"Yes, indeed, it is the flag-staff upon Castle Gnadeck. I saw it a few moments ago, and am now rejoicing unspeakably in the thought that there lies a spot of earth that we may call our own,—a place from which no one has the right to drive us. Thank God, we have a home!"

"And such a home!" said the forester, as his beaming eyes looked around the horizon. "When I was quite a little child, how I longed for the Thuringian forest! It was all because of my grandfather's stories. In his youth he had lived in Thuringia, and had the tales and legends of his home at his tongue's end; and when I had reached man's estate, I came hither. Then all the forest which we see before us belonged to the Gnadewitzes, but I would not enter their service,—my father had told me too much about them. I was the first Ferber from time immemorial who had renounced their service. I applied to the Prince of L——. The last of the Gnadewitzes divided his forests because the Prince of L—— was willing to pay an immense sum of money that he might enlarge his own woodland possessions. And thus it happened that the most ardent desire of my youth was gratified, for I live now in the house that may be called the cradle of the Ferbers. You know that we came at first from Thuringia?"

"Oh yes, I have known that from my childhood."

"And do you know the story of our origin?"

"No."

"Well, it was long ago, and perhaps I am the only one who now knows anything about it, but it shall not be lost, for remembrance is all the gratitude

that posterity can show for a brave action,—so now you shall hear the story, and then you can tell it again.

"About two hundred years ago,—you see we can trace back a considerable pedigree,—the only pity is that we have no idea who the mother of our race was,—if you should ever be asked any questions concerning her by the Baroness Lessen, or others, you can answer with confidence that we suspect her to have been either Augusta von Blasewitz,—for the story dates from the thirty years' war,—or a vivandiere: perhaps she was a good, honest woman, who clung to her husband through all the hardships of the war, although I cannot forgive her for forsaking her child,—well, then, about two hundred years ago, as the wife of the huntsman Ferber opened her door in the morning—the very door that now shuts upon my home—she saw a little child lying upon the threshold. She clapped the door to again in a great hurry, for the forest was then swarming with gypsies, and she thought it would prove to be one of their dirty brats. But her husband was more of a Christian, and took the child in. It was scarcely a day old. A paper was pinned upon its breast, stating that the child was born in holy wedlock, that he had been baptized by the name of Hans, and that whoever would take care of him should receive further revelations concerning him at some future day. Hidden in the child's dress was found a purse containing some money. The huntsman's wife was a good woman, and when she heard the child was born of Christian parents, and was probably the son of some honest soldier who had left it here that it might not be exposed to the dangers of the war, she took it to her heart and brought it up with her own little girl as if they had been brother and sister. It was well for him that she did so, for no one ever heard another word about his relatives. His foster-father afterwards adopted him, and, to make his happiness complete, he married his foster-sister. He, as well as his son and grandson, lived where I live now, as foresters to the Gnadewitzes, and they all died there. My grandfather was the first who left this place with his master for one of the estates in Silesia. As a boy, I was much disappointed that some countess mother did not turn up in the end who should recognize the foundling as her son, stolen from her by the malice of an enemy, and bear him home in triumph to her castle. Later in life I learned to endure the want of this romantic termination to the story with a good grace, as I considered that in such case my own appearance here would have been very dubious, and my honest name pleased me too much to wish it changed for any other; but imagine my sensations when I stood for the first time upon the threshold where the little foundling had passed the most helpless moment of his life, when, deserted by his natural parents, sympathy had not yet supplied their place. The worn stone is undoubtedly the same upon which the child lay, and as long as I live here or have anything to do with the place, it shall never be removed."

Suddenly the forester leaned forward and pointed through the boughs, for they had entered the wood.

"Do you see that white spot?" he asked.

The white spot was the cap of Sabina, who was sitting at the door of the Lodge waiting for them. When she saw the carriage, she rose quickly, shook the contents of her apron, which proved to be a quantity of forget-me-nots, into a basket, and came to assist Elizabeth to alight.

The horse trotted, neighing, behind the house, where he was awaited and received with a caressing pat. Hector laid himself down upon the ground, wagging his tail contentedly, and the doves and sparrows, which the noise of the arrival had frightened away, returned and hopped fearlessly about upon the green painted bench and table under the linden, where, as the little rogues well knew, the forester was in the habit of taking his morning and evening meals. He went into the house for a moment that he might exchange his uniform for the more comfortable garment worn at home, and soon returned, pipe and newspaper in hand, to the linden, where Sabina soon began to lay the table.

"'Tis a fact, it's a silly piece of Sunday work for such an old woman as I am," said the housekeeper, laughing, as she passed Elizabeth, who, sitting upon the stone step which now possessed such an interest for her, continued the weaving of the wreath which Sabina had begun. "But I have been used to such work from my youth. I have two little black pictures up in my room, likenesses of my blessed father and mother; they certainly deserve that I should honour them and hold them in loving remembrance, so I hang fresh flowers around them every Sunday, as long as there is a blossom to be had. A couple of children from Lindhof bring me fresh ones every Sunday, and to-day they brought me so many that there is enough for a wreath for Gold Elsie; if she puts it in a dish of water it will keep fresh all through the week."

Elizabeth sat a long time this evening with her uncle. A flood of memories came rushing over his mind, called forth by his narration of the old story of two hundred years before. He recalled many a wish, plan, and aspiration of his youth, which now provoked only a smiling sigh of sympathetic pity,—they had all vanished before the actual, like dust before the wind. He talked them over now, as one who, standing upon the land, hears the dash of the breakers afar that cannot reach him. Sometimes he would make some witty attack, in the midst of his recollections, upon Elizabeth, who would parry his thrusts and retort merrily.

Meanwhile a light arose behind the trees, which had blended undistinguishably with the dark heavens, but which now stood out in strong relief against the bright background. Single rays shot like silver arrows between interlacing boughs, and lay motionless like oases of light upon the dim meadow, until at last the moon arose, large and victorious, above the tops of the trees, and its full

lustre flooded the landscape. The gentle breeze of evening had long since folded its wings,—you could have counted the shadows of the linden leaves upon the moonlit earth, so distinct and motionless they lay. All the clearer was heard the gurgle of the little fountain in the court-yard of the Lodge, and the low, indefinite murmur from the woods, which Elizabeth called "the sleepy rain" of the forest.

"There," said Sabina, crowning Elizabeth's head lightly with the forget-me-not wreath, which she had just completed. "Carry it home so, and you'll not crush it."

"Then it may stay there," said she, laughing, as she arose. "Many thanks for my ride! Good-night, uncle, good-night, Sabina!"

And then she hastened through the house and garden, and was soon outside the gate, which she closed behind her, and flew along up the narrow moonlit forest path. In the dwelling-room above, the lamp was burning; in spite of the bright moonlight, its beams were distinctly visible, for the front of her home lay in deep shade.

As she reached the little clearing, a remarkable shadow fell across her path. It was neither a tree nor a post, but the figure of a man, a stranger, who had been standing upon one side of the path, and now, to her terror, approached her. The apparition courteously removed its hat, and Elizabeth's terror vanished on the instant, for she saw before her the smiling, good-humoured countenance of a well dressed, rather elderly man.

"I pray your pardon, Fräulein, if I have frightened you," he said, as he looked kindly over the large, shining glasses of his spectacles into her face. "I assure you, I have no designs either upon your life or your purse, and am simply a peaceful traveller, returning to his home, who greatly desires to know what the light in the ruins yonder may betoken; and yet this moment convinces me that my question is quite superfluous. Fairies and elves are holding their revels there, while the fairest among them keeps guard in the forest around, that none may invade their charmed circle with impunity."

This gallant comparison, trite as it may appear, was not ill applied at this moment, for the slight girlish figure in white robes, with the blue wreath crowning her angelic countenance, and bathed in moonlight, might well have been mistaken for a fairy vision, as it glided so lightly among the trees of the wood.

She herself laughed inwardly at the quaint compliment, but with a little pique at the thought of resembling such a mercurial elfish being, and she replied to the old gentleman with maidenly dignity.

"I am really sorry," she said, "to be forced to lead you back to realities, but I fail to see anything in the light yonder, except a commonplace lamp in the dwelling-room of a forester's clerk in the service of the Prince of L——."

"Ah!" laughed the gentleman, "and does the man live all alone in those

uncanny old walls?"

"He might do so with a quiet mind, for over those whose consciences are pure nothing uncanny can have any power. Nevertheless some loving creatures bear him company, among the rest, two well-fed goats and a canary bird, not to mention the owls, who have retired into private life in great indignation, since the frivolous conduct of human beings does not assort at all well with the solemn views of life entertained by their grave worships."

"Or perhaps because they shun the light and cannot endure——"

"That the new arrival should adore the truth?"

"Perhaps that, too; but I was about to suggest that they fly from the two suns that have suddenly arisen in the old ruins."

"Two suns at once? That would be a terrible experience for their poor owls' eyes, and might even prove too much for a fire-worshipper," replied Elizabeth, laughing, as she passed him with a slight inclination, for her parents had just emerged from the gate in the wall, and were advancing towards her. They had come out with some anxiety when they heard Elizabeth's voice and that of a stranger, and they gently reproved her, after she had related her little adventure, for entering so thoughtlessly into conversation with strangers.

"Your badinage might have had unpleasant consequences for you, my child," said her mother. "Fortunately, they were gentlemen."

"Gentlemen?" interrupted her daughter, with surprise. "There was only one."

"Look around," said her father; "you can see for yourself."

And certainly just where the path began to descend into the valley, two hats were plainly to be seen.

"So you see, mother dear," said Elizabeth, "what an entirely harmless encounter it was. One never stepped out from behind the bushes, and there was certainly not an atom of the brigand to be seen in the kind old face of the other."

When she went to her room she carefully took the wreath from her head, laid it in fresh water, and placed it before the bust of Beethoven, then she kissed the forehead of the sleeping Ernst, and said good-night to her father and mother.

CHAPTER IX.

"Hallo, Elsie, do not run so!" shouted the forester, the next day at three o'clock

in the afternoon, as he came out of the forest with his rifle on his shoulder and crossed the meadow towards the Lodge.

Elizabeth was running down the mountain, her round hat hanging upon her arm instead of resting upon the braids that glanced in the sunlight, and as she reached the house she flew laughing into her uncle's arms, which he extended to receive her.

She put her hand into her pocket, and stepped back a few paces. "Guess what I have in my pocket, uncle," she said, smiling.

"Well, what can it be? No need to puzzle one's brains long about it. Probably a little sentimental hay,—a few dried flowers, kept for the sake of the melancholy associations that they recall,—or some printed sighs over the woes of the world, bound in gilt pasteboard?"

"Wrong, indeed; twice wrong, Herr Forester, for, in the first place, your wit glances harmlessly aside from me, and in the next—look here!"

She drew a little box from her pocket, and lifted the cover. There, upon green leaves, was comfortably lying a large lemon-coloured caterpillar, with black spots, broad bluish-green stripes upon its back, and a crooked horn upon its tail.

"By all that is wonderful, Sphinx Atropos!" cried the delighted forester. "Ah, my sunbeam, where did you find that exquisite specimen?"

"Over at Lindhof, in a potato-field. Isn't it beautiful? There, let us shut the box carefully, and put it back in my pocket."

"What! am I not to have it?"

"Oh yes; you can have it,—that is if you are inclined to pay for it."

"Zounds! What a girl you have become! Come, give it to me,—here are four groschen."

"Not for the world. You can't have it for one farthing less than twelve. When many a ragged, yellow old bit of parchment,—that one can hardly bear to touch,—is paid for with its weight in gold, certainly such a perfect piece of Nature's workmanship is worth twelve groschen."

"Yellow old parchment! never breathe such a word into scientific ears, if you value your reputation."

"Ah, there are none such to be breathed into here in the forest."

"Take care; Herr von Walde——"

"Is hiding in the Pyramids."

"But he might suddenly return and take a certain self-conceited young person to strict account. He is cock-of-the-walk among learned men."

"Well, for aught I care, they may raise monuments in his honour, and strew laurels in his path, as much as they choose. I cannot forgive him for forgetting, in the midst of all that dead lumber, the claims that the living have upon him.

While he is engaged in an enthusiastic search, perhaps, for some wonderfully preserved receipt by Lucullus, or lost in investigations as to whether the Romans did actually feed their fish upon the flesh of slaves, the poor employed upon his estate starve under the baroness' rule—actually crushed beneath the yoke of modern slavery."

"Hallo! how his left ear must burn! What a pity that he cannot hear this confession of faith! Here are your twelve groschen, if you must have them. You want to buy some trinket or other, a feather, or ribbons for your hat, hey?" he said, smiling.

She held her hat out at arm's length before her, and contemplated with admiration the two fresh roses which she had stuck into the simple band of black velvet that encircled it. "Does not that look lovely?" she asked. "Do you think I would voluntarily hide my head beneath nodding plumes when I can have roses, fresh roses? And there is your caterpillar, and now you shall know why I want to black-mail you. This morning the poor widow of a weaver in Lindhof came to my mother, begging a little assistance. Her husband had had a fall, which injured his arm and his foot, so that he has not been able to earn anything for weeks. My mother gave her some old linen and a large loaf of bread. She could do nothing more, as you know. See, here I have fifteen groschen,—from my money-box,—there is not another farthing in it just now, and three from little Ernst, who would gladly have sold his tin soldiers to help the poor woman, and with the price for the caterpillar I shall have a whole thaler, which I shall carry to the poor thing immediately."

"Let me see. Here is another thaler; and, Sabina," he called into the house, "bring out a piece of meat from your pickling-tub, and wrap it up in green leaves. You shall take that too," he said, turning again to Elizabeth.

"Oh, you dearest of splendid uncles!" cried the girl, taking his large hand between her slender palms and pressing it tenderly.

"But take care," he continued, "that the piece of good salt meat does not turn into roses. It would be a sad change for the poor weaver's wife. You seem to be following in the steps of your saintly namesake."

"Yes; but fortunately I have here no cruel Landgrave to fear. And if I had, I would tell the truth in spite of him."

"Gracious gods, what a heroic soul it is!"

"But I think the courage to tell a lie would be far greater, even though it were a pious one."

"True, true, my daughter. I think I could hardly have done it either. Ah, here comes Sabina!"

The old housekeeper issued from the door, and whilst she wrapped up the meat for Elizabeth, in accordance with the forester's directions, she whispered

to him that Herr von Walde, who had yesterday arrived from abroad, had been waiting for him for some time.

"Where?" he asked.

"Here in the dwelling-room."

Now they had been standing directly beneath the open windows of this room. Elizabeth turned quickly round, blushing scarlet, but could see no one. Her uncle, without turning, shrugged his shoulders with an infinitely comical gesture, stroked his long moustache, and whispered, with a suppressed laugh: "Here's a nice state of things! You have settled matters finely,—he has heard every word.7"

"So much the better," replied his niece, throwing her head back with an air of defiance. "He does not hear the truth very often, perhaps." Then bidding farewell to her uncle and Sabina, she walked slowly away through the forest in the direction of Lindhof.

At first she was annoyed at the thought that Herr von Walde had been obliged, entirely against his will, to listen to the judgment which had been passed upon him. Then she was sure that she should have told him just the same truth to his face. And as it was scarcely to be supposed that he would ever trouble himself about her estimate of him, it certainly could do him no harm that he had been involuntarily the auditor of a frank, impartial sentence passed upon him, even although such sentence came from the lips of a young girl. But how had it happened that he had returned so suddenly and unexpectedly? Fräulein von Walde had always spoken of her brother's absence as likely to continue for several years, and the day before she had had not the slightest expectation of his return. And then her encounter of the previous evening flashed into her mind. The old gentleman had said that he was a traveller returning home; but it was impossible that he, with his smiling, good-humoured face, could be the grave, haughty proprietor of Lindhof, who, perhaps, was the person that had remained concealed beneath the trees while his companion was getting an answer to his inquiries. But what could Herr von Walde want with her uncle, who, as she knew, had never stood in any relation to him whatever?

These and similar thoughts occupied her mind upon her way to the weaver's. Husband and wife were delighted by the unhoped-for assistance, and heaped Elizabeth with profuse professions of gratitude as she left the house.

She passed through the village, and directed her steps to Lindhof, where she had promised to practice as usual. The lesson had not been postponed, notwithstanding the return of Herr von Walde. The proprietor's return had worked a great change in the whole look of the castle. All the windows of the lower story on the south side, which had so long been dark and closed behind their white shutters, now reflected the sunlight in a long, shining row. The apartments

within were undergoing a thorough airing and dusting. A glass door stood wide open, revealing the interior of a large saloon. Upon one of the steps which led down to the garden at the back lay a snow-white greyhound, with his slender body stretched out upon the hot stone and his head resting upon his forepaws; he blinked at Elizabeth as though she had been an old acquaintance. At an open window the gardener was arranging a stand of flowers, and the old steward Lorenz was walking through the rooms, superintending everything.

It was remarkable that all the people whom the young girl met had, as if by magic, entirely altered their whole expression. Had a tempest swept through the sultry atmosphere and a fresh breeze filled all the rooms, so that voices sounded clearer, and bent forms grew straight and elastic? Even old Lorenz, whose face had always worn so grim and depressed a look, as though there were a weight of lead upon his shoulders, shot real sunshine from his eyes, although he was scolding one of the maids; Elizabeth looked on in surprise. She had only seen him before gliding about upon the tips of his toes, and in low, suppressed tones announcing guests to the ladies in the drawing-room.

In amazement at this sudden bursting into bloom of new life and activity, Elizabeth turned towards the wing appropriated to the ladies. Here the deepest silence still reigned. In the apartments of the baroness the curtains were closely drawn. No noise penetrated through the doors by which Elizabeth passed. The air of the passages was heavy with the odour of valerian, and when at the lower end of one of the halls, Elizabeth saw through an open door one human face, what a change met her eye! It was the baroness' old waiting-maid who looked out, probably to see who was so bold as to invade the solemn repose of the corridor. Her cap was set upon her false curls all awry, and the curls themselves were but loosely put on. Her countenance wore a troubled expression, and a round, red spot on each cheek, betokened either high fever or some violent, mental agitation. She returned Elizabeth's salute shortly and sullenly, and disappeared into the room, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

When Elizabeth reached Fräulein von Walde's apartment, she thought that she had arrived at the last act in the mysterious drama which had begun in the baroness' rooms, for no "come in" answered her repeated knock. Not only were the curtains here drawn, but the shutters also were closed as she saw when she gently opened the door. The profound quiet and the darkness deterred her from entering, and she was about to shut the door again when Helene, in a weak voice, called to her to enter. The little lady lay on a couch at the farther end of the room, her head resting on a white pillow, and Elizabeth could hear that her teeth were chattering as if with cold.

"Ah, dear child," she said, and laid her cold, damp hand upon her young friend's arm, "I have had a nervous attack. None of my people have observed

that I am lying here so ill, and it has been terribly lonely in this dark room. Pray open the windows wide,—I need air, the warm air of heaven."

Elizabeth immediately did as she desired, and when the daylight streamed in upon the pale face of the invalid, it revealed traces of violent weeping.

The sunshine aroused more life and motion in the room than Elizabeth had anticipated; she was startled by a loud scream which proceeded from one corner. There she discovered a cockatoo, with snow-white plumage and a brilliant yellow crest, swinging to and fro upon a ring.

"Heavens! what a fearful noise!" sighed Helene, pressing her little hands upon her ears. "That terrible bird will tear my nerves to pieces!"

Elizabeth's glance rested amazed upon the little stranger, and then explored the rest of the apartment, which looked like a bazaar. Upon tables and chairs were lying costly stuffs, shawls, richly-bound books, and all kinds of toilet articles. Fräulein von Walde noticed Elizabeth's look, and said briefly, with averted face: "All presents from my brother, who returned home quite unexpectedly yesterday."

How cold her voice was as she said it! And there was not the slightest hint of pleasure to be discovered in her features, swollen with weeping; the large eyes, usually so soft and gentle, expressed only vexation and annoyance.

Elizabeth stooped silently and picked up a gorgeous bouquet of camellias, that was lying half faded upon the floor.

"Oh yes," said Helene, sitting up, while a slight flush appeared on her cheeks, "that is my brother's good-morning to me; it fell down from the table, and I forgot it. Pray put it in that vase there."

"Poor flowers," said Elizabeth, half aloud, as she looked at the brown edges of the white petals, "they never dreamed when they opened their tender buds, that they were to bloom in such a cold atmosphere!"

Helene looked up into her friend's face with a searching, troubled glance, and for an instant her eyes expressed regret. "Put the flowers on the sill of the open window," she whispered quickly, "the air there will do them good. Oh, heavens!" she cried, sinking back among her cushions. "He is certainly a most excellent man, but his sudden return has destroyed the harmony of our delightful home life."

Elizabeth looked almost incredulously at the little lady who lay there, her clasped hands raised, and her eyes lifted to heaven, as if fate had decreed her a most bitter trial. If she had failed yesterday to find the key to Helene's conduct, she was certainly more puzzled than ever to-day by this incomprehensible character. What had become of all those sentiments of fervent gratitude that had breathed from every word whenever Helene had spoken of her absent brother? Had all the sisterly tenderness which had seemed to fill her heart vanished in

a single moment, so that she now lamented what, according to her own words, she had so lately regarded as the most delightful thing that could happen? Even supposing that the returned brother did not sympathize with the circle in which alone she felt happy, if he should oppose her dearest wishes, was it possible that coldness and anger could exist between two beings whom fate had bound together by so close a tie, a tie which must bring them all the nearer to each other, since one was so helpless, and the other so alone in the world? Elizabeth suddenly felt profound pity for the man who had sailed on distant seas and wandered through strange lands so long, only to be greeted as a disturbing element when he once more appeared at his own fireside. Apparently there was one tender spot in his proud heart, love for his sister; how deeply wounded he must be that she had no loving welcome for him, and that her heart was cold and hard towards him!

Occupied with these thoughts, Elizabeth arranged the flowers in the vase. She returned not a syllable to Helene's outbreak, which had so maligned her brother to stranger ears. And Helene herself, shamed probably by Elizabeth's silence, seemed to be conscious that she had lost her self-control, for she suddenly, in an altered voice, begged her to take a chair and stay with her for awhile.

At this moment the door was violently flung open, and a female figure appeared upon the threshold. Elizabeth was at some trouble to recognize in this apparition in its neglected, careless dress, betraying every sign of great agitation, the Baroness Lessen. Her scanty locks, usually so carefully arranged, were streaming from under a morning-cap across her forehead, no longer white and smooth as ivory, but flushing scarlet. The stereotyped self-satisfaction had vanished from her eyes, and she presented a most insignificant appearance as she looked shyly into the room!

"Ah, Helene!" she cried anxiously, without noticing Elizabeth, and her corpulent figure advanced with unwonted rapidity. "Rudolph has just sent for the unfortunate Linke to come to his room, and he abused the poor man so violently and loudly that I heard him in my bed-room on the other side of the court—Heavens! how wretched I am! The morning has agitated me so that I can scarcely stand, but I could not listen to such injustice any longer, and sought refuge here. And those servile wretches, the other servants, who, while Rudolph was away, scarcely dared to wink their eyes,—there they stand now boldly beneath the windows, taking a malicious pleasure in the misfortunes that are befalling a faithful servant. Everything is destroyed that I had arranged so carefully and with such pains for the salvation of this household. And Emil is at Odenberg! How miserable and forlorn we are, dearest Helene!"

She threw her arms around the neck of the little lady, who started up pale as ashes. Elizabeth took advantage of this moment to slip out of the room.

As she passed along the corridor leading to the vestibule she heard some one speaking loudly. It was a deep, sonorous, manly voice, which grew louder now and then under the influence of excitement, but there was no sharpness in its tones even when they were loudest. Although she could not distinguish a word, the tone thrilled through her,—there was something inexorable in the intonation of the emphasized sentences.

The echo in the long corridor was deceptive. Elizabeth did not know whence the voice proceeded, and she therefore ran forwards quickly that she might the sooner reach the open air. But after a few steps she heard, as though the speaker were directly beside her, the words, ”To-morrow evening you will leave Lindhof.”

”But, most gracious Herr!”—was the answer.

”I have nothing else to say to you! now go!” was uttered in a commanding tone; and just then Elizabeth, to her terror, found herself opposite a wide-open folding door. The tall figure of a man stood in the middle of the room, his left hand behind him, and his right pointing to the door. A pair of flashing, dark eyes met her own as she passed hastily through the vestibule and into the garden. It seemed as if that look, in which there glowed an indignant soul, pursued her and drove her onward.

As the Ferber family were sitting at supper, her father told with expressions of pleasure how he had made the acquaintance of Herr von Walde that day at the Lodge.

”Well, and how does he please you?” asked his wife.

”That is a question, dear child, that I might be able to answer if I should happen to have daily intercourse with him for a year or so, although even then I cannot tell whether I should be able to give a satisfactory reply. The man is very interesting to me—as one is continually tempted to try to discover whether he really is what he appears,—a perfectly cold, passionless nature. He came to my brother to learn the particulars concerning the affair between his superintendent and the poor labourer’s widow, because he had been informed that Sabina had been an eye-witness of the ill treatment she had received. Sabina was obliged to tell how she discovered the poor woman. He asked about everything, even the smallest circumstance, but in a very short, decided manner. What impression Sabina’s account made upon him no one could tell; his looks were utterly impenetrable, not the smallest change of countenance betrayed his thoughts. He comes directly from Spain. From the few remarks that he let fall, I judge that his sudden return to Thuringia is owing to a letter from some one of his friends here, telling him of the mismanagement of affairs upon his estate and the unhappiness among his tenantry.”

”And his exterior?” asked Frau Ferber.

”Is pleasing, although I have never seen so much reserve and inaccessibility expressed in a man’s bearing I entirely understand how he has the reputation of boundless haughtiness; and yet I cannot, on the other hand, convince myself that such exceeding folly can lurk behind such remarkably intellectual features. His face always wears the look of cold repose of which I have spoken; but, between the eyebrows, there is what I might call an involuntary, unguarded expression of what a superficial observer might think sternness; to me it seems settled melancholy.”

Elizabeth listened thoughtfully to this description. She had already learned how that cold repose could be entirely laid aside for a time, and she told her father of the scene which she had witnessed.

”Then sentence has been passed sooner than I anticipated,” said Ferber. ”Possibly your uncle may have done his part towards this end by his strong language,—he does not hesitate when asked for an opinion. He was so frank with Herr von Walde, that he felt quite relieved and retained not an iota in his heart of all that had been vexing him in the course of the past year.”

CHAPTER X.

Scarcely a week had passed since the evening mentioned in the last chapter, but these few days had brought about great changes in the household at the castle of Lindhof. The dismissed superintendent had already been replaced by a new man, whose power, however, was very limited, as Herr von Walde had undertaken the chief oversight of affairs himself. Several day-labourers who had been summarily dismissed, either because they were warm adherents of the village pastor, and had, on account of their work, been frequently absent from prayers at the castle, or because they did not care to listen to the chaplain’s sermons, were again working on the estate.

The day before, Sunday, Herr von Walde, accompanied by the Baroness Lessen and little Bella, had attended service in the village church at Lindhof. To the surprise of all, the chaplain, Herr Möhring, had appeared in the organ-loft as one of the audience, and at noon the worthy pastor had taken dinner with the family at Castle Lindhof. Doctor Fels paid daily visits there, for Fräulein von Walde was sick. That was the reason why Elizabeth had not been requested to give her another lesson, and also, as the forester said, why the Baroness Lessen

”had not been banished to Siberia, for,” said he, ”Herr von Walde would not be such a savage as to make his ailing sister still more ailing, by depriving her of the society which was dearest to her. He knew that if his mother left, Herr von Hollfeld’s visits would also cease.” It was malicious to say so, but, as he added, ”incontrovertibly just.”

In the village it was well known that it had required several terrible tempests to clear the air at Castle Lindhof. For the first three days after his arrival Herr von Walde had taken his meals alone in his private apartments, and the letters which the baroness’ waiting-maid had delivered to him, at all times of the day, from her mistress, were returned unopened, until at last the violent illness of his sister had brought about a meeting between her brother and her cousin by her bedside. Since that day intercourse had again been apparently established between the two, although the servants declared that they exchanged scarcely a word at table. Herr von Hollfeld had been over once to greet the returned traveller, but it was observed that he rode away with a perceptibly lengthened face, after a very short stay.

On a melancholy, rainy day in August, Elizabeth was again requested by Fräulein von Walde to spend half an hour with her at the castle. The lady was not alone when she entered the room. Herr von Walde sat in the recess by the window. His tall figure was leaning back on a couch, his head nearly touching the light-coloured wall behind him, so that his dark-brown hair stood out in strong relief against it. His right hand, which carelessly held a cigar, was resting upon the window-sill, while his left was raised as if he had just been speaking. His neighbour, the Baroness Lessen, was bending towards him, and, with a most winning smile upon her face, seemed to be listening intently to his words, although, as it appeared, they were not addressed to her, but to Helene. She was sitting tolerably near him, and had some crochet work in her hand. Fräulein von Walde was lying upon a lounge. A full dressing-gown entirely enveloped her small figure, and her beautiful brown curls escaped from beneath a morning-cap, trimmed with pink ribbons, which heightened, by force of contrast, the pallor of her countenance. The cockatoo was perched upon her hand, and from time to time she held him caressingly to her cheek. ”The terrible bird” was now called ”darling,” and might scream as loud as it liked,—it was only soothed by a tender ”What’s the matter with my pet?” Here, then, all was peace and reconciliation.

Upon Elizabeth’s entrance Helene beckoned to her kindly, but it did not escape her that there was a slight embarrassment in the little lady’s manner.

”Dear Rudolph,” she said, as she took Elizabeth’s hand, ”let me present you to the delightful artiste to whom I owe so many pleasant hours,—Fräulein Ferber, called by her uncle, and in all the country around, Gold Elsie. She plays so deliciously that I entreat her to make us forget the gray and gloomy skies above

us this afternoon. You see, dear child," she continued, turning to Elizabeth, "that I am still too weak to assist you at the piano; will you have the great kindness to play something alone for us?"

"With all my heart," replied Elizabeth. "But I shall play timidly, for there are two formidable powers to oppose me,—the gloomy heavens, and the favourable expectations that you have awakened of my performance."

"Pray allow me to excuse myself for an hour," said the baroness, as she collected her working materials and arose; "I should like to drive out with Bella,—it is so long since the poor child has taken the air."

"Really, I should suppose that she could easily take it here at any time, by simply putting her head out of the window," said Herr von Walde dryly, knocking the ashes from his cigar as he spoke.

"Heavens! are you unwilling, Rudolph, that I should take a drive? I will instantly remain at home, if——"

"I can conceive of no reason why I should be unwilling. Drive as often and as much as you like," was the indifferent reply.

The baroness compressed her lips, and turned to Helene: "We have decided, then, to take coffee in my room. I shall not stay out long, on account of the mist. I shall be back punctually in an hour, and shall depend upon the pleasure of conducting you to my room myself, dearest Helene."

"That pleasure you must resign," said Herr von Walde. "It has been my office for many years, and I hope my sister does not think me grown too awkward during my absence to discharge it."

"Most certainly not, dear Rudolph; I shall be greatly obliged, if you will be so kind," cried Helene, quickly, looking anxiously from one to the other.

The baroness conquered her vexation bravely. She held out her hand to Herr von Walde, with a smile of great sweetness, kissed Helene upon the cheek, and rustled out of the room with an "au revoir."

During this conversation, Elizabeth observed more closely the features of the man, whose glance and voice had impressed her so profoundly. It is true, her terror, for really the emotion caused by her first meeting with him was nothing less, had been renewed for a moment, as on entering she caught sight of Herr von Walde. How quiet the eyes were now, which had seemed before to flash fire; his look, as it rested upon the baroness, was icy cold. With this expression in his eyes, the upper part of his face, which bore the stamp of great sternness, grew to iron. A carefully arranged chestnut-brown moustache covered his upper lip, and his beard; which was unusually fine and silky, fell in soft waves upon his chest. Herr von Walde did not look young, and although his well-knit figure had preserved all its elasticity, there was that indescribable composure and self-possession in his whole manner and heaping peculiar to the man of riper age,

and which inspires involuntary respect.

When the baroness had left the room, Elizabeth opened the piano.

"No, no! no notes!" Helene cried to her, as she saw her turning over the music-sheets. "We want to hear your own fancies; pray extemporize."

Elizabeth seated herself immediately, and soon the outer world was all forgotten by her. A wealth of melody welled up in her soul, which carried it far aloft. At such moments she knew that she was gifted beyond thousands of her fellow-mortals, for she had the power of giving expression to the most hidden emotions of her heart. The purity of her whole inner world was mirrored in sound; she had never been obliged to seek for a melody which should embody her feeling, it lay ready in her soul,—ready as the feeling itself. But to-day there was something blended with the tones that she could not herself comprehend; she could not possibly pursue and analyze it, for it breathed almost imperceptibly across the waves of sound. It seemed as though joy and woe no longer moved side by side, but melted together into one. As she was herself impressed by this strange presence, she penetrated still deeper into her world of feeling,—gradually the clear depths of her pure, maidenly soul were revealed to the listeners; they stood, as it were, by some transparent, magic fountain, and saw within its quiet waters the lovely form of the young girl reflected, with twofold distinctness, for there was a perfect harmony between her exterior and her interior being.

The last faint chord died away. Large tear-drops hung from Helene's lashes, and her pallor was almost supernatural. She glanced towards her brother, but he had turned his face away, and was gazing out into the garden. When at last he looked towards her, his features were as calm as ever, only a slight flush coloured his brow; the cigar had dropped from his fingers and lay upon the ground. He said not one word concerning her playing to Elizabeth, as she rose from the piano. Helene, whom this silence distressed, exhausted herself in flattering expressions, that she might induce her young friend to forget, or, at least, not to notice the coldness and indifference which her brother displayed.

"Was it not delicious?" she cried. "The people in B—— could have had no idea of the golden fountain of music bubbling up in Elsie's heart, or they would never have allowed her to wander into the Thuringian forest."

"Have you lived until now in B——?" asked Herr von Walde, fixing his eyes upon Elizabeth. She met his gaze for an instant; the ice had all melted, and was replaced by a wondrous radiance.

"Yes," she answered, simply.

"It was a sad experience to come suddenly from a large beautiful city, which offers every imaginable diversion and enjoyment, to the silent forest, and live upon a lonely mountain. You were, of coarse, inconsolable at the exchange?"

"I regarded it as a piece of undeserved good fortune," was the unembar-

rassed reply.

”Indeed? Most strange! It seems to me that one would hardly choose the thistle when the rose might be had.”

”Of course, I cannot presume to pass judgment upon your opinions.”

”True, because you do not know me; but my idea is almost universal.”

”Yet surely it is very one-sided.”

”Well, then, I will not combat further your peculiar taste, with which you would scarcely find any one to sympathize among companions of your own age. I will rather believe, for your credit, that it was not so easy to leave your friends.”

”But it was very easy, for I had none.”

”Is that possible?” cried Fräulein von Walde. ”Did you have no intercourse with any one?”

”Oh, yes, with the people who paid me.”

”You gave lessons?” asked Herr von Walde.

”Yes.”

”But did you never feel the want of a female friend?” cried Helene quickly.

”Never, for I have a mother,” replied Elizabeth in a tone of deep feeling.

”Happy child!” she murmured, and drooped her head.

Elizabeth felt that she had unwittingly touched a sore place in Helene’s heart. She was sorry, and longed to efface the impression. Herr von Walde seemed to read her thoughts in her face, for, without noticing Helene’s emotion, he asked: ”And did you desire to live in the Thuringian forest especially?”

”Yes.”

”And why?”

”Because I had been told from my earliest childhood that my family had its origin in the Thuringian forest.”

”Ah, yes, you belong to the Gnadewitzes.”

”My mother’s name was Gnadewitz. I am a Ferber,” answered Elizabeth, with decision.

”You say that as if you were thankful that you did not bear the name of Gnadewitz.”

”I am thankful for it.”

”Hm!—in its time it has made a fine noise in the world.”

”None pleasant to hear.”

”Why, what would you have? At every court it was pure gold, for it was very old, and the last of those who bore it were heaped with dignities and honours, on account of the antiquity of their name.”

”Pardon me, but I cannot possibly understand how—” she blushed, and was silent.

”Go on; you have begun the sentence, and I depend upon hearing the end.”

”Well, then, how sin can be honoured, because it is old,” she rejoined, with hesitation.

”Softly! they say that several of the Gnadewitz lineage were brave and true.”

”That may be; but is there not great injustice in the idea of rewarding their merit, centuries after, by honouring those who are neither good nor true?”

”Should not noble deeds live forever?”

”Most certainly; but, if we refuse to emulate them, we certainly are not worthy to share in their rewards,” was Elizabeth’s prompt answer.

A carriage rolled up the avenue. Herr von Walde frowned, and passed his hand across his eyes as if he had been rudely awakened from a dream. In a moment the door opened, and the baroness entered. She, as well as Bella, who was walking by her mother’s side to-day with quite an air of grown-up dignity, had not yet laid aside her bonnet and mantle.

”I am glad to be at home again,” she cried. ”The air to-day is horrible. I repented a hundred times having left the house, and shall probably atone for my maternal solicitude by a heavy cold. Bella was so anxious to see for herself how you are, dear Helene, that I allowed her to come in with me.”

The child went directly up to the lounge. She did not appear to notice Elizabeth, who was sitting close by, and brushed past her so rudely, as she bent to kiss Helene’s hand, that a button upon her sack caught in the delicate trimming of Elizabeth’s dress and tore it. Bella lifted her head and glanced at the mischief she had done; then she turned and went across to Herr von Walde to give him her hand.

”Well,” said he, withholding his hand, ”have you no apology to make for your awkwardness?”

She made no reply, and retired to the side of her mother, upon whose cheeks the ominous red spots appeared. The look which she cast upon Elizabeth showed that her daughter was not the cause of her irritation.

”Well, child, can’t you speak?” asked Herr von Walde, rising.

”Fräulein Ferber sat so close,” said the baroness in a tone of excuse, as Bella continued obstinately silent.

”Indeed, I should have moved aside. There is no great harm done,” said Elizabeth, and she held out her hand to Bella with an enchanting smile. But the child took no notice of it, and hid both her hands in her dress.

Without a word, Herr von Walde approached her, took her by the arm, and led her directly to the door, which he opened. ”Go instantly to your room,” he said, ”and do not come where I am again unless I particularly desire you to do so.”

The baroness was raging inwardly. Her countenance worked for a moment,

but what could she do? She was powerless to contend with the violence and barbarism of this man, who was master here, and who now took his seat again with a composure that betrayed an utter unconsciousness of the cruelty of his behaviour. Her prudence obtained the upper hand.

"I hope, dear Rudolph," said she, and her voice trembled a little, "that you will not reckon this slight misdemeanour against Bella. Pray, make some allowance,—it is all the fault of her governess."

"Miss Mertens? Indeed, it must have cost her, with her innate gentleness and refinement, infinite pains to train Bella to conduct herself as she has just done."

The baroness blushed scarlet; but she controlled herself. "Heavens!" she cried, determined to change the subject; "this stupid circumstance has made me forget to tell you that Emil has ridden over from Odenberg. He got wet through on horseback, and is just changing his dress. May he pay his respects?"

Helene's cheeks glowed, and a ray of happiness shot from her eyes; but she said not a word, only drooping her face so as to conceal every sign of her inward agitation.

"Certainly," replied Herr von Walde. "Does he intend to make some stay here?"

"He will be here for a few days, with your permission."

"By all means. Then we shall see him in your room when we come to take coffee."

"He will be most happy. Will you not come immediately? My maid tells me that all is in readiness there to receive you."

Elizabeth arose, and prepared to take her leave. Herr von Walde, as soon as he saw this, looked inquiringly at the baroness. Doubtless he expected that she would extend an invitation to the young girl, but just at this moment the lady discovered that the gardener's arrangement of the flower-stand in the window was "too charming," and in enraptured contemplation of a bunch of azaleas she turned her back upon Elizabeth.

Fräulein Ferber courtesied profoundly and left the room, after Helene had repeated, in a trembling voice, her expressions of gratitude. Without, in the corridor, she met Herr von Hollfeld. At sight of her he quickened his pace, casting a lightning glance around to assure himself that no listener was near. Before she was aware of it, he had seized Elizabeth's hand, imprinted a glowing kiss upon it, and whispered: "How rejoiced I am to see you once more!"

Her astonishment was so great that she could not at first find a word to say. She drew back her hand as though she had been stung, and he accepted her repulse, because at that very moment the door of Helene's room opened, and Herr von Walde appeared. Hollfeld raised his hat to Elizabeth as if he had just seen

her, and his features subsided instantly into an expression of utter indifference as he walked towards his relative.

Elizabeth was disgusted with his farce,—first, at the insulting familiarity, which made her blood boil with indignation, and then, at the denial of any acquaintance before a third person. Her maidenly pride was deeply wounded. She reproached herself that she had not rebuked his impertinence boldly upon the spot. A crimson flush glowed in her cheeks with shame that she should have been treated so by any man; it seemed as if the spot upon her hand, where his hot lips had rested, still burned, and she hastily held it beneath the stream of a fountain in the park, that the imaginary stain might be washed away.

Much agitated, she reached her home, and complained with tears to her mother of the insult that she had received. Frau Ferber was a sensible woman, possessed of clear, calm insight. She was convinced by Elizabeth's resentment that her child's heart was not in the least danger, and her fears were laid to rest. It was easy to defend her from attacks from without; but who could guard her from the grief that a misplaced attachment would entail upon her?

"You know now what manner of man Herr von Hollfeld is," she said. "It will not be difficult strictly to avoid all future contact with him, and if he should presume in spite of your efforts, he must be sternly repulsed. His conduct seems to be the result of aristocratic conceit and cowardice, two qualities which will probably deter him from any further advances, when he discovers how disagreeable they are to you. But at all events, familiarize yourself with the thought that your behaviour towards him must of necessity create an enemy who will, at some future day, put a stop to your intercourse with Fräulein von Walde. Of course such a consideration cannot for one instant lead you to hesitate as to your line of conduct. Go on your way then, my child, quietly and with self-possession. I should certainly not advise you to give up your visits to Castle Lindhof."

"Assuredly not! no, that I will not do!" cried Elizabeth, quickly. "What would my uncle say if the chicken should actually come flying back to creep beneath the shelter of home?" she added, smiling through her tears. "It would be wretched indeed, if with all the strength of which I have boasted, I am not strong enough to repulse an impertinent man so effectually that he shall desist from all future advances."

She recalled her conversation with Herr von Walde, and found, to her great satisfaction, that she must certainly be exceedingly brave, for assuredly it had required no small exercise of courage, while confronting that stern countenance, to declare her own convictions, which attacked so decidedly the proud edifice of his ancestral pride. She had expected every moment to see his glance sheathe itself in ice again, as it had done in conversation with the baroness; but the singular glow and expression which had so struck her when first he addressed her,

had not faded from his eyes,—she could almost, in fact, believe that she detected beneath his moustache a smile lurking around the corners of his mouth. Perhaps he had determined to-day to enact the part of the lion towards the mouse. He had magnanimously permitted a little girl to pour out her naive ideas at his feet, where they might remain lying, since to bend his aristocratic back to pick them up and examine them was not to be thought of,—they probably amused him as exemplifying the saying of the dog "baying the moon." She repeated all this continually to herself, that she might stamp afresh upon her treacherous memory his general reputation for boundless arrogance.

She could not tell how she became conscious of it, but she was now perfectly aware that she should suffer unspeakably if Herr von Walde's arrogance was ever exercised towards her; so she must be doubly on her guard and not allow herself to be misled by his observance of the usual forms of common politeness, of his high regard for which the next day brought her a most convincing proof.

CHAPTER XI.

She had just gotten ready, the next afternoon, to go into the garden with her work-basket, when the bell rang at the gate in the wall. In consideration of the scene of the day before, her surprise was certainly justifiable, when, as the gate was opened, she saw Bella standing before her. Behind the child stood Miss Mertens and the elderly gentleman with whom Elizabeth had lately had an evening encounter. As she entered Bella extended her hand, but looked shy and confused and said not a word. Elizabeth, much amazed, at once guessed the reason of her coming, and tried to help her in her embarrassment by saying how glad she was to have a visit from a little girl, and by asking her to come into the garden. But Miss Mertens stepped forward.

"Do not make it all so pleasant for Bella, Fräulein Ferber," said she, "she has been expressly ordered to make an apology to you for her misconduct yesterday. I must insist upon her speaking."

These words, spoken with much firmness, and still more, perhaps, the sheltering darkness of the hall through which Elizabeth was leading her by the hand, at last loosened Bella's tongue, and she softly begged pardon for her fault, and promised never to be so naughty again.

”And now that is happily settled,” cried the gentleman, as he advanced to Miss Mertens’ side, and with an arch smile made a low bow to Elizabeth.

”It may, perhaps, strike you as very odd,” he said, ”that I should attach myself to this reconciliation deputation, with which I have no concern; but I have an idea that on such occasions people are rather inclined to overlook all slight transgressions, and so,—there can be no more favourable moment for the smuggling in of a stranger.

”My name is Ernst Reinhard; I am the secretary and travelling companion of Herr von Walde, and I have had no more earnest desire for a week past than to become acquainted with the interesting family at Castle Gnadeck.”

Elizabeth kindly extended her hand. ”These old walls have witnessed so many of the misdeeds of the robber knights of old, that we have no right to condemn smuggling; you will be cordially welcomed by my parents.”

She led the way, and opened the huge oaken door leading into the garden.

Her parents and uncle, who, with little Ernst, were sitting under the lindens, arose as the strangers entered, and came towards them. Elizabeth introduced them all round, and then, at a sign from her mother, returned to the house to order some refreshments for the guests. When she came back again, Bella had already laid aside her sack and parasol, and with a joyous face was sitting in a swing, which had been hung between two trees. Ernst was swinging her, and seemed not a little proud of his new playmate.

”Indeed,” said Reinhard, pointing to Bella as she flew up in the swing, shouting with delight, ”no one who had seen that child this morning and her sullen bearing, as she went into Herr von Walde’s apartment to ask forgiveness for yesterday’s misconduct, or her defiant and angry expression, when he told her that he could not receive her again until she had personally begged pardon of Fräulein Ferber,”—here Elizabeth reddened, and became absorbed in the preparation of some bread and honey for the two children,—”would recognize her for the same being, whose face is now beaming with the innocent joy of childhood.”

The hour passed very pleasantly. Miss Mertens was both refined and cultivated, and Reinhard told many delightful stories of his travels and researches.

”Probably we should not have thought of returning home for some time,” he said in concluding an interesting account of adventures in Spain, ”had we not received unfavourable accounts from Thuringia, which, following fast upon each other, induced Herr von Walde to give up new plans for travel. The ambition of power often makes its possessor blind. The incautious request from a feminine pen that Herr von Walde would pension off the good old village pastor at Lindhof, because he had grown prosy and was incapable of training the souls under his care, capped the climax of our unwelcome hews, and we set out for home immediately.

”When, late in the evening, as we approached Lindhof, we left the highroad and our carriage, that we might go the rest of the way on foot, we met with a most charming adventure. How odd! look, Reinhard, what do you suppose is the meaning of that light in the ruins of Castle Gnadeck?’ asked Herr von Walde. ’It means that there is a lamp there,’ was my reply. ’We must investigate this,’ said he, and we ascended the hill. The light grew brighter, and at last, to our astonishment, we saw that it streamed from two high illuminated windows. And then, light steps were heard behind us, something white fluttered among the bushes, and suddenly, what I took for a being of ethereal mould hovered before us upon the moonlit sward. I took heart and approached, expecting every moment that the airy form would vanish before the breath of my lips; but alas! its own lips opened, and told of two well-trained goats and a canary bird.”

All laughed at this account.

”While we were descending the mountain,” Reinhard continued, ”my master said not a word; but from certain signs I judged that he was quite as ready to laugh at me as you were; it would have been a fine thing if you could have accompanied us as a good fairy, for we left all the moonlight and beauty behind us upon the mountain, and had to walk on through the dim valley, where the mists were rising, and where there was nothing, not even a wandering zephyr to bid us welcome home. At Castle Lindhof numberless lights were flitting to and fro like will-o’-the-wisps. The carriage, with our luggage, had already arrived, and seemed to have produced the same effect by the sound of its rolling wheels, as that ascribed to the thunder at the day of judgment, for there was such hurry, confusion, and disorder reigning there when we arrived, that, for my part, I should have been thankful to retrace my steps, and lay my weary head upon the first quiet, mossy spot that I could find in the forest. The only person who, in the midst of the universal agitation, presented an appearance of placid self possession was the chaplain, Möhring. He had put on a white cravat with great despatch, and welcomed the master of the house at the foot of the grand staircase in a speech full of unction.”

”The reign of that stern gentleman is at an end now, is it not?” asked the forester.

”Yes, indeed, thank God!” replied Miss Mertens. ”He will leave Lindhof in a short time. Baroness Lessen’s influence has procured him a good parish. He could not endure to sink back into insignificance where he had so lately held sway. I can readily understand it, for he had ruled with all the persecuting zeal of a tyrant who seeks to tread every one beneath his feet. He would not allow a thought in his kingdom without his permission, and even the baroness, his mistress, upon whom he smiled so servilely, felt his iron rule. Every one in the household, without exception, was obliged to write down, in the evening, the

thoughts and sentiments that had occurred to them during the avocations of the day. I can see before me now the poor housemaids, to whom even a short letter to their friends at home is a greater task than a long ironing-day, sitting in that cold room on the winter evenings, holding the pen in their tired clumsy fingers, and beating their poor brains for something to say.

"'Yes, if the chaplain had worked as hard as I have done the whole day,' one would whisper softly but angrily to another, 'he would not relish writing much.'"

"Indeed, I think so," cried the forester. "What a shameful system of torture and oppression has been carried on there under the cloak of service to the Lord!"

"The worst of it all is," said Ferber, "that unless a man is possessed of great culture, or of a special fund of good humour, he ends by detesting not only his tormentors but the whole subject of religion that causes him such suffering. Thus, he is led more and more astray from all faith, while his outward observance of forms must be stricter than ever, his subsistence depending upon his wearing the mask well. All this gives the death-blow to true religion among the people."

"Well, we are fortunate in at least having one among us who has force of character enough and sufficient strength of will, to say, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther!' Zounds! it came upon us like a second deluge!" said the forester.

"True, Herr von Walde is possessed of an energy and force of character such as falls to the lot of but few," replied Miss Mertens, quickly. "His mouth is closed, but his eyes are wide open, and servility, malice, and hypocrisy quail before them and drop their masks."

In the mean while Reinhard had been attentively examining the walls of the ruinous wing of the old castle which bounded the garden on the south. Three large, pointed, arched windows, faultless in shape, extended upward to the height of the second story from about six feet from the ground. Close beside them a curious jutty projected far into the garden, forming a deep corner, where grew a giant oak, which stretched some of its boughs through the two nearest sashless windows far into the airy, cool apartment within, which must once have been the chapel of the castle, intended to accommodate a large number of worshippers, for it extended through the entire depth of the wing. Opposite these windows were three others of like dimensions; they had been less exposed to wind and weather, and had preserved some fragments of coloured glass in their delicately carved stone rosettes. Through them could be seen the dark court-yard, with its crumbling, ghostly walls like a picture painted in gray. The garden side of this wing looked gay and odd enough. The most extravagant caprice had here heaped together all styles of windows and decorations; judging by the exterior, the old building must have been a perfect labyrinth of rooms, passages, and staircases. The jutty alone seemed to be in a most dangerous state of decay. It inclined perceptibly to one side, and appeared to be awaiting the moment when it should

bury the blooming life of the oak beneath its masses of stone. It had thrown a green mantle coquettishly over its falling form,—an impenetrable garment of ivy wreathed it all over from the ground to the ruinous roof, and effectually concealed every crack and aperture in the masonry. Some sprays of the ivy had crept across the oak and climbed up to the sculptured arms on the principal front of the chapel, which looked forth grimly enough from beneath its intrusive decoration.

"I attempted," said Ferber, "to explore this wing as far as I could, shortly after my arrival here, for its peculiar style of architecture interests me greatly; but I could not get farther than the chapel, where, indeed, it seemed dangerous to stay long. You see the whole upper story has fallen in, and the weight of the ruins has caused the ceiling of the chapel to sink considerably, so that it seems ready to tumble at the slightest breath of wind. The jutty has only lately looked so threatening in consequence of several severe storms. It must be taken away, for it makes a part of the garden inaccessible to us. If I could have engaged any workmen, it should have been pulled down before now."

After this explanation, Reinhard had no further relish, as he expressed it, for wandering about in the old ruins. But he was all the more interested in the connecting building, and Ferber arose to show his guests his dwelling. And first, they ascended the rampart behind them. Ferber was very capable and skilful, and employed every moment of his leisure in improving his new possession. With his own hands he had mended the steps which led to the top of the rampart, and they arose now smooth and white from the close-shaven turf which clothed its sloping side. On top, the tolerably wide plateau was strewn with fresh gravel, and in the centre of it, embowered in the linden boughs which overshadowed the basin below, stood a group of home-made garden chairs and a table. While they leaned against the breastwork and enjoyed the confined but lovely view from the steep mountain over the valley beneath, Elizabeth told the story of Sabina's ancestress, for doubtless this rampart had been the scene of her narrative.

"Br-rr!" said Reinhard, shuddering. "What a leap it would have been! The wall is high, and when I imagine below there, instead of that mossy carpet, the sluggish, slimy waters of a castle-ditch full of frogs and lizards, I cannot possibly understand the resolution required to throw one's self over."

"But," said Miss Mertens, "despair has led many a one to seek a death even more horrible."

At this moment Elizabeth saw with her mind's eye the glowing, passionate expression with which Hollfeld had hastened towards her on the preceding evening. She remembered the disgust that she had experienced at his touch, and she thought to herself that it was not very difficult to imagine the position of the persecuted girl.

"Come in, child," said her uncle, rousing her from her reverie. "Are you

listening to hear the grass grow that you stand there so silent?"

Beneath his clear gaze, and at the sound of his strong, honest voice, the terrible vision vanished in an instant. "No, uncle," she replied, laughing, "that I shall not attempt, even though I do boast that I have wonderfully keen eyes and ears for the processes of nature."

He took her hand, and led her after the others, who were just entering the house. At the top of the steps, Bella came running to Miss Mertens. She had several picture-books in one hand, and with the other she drew her governess into Elizabeth's room.

"Only think, Miss Mertens, you can see our castle from here!" she cried. That they were the owners of Lindhof she seemed firmly to believe, and no wonder. The way in which the baroness had, until now, wielded her sceptre, had left no doubt in the child's mind that her mother was the indisputable mistress of Lindhof. "Look," she continued gaily, "do you see the path down there? Uncle Rudolph has just ridden past. He saw me, and waved his hand to me. Mamma will be glad that he is kind to me again."

Miss Mertens admonished her to be a good little girl, and get her hat and sack, for it was time to go.

Elizabeth and Ernst accompanied them out into the park.

"We have stayed too long," said Miss Mertens anxiously, as she took leave of the Ferbers and stepped out into the forest-clearing. "I must be prepared for a tempest this evening."

"You think the baroness will be vexed at your remaining here so long?"

"Without doubt."

"Never mind,—you must not repent it. We have spent such a delightful afternoon," said Reinhard.

The children had wandered on before them, hand in hand, and disappeared now and then among the trees on either side of the path, plucking flowers. Hector, who had forsaken his master to accompany them, leaped joyously hither and thither, never forgetting to return now and then to be stroked and patted by the gentle hand of Elizabeth, the lady of his love, as her uncle said.

Suddenly he stopped, and stood still in the centre of the path. They had nearly reached the borders of the park. Through the forest they could see the vivid green of the lawn, and the plashing of the nearest fountain was audible. Hector had discovered a female figure hastily approaching. Elizabeth recognized her instantly as silent Bertha, although her whole appearance seemed strangely altered.

She could have had no idea that any one was near, for, as she walked, she gesticulated violently with her arms. Her cheeks were crimson, her eyebrows contracted as though in the greatest agony of mind, and her lips moved as though

she were talking to herself. Her white hat, which she had decked with flowers, had slipped from her dark braids, and was hanging upon her neck by its loose red strings, which, as her motions grew still more earnest, became wholly untied, and the hat fell on the ground without the knowledge of its owner.

She came rapidly forward, and did not raise her eyes until just as she stood close to Elizabeth. Then she started as though stung by an adder. In a moment the expression of anguish upon her countenance was changed to one of the bitterest anger. Hate flashed from her eyes, her hands clenched convulsively, and while something like a low hiss escaped her lips, she seemed as if about to spring, raging, upon the young girl. Reinhard instantly placed himself by Elizabeth's side, and drew her slightly back. When Bertha saw him, she uttered a low cry, and rushed madly into the thicket, through which she forced a path, although her clothes were torn by the thorns, and she struck her forehead against the drooping boughs. In a few moments she was lost to sight.

"That was Bertha, from the Lodge!" cried Miss Mertens, with surprise. "What can have happened to her?"

"Yes,—what can have happened?" repeated Reinhard. "The young creature was in a state of terrible excitement, and seemed to grow actually furious at sight of you," turning to Elizabeth. "Is she related to you?"

"No indeed," she replied. "She is only distantly connected with my uncle, and I do not even know her. She has avoided me from the beginning most resolutely, although I wished much to be on friendly terms with her. It is clear that she hates me, but I cannot tell why. Of course it troubles me, but her character is not sufficiently pleasing to induce me to attach much importance to her dislike."

"Good Heavens, my child, there is no question of dislike here! The little fury would have gladly torn you to pieces with her teeth."

"I am not afraid of her," replied Elizabeth, smiling.

"But I would advise you to be careful," said Miss Mertens. "There was something actually demoniac in her looks. Where could she have been?"

"Probably at the castle," remarked Elizabeth, as she picked up Bertha's hat, and brushed the moss and dried leaves from it.

"I think not," rejoined Miss Mertens. "Since she has been dumb she has, very strangely, ceased visiting Lindhof. Before then she came every day, attended the Bible Class, and was a great protegée of the baroness, but suddenly it all came to an end, to the surprise of all. Only now and then, in my solitary rambles in the park, I have seen her gliding through the bushes like a snake,—indeed she seems to me to bear an affinity to that reptile."

They had already reached one of the gravelled paths leading through the park, and it was time to take leave of each other. They separated with mutual cordiality.

”Now, Elsie,” said Ernst, as the other three vanished behind a group of trees, ”we’ll see which of us will reach the corner first.” The corner was the entrance to a narrow forest-path which led directly to the foot of the mountain.

”Agreed, my darling,” laughed Elizabeth, and began to run. At first she kept even step with the little boy who was beside her; but just before the goal was reached, she flew forward lightly as a feather, and stood in the entrance of the path, and, to her terror, close to the head of a horse which snorted violently. Hector, who was by her side, barked loudly. The horse leaped aside and stood erect upon his hind legs.

”Back!” cried a powerful voice. Elizabeth snatched op the little boy and sprang with him out of the way, while the horse rushed out of the forest, and, scarcely touching the ground with his hoofs, galloped madly across the meadow. Herr von Walde was seated upon the frightened animal, which did its best to throw its rider. He, however, sat firm as a rock; only once he leaned from his saddle and struck with his riding-whip at Hector, who was leaping and barking about the horse, greatly increasing its fright. For awhile it bounded wildly over the meadow, then suddenly turned away and disappeared into the forest.

Elizabeth’s teeth fairly chattered with fright at the horrible accident which she had no doubt would shortly occur. She took Ernst by the hand and was about to run to the castle for assistance, when, before she had gone many steps, she saw the horseman returning. The animal was much more quiet, his bit was covered with foam, and his legs trembled. Herr von Walde patted his neck caressingly, sprang off, tied him to a tree, and then approached Elizabeth.

”Pray forgive me,” she said in a trembling voice, as soon as he stood beside her.

”What for, my child?” he rejoined gently. ”You have done nothing. Come, sit down upon this bank, you are deadly pale.”

He moved as if to take her hand and lead her to the spot which he had designated, but his arm dropped instantly by his side. Elizabeth mechanically obeyed him, and without another word he seated himself beside her. Little Ernst leaned against his sister and fixed his large beautiful full eyes upon Herr von Walde’s face. The boy had been frightened for one moment when the horse had first appeared, but the gallop around the meadow had amused him, for he had no suspicion of danger.

”What did you intend to do when you came running so hastily into the forest?” Herr von Walde asked Elizabeth after a short silence.

An arch smile played about the still pale lips of the young girl. ”I was pursued,” she replied.

”By whom?”

”By this boy,” pointing to Ernst, ”We were running a race.”

”Is the little one your brother?”

”Yes;” she looked lovingly in the boy’s face and passed her hand over his dark curls.

”And she is my only sister,” said the little fellow with great emphasis.

”Indeed! Well, you seem quite fond of this only sister,” said Herr von Walde.

”Oh yes; I love her dearly. She plays with me just like a boy.”

”Is it possible?”

”Oh yes; if I want to play soldiers she puts on just the same kind of paper hat that she makes for me, and marches, drumming up and down the garden, just as long as I choose. And before I go to bed she tells me lovely stories while I am eating my supper.”

A bright smile broke over Herr von Walde’s face. Elizabeth had never seen it before, and she found that it gave an indescribable charm to features which she had thought immovably stern; it seemed to her like a clear sunbeam breaking through a thick, cloudy sky.

”You are quite right, my boy,” he said, drawing the child towards him; ”those are most valuable talents to possess; but is she never angry?” he asked, pointing to Elizabeth, who was enjoying like a child, Ernst’s revelations, which seemed comical enough to her.

”No, never angry,” replied the boy, ”only serious sometimes, and then she always plays on the piano.”

”But, Ernst——”

”Oh yes, Elsie,” he interrupted her eagerly; ”don’t you remember when we were so poor in B——?”

”Ah, there you are right,” she replied with composure; ”but it was only when papa and mamma had to work so hard that we might have bread to eat; it was much better afterwards.”

”But you still play on the piano?”

”Yes,” answered Elizabeth laughing, ”but no longer for the reason which Ernst gives. My father and mother are now provided for.”

”And you?” Herr von Walde persisted.

”Oh, I? I am quite brave enough to fight life’s battle and win my own independence in the struggle?”

”How do you propose to do it?”

”Next year I shall go somewhere as a governess.”

”Does not Miss Mertens’ example deter you?”

”Not at all. I am not so weak as to wish for a luxurious life while so many others in my circumstances take upon themselves so bravely the yoke of service.”

”But here there is question not only of service but of endurance. You are proud. It is not only your look at this moment which tells me so, but every

sentiment which you uttered yesterday."

"Indeed, it may, perhaps, be pride that induces me to rank real dignity of character far above any mere exterior advantages which egotism has invented and maintains, and for that very reason I believe that one human being can humble another only by setting before him an example of moral and intellectual greatness which it is impossible for him to imitate,—never by insulting treatment."

"And you think that these views will steel you against all the mortifications great and little which a heartless, capricious mistress might heap upon you?"

"Oh no, but I need never bow before her."

A short pause ensued, during which Ernst approached the horse, examining him attentively.

"From what you said yesterday, I gathered that you are attached to your present home," Herr von Walde began again.

"Yes, more than I can tell."

"Ah! I can understand that, for this is the loveliest spot in Thuringia. How then can you so easily endure the thought of leaving it again?"

"On the contrary, I shall not find it at all easy; but my father has taught me that our pleasures must yield to our necessities, and I understand perfectly that it must be so. I confess that I cannot easily comprehend how one can give up what is so pleasant except at the command of necessity."

"Ah! that was aimed at me. You cannot conceive how a man can voluntarily hide himself in the pyramids when he might breathe the cool, sunny air of Thuringia."

Elizabeth felt a burning blush suffuse her cheeks. Herr von Walde had humourously alluded here to the jesting conversation that she had had with her uncle, to which he had been an involuntary listener.

"If I should attempt to explain this to you I should fail, for you seem to me to find all that you look for in your home circle," he said after a moment's silence. He had leaned forward and was mechanically drawing figures with his riding-whip upon the ground at his feet. He spoke in those deep tones which always appealed powerfully to Elizabeth's mind. "But there is a time for some of us," he continued, "when we rush out into the world, to forget in its whirl and novelty that we cannot find happiness at home. If a man cannot fill up a painful void in his existence, he can at least ignore it by devoting himself to science."

This, then, was the sore spot in his heart. He had not found the affection in his own home that he longed for, and that he had a right to claim and expect from a sister for whom he manifested always the purest and most self-sacrificing tenderness.

Elizabeth had comprehended this pain, even before she had seen Herr von Walde, and, at this moment, when he alluded to it so openly, she longed most

fervently to console him. Words of sympathy hovered upon her lips, but she was possessed suddenly by an unconquerable shyness which prevented her from speaking; and as she glanced up at him and marked the firm lines of his profile and his brow which was so proud and commanding, while his voice sounded so gentle and melancholy, the embarrassing suspicion flashed upon her that he had forgotten for a moment who was sitting beside him; his aristocratic ideas would cause him bitterly to repent the moment when, under the influence of a sudden self-forgetfulness, he had revealed a glimpse of his sternly guarded consciousness to an insignificant girl. This thought dyed her cheeks again; she arose quickly and called Ernst. Herr von Walde turned in surprise, and for an instant his eyes rested searchingly upon her face; then he also arose, and, as if to confirm her suspicion, stood at once proudly calm and composed before her,—but she noticed for the first time that sad, gloomy expression between the eyebrows, which her father had spoken of, and which impressed her just as his voice had done.

"You are usually very quick to think,"—he said, evidently trying to give the conversation a gayer turn, and slowly walking along by Elizabeth's side,—she was going for Ernst who had not heard her call. "Before one has quite finished a sentence the answer is plainly ready on your lips. Your silence, therefore, at this moment, tells me that I was quite right when I said that you would not understand me, because you have found all the happiness that you look for."

"The idea of happiness is so different with different people, that indeed I hardly know."

"We all have the same idea," he interrupted her; "it may still slumber in you."

"Oh, no!" she cried, forgetting her reserve and with enthusiasm,—"I love my friends with my whole heart, and am most happily conscious that I am loved in return!"

"Ah, then you did not quite misunderstand me! Well,—and your friends,—there must be a large circle to whom you open your heart?"

"No," she cried, laughing,—"their tale is soon told! My parents, my uncle, and this little fellow here," and she took Ernst by the hand as he came running to her, "who grows larger and makes more demands upon me every year. But now we must go, my darling," she said to the child, "or mamma will be anxious."

She bowed courteously to Herr von Walde,—it seemed to her that the shade upon his brow had disappeared. He raised his hat to her and shook hands with Ernst,—then he walked slowly towards the horse that was pawing impatiently, untied it, and led it away by the bridle.

"Do you know, Elsie," said Ernst, as they were ascending the mountain, "whom Herr von Walde looks like?"

"Whom?"

”The brave knight of St. George, just when he has killed the dragon.”

”Aha!” she laughed. ”But you have never seen any picture of the brave knight.”

”I know that. Still I think he looks like him.”

And she too had thought of the resemblance when she had seen him controlling his unruly steed. At this moment she remembered the pang she had suffered at the thought of a probable accident, and her unspeakable delight at seeing him return from the thicket unharmed. She stood still, and with a smile of wonder laid her hand upon her throbbing heart.

”Now see,” said Ernst, ”you have been running too quickly up the mountain. I could not keep up with you. What would uncle say if he knew it?”

She walked slowly on, like one in a dream. She scarcely heard the child’s reproof. What then was this strange half-consciousness which had yesterday mingled itself with her melodies, causing them to mourn and to rejoice at the same moment? Again she felt it take possession of her soul more mightily and intoxicatingly than before, but it was just as mysterious and incomprehensible.

”But, Elsie,” cried Ernst, impatiently, ”what is the matter with you? You are walking so slowly that it will be dark before we reach home.”

He took hold of her dress, and tried to pull her on. This call from the outer world was too energetic to be any longer withstood,—Elizabeth roused herself and walked on quickly, to the child’s entire content.

When they reached the castle Elizabeth laid Bertha’s hat, which was still hanging upon her arm, upon the table. She was unwilling to mention her meeting with the girl to her parents, for she rightly judged that it would make them anxious, and that they would relate the occurrence to her uncle, who had been so angry and bitter of late whenever Bertha was alluded to, that Elizabeth feared that if he heard of the meeting in the wood he would put a stop to the annoyance by immediately dismissing the cause of it from the Lodge. Ernst had noticed neither the hat nor her desire to conceal it, so there was no danger that he would betray her.

After supper Elizabeth walked down to the Lodge. She met Sabina in the garden, and heard to her satisfaction that her uncle had gone to Lindhof. She gave the hat to the old housekeeper, and told her of Bertha’s extraordinary behaviour, asking in conclusion whether she were at home yet. Sabina was indignant.

”Indeed I think, child, that if you had been alone she would have scratched your eyes out. I don’t know what will become of her. These last few days she has been worse than ever. She does not sleep at nights, but walks up and down in her room, talking again—but only to herself. If I had but the courage to open her door just when she is at the worst,—but I could not do it though you would give me heaps of gold. You will laugh at me, I know; but she’s not right. Look

at her eyes—they sparkle and glow as though all the fire of the Blocksberg were burning in them. No, I shall hold my tongue; the Herr Forester sleeps soundly, and so do the rest,—but I wake at the slightest noise, and I know perfectly well that Bertha is up and away many a night, and when she goes the great watch-dog is gone too from his kennel. He is the only one in the house that loves her; and, fierce as he is, he never touches her."

"Does my uncle know this?" asked Elizabeth with surprise.

"Not for the world! I wouldn't for my life tell him, for who knows what mischief would come of it?"

"But, Sabina, only think. You may do great harm to my uncle by remaining silent. The house is so lonely if there is no dog in the yard——"

"But I stand at the window of my room and watch until she comes from the mountain and chains up the dog again."

"What a tremendous sacrifice to make to your superstition! Why not tell Bertha——"

"Hush! not so loud, there she sits!" Sabina pointed through the fence to the pear tree in the court-yard. Upon the stone bench under the tree Bertha was sitting, apparently quite composed, trimming carrots. The crimson of excitement had passed away from cheek and brow, and given place to a livid pallor. Elizabeth could see now that the girl had lately grown much thinner. Her delicate nose looked pinched, and her cheeks had lost their lovely oval. There were dark ridges around her eyes, and between her eyebrows there were two deep wrinkles in the delicate skin which gave a sullen expression to the face, but, in connection with certain lines around the mouth, lent an air of deep melancholy to her look. The sight cut Elizabeth to the heart. Some misery was burdening the soul of that lonely creature, misery all the harder to endure because it was borne in silence. She forgot all the dislike of her which Bertha had always shown, and took several quick steps towards her, that she might lay that weary head upon her breast and say, "Rest here, poor child! Tell me of the grief that you are struggling with in such loneliness, and I promise to aid you to endure——" but Sabina seized her arm and detained her.

"You must not go," she whispered in terror; "I will not let you. She is just in a condition to stick that knife into you."

"But she is so terribly unhappy. Perhaps I can convince her that only the kindliest sympathy moves me."

"No, no! I'll soon show you whether anything can be done with her."

Sabina descended the steps into the court-yard. Bertha let her approach without raising her eyes.

"Fräulein, Elizabeth found it," said Sabina, holding the hat towards her; then she laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder, and continued kindly: "She would like

to say a few words to you."

Bertha started up as if she had received a deadly insult. She angrily shook off Sabina's hand, and darted a furious glance towards the spot where Elizabeth was standing,—a proof that she had known before that she was there. She threw her knife upon the table, and by a hasty gesture overset the basket at her feet, so that the carrots were scattered around upon the pavement. She ran into the house. They heard her through the open window shut the door of her own room and bolt it behind her.

Elizabeth was stupefied with surprise mingled with much pain. She would have so liked to console the wretched girl, but she now perceived that it was not to be thought of.

For a week past she had been daily to the castle. Fräulein von Walde had been steadily improving in health since the afternoon when, as the baroness tenderly expressed it, she had found a cure in the coffee which she herself had prepared, and in Herr von Hollfeld's arrival. She was diligently practising several duets, and at last confided to Elizabeth that she wished to celebrate her brother's birthday fête the last of August. It was to be a very splendid celebration, for she intended to make it also a welcome home to the long absent traveller. On that day he should first hear her play again after so many years, and she knew what a pleasant surprise it would be to him.

Elizabeth always looked forward with a mixture of pleasure and dread to these practisings. She did not know why herself; but the castle and park had suddenly become dear and attractive to her; she even had a kind of tender regard for the bank where she had sat with Herr von Walde, as if it were an old friend; she made a little circuit in order to pass by it. Herr von Hollfeld's behaviour inspired her, on the contrary, with very different feelings. After she had several times foiled his attempts to meet her by a hasty avoidance of him, he came to Fräulein von Walde's room, one day, and begged permission to remain there during the lesson. To Elizabeth's terror, Helene, with delight beaming in her eyes, assured him that he was doubly welcome as a convert who had hitherto had no taste whatever for music. He now made his appearance regularly, silently laying some fresh flowers upon the piano before Helene as he entered, in consequence of which she invariably struck several false chords. Then he retired to a deep window-seat whence he could look the players directly in the face. As long as the practising continued he covered his eyes with his hand, as if he wished to shut out the world that he might resign himself entirely to the charms of music. But, to Elizabeth's vexation, she soon observed that he only covered his face so as to conceal it from Helene; from behind his hand he stared the whole time fixedly at Elizabeth, following her every motion. She shuddered beneath those eyes which, usually so dull and expressionless, always burned with a peculiar fire

when he looked at her. Under this hateful ordeal she often had to exercise great self-control in order to play correctly.

Helene apparently had no suspicion of the cunning which Hollfeld had employed to attain his end. She often stopped playing for awhile and conversed with him, that is, she talked herself, and, usually, very well. She listened to his monosyllabic replies,—which were empty and foolish enough,—as if they were the words of an oracle wherein more meaning than met the ear was to be found.

He always departed a few minutes before the end of the lesson. The first time that he did so, Elizabeth discovered him from one of the hall windows that commanded an extensive view of the park, standing waiting at the entrance of the forest-path, by which she must pass. She defeated his intention, not without secret self-gratulation, by paying a visit of an hour to Miss Mertens, who received her with open arms; and she grew so fond of the governess that she never passed the door of her room without entering for an hour's quiet talk.

Miss Mertens was almost always depressed and sad. She saw that her stay at Lindhof was becoming impossible. The baroness, suddenly deprived of her sovereign authority and its consequent manifold occupations, was often bored nearly to death. She was obliged to wear her mask of gentleness and content while she was with her relatives, which was hard enough, and therefore all her ill humour had to be pent up within the locked doors of her own apartment. But she never vented it upon Bella, for, looking upon her child more as a born baroness than as a daughter, she restrained herself; nor upon her old waiting-maid, for whom she had, no one knew why, what the old steward Lorenz called "an ungodly sort of respect." Nor could she scold the lower servants without offending the master of the house, and therefore all her malice was wreaked upon the unfortunate and defenceless governess.

In order to torment her victim most thoroughly, the lady ordered the lessons to be daily conducted beneath her own most illustrious eyes. In presence of the pupil, the methods of the teacher were perpetually analyzed and criticised. It was no wonder that Bella did not improve under such instructions, and her nerves, too, were sure to be ruined, for Miss Mertens had the most disagreeable voice in teaching in the world,—how, too, could the child be expected to be graceful while she had constantly before her eyes the angular, clumsy manner in which her governess held her book and turned over the leaves, etc.? In history, Miss Mertens' reflections were quite too sentimental, or too plebeian, and, besides, she was so outrageously impertinent "as to have opinions of her own." In some cases the lesson was deliberately interrupted; the baroness placed herself in the teacher's chair, and the governess was obliged to listen reverentially to a lecture full of supercilious scorn and aristocratic arrogance. If the lady needed support, the chaplain, Herr Möhring, was sent for. And then, the nettle-stings of

her discourse vanished into insignificance by the side of the cruelty with which the unappreciated martyr invoked upon the head of the wretched governess all the gall of his suppressed sermons. The baroness must have known that the chaplain's French was execrable,—but she requested him to be present during the French hour that he might correct Miss Mertens' accent. Bella's improvement was forgotten in the overflow of her mother's petty malice.

Sometimes Miss Mertens would declare, with tears, that only love for her mother, who looked to her for support, induced her to submit to this martyrdom. The old lady was almost entirely dependent upon the exertions of her daughter, and therefore any change of situation was very undesirable in view of the pecuniary loss which must attend it But however depressed her spirits might be, her gentle face brightened whenever Elizabeth knocked at the door, and asked, in her sweet, fresh accents, if she might come in. At sight of the young girl all her care and anxiety took flight, and as they sat together on the little sofa by the window they had many a happy hour, and the poor governess seemed to live over again her own youthful days, and Elizabeth gained not a little from the fund of knowledge and riper experience of her more mature friend.

These brief afternoon visits had also a secret charm for Elizabeth, which she would not for the world have confessed, and which, nevertheless, caused her heart to throb quickly, and an undefined sensation of mingled joy and anxiety to possess her as she knocked at the door.

The windows of Miss Mertens' room looked out upon a large court-yard, which Elizabeth used to call the convent garden,—it lay so retired and quiet, encircled by its four high walls. Some spreading lindens cast their green shade upon the rich grassy soil, only intersected here and there by narrow paved paths. In the centre of the space was a fountain, which supplied the house with delicious water, and upon the edge of the large basin several marble figures were reposing their white limbs, bathed in the green light that broke through the overhanging trees. When the sun poured his fierce rays, like melted lead, upon the open parts of the park and garden, this spot was always refreshingly cool. A door upon the ground-floor, leading from the court-yard directly into Herr von Walde's library, almost always stood open. Now and then he himself would issue from it, and pace to and fro with folded arms. What thoughts lay hidden behind that fine white forehead, when, after walking thus for awhile, with his head sunk upon his breast, he suddenly raised it, as if roused from some delightful dream! Miss Mertens often remarked that he seemed to have returned from his travels much altered.

Before his departure, she said, Herr von Walde's face had seemed to her like that of a statue, so serious and immovable; and although she had always known him to be a man of genuine nobility of character, she had been oppressed when

near him by the icy coldness of his manner. Now it seemed to her as if some revivifying hand had passed over his nature; even his step was lighter and more elastic, and she would maintain that, in his pacings to and fro in the court yard, a smile frequently broke over his face, as if he saw, in imagination, some vision that delighted him. While she talked thus, Miss Mertens would smile and declare mysteriously that he must certainly have brought home some very agreeable memories with him, and that she could not refrain from suspecting that matters at Lindhof would soon wear a different aspect. She never noticed the involuntary start of her young friend when she arrived at this conclusion, and Elizabeth was equally unaware of it, for the pang that she felt at such an idea, made her utterly incapable of controlling her external behaviour.

The quiet pacing to and fro beneath the lindens was, however, often interrupted, not only by Herr von Walde's workmen and men upon business, but by the needy and unfortunate, who would come timidly down the steps, ushered by a servant, and stand with bowed heads before the commanding figure that confronted them, until they were encouraged by the gentle tones of his voice to speak, as he kindly bent down to catch their whispered words. They always left him greatly cheered, for those who were not worthy of his assistance did not dare to present themselves before him.

One day Elizabeth set out for Castle Lindhof a half hour earlier than usual. The fact was that her father, in returning at noon from the Lodge, had met Miss Mertens in the forest. She had evidently been weeping, and was unable to speak at the moment; she had merely bowed and passed hurriedly on. This intelligence made Elizabeth very anxious. She would not for the world have postponed her visit to the governess until the end of her lesson,—the lonely woman was certainly in need of love and friendly sympathy.

Just across the large meadow which bordered upon the forest was a charming pavilion. A dark grove surrounded the graceful structure upon three sides, so that its white front stood out in shining contrast with the green shade. It had hitherto been kept closed, although the outside shutters to the windows were thrown back and Elizabeth had seen that the room within was furnished most luxuriously. But to-day, as she issued from the forest, she saw that the doors of the pavilion were wide open. A servant, with a waiter in his hand, stepped out and requested her to enter. As she approached she could see that Fräulein von Walde, the baroness, and Hollfeld were drinking coffee in the pretty room which constituted the whole interior of the building.

"You are a little too early to-day, my child," said Helene, as her young friend appeared upon the threshold. Elizabeth replied that she wished to pay a visit to Miss Mertens before the practising.

"Ah! pray let that go to-day," said Helene, quickly, but evidently confused,

while the baroness looked up from her crotchet-work with a malicious smile. ”Do you know that a large package of new music has just come from Leipzig?” continued Fräulein von Walde; ”I have looked over it slightly, the pieces are beautiful. Perhaps we can find among them just the thing that we want for our concert. Sit down, we will go to the castle together.”

She offered Elizabeth a basket of cake, and put a magnificent pear upon her plate.

At this moment, Herr von Walde’s dog came bounding into the room; instantly both ladies were on the alert and expectant; Helene looked towards the door with a manifest effort to seem quiet and unconstrained, but the baroness threw her work into a basket, examined the coffee-pot to see whether the coffee was still hot, placed a cup near the sugar basin, and drew a chair up to the table. The malicious smile was replaced by an air of grave reserve, and she was apparently resolved to make as dignified and imposing an appearance as possible. At sight of the dog, Hollfeld hastened into the garden, and came back in a few moments with Herr von Walde, who had evidently just returned from a drive, for he wore a gray dust coat and a round felt hat.

”We were afraid, dear Rudolph,” Helene cried out to him as soon as he appeared, while she half arose and held out her hand,—”that we should not see you at all to day.”

”I found more business awaiting me at L—— than I had anticipated,” he replied, seating himself, not upon the chair which had been placed for him, but upon the sofa by the side of his sister, so that when Elizabeth raised her eyes she looked him full in the face, for he sat directly opposite to her. ”Besides,” he continued, ”I have been at home full half an hour, but Reinhard wished to speak with me upon private business which required immediate action, and so I nearly lost the pleasure of taking coffee with you, my dear Helene.”

”That miserable Reinhard!” and Fräulein von Walde pouted a little; ”he might have waited awhile,—the world would still have turned around.”

”Ah! dear child,” sighed the baroness, ”we cannot alter these things. We are condemned all our lives long to be the slaves of our inferiors.”

Herr von Walde quietly turned towards her, and his glance measured her slowly from head to foot.

”Well, why do you look at me so, my dear Rudolph?” she asked, not without a tinge of uneasiness in her tone.

”I looked to see whether you really seemed fitted to play one of those sad parts in Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”

”Always ridicule when I look for sympathy,” rejoined the lady, endeavouring to lend a gentle, melancholy tone to her harsh voice. ”I might have known it, but——” She sighed again. ”We do not all possess your enviable equanimity,

which is never affected by the petty annoyances and necessary evils of this life. We poor women have our miserable nerves, which make us doubly sensitive to everything that jars upon our minds. If you had seen me this morning, in what a wretched condition I was——"

"Indeed!"

"I have been tried inconceivably. Well, Miss Mertens must answer for it."

"Has she injured you?"

"What an expression! My dear Rudolph, how could a person in her situation injure me? She has vexed me,—made me exceedingly angry!"

"I am greatly pleased to see that you do not bend without a struggle to the yoke of bondage."

"I have lately had to endure more than I can tell with that stupid creature," the baroness continued, without heeding her cousin's comment. "My maternal duties are sacred in my eyes, and therefore I have been obliged to superintend my child's instruction. It is, of course, a matter of great moment to me that her youthful mind should be rightly trained. Unfortunately, I have become more and more convinced that Miss Mertens' knowledge is very limited and her views and principles not those which I should wish adopted by a young girl of Bella's rank in life. This morning I heard the silly woman telling the child that nobility of soul was far superior to nobility of birth—as though the one could be separated from the other,—and that she ranked a beggar with a clear conscience above a crowned head whose conscience was not pure; and a quantity more of the same stuff. When I tell you that Bella, the Lord willing, will live at court,—I have all but secured the post of maid of honour at the court of B—— for her,—you will readily conclude that I interrupted such teaching upon the spot. You must admit, my dear Rudolph, that, with such views, Bella would play a poor part at court—nay, even her stay there would be quite impossible."

"Certainly, there is no doubt of that."

"Thank Heaven!" cried the baroness, breathing freely. "I was really in a little doubt as to how you would receive Miss Mertens' dismissal. You know you always valued her far above her deserts. She was so impertinent when I interfered with her lessons that there was nothing for me to do but to send her away."

"I have no right to lay down laws to you with regard to your people," replied Herr von Walde, coldly.

"But I always try to please you as far as I can, my good Rudolph. I cannot tell you how rejoiced I am that I shall see no more of that repulsive English face."

"I am sorry that you will not be able entirely to avoid it, since she will still remain under the same roof,—my secretary Reinhard was betrothed to her about half an hour ago."

The work dropped from the baroness' fingers. This time not only her cheek but also her brow was suffused with crimson.

"Has the man lost his senses?" she cried at last, recovering from her stupefaction.

"I think not, since he has just given such proof of being in full possession of them," said Herr von Walde, with composure.

"Well, I must say that he plays his part of antiquary well. Such a lovely, blooming, young bride!" cried the lady contemptuously, endeavouring to laugh heartily. Hollfeld joined in her laughter, thus giving the first sign of his having heard the conversation. Helene cast a troubled glance at him; but this mirth cut Elizabeth to the soul,—she felt the greatest indignation stirring within her.

"I hope," the baroness began again, "that you will not take it ill of me——"

"What now?"

"That I cannot consent to associate with that person any longer."

"I cannot force you to anything, Amalie, any more than I can forbid my secretary to marry."

"But you can dismiss him if he chooses a wife who makes his residence beneath your roof disagreeable to your nearest relatives."

"That I cannot do either; he has been engaged by me for life, and I have just secured to his future wife a pension in case of his death. Besides, you make a slight mistake, my good cousin, if you suppose that anything in the world could induce me to allow a man to leave me whom I have always found faithful. I am much pleased with Reinhard's choice, and have allotted him the use of the apartments upon the ground-floor of the north wing during his life. His mother-in-law will reside with him."

"Well, I congratulate him upon that valuable acquisition," replied the baroness, and her sharp voice trembled with anger. "I will, however, make one remark: as I cannot bring myself to endure the presence of that person in my apartments for a day longer, she must provide herself with some place where she can stay until her marriage. Probably even you will see, my dear Rudolph, that there is a manifest impropriety in the interesting pair's still living, under present circumstances, beneath the same roof."

"Permit me," said Elizabeth, here turning to Helene, "I am very sure that my parents would extend a warm welcome to Miss Mertens,—we have quite room enough."

"Ah, thank you!—matters could not be better arranged," answered Fräulein von Walde,—extending her hand to her young friend. The baroness shot an angry glance at Elizabeth.

"The affair will thus be settled very satisfactorily," she said, preserving her composure with difficulty. "I will contain myself, and hope in all humility that the

future Frau Reinhard will vouchsafe me a spot where I shall be relieved from the sight of her disagreeable countenance. Apropos, Fräulein Ferber," she continued after awhile, in a careless tone, "I have just remembered that the money for your lessons has been for several days in the hands of my maid; just knock at her door as you go by, and she will give it to you with a receipt, which you will please sign."

"But, Amalie!" exclaimed Helene.

"I will do as you desire, madame," replied Elizabeth, quietly. She had noticed that while the baroness was speaking a lightning flash of rage shot from Herr von Walde's eyes, a thunder-cloud seemed to pass over his countenance, but in a moment these witnesses to his agitation gave place to a look of withering sarcasm.

"If I might offer a little advice, Fräulein," he said, turning to Elizabeth,—"I should counsel you not to venture rashly into the baroness' apartments,—they are uncanny. Evil spirits are seen there in broad daylight, and they have often worked mischief. Do not give yourself the slightest trouble in the matter,—my steward shall attend to it; he is thoroughly trustworthy, and manages such affairs with so much delicacy that he would really shame even a lady."

The baroness hastily folded her work together and arose.

"It would be better for me to pass the rest of the day in my solitary room," and she turned to Helene, and her lips quivered; "there are times when our most harmless words and actions are misunderstood and resented. I pray you, therefore, to excuse me from appearing at tea."

She made a ceremonious courtesy to the brother and sister, took the arm of her son, who looked much confused, and rustled out of the room.

Helene arose with tears in her eyes, and was about to follow her, but her brother took her hand with kindly gravity, and drew her down again upon the Sofia beside him.

"Will you not give me the pleasure of your company while I drink my coffee?" he said gently, and as quietly as if nothing had occurred.

"Oh, yes, if you wish it," she replied hesitatingly and without looking at him; "but I am sorry to tell you that you must hurry a little, for Fräulein Ferber has come to practise with me, and she has already been kept waiting an unconscionable time."

"Well, let us go to the piano immediately,—but upon one condition, Helene."

"And that is?"

"That you allow me to listen."

"No, no, that I cannot permit,—I am not far enough advanced,—your ears could not endure my bungling.

"Poor Emil! He does not dream that he owes the delight of listening to you

to his uncultivated ear!"

Helene blushed. She had hitherto never mentioned Hollfeld's visits to her brother for reasons that may easily be imagined. Besides, she supposed that they would have been a matter of entire indifference to him, and now it appeared that he really attached importance to them. She seemed to herself to be a detected deceiver, and for a few moments she could not speak. Elizabeth suspected what her sensations were; she too grew confused, and felt her face flush painfully. Just at this moment Herr von Walde turned towards her, his keen, searching glance scanned her countenance, and the gloomy wrinkle appeared between his eyebrows.

"Does Fräulein Ferber improvise during these hours for practice as they are called?" he asked his sister, speaking more quickly than was his wont.

"Oh no," she answered, glad to recover her composure,—"had she done so I should not have spoken of bungling. I admitted Emil because I think that where there is a budding taste for music, it should be encouraged."

Herr von Walde smiled slightly, but it was not the smile which had lately possessed such a peculiar charm for Elizabeth. The dark lines in his brow did not disappear, and his look was gloomy as he still observed Elizabeth keenly.

"You are right, Helene," he said at last, not without a tinge of irony. "But what magnetism there must be in these musical practisings that they have worked such miracles! A very short time ago Emil would much rather have listened to his Diana's baying, than to Beethoven's sonatas."

Helene was silent, and cast down her eyes.

"But we have forgotten Miss Mertens," said her brother suddenly, in a different tone. "Would it not be advisable for Fräulein Ferber to settle that matter as soon as possible?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Helene, quickly, seizing upon any pretext to divert the conversation from its present painful direction. "We had better omit the lesson for to-day,—while you, dear child," and she turned to Elizabeth, "take the necessary steps,—pray go now, then, to your parents, and ask them in my name to offer an asylum to the poor lady."

Elizabeth arose, and Helene also stood up. When her brother saw that she wished to leave the pavilion, he put his arm about her little form, raised her from the ground like a feather, and carried her to the wheeled chair that stood outside the door. After he had arranged the cushions at her back, and covered her little feet carefully with a shawl, he raised his hat to Elizabeth, who saw that the wrinkle between his eyebrows was not yet gone, and pushed the chair along the nearest path leading to the castle.

"She quite fills his heart," thought Elizabeth, as she ascended the mountain, "and Miss Mertens must be wrong if she imagines that he will ever give

to another a higher, or even a like place in his affections. He is jealous of his cousin, and rightly so. How can it be—" and here she stood still for a minute as two masculine figures arose to her mind's eye,—"that such a man as Hollfeld can have any charms for Helene by the side of Herr von Walde? The one retreats behind an appearance of wise silence because he has nothing to say, while the other, through whose noble external repose breaks such fire, possesses a world of power trained and restrained by force of character. Hence his seeming great reserve, which commonplace people cannot possibly understand."

She suddenly remembered the look that Herr von Walde had fixed upon her. Did he think her an accomplice,—his sister's confidante,—and was he vexed with her when, in fact, she had, at this present moment, no more earnest desire than that Herr von Hollfeld's passion for music might subside as quickly as it had been aroused? Of course, she could not say so to any one,—least of all to Herr von Walde,—and, therefore, she must silently pay the penalty for those painful blushes that had suffused her cheeks just at the wrong moment, and when there was no earthly reason for them.

CHAPTER XII.

Her father and mother instantly acceded to Elizabeth's request; and she hastened back to the castle to carry to Miss Mertens their cordial invitation. The governess, when Elizabeth entered her room, was leaning with folded hands against the wall. At her feet stood a trunk half packed, closets and wardrobes were wide open, and the chairs were heaped with books, dresses, and linen. The young girl hastened to her friend, threw her arms around her, and looked into her face, which, while it bore traces of tears, was beaming with happiness.

"I am so astounded by the sudden change in my lot," said Miss Mertens, after Elizabeth had offered her congratulations, "that I am obliged to close my eyes how and then and collect my senses. Only this morning everything seemed so dark before me,—I actually could not tell where to go,—the ground seemed slipping from under my feet. And just in the midst of my anxiety a home is suddenly provided for me. A man whom I esteem thoroughly, but whose regard for the poor governess I had never suspected, will be forever faithful to me, and I can fulfill the warmest desire of my heart and have my dear good mother to live with me! What will she say when she receives the news,—she, who has suffered

so much in thinking that I must battle with the storms of life alone, and that she could not recall me to her loving heart!"

She told Elizabeth that in a few weeks Reinhard would go to England for her mother. His employer had himself proposed the journey, and insisted upon defraying all the expenses. Whenever Miss Mertens mentioned Herr von Walde the tears filled her eyes,—she declared that all the wrong done her by the baroness was more than overbalanced by his kindness and generosity; he could not endure to have any one beneath his roof suffer injustice. Elizabeth completed the measure of her happiness by the invitation which she brought. Miss Mertens had intended to go to the little village inn until she could find lodgings.

"But now we will go to your house together as soon as possible," she said, her face beaming with joy. "The baroness, a short time ago, sent me my salary, requesting that I would not again enter her presence, and Bella passed through my room without even looking at me,—that grieves me, grieves me very deeply, for I have cherished her like the apple of my eye. Her health used to be very delicate, and while her mother has been absent, attending the court balls, I have sat by her bedside and watched her feverish slumbers night after night. Now it is all forgotten,—but I only meant to let you know that I need not take leave of either of them."

While Miss Mertens went to bid good-by to Fräulein von Walde and a few others in the house who were fond of her, Elizabeth packed up a travelling bag for her. The new inmate of Gnadeck only took a few necessary articles with her; the rest of her possessions were sent to the future apartments of the betrothed pair.

It was an amusement for Elizabeth to arrange Miss Mertens' books in a bookcase in one of these apartments. Herr von Walde had allowed all the furniture in the rooms to remain for the use of their new inhabitants. Many of these books were most interesting; she not only glanced at their title pages, but, as she stood there, ran over several pages. Miss Mertens and her affairs were all forgotten for the moment as if they had never existed. While she was buried in Goethe's appearance in the crowd at the coronation of Joseph II., a fresh rose fell over her shoulder upon the pages of the book Elizabeth started, but instantly smiled, shook off the rose, and went on reading. Miss Mertens, who was doubtless standing behind her, should not exult in any effect of her teasing. But she suddenly uttered a low cry,—a white, well-formed man's hand appeared and was gently laid upon hers. She turned round,—not Miss Mertens, but Hollfeld, was standing behind her and spreading out his arms with a smile, as if to seize the startled girl.

Instantly her alarm was converted into indignation; but before she could breathe a word, a harsh commanding voice cried out: "Emil, everybody is looking

for you. Your superintendent from Odenberg is here to see you upon business of importance. Pray go to him instantly!"

Beside Elizabeth was an open window. Outside of it stood Herr von Walde, with his arms leaning upon the broad sill looking in. It was his voice which banished Hollfeld on the instant in great embarrassment. What an angry expression there was upon the uncovered forehead, in the compressed lips, and in the eyes that flashed upon Hollfeld's retreating figure as it vanished through the opposite door!

At last his glance returned to Elizabeth, who had hitherto stood still, but who now, recovering from her two-fold fright, was about to retreat into the recesses of the apartment.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, brusquely; his voice had not lost its former harsh tone. Elizabeth, deeply wounded by the manner and style of his address, was about to return a defiant answer, when she suddenly recollected that she was in his house, and therefore she simply answered:

"I am arranging Miss Mertens' books."

"There was another answer upon your lips,—I saw it, and I wish to know what it was."

"Well, then,—I was about to say that I do not reply to questions asked in such a manner."

"And why did you suppress this reproof?"

"Because it occurred to me that you have the right to command here."

"I am glad,—it is well that you think thus,—for I should like just at this moment to exercise this obvious right of mine: tread upon that rose which lies languishing there at your feet."

"That I shall not do,—it has done no wrong." She picked up the rose, a beautiful half-open centifolia, and laid it upon the window-sill. Herr von Walde took the flower, and without more ado tossed it away over the lawn.

"There let it die a poetic death," he said with a sneer, "let the grasses bend above it, and the evening dews shed sympathetic tears over the poor victim."

The rigid expression had passed away from his features, but there was still the same inquisitorial look in his eyes, and his voice was not much gentler, as he asked:

"What were you reading when it was my misfortune to interrupt you?"

"Goethe's 'Wahrheit und Dichtung.'"

"Do you know the book?"

"Only selections from it."

"Well, how do you like the touching story of Gretchen?"

"I do not know it."

"You have it open in your hands."

”No, I was reading the coronation of Joseph II., at Frankfort.”

”Let me see it.”

She handed him the open book.

”It is even so! But look how ugly that is! Just where Goethe describes the emperor ascending the throne, there is an ugly green spot. Doubtless you pressed the green rose leaves too tenderly upon the leaf of the book; the Emperor, Goethe, and Miss Mertens will hardly forgive you for it.”

”That spot is old—I did not touch the rose.”

”But you smiled at sight of it.”

”Because I thought it came from Miss Mertens.”

”Ah, there is something touching in this friendship! It must have been a great disappointment when, instead of your friend, you saw my cousin’s handsome face behind you.”

”Yes.”

”’Yes.’ How that sounds! I like laconic brevity, but it must not be ambiguous. What does that ’yes’ mean? It sounds neither sweet nor bitter; and then your face!—why is that defiant frown there between your eyebrows?”

”Because I think that there are limits to every right.”

”I did not know that I was making use of my right just at present.”

”But you will know it if you will ask yourself whether you would address me thus harshly in my father’s house.”

Herr von Walde grew pale. He compressed his lips, and retreated a few paces. Elizabeth took the book which he had laid upon the window-sill, and went to the bookcase to close it.

”Under the same circumstances, I should have spoken exactly so in your father’s house,” he said, after awhile, somewhat more gently, as he again approached the window. ”You make me impatient. Why do you answer so ambiguously? How could I tell from that simple syllable whether the disappointment of which you spoke were a disagreeable or a pleasant one? Well?”

He leaned far across the window-sill, and looked full into her face, as though to read the answer upon her lips; but she turned away with irritation. Hateful thought! How could any one suppose that Hollfeld could ever be agreeable to her? Did not her face, her whole bearing towards the man, show how thoroughly disagreeable she thought him?

At this moment Miss Mertens entered the room to seek Elizabeth. She had completed all her preparations, and was quite ready to leave the house. With a sigh of relief, Elizabeth hastened to her, while Herr von Walde left the window and paced to and fro several times on the lawn. When he again approached, Miss Mertens went towards him, and courtesied profoundly. She told him that she had in vain endeavoured to obtain access to him several times that day, and that she

rejoiced to have an opportunity to thank him for his kindness and thoughtfulness.

He made a deprecating gesture, and offered his congratulations upon her betrothal. He spoke very calmly. Again his whole presence breathed an atmosphere of dignity and reserve, so that Elizabeth could not understand how she had ever found the courage to remind this man of the laws of common politeness. The eyes that had flashed so passionately now looked serenely into Miss Mertens' face. The deep, gentle tones of his voice obliterated all remembrance of the cutting irony that had rendered it so sharp a few moments before, when it had given to his words such an accent of irritation, and had sounded as if designed only to wound and avenge.

That Herr von Walde was filled with bitterness towards his cousin, Elizabeth had already noticed once before that day. But why should she be made to suffer whenever he encountered him? Was not Hollfeld's continual intrusiveness sufficient annoyance to her? Why should she be made the victim of an irritation for which Helene alone was to blame? A sharp pang shot through her as she remembered how tenderly and forgivingly Herr von Walde had taken his sister in his arms, never casting a single look of reproach upon her when Hollfeld's visits had been alluded to. She, the poor piano-player, who was of necessity forced to endure Hollfeld's presence, must be the scapegoat. Or had he perhaps seen how Hollfeld had thrown the rose upon her book, and was his aristocratic pride wounded that his cousin should pay such homage to an untitled maiden? This thought flashed upon Elizabeth as an explanation of everything. Yes, thus only could his conduct be explained. She was to crush the poor flower, that all proof might be destroyed that Herr von Hollfeld had for one moment forgotten his aristocratic descent. That was the reason why he had suddenly spoken in such a harsh tone of command,—a tone which only those heard from him who had committed some fault, and why she was called upon to explain the impression which Hollfeld's sudden appearance had made upon her. At this moment she would have liked to confront him, and tell him frankly how odious his high-born cousin was to her,—that so far from feeling honoured by his attentions, she looked upon them as nothing less than insults. But it was too late. Herr von Walde was discussing Reinhard's journey to England with Miss Mertens so calmly and kindly that it would have been ridiculous, in the midst of such a discussion, suddenly to resume the thread of the previous stormy conversation. Besides, he did not once look at her again, although she stood tolerably near to Miss Mertens.

"I am really half persuaded to go with him," he said in conclusion to the governess. "Reinhard shall return with your mother, for I intend to give him the entire charge of Lindhof here, and I will pass the winter in London, and go to Scotland in the spring."

"And not return for years?" Miss Mertens interrupted him, anxiously. "Has

Thuringia, then, no attraction for you?"

"Oh, yes; but I suffer here, and you know that prompt and active treatment will often cure where cautious, cowardly delay might bring danger. I hope much from the air of Scotland."

The last words were spoken in a tone meant to be gay, but the lines between his brows were stronger than ever, and caused Elizabeth to doubt much whether his cheerfulness were genuine.

He shook hands with Miss Mertens, and walked slowly away, soon disappearing behind a clump of trees.

"There it is," said the governess, sadly; "instead of bringing a lovely young wife home to Lindhof, as I hoped he would, he is going away again, and perhaps will not return for years. He is restless, and no wonder, when one thinks of the comfortless home that he has. Baroness Lessen he cannot endure, and yet he is forced to see her daily at his fireside, for his sister, whom he loves so tenderly, has declared to him, that in the society of this woman she is able to forget the bitter trials of her life. And his cousin, too, is an unbidden guest. Herr von Walde's nature is too frank and open to allow him to conceal his dislikes; but these people are made of iron and steel,—the indifference of the master of the house never affects them in the least; they have neither eyes nor ears when he hints at their leaving. And as for Herr von Hollfeld, he seems to me a very insignificant creature, and very repulsive. I cannot conceive how he could have won Fräulein von Walde's heart."

"Do you know that too?" asked Elizabeth.

"Ah, child, that has been a secret known to everybody for a long time. She loves him as truly and deeply as only a woman can love. But this unfortunate attachment, on which she now lives and breathes as in sunlight, will one of these days cast the darkest shadow that has yet fallen upon her sorrowful existence. All this Herr von Walde comprehends; but he cannot open the eyes of his sister without inflicting a mortal wound, and so he sacrifices everything to his fraternal tenderness, and leaves the home where he is made so unhappy."

During this conversation, Miss Mertens and Elizabeth had left the castle, and were now ascending the mountain path. Reinhard, who had been to the village, soon joined them. Miss Mertens told him of her interview with Herr von Walde, and all that he had said about going to England.

"He has not yet mentioned it to me," said Reinhard; "but he often looks as if he longed to leave Lindhof. Such a household! The master of the house is considered by his relatives in the light of a fifth wheel to a coach,—he maintains them, and they show their gratitude by estranging his sister's heart from him. Good Heavens! if I could only take his place for two days, I would soon exorcise the evil spirit and not a trace of it should ever appear again. However, I hope

that Herr von Hollfeld will at least soon return to Odenberg for a few days. His superintendent has just arrived with the intelligence that the housekeeper has left,—no one stays there long—my gentleman is too stingy. And several other matters are in disorder there."

When they reached Castle Gnadeck, the guest was most cordially welcomed by the Ferbers. How comfortable and homelike did Miss Mertens' room seem to its new inmate! It shone with neatness; the counterpane and table-covers were spotless, a beautiful Schwarzwald clock was ticking softly just above the prettily arrayed writing-table, and a vase of roses and mignonette upon the window-sill filled the air with fragrance. Through the open door could be seen the dwelling-room of the family. There the table was already laid, and Elizabeth lighted the spirit-lamp beneath the tea-kettle, while Miss Mertens was arranging in drawers and wardrobe the few articles that she had brought with her.

In the mean while the forester, with his long pipe and Hector, had arrived, and Reinhard also stayed, so that a merry circle was soon assembled. The forester was in a particularly happy humour. Elizabeth sat beside him, and did her best to join in his gaiety; but it had never seemed so difficult to her before, and he, who had an acute perception of the most delicate modulations of her voice, soon perceived it.

"Holla, Gold Elsie, what is the matter with you?" he cried, suddenly. "All is not right here." He took her by the chin and looked into her eyes. "I see,—there is a veil over your eyes, and over your heart, too! Zounds! what a sudden change! And what does this sad nun's face mean?"

Elizabeth blushed deeply beneath his scrutinizing gaze. She did all that she could to parry his questions by jest and laughter, but she did not succeed very well, and at last there was nothing for her but to seat herself at the piano, where he never teased nor laughed at her.

How much good it did her heavy heart to give it voice in full rolling chords, as the sound floated sadly out into the gathering twilight,—telling of the gloom that had fallen upon her at the thought of Herr von Walde's again leaving Thuringia! Where now were all her dreamings and all her endeavours to read the meaning of that mysterious warning that had of late breathed through her melodies? It rung out clearly now in mighty tones, at the sound of which all the former gentle breathings of her inward emotions died away in an inaudible whisper. A fairy land, full of golden promise, was revealed before her; her enchanted eyes gazed rapturously upon the fair landscape,—but never, never might she tread that magic ground, for nothing could bridge the abyss at her feet. The veil beneath which her heart had hitherto lain in blissful self-ignorance was rent, and with joy and pain unspeakable she knew—that she loved.

She did not know how long she had been playing. But she was suddenly

aroused from her utter forgetfulness of the world without by a bright gleam of light falling directly on the pale bust of Beethoven. Her mother had just lighted the large lamp, and Elizabeth saw her uncle sitting near her on the broad window-seat. He must have entered noiselessly. As her hands dropped from the keys, he gently smoothed her hair with his hand.

"Do you know, child," he said, after the last faint sound had died away, and his voice trembled with emotion, "if I had not already seen that something was the matter, I should soon have learned it from your playing,—it was tears, nothing but tears!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Miss Mertens' presence lent an additional charm to the circle at Gnadeck. For the first time for long, dreary years the governess found herself an object of interest and affection, and at home. Her gentle nature, so long chilled and repressed, now showed itself, and, combined with her varied culture, made her a most attractive addition to the household. She longed to be of use whenever she could, and took great pains with little Ernst, who had a lesson every day in French and English; while Elizabeth, too, gathered all the advantage that she could from her visitor, and studied diligently, knowing that it was the best resource to ward off sad reveries.

In the mean while, the practisings at Castle Lindhof went on as before. Hollfeld, who had only been absent at Odenberg for one day, was still an enthusiastic auditor, trying by every means in his power to obtain a private interview with Elizabeth. Once or twice he had cunningly contrived that, in the intervals of rest, Helene should leave the room to find something that he wanted, but he gained nothing by these manoeuvres, for Elizabeth always left the room at the same time to procure a glass of water. His attempts to meet her upon her return to her home she frustrated also, for Miss Mertens and little Ernst were always awaiting her at the borders of the park. This perpetual frustration of his endeavours at last made him impatient and less cautious. He no longer held his hand before his face. His looks were entirely unguarded, and it was only owing to her near-sightedness that Helene was spared a most painful discovery. Thus Elizabeth's visits to the castle grew more and more annoying, and she was thankful that the fête day was at last close at hand, since with that celebration the daily

practisings would, at all events, be discontinued.

The day before Herr von Walde's birthday, Reinhard announced at Gnadeck that a guest had already arrived at Castle Lindhof.

"That scatter-brain completes our misery," he said, with vexation.

"Who is she?" said Miss Mertens and Frau Ferber, laughing at the same moment.

"Oh, she is said to be a friend of Fräulein von Walde,—a lady from court at L——. She is to assist in the ordering of the fête. Heaven help us all, for she turns everything upside down."

"Ah, it must be Fräulein von Quittelsdorf," cried Miss Mertens, still laughing. "Yes, indeed, there is quicksilver in her veins. She is terribly frivolous, but she is not really bad at heart."

Later in the afternoon Reinhard accompanied Elizabeth to Lindhof. As she approached the castle, Herr von Walde's horse was led up to the great entrance on the southern front of it. He himself immediately issued from the glass door, riding-whip in hand, and descended the steps. Elizabeth had not seen him since the afternoon when he had treated her with such harsh want of consideration. She thought he looked very pale and stern.

Just as he was mounting, a young lady, dressed in white, came out upon the steps. She was extremely pretty, and with much grace she hastened down to pat the horse upon the neck and give him a lump of sugar.

Fräulein von Walde, who also appeared leaning upon Hollfeld's arm, stood at the top of the steps, and kissed her hand in token of farewell to her brother.

"Is not that young lady Fräulein von Quittelsdorf?" asked Elizabeth.

Reinhard assented, with a wry face.

"She is certainly very pretty," said the young girl. "Herr von Walde seems much interested," she added, in a lower tone, as the rider leaned from his saddle, and appeared to be listening intently to what the young lady was saying.

"Oh, he does not wish to be rude, and therefore gives her a moment's attention. She would talk the moon out of the sky, and, I verily believe, would seize and hang upon the horse's bridle if she saw any danger of his leaving before she had finished what she had to say."

In the mean time they had reached the vestibule. Here Elizabeth took leave of Reinhard, and betook herself to the music-room, where she found Fräulein von Walde and Hollfeld. The former retired for a moment to her dressing-room, to arrange her curls, that were somewhat out of order, and Hollfeld took advantage of this moment to approach Elizabeth, who had retired to the recess of a window, and was turning over the leaves of a music-book.

"We were provokingly disturbed the other day," he whispered.

"We?" she asked, with emphasis, retreating a step or two. "I, indeed, had

reason to complain of being disturbed. I was much provoked, I assure you, by the interruption of my reading."

"Oh, every inch a queen!" he cried jestingly, but in a low tone of voice. "I certainly did not intend to offend you,—on the contrary, do you not know what that rose meant?"

"It would most certainly say that it would a thousand times rather be left to perish upon its stalk than be plucked for such idle purposes."

"Cruel girl! You are hard as marble. Can you not guess, then, what lures me hither daily?"

"Admiration, doubtless, for our great composers."

"You are wrong."

"Then the hope of improving your musical taste."

"Oh, no! That would not bring me a step hither. For me, music is only a bridge——"

"From which you might easily fall into cold water."

"And would you allow me to drown?"

"Most certainly—yes. I am not ambitious of a medal from the Humane Society," replied Elizabeth, dryly.

Fräulein von Walde returned. She seemed surprised to find the pair conversing, for until this moment there had never been a word exchanged between them. She looked keenly at Hollfeld, who could not control his feeling of annoyance, and then seating herself at the piano, began to prelude, while Elizabeth arranged the notes. Hollfeld took his usual place, and leaned his head upon his hand with a melancholy air. But never had his gaze rested upon Elizabeth with such glowing and passionate intentness. She repented having entered into conversation with him. Her endeavour to repulse him by coldness and severity appeared to have had quite a contrary effect. Repugnance and fear overcame her at sight of him, and, notwithstanding the thought of her uncle's probable smile of triumph, the determination rather to resign the practisings entirely than to subject herself any longer to these insolent glances, gained ground in her mind.

The hour was nearly ended, when Fräulein von Quittelsdorf entered in haste. In her arms she carried a little creature in a long, white, infant's cloak, pressing its head down upon her shoulder with one hand.

"Frau Oberhofmeisterin von Falkenberg sends her compliments," she said with formality,—"regrets excessively that a cold will prevent her presence tomorrow, but she takes the liberty of sending her lovely, blooming grandchild——"

Here the creature in her arms made desperate exertions, and, with a loud howl, jumped down upon the ground, and ran under a chair, dragging the long robe after it.

"Ah, Cornelie, you are too childish," cried Fräulein von Walde, with a laugh

of amusement and vexation, as Ali's distressed face, surrounded by a baby's cap, peeped out from beneath the chair. "If our good Falkenberg could hear of this, you would play no more tricks at the court of L——."

Bella, who had also just entered, shrieked with laughter, only endeavouring to control herself when her mother, amazed at the noise, appeared and represented to her how unbecoming such loud merriment was. The baroness, smiling, shook a threatening forefinger at Fräulein von Quittelsdorf when Helene told her what had happened, and then approached Elizabeth.

"Perhaps Fräulein von Walde has not told you," she said rather graciously, "that all invited to the fête to-morrow will assemble at four o'clock in the large saloon. Pray be punctual. The concert will not be over until near six. I tell you this that your parents may not expect you at home before that time."

At these words, Helene looked down upon the keys of the piano in great confusion, while Fräulein von Quittelsdorf took her stand beside the baroness, and stared Elizabeth impertinently in the face. Beautiful as were the black eyes that were fastened upon her, Elizabeth was annoyed by their steady stare. She bowed to the baroness, assuring her that she would be punctual, and then looked full and gravely at the fair impertinent. The effect was instantaneous. Fräulein von Quittelsdorf looked away, and, in some confusion, turned upon her heel like a spoiled child. Just then she discovered Herr von Hollfeld in the recess of the window.

"How, Hollfeld," she cried, "are you here, or is it your spirit? What are you doing here?"

"I am listening, as you see."

"You are listening? Ha, ha, ha! And of coarse enjoying such indigestible food as Mozart and Beethoven! Don't you remember telling me, four weeks ago, at the last court concert, that you always suffered from dyspepsia after listening to classical music?"

She laughed boisterously.

"Ah, pray let nonsense go now, dearest Cornelie," said the baroness, "and aid me in this programme for the fête with your inventive genius. And you, dear Emil, would do me a great favour if you would come too. You know that I am obliged now to enforce my authority by the presence of a masculine supporter."

Hollfeld arose with visible reluctance.

"Oh, take me too, pray! Would you be so cruel as to leave me here alone until tea-time?" cried Helene, reproachfully, as she stood up. She looked displeased, and it seemed to Elizabeth that she noticed, for the first time, an envious expression in the lovely blue eyes as they looked at the tripping feet of Cornelie, who, without another word, had taken Hollfeld's arm, and was leaving the room. Elizabeth closed the piano, and took a hasty leave.

In all the passages of the castle through which she went there was hurry and bustle. The servants were carrying baskets of china, glass, and silver to the rooms adjoining the grand saloon. From the subterranean regions of the kitchens there streamed a fragrant odour, and through the open door of one of the servants' rooms were seen heaps of green garlands and wreaths.

And he in whose honour all were exerting themselves to-day was riding alone in the forest, gloomily devising ways and means for fleeing from the joyless, unquiet life in his home.

Elizabeth went down to the village to execute a commission for her father. A few days before, a violent storm in the night had so shaken the ruinous jutty in the corner of the garden that there was danger that the slightest jar might send it toppling down upon the garden, burying beneath its fragments the beds and paths which had just been so laboriously arranged. Two Lindhof masons had promised to take down the ruin the following Monday, but as the forester had declared that he knew from experience that small reliance was to be placed upon their promises, Elizabeth was to remind them of their engagement, and impress upon them the urgent necessity for keeping it.

The result of her expedition was favourable. One of the workmen swore by all that was Holy that he would be upon the spot, and she was now wandering through the quiet, lonely path towards her home. About midway upon the path leading from the village to the forest Lodge, a much narrower path branched off, and ascended the mountain to Castle Gnadeck. It was seldom used, and might have escaped stranger eyes, for in some places it was overgrown with low bushes, and fallen leaves lay so thick among the gnarled roots of the trees that it seemed never to have been trodden by the foot of man. Elizabeth loved the path, and now chose it for her return home.

She had never encountered a human being here, but to-day she had not penetrated far into the green twilight before she observed, about twenty paces in front of her, towards the right, just by the trunk of an enormous beech tree, something like an arm slowly projected and then dropped. She could distinctly perceive this movement, as just at that spot the trees separated, and encircled a light spot of grass which shone like an oasis in the dark forest. Elizabeth advanced noiselessly and slowly, but as she arrived opposite to the beech tree she suddenly stood still in terror.

A man was leaning against the tree. His back was turned towards her; his head was uncovered save by masses of coarse, uncombed hair. For one moment he stood motionless, apparently listening, then advanced a step, raised his right arm, and pointed the barrel of a pistol towards the light spot in the forest, after awhile letting his arm fall again by his side.

"He is practising at a mark," thought Elizabeth, but she only thought so

to compose herself, for an indescribable terror had at once taken possession of her; she did not know whether to run backward or forward in order to escape observation, and so she stood still, rooted to the spot.

Suddenly the noise of a horse's hoofs struck upon her ear. The man started and stood erect as though electrified. A few moments afterwards a horseman appeared where the forest was more open. The horse walked slowly over the soft turf; its rider, lost in thought, had dropped the bridle upon its neck. The man with the pistol rapidly advanced a couple of paces; raised his arm in the direction of the horseman, and at the same moment turned his head so that Elizabeth instantly recognized the former superintendent, Linke, his features deadly pale and distorted with rage and hate, while the horseman, who was slowly coming within range of the deadly weapon, was Herr von Walde. An instantaneous transformation took place in Elizabeth. The girlish terror that had caused her to tremble at sight of the villain, gave place to a wondrous courage and an incomprehensible calmness and self-control at the thought that she was destined to come to the rescue here. She glided noiselessly through the trees and stood suddenly, as if she had risen from the earth, beside Linke, who, his eyes riveted upon his victim, had no suspicion of her approach. With all the strength of which she was mistress she seized his arm and threw it up. The pistol was discharged with a loud report, and the ball whistled through the air and lodged in the trunk of a tree; as the startled wretch fell upon the ground, a woman's loud scream for help rang through the forest. The assassin tottered to his feet and plunged into the thicket. In the mean time the horse had reared and plunged with fright, but, speedily controlled by its rider, came galloping across the clearing to the spot where Elizabeth was leaning against a beech tree, pale as death. The danger was past, and her feminine nature was reasserting itself. She trembled in every limb, but a happy smile illuminated her countenance when she saw Herr von Walde coming towards her safe and unharmed.

At sight of her he leaped from his horse; but she, who had just manifested such extraordinary self-possession, screamed with fright and turned suddenly as she felt two hands laid upon her shoulders from behind,—Miss Mertens' agitated face was close to her own.

"Good God! Elizabeth," cried the governess, breathlessly, "what have you done! he might have killed you!"

Herr von Walde pushed through the underbrush that separated them from him.

"Are you wounded?" he asked Elizabeth, hurriedly and earnestly.

She shook her head. Without another word he raised her from the ground and carried her to the fallen trunk of a tree, where he gently placed her. Miss Mertens sat down beside her and leaned the girl's head upon her shoulder.

”Now pray tell me what has happened,” said Herr von Walde to the governess.

”No, no,” cried Elizabeth in terror; ”not here, let us go,—the murderer has escaped,—perhaps he is lurking among the bushes, and may yet accomplish his design.”

”Linke was about to murder you, Herr von Walde,” said Miss Mertens, in a trembling voice.

”Miserable wretch! that shot then was for me,” he calmly observed. He turned and went into the thicket where Linke had disappeared. Elizabeth almost lost her self control, and was on the point of following him when he returned.

”Reassure yourself,” he said to her; ”there are no traces of him to be seen; he will not shoot again to-day. Come, I beg you, Miss Mertens, tell me all about it.”

It appeared that knowing that Elizabeth was going to the village, the governess had gone to meet her in the narrow forest path. As she was slowly descending the mountain she saw all that Elizabeth had seen. The villain's intentions were plain, but she had been so paralyzed by fright that she had not been able to move nor cry out. She stood fastened to the spot with deadly terror, when suddenly Elizabeth, whom she had not seen, stood behind the assassin. In her horror at her friend's danger, the cry for help escaped her which had been heard simultaneously with the report of the pistol. She related all this hurriedly, and in conclusion added: ”Where did you get the courage, Elizabeth, to seize the man? I shudder at the mere thought of touching him, and should have screamed loudly instead.”

”If I had screamed,” replied Elizabeth, simply, ”Linke might have accomplished his purpose, in his involuntary start of alarm.”

Herr von Walde listened quietly but intently to Miss Mertens' account. Only when she described how Elizabeth had seized the murderer's arm, did his face lose colour for an instant, as he riveted a keen, anxious glance upon the girl, to assure himself that she had actually escaped the danger unhurt. He leaned over her, took her right hand and pressed it to his lips, and Elizabeth plainly perceived that his hand trembled.

Miss Mertens, who observed how this expression of gratitude confused Elizabeth and called up a burning blush in her cheeks, left her seat, and picking up the pistol Linke had thrown from him in his flight, handed it to Herr von Walde.

”Horrible!” he murmured. ”The wretch would have murdered me with one of my own weapons.”

Elizabeth now arose, and assured Miss Mertens that all traces of her fright had vanished, and that she was quite able to resume her walk towards Gnadeck.

They would both have taken leave of Herr von Walde, but he tied his horse to the terrible beech tree, and said, lightly:

"We know well that Linke's nature is most revengeful; he may perhaps hate her to whom I owe my life even more than he hates me. I cannot permit you to proceed without a protector."

They ascended the mountain. Miss Mertens hastened on, that she might incite Herr von Walde to greater speed, in order to take steps for the apprehension of the criminal as quickly as possible; but her exertions were all in vain. He walked slowly by the side of Elizabeth, who, after a few moments of conflict with herself, begged him, in a gentle, timid tone, not to go back alone to his horse, but to send for him from Castle Lindhof.

He smiled. "Belisarius is wild and obstinate; you know him already," he said. "He obeys no one but myself, and would never allow any one but his master to take him home. Besides, I assure you, that cowardly wretch will attempt nothing further to-day. And if he should, I bear a charmed life. Has not my happy star risen to-day in my heavens?"

He stood still. "What do you think," he asked, suddenly, in a low tone, and his eyes flashed as he looked at her, "shall I listen to the delicious hope that it may shine upon me for the rest of my life?"

"If it is to tempt you to run repeated risks, it were certainly better not to place such unconditional faith in your star."

"And yet I run the greatest risk of all in trusting such a hope," he murmured, half to himself, as his face darkened.

"I do not understand you," said Elizabeth, surprised.

"It is quite natural that you should not," he replied, bitterly. "Your wishes and hopes lie in quite another direction. Notwithstanding all our stern self-discipline, we are sometimes overmastered by a beautiful dream. No, no, say nothing more! I am punished already, for I am awaking."

He quickened his pace, and walked by Miss Mertens' side, while Elizabeth followed more slowly, lost in wonder at the harsh tone which he had suddenly assumed, and which so wounded her. He spoke not another word; and when at last the walls of the old castle appeared through the trees, he took his leave, coldly and shortly, and descended the mountain.

Miss Mertens looked after him in surprise. "Incomprehensible man!" she said at last, and shook her head. "Even though he attaches but little value to his life, as would seem to be the case, surely a word or two of gratitude at parting from you would not be superfluous, when he knows that you have risked your life for his sake."

"I see no necessity for anything of the kind," rejoined Elizabeth. "You attach altogether too much importance to what I have done. I simply fulfilled my duty

to my neighbour; and would," she added, with a strange defiance in her tone and manner, "have done the same if the case had been reversed, and Linke's had been the threatened life. I hope sincerely that Herr von Walde understands this, for to his haughty nature the feeling of obligation to another must be intensely painful, and I would not for the world be that other."

At this moment anxiety and anger were striving within her for the mastery. In thought she followed Herr von Walde, and shuddered with horror as she remembered that perhaps he was just passing some spot where the assassin was lying in wait for him; then she reminded herself, as she quickened her steps, of what utter folly it was to waste so much thought and feeling upon a man who persistently turned the roughest side of his nature towards her. Even in intercourse with the baroness, who was so utterly distasteful to him, he preserved his repose of manner, never for one moment forgetting the laws of common courtesy, although he invariably maintained his convictions with the greatest decision. He had never been seen by those about him except when surrounded by an atmosphere of the serenest dignity. It was only when talking with her that he did not appear to consider it worth his while to control himself. How violent and bitter he could be then! How his eyes flashed as he waited impatiently for her replies, when they were not prompt and decided! And he required besides that she should understand him almost before he spoke, and yet was often utterly incomprehensible even when he did speak. Perhaps every one else was cleverer than she, and could more easily comprehend his manner of speaking, which was such a riddle to her. Was it unwise to determine to avoid all intercourse with him for the future? Certainly not. Well, fortunately, his departure was at hand. Fortunately? The structure of self-deception, which her pride and defiance had erected, crumbled to ruins at this thought; yes, it so utterly vanished, that, to Miss Mertens' surprise, she turned and walked quickly down the path that led to Castle Lindhof. She must satisfy herself that he reached his home in safety. Miss Mertens followed her to a grove whence they could see the door where he usually dismounted, and they were greatly relieved when he shortly emerged from the forest.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the evening the Ferber family were sitting in the shade of the lindens at the

spring. Frau Ferber and Miss Mertens were busied in making a rug which was to lie upon the floor under the piano in winter time.

Frau Ferber had lost for awhile that dignified composure that so well became her still beautiful face. She could not forget the afternoon's occurrence; for, although she saw her child before her safe and sound, she had been very much agitated by Miss Mertens' account. She looked frequently at Elizabeth, fearing, as she remarked her slightest change of colour, that some illness would ensue from the excitement that she had passed through. The father's views were different. "That's my brave daughter!" he said with sparkling eyes, "determine coolly and execute quickly,—thus I would have you do."

To Frau Ferber, her husband had always seemed the ideal of what a man should be. Even now, after so many years of married life, she followed blindly where he led; and in her estimation his opinions admitted of no question. But to-day, as she listened to his paternal praises, a sigh escaped her as she remarked that a mother loved her children infinitely more than a father possibly could.

"Certainly not more, only differently," was Ferber's quiet rejoinder. "It is because I love them that I educate them to be full-grown, responsible beings, capable of thinking and acting courageously and independently, that they may never belong to the miserable class whom want of all force of character condemns to constant suffering."

Elizabeth had also brought her work-basket into the garden, but little Ernst looked greatly disappointed as he saw her take out her sewing.

"Very well, then, Elsie," he said petulantly. "Herr von Walde may ask me a dozen times if I love you,—I shall not say yes again. You never play with me any more; and, I suppose, you think you are as big a girl as Miss Mertens! But you needn't think that,—you won't be for a long while yet."

They all laughed at this odd confounding of age with size. But Elizabeth rose immediately to amuse the little boy, tucked up her long dress, and drew lots which should chase and which run from the other; and then they were both off like a flash, up and down the rampart, hither and thither through the garden.

In the mean time there was a ring at the gate in the wall. Herr Ferber opened it, and Dr. Fels, Reinhard, and the forester appeared upon the threshold. Elizabeth was just running along the principal walk, and did not immediately see the visitors.

"Well, I must say," laughed Dr. Fels, standing still, "this is a wonderful transformation. In the afternoon Valkyria, and in the evening a butterfly!"

But the forester advanced, threw his arm around his niece, and then held her off at arm's length, that he might scan her delicate figure. "My fine darling!" he cried with sparkling eyes, "she looks as fragile and delicate as though she were made of ivory, and yet she has the force of a man in her heart and hands; 'tis an

immense pity you are not a boy. I would clap you into a green hunting-coat in spite of all that your father could say."

In the mean while Dr. Fels also drew near, and held out his hand to Elizabeth. "Herr von Walde rode to town to-night," he said, "and requested me to come hither. He is very anxious to know that your fright and terror have produced no evil consequences."

"None whatever," she replied, blushing deeply. "As you see," she added, laughing, "I am perfectly well able to perform my sisterly duties, and Ernst has just assured me that I am very hard to catch."

"Well, I will carry Herr von Walde this message, word for word," said the doctor with an arch smile. "Let him decide whether it is a comforting one, or the contrary."

Ferber now invited the gentlemen to join the circle beneath the lindens. The doctor lighted a cigar and seemed most content. They discussed Linke's attempt very fully. After his dismissal from Lindhof, many of the underhand dealings by which he had taken advantage of his master's absence, had come to light. Although Herr von Walde had taken no steps to bring the offender to justice, the knowledge of his dishonesty spread abroad, and was the means of preventing the superintendent from procuring another situation. Undoubtedly this had filled the measure of his desire for revenge, and had excited him to to-day's deed. Every means had been tried for the apprehension of the assassin; the forester with his men had searched the forest, but their exertions had been followed by no result. Reinhard said that every one at Castle Lindhof had been forbidden to mention the matter to Fräulein von Walde, lest the fright should injure her. And the baroness, Hollfeld, and the old waiting-maid were to know nothing of it.

"Herr von Walde has also requested," he continued, "that the matter should be kept as secret as possible in L——, for he knows that half the town is invited for to-morrow's fête."

"That is, everything that creeps or flies upon a golden, silver, or coloured field," interrupted the doctor sarcastically; "every coat of arms that can be found, and all the court-councillors, and officials. Oh, the selection has been made upon the strictest principles of court etiquette, I assure you. So I have enjoined it upon my wife to conduct herself with becoming humility, like a crow among soaring falcons. To our surprise the baroness,—for she manages the whole affair,—has sent us an invitation."

"Apropos, my dear doctor!" cried Reinhard laughing, "they told me in L—— to-day that the old Princess Catharine wished to install you as her physician, but you declined the honour,—is that true? All L—— is actually standing on its head with surprise."

”Ah, that is nothing new; the dear little town passes half its time in that posture, and the consequence is that the light of intelligence shines upon the tough soles of its feet. But you have heard correctly. I was sufficiently bold to decline that honour.”

”But why?”

”First, because I have no time to be coddling the hysterical whims of her aristocratic head every day; and then my sacred respect for court etiquette is too great.”

”Yes, yes,” cried the forester, laughing, ”that is the reason why I always cross myself three times when I leave the royal castle behind me. The prince and princess,—our good princess especially troubles no one,—they shut their eyes when mere matters of ceremony are not according to stiff, prescribed rules; but that court mob, that lisps and crawls and wags its tail about them,—heaven help us! it absolutely shrieks murder if a man walks boldly and uprightly, and goes into fits at the sound of a voice that comes clear and full from the chest just as God meant it should.”

It had grown very dark. The family and Miss Mertens accompanied the visitors to the gate in the wall; and, as they all stepped forth upon the open sward, they heard sweet sounds floating up from the valley through the forest, which lay steeped in the silence of night, and where the birds had ceased to flit among the boughs, and even the breeze had fallen asleep in the tree-tops in the midst of the strange tales from distant lands that it whispered to them every evening. The band from the town was serenading Herr von Walde.

CHAPTER XV.

The next morning at five o’clock the inmates of Gnadeck were awakened by a discharge of artillery. ”Aha!” said Ferber to his wife, ”the celebration is beginning.” But Elizabeth was startled from a fearful dream, in which the misfortune which she had yesterday averted seemed actually to take place. She had just seen Herr von Walde fall dying to the ground, when the cannon in the valley awoke her. It was some time before she could collect herself. For one moment she suffered fearfully. It seemed as if heaven and earth were vanishing from her as that noble figure fell; and even now, when she saw the golden light of morning falling upon the familiar objects in her room and not upon the blood-stained sward, her

agitated nerves still quivered; she had never, not even the day before, when she had so fearlessly risked her life for his, felt so deeply that his death would be hers also.

Again and again the cannon thundered up from the valley. The window-panes shook slightly, and the little canary fluttered in terror from side to side in his cage. At each report Elizabeth shuddered; and when her anxious mother, who could not quite allay her fears for the result of the previous day's occurrence, although her child had seemed unharmed and well, came to her bedside to ask how she had slept, the girl threw her arms around her neck and burst into an uncontrollable fit of tears.

"Good heavens, my child!" cried Frau Ferber, much frightened, "you are ill. I knew that you would suffer from yesterday's shock, and there is that terrible shooting going on in the valley."

Elizabeth had some trouble in convincing her mother that she felt perfectly well, and that she could not be induced to lie in bed, but was resolved to take her breakfast with the family. And to put a stop to all further remonstrance, she immediately arose, bathed and dressed, and assisted her mother in preparing the simple breakfast.

The sound of the cannon suddenly ceased, and before long all traces of tears vanished from Elizabeth's eyes. The world looked brighter to her; for, although a life of renunciation lay before her, he still lived; this thought had, in consequence of her fearful dream, a soothing effect upon her restless heart. Even if he went away to distant lands, and she was forced to live years without seeing him, a time must come when he would return. And she could still love and think of him, for he belonged to no one else.

Later in the day she went with her family and Miss Mertens to the Lodge, where they had been invited to dine. There was a dark cloud upon the forester's brow as he came to meet them. Elizabeth soon discovered that he was troubled about Bertha.

"I cannot and will not bear it any longer!" he cried angrily. "Must I turn spy in my old age, and constantly be upon the watch to prevent a wayward, foolish child, who has no possible claim upon me, from making a perpetual fool of herself?"

"But remember, uncle, she is unhappy," said Elizabeth, somewhat alarmed.

"Unhappy?—she is a deceitful fool!—I am no ogre, and when I thought her really unhappy, that is, when she lost both her parents, I did all that I could to protect and guide her. But that is not what is the matter with her, for scarcely two months after her loss she went singing about and chattering like a magpie, so that I was really grieved to see such heartlessness and frivolity. What is she unhappy about, eh? But I don't want to know her state secret if she has no confidence in

me;—let it alone. For all I care she may wear that die-away look upon her face for the next year; but to pretend to be dumb, to run about in the forest at night like a maniac, and perhaps one of these fine days burn down my house about my ears, it is more than I can bear, and I must have a word or two to say about the matter."

"Did you not heed the warning that I gave you?" asked Ferber.

"Certainly I did; I put her into another room; she sleeps now just above me, so that I can hear her lightest step. At night both the house doors are not only bolted, as they have always been at night, but locked too, and I take the key into my room. And oh! the cunning of women,—but that's an old story. At any rate my precautions ensured us some rest. But last night I could not get to sleep; the affair with Linke was running through my brain, and I heard steps above me, cautious steps, soft as a cat's. Aha! I thought, she is at her nightly promenades again, and I rose, but when I went up-stairs the nest was already empty. On a table at the open window a light was burning, and as I opened the door the curtain flew into the flame. Zounds! if I had not been quick as a flash we should have had a blaze that would have been well fed by those old balconies. And how did she get out? Through the kitchen window. I would rather take care of a swarm of ants than of such a sly, deceitful creature."

"I am convinced that some love affair is at the bottom of the girl's conduct," said Frau Ferber.

"Yes, you told me so once before, sister-in-law," replied the forester with irritation, "and if you would be kind enough to tell me with whom, I should be infinitely obliged to you. Look around us and see if there is any one here to turn a girl's brain. My assistants,—they are not half good enough for her; she never would have a word to say to them; it cannot be the rogue Linke, with his crooked legs and carroty wig, and there is no one else here."

"You have forgotten one," said Frau Ferber significantly, with a glance towards Elizabeth, who had lingered behind to cut a whip for Ernst.

"Well?" asked the forester.

"Herr von Hollfeld."

The forester remained silent for awhile. "Hm!" he muttered at last, "I should never in the world have thought of him. No, no," he continued quickly, "I do not believe it, for in the first place the girl cannot possibly be such a fool as to believe that he would make her my lady von Odenberg, and——"

"Perhaps she hoped that he would, and finds herself mistaken," interrupted Frau Ferber.

"She is vain and arrogant enough for it, but he,—he cares nothing for women,—he is a cold, heartless egotist," said the forester.

"An egotist, I grant you," said Frau Ferber, "and that explains Bertha's con-

duct and manner."

"That would be a fine affair," cried the forester angrily, "to think that I should have been hoodwinked like any old fool in a comedy! I will sift the matter now to the bottom, and woe to the girl if she has really dared to bring disgrace upon herself and me!"

The dinner was a very quiet one. The forester was out of sorts, and would have extorted a confession from Bertha upon the spot had not Frau Ferber prayed him to wait for a few days. After coffee the guests left the Lodge; the forester threw his rifle across his shoulder, and plunged into the forest, which, as he said, always soothed and brought him to reason.

Elizabeth dressed herself for the concert, that is, she put on a simple, white muslin dress, whose only decoration was a bouquet of fresh wild flowers. Her mother tied around her neck a little locket attached to a very narrow black velvet ribbon, and this was her toilet, which would certainly have seemed most embarrassingly simple to most young girls going for the first time among a large assemblage of brilliantly-dressed people; but Elizabeth, if she thought of it at all, congratulated herself upon the delicate neatness of her muslin, and would rather not have worn her mother's little ornament on this occasion, as she considered that she was to appear only as a musician and not as one of the guests, and that her fingers were all that she need be anxious about. She was rather annoyed that the arms above these same fingers were bare, and that her dress was low-necked. She had hitherto never worn a dress that did not cover her neck to her chin, and could not see why the fashionable world had decided that women should be *decolleté* in large assemblies. She thought as little of the exquisite form and dazzling whiteness of her shoulders and arms as of the beauty and grace of her head, which, with its heavy braids of golden hair, was set so exquisitely upon her finely-moulded neck. Her mother herself had arranged her hair to-day, and it clustered in short shining curls above her forehead, contrasting wondrously with the delicately pencilled but decided arch of the dark eyebrows. And Frau Ferber could not but agree with Miss Mertens, who, as she watched Elizabeth disappear upon the forest path, declared with enthusiasm that she was supernaturally lovely. The mother had just acknowledged to herself that her child's beauty had unfolded in a most striking degree.

When Elizabeth entered the vestibule of Castle Lindhof she encountered Dr. Fels, who, with his wife upon his arm, was just turning down one of the corridors. She hastened towards him, and accosted him gaily, for her heart had been beating anxiously as she approached the castle, at the thought that she should be obliged to enter entirely alone the spacious saloon, where the greater part of the company were doubtless already assembled. The doctor received her most cordially, and presented her to his wife, in an undertone, as "yesterday's heroine." Both gladly

took her under their protection. The large folding-doors were flung open, and Elizabeth was grateful for the lucky star that had allowed her to take shelter behind the tall, commanding figure of the doctor's wife, for she was at first rather overcome at sight of the large, richly-decorated apartment, over whose highly-polished floor glided the costly dresses of the ladies and the polished boots of the gentlemen. In the centre of the saloon stood the Baroness Lessen, arrayed in magnificent dark-blue moire-antique, and receiving the guests. She returned the salutations of the doctor and his wife very politely, but very coolly, and replied to the doctor's question, "Where is Herr von Walde?" by pointing to a knot of men standing near a window, whence issued a murmur like the Babylonish confusion of tongues.

While Fels and his wife walked towards the spot, Elizabeth gladly and gratefully obeyed a gesture from Helene, who, sitting at another window, hurriedly and agitatedly informed her that she had suddenly had an attack of what is called "stage fright;" that she was in overwhelming terror at playing before so many people, and would rather creep into a mouse-hole. And then she begged Elizabeth, instead of the four-handed composition with which the concert was to open, to play a sonata of Beethoven's, a wish with which Elizabeth immediately complied. Her embarrassment vanished. She stepped up to the table where the music was lying, and selected the sonata which she was to play. Meanwhile, carriage after carriage rolled into the court-yard. The folding-doors opened and closed incessantly upon such quantities of tulle and velvet and lace, which were crowded into the saloon, that Elizabeth smiled pityingly at the thought of her simple white muslin, so soon to loose its unwrinkled smoothness in such a crush of crinoline.

She could very easily decide, from the manner of the baroness, upon the social rank of the guests. One gracious wave of the feather-crowned head of the great lady answered every social requirement whenever she received untitled guests, and these untitled guests did their part well in acknowledging and respecting this aristocratic reserve. All, in obedience to a gesture from the baroness, first made their way towards the window where stood Herr von Walde,—who, however, remained entirely invisible to Elizabeth,—and then scattered into single groups, either awaiting the opening of the concert, or engaged in conversation among themselves.

Suddenly the doors flew open again, and a corpulent old lady hobbled in upon the arm of an equally aged gentleman, whose coat glittered with orders,—and with them came Fräulein von Quittelsdorf. The baroness hastened toward these guests, and Fräulein von Walde also arose with difficulty, and, taking Hollfeld's arm, went to meet the aged pair, while all the ladies standing around her followed like the tail of a comet. The crowd of men at the window divided

suddenly as by magic, and Herr von Walde's lofty figure appeared.

"We must come to you, if we wish to see you, naughty man!" cried the old lady, shaking her forefinger at him, as she hobbled towards him. "You see, in spite of my poor feet, and although you have neglected me shamefully, I am here to-day to offer you my congratulations."

He bowed, and said a few words to her, to which she replied by laughingly tapping him upon the shoulder with her fan. Then he conducted her to an arm-chair, where she seated herself with much majesty.

"The Countess of Falkenberg, chief lady in waiting at the court of L——," was the reply of the doctor's wife when Elizabeth asked who the old lady was. Fräulein von Quittelsdorf looked exquisitely beautiful to-day in her white crape dress, with a wreath of scarlet euphorbia in her dark hair, as she busied herself about the noble lady, while she did not forget to cast a roguish glance now and then at Fräulein von Walde.

The arrival of the guests from the court was the signal for the beginning of the concert. Elizabeth could almost hear her own heart beat. She was standing behind the doctor's wife, and was hidden from all the eyes which would in one moment be directed towards her, following every one of her movements. Suddenly she was overcome with timidity, and she repented bitterly having consented to play first alone. She trembled when Fräulein von Walde motioned to her to begin, but there was no time to withdraw. She took a long breath, and walked slowly, with downcast eyes, to the piano, where she courtesied timidly.

At first there was a breathless silence; then a whisper ran from mouth to mouth, which was instantly hushed when the young girl struck the keys. Elizabeth's fear and embarrassment all vanished at the sound of the first chords. She was no longer alone. He with whom she had so often wandered along meadow paths in brilliant sunshine, and past gloomy abysses in storm and rain, was with her,—the one who had so often aroused within her joyous presentiments, and who had expressed in immortal harmonies all the loftiest and most sacred aspirations of her nature,—who was as dear and familiar to her as her mother's face, although her gaze fell dazzled by the fiery glories which wreathed his majestic head. The flower-crowned heads ranged against the walls, the lorgnettes and spectacles which, glittering in the sunlight, shot their lightning directly upon the lonely performer in the midst of the saloon, all vanished. She was alone with the great master, following with rapture every manifestation of his creative spirit.

An actual storm of applause startled her when she had finished. She courtesied, and then almost flew to her protectress, Frau Fels, who, speechless with emotion, held out both hands to her. The concert did not last very long. Four young gentlemen from L—— sang a delightful quartette, and then there was a performance by a famous violin player. Fräulein von Quittelsdorf sang two songs

in a charming voice, but without any ear, so that at every high note the guests either moved involuntarily and nervously upon their chairs, or cast their eyes down in confusion. And then came one of the well-practised duets. Fräulein von Walde had recovered her composure, and played excellently well with Elizabeth.

When the concert was over, Elizabeth went towards the door of an anteroom, where she had left her shawl. She was closely followed by an elderly gentleman, who had been sitting opposite her, and had regarded her attentively. At his request, Frau Fels presented him to the young girl as the Military Inspector-general Busch. He said many flattering things about Elizabeth's performance, and added that he was much pleased to become acquainted with the heroic preserver of the life of the lord of the castle; he had accepted to-day's invitation with all the greater pleasure, since within the last few hours he had been deprived of all hope of claiming her assistance in the investigation of the murderous attempt.

He laughed heartily at Elizabeth's sudden alarm.

"No, no, I pray you not to look so horror-stricken, Fräulein," he said at last. "As I have just told you, we shall have no occasion to subject you to a cross-examination. Linke has himself put a stop to our proceedings by a single blow. His dead body was taken from the lake in the park this afternoon," he added, in a low tone. "They informed me of it at the inn, where I alighted. I proceeded, accompanied by the Waldheim physician, who happened to be at the inn, to the scene of the suicide, and convinced myself that that hand will never again be raised against the life of another. The condition of the body shows that Linke must have sought death immediately after the failure of his murderous purpose."

Elizabeth shuddered. "Does Herr von Walde know of his fearful end?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"No; I have had no opportunity to speak with him alone."

"None of the company present appear to have any suspicion of yesterday's occurrence," said Frau Fels.

"Fortunately they have not, thanks to our foresight and reserve," replied the inspector-general, ironically. "As it is, poor Herr von Walde has been quite overwhelmed with congratulations upon being born into the world. What would his friends have done to him had they known how fortunately his life has been preserved?"

The butler, Lorenz, at this moment approached Elizabeth and held out to her a little silver waiter, upon which lay several folded slips of paper. She looked up in questioning surprise, and he said respectfully:

"Will you have the kindness to take one of the papers?"

Elizabeth hesitated.

"This is probably part of our entertainment," said Frau Fels. "Take it quickly, that the butler may not be detained."

Almost mechanically she took up one of the slips of paper, but started in alarm as the Baroness Lessen suddenly appeared at the door, and looked searchingly around the room.

"Come, Lorenz," she said hastily, stepping towards the servant, "what are you doing here?"

"I have just handed Fräulein Ferber the salver, gracious lady," replied the old man.

The baroness gave him an angry look, and then measured Elizabeth from head to foot. "How, Fräulein Ferber," she said sharply, "are you still here? I thought you were at home long ago, resting upon your laurels."

Without waiting for a reply, she turned to leave the room; but just upon the threshold she looked back at the old butler with a frown and shrugged her shoulders.

"What can you be thinking of, Lorenz? You grow very thoughtless. This infirmity has grown upon you of late."

With these words, she bustled out, and the old man quietly followed. He replied not one word to her harsh reproof,—only contracted his bushy, gray eyebrows, so that his honest eyes almost disappeared.

The others remained looking at each other in astonishment, when the doctor entered. He made a profound, comical obeisance to his wife, and said solemnly:

"In consideration of the fact that Fräulein von Quittelsdorf has just had the clemency to unite us again as closely as by the priestly blessing fifteen years ago, I am content still further to endure the conjugal yoke, and particularly on this day to enjoy by your side, and, cherished by your tender care, O true and faithful spouse, all the delights prepared for us!"

"My dear husband, what do you mean?" cried his wife, laughing.

"Pardon me,—I mean nothing at all. Ah, I see you have not heard Fräulein von Quittelsdorf's directions. What a pity! I am then compelled to inform you that every married couple here present, whether now upon a war footing or otherwise, must repair, within the next quarter of an hour, to the convent tower in the forest, where a rural festival will be held. There it will be your duty to provide me with as much to eat and drink as my soul may desire, and in every way to attend upon my wishes, after the pattern of the famous Penelope. But that the unmarried men who are present in large numbers may have no reason to complain,—that their mouths also may be filled,—a sort of lottery has been ingeniously devised. Every unmarried lady is provided with a slip of paper, upon which stands written the name of some unmarried man, and it is left to Cupid and Fate either to unite or to separate faithful hearts."

At these words Elizabeth was seized with actual terror. She had never

thought of other entertainments following upon the concert; but now she clearly understood why the baroness, on the previous day, had so distinctly alluded to her return home after the conclusion of the music. Her cheeks glowed with shame, for she had exposed herself to the charge of being very assuming by taking from the butler's salver the little slip of paper, which now burned like fire in her hand. Always quick to decide, she went into the saloon where the opening of the mysterious papers was going on amid the laughter of the ladies and their assigned partners.

"What a senseless idea this, of Fräulein von Quittelsdorf's," a young sprig of nobility was just exclaiming peevishly to his neighbour as Elizabeth passed them. "Here I have that stout, pious Fräulein Lehr upon my hands. *Fi donc!*"

Elizabeth had not long to look for the baroness. She was standing apart, near a window, in lively, but, as it seemed, not entirely agreeable conversation with Fräulein von Quittelsdorf, the chief lady in waiting, and Helene. The countess seemed to be remonstrating with Fräulein von Quittelsdorf, who did nothing but shrug her pretty shoulders helplessly from time to time. Intense vexation was expressed in the baroness' countenance,—there was no need of the round, red spot on either cheek to show that she was angry. Not far from the group Herr von Walde was leaning with folded arms against a pillar. He seemed to be only half listening to the words of the be-ribboned old courtier who was standing beside him,—his eyes were fixed upon the gesticulating ladies.

Elizabeth hurriedly approached the baroness. It did not escape her that, at sight of her, Fräulein von Quittelsdorf gently nudged the countess, whereupon the latter turned and regarded her with a malevolent air. She saw that she was the subject of their discussion, and she quickened her pace, that she might avert from herself as soon as possible any unworthy suspicion.

"Most gracious lady," she said, with a slight courtesy, "in consequence of a misunderstanding, I have become possessed of this slip of paper, and have just learned that it entails upon me duties which I cannot possibly undertake, for my parents are expecting me at home."

She handed the little slip to the baroness, who took it immediately, while a ray of actual sunshine broke over her features.

"I think you are in error, Fräulein Ferber," Herr von Walde suddenly interposed, in a clear, melodious voice. "It is incumbent upon you to excuse yourself to the gentleman whose name the paper contains; it rests with him whether he will release you or not." He scanned, with a peculiar smile, the company, who were dividing into couples and making ready for departure; even the old gentleman beside him approached the countess, and offered her his arm. Herr von Walde continued, as he slowly approached: "As master of the house, I cannot permit any want of consideration of one of my guests, wherefore I must beg you,

Fräulein Ferber, to open the paper."

Elizabeth obeyed, and then handed him the open slip, with a crimson blush. He glanced at it.

"Ah!" he cried, "I have, as I see, defended my own rights. You must admit that I am fully justified in either accepting or refusing to accept your excuses. I prefer the latter course, and must entreat you strictly to comply with the injunctions laid upon you by that paper."

The baroness approached him, and laid her hand upon his arm. It looked as if she were almost struggling to suppress her tears.

"Forgive me, dear Rudolph," she said, "it is really not my fault."

"I do not know to what fault you allude, Amalie," he replied, with icy coldness; "but you certainly choose the right time in which to ask forgiveness,—-just at this moment I could easily forgive an injury."

He took his hat which a servant handed to him, and made the signal for departure.

"But my parents!" stammered Elizabeth.

"Are they ill, or about to leave Gnadeck immediately?" he asked, standing still.

"Neither."

"Well, pray then let me see to it that they receive intelligence of the cause of your delay."

He called a servant, and despatched a message to Gnadeck.

While the saloon was gradually emptied, the group of ladies which had been joined by the aged cavalier and Hollfeld, who looked much chagrined, remained standing near the window.

"It serves you quite right, Cornelie," said the countess. "You have set the crown upon your folly to-day. What a silly idea this lottery is! How often have I endeavoured to put a stop to your nonsense, to which, unfortunately, our gracious princess lends only too willing an ear? How should the butler know any better, when you gave him no instructions? You consider yourself to belong naturally to the court, and yet do not know that that sort of person has not an idea of his own. I should not for an instant grudge you this lesson, if only poor von Walde were not the victim of your frivolity. There he goes with that little white goose upon his arm; he who, with his haughty, aristocratic self-consciousness, has many a time been regardless of the wishes of some high-born lady, who would have been charmed to take his arm. What must he suffer to be tied for several hours to that little piano-player, the daughter of a—forester's clerk?"

"Why does he sacrifice himself so very readily?" rejoined Fräulein von Quittelsdorf. "It was quite unnecessary for him to meddle at all in the matter. The girl had made up her mind to go, when suddenly he steps forth like a knight without

fear or fault, and takes up the burden voluntarily."

"At all events the burden is dazzlingly beautiful," said the old cavalier with a conceited smile.

"What are you thinking of, count?" cried the countess. "That is just like you, who rave about every round-faced peasant girl that you meet. I do not deny that the girl is pretty; but was not poor Rosa von Bergen an actual angel of beauty? Hundreds were languishing at her feet; but von Walde, whom she really preferred, was like a glacier to her. No, he has not the smallest sensibility to feminine beauty and loveliness. I long ago erased his name from my list of eligibles for my young protegées. He has just declared, most distinctly, his reason for sacrificing himself to-day. He is evidently much pleased and delighted with the attentions that we have lavished upon him, and wishes to see every one happy and contented about him,—even the little thing who played the piano. I advise my dearest Lessen for the future not to trust implicitly to the tact and ingenuity of our charming Quittelsdorf."

The maid of honour bit her lips, and dragged her lace shawl over her lovely shoulders. The carriage now drew up in which the countess and Helene, accompanied by the baroness and the count, were to be driven to the place of rendezvous.

"The old cat!" cried Fräulein von Quittelsdorf, after she had assisted the countess into the carriage. "She is furious because she was not asked to assist in the arrangements for to-day. Did not you see, Hollfeld, how very nearly that false front of hers slipped down upon her nose when she was waggling her head in such agitation? I should have laughed for two weeks without intermission if her bald head had suddenly made its appearance underneath that flower garden on top!"

She was convulsed with laughter at the idea. Her companion walked, without a word, and with accelerated pace, by her side, as though he heard nothing of her chatter. His whole bearing manifested hurry and disquiet. He seemed most desirous to overtake the rest of the assemblage as quickly as possible. He cast searching glances through the bushes on either side of the way, and, whenever he caught a glimpse of a white dress, stopped for a moment, as though to identify the wearer.

"Indeed, you are too tiresome, Hollfeld; you weary me to death!" cried the lady peevishly. "To be sure it is your privilege to be as mute as a fish and yet enjoy the reputation of a clever man. Where your wits are now I am sure I cannot imagine. What, in Heaven's name, are you running so fast for? Allow me to entreat you to have some regard for my crape dress, which will be torn to rags by these bushes through which you are hurrying me, with such speed."

The convent tower,—the only uninjured remnant of a former nunnery,—

was situated in the depths of a grove of oaks and beeches in a part of the forest domain appertaining to the Lindhof estate, which here extended far towards the east.

A certain lady of Gnadewitz, a sister of the ancestor of the wheel, had built the nunnery, whither she, with twelve other young maidens, retired to pray for the soul of her brother, cut off so ignominiously in the flower of his days. Year after year the giant boughs of the oaks had tapped at the windows of the cells and leaned above the high wall over the small garden of the convent. They had seen many a fresh young creature pass hurriedly along the dim narrow forest path to ring the bell at the convent portal with feverish impatience, as though unable to wait one instant longer for the promised peace abiding within those walls. They had seen how, behind those irrevocable bolts and bars, the mute lips of the nun grew white,—how convulsively her waxen hands clutched the crucifix, while her agonized looks would seek the ground; for the sight of the clear, blue heavens, arching above the gay children of the outer world, awakened joyous memories within her, and breathed a keen desire for pleasure and life into the soul and heart muffled forever in the folds of the sackcloth of her order.

The Reformation, which overthrew the convents like card houses, had stridden through this still forest also, and had passed its mighty hand over the walls of this gloomy pile, which had, in expiation of the misery and crime that had cursed its origin, been the perpetual abode of unhappiness. And even the hollow mockery of existence within its walls had vanished to the four winds. One stone after another had tumbled to the feet of the lofty oaks, whose branches had brushed against it while it formed part of some carved arch or window-frame, and which now strewed leaves upon it till it sank away far more softly bedded than the poor bodies of the nuns, which were, so said the legend, all sleeping together in a subterranean dungeon.

The tower was square, clumsy, and ugly. On the flat roof above, that was surrounded by a stone balustrade, the stairs were capped by a very small, square apartment, from which egress upon the roof was obtained through a massive oaken door. Here there was a magnificent prospect and distant view of L——. For the sake of this prospect the tower had been rebuilt and kept in constant repair. Immense iron clamps bound the walls together at the corners, and numberless lines of fresh mortar meandered across its blackened surface, so that the old building looked at a distance like a gigantic piece of agate.

But to-day the old pile was decked out like some old fellow dressed for a wooing. Fresh flowers,—that is to say, four gigantic fir trees—were sticking in his hat; and from their tops gay banners were floating, like large birds above the green waves beneath. The old fellow, who, until to-day, had only whispered nightly and daily confidences to his comrades the oaks but had never

made an advance towards them from his dignified position, was now clutching them with green wide-spread arms; huge garlands were draped from his topmost walls, and were lost among the boughs of the surrounding forest; while from one side a white sail-cloth was extended and attached to the trunks of two tall hemlocks. Beneath the shade of this tent were several refreshing-looking casks, a whole battery of dusty red-sealed flasks and countless silver-capped bottles in ice-buckets,—all presided over by a very pretty girl in the dress of a vivandiere.

Elizabeth had silently and passively left the large hall upon Herr von Walde's arm. In spite of her determination to go home, she had not had the courage to gainsay him, or to tell him of her desire,—he had spoken in a tone of such authority; and, what had influenced her still more, had entered the lists, as it were, for her, and sought to help her out of her embarrassment. Any opposition on her part would have seemed like obstinate defiance of him, and would have served only to increase her painful apprehension of drawing to herself general attention.

The silken garments of the ladies rustled along the walls of the corridor behind her. Laughing and chattering, the gay crowd followed Herr von Walde in a long train until it issued from the chief entrance door, and then it scattered hither and thither, taking the various forest paths which led to the convent tower. Those whose elaborate toilets required special care took the broad, well-kept path. Herr von Walde certainly never dreamed that his companion's simple, snowy muslin could be as precious in her eyes as were the rich dresses of the other ladies in theirs, or he certainly would not have selected the narrow, lonely pathway into which he suddenly turned.

"It is usually very damp here," Elizabeth broke silence timidly,—hitherto no words had passed between them. Her feet trembled as though they would far rather retreat than advance, and yet it is possible that her thoughts were not of her dress nor her thin shoes, but rather of the long, narrow, leafy way before them, through which she must pass alone by his side, and of the voice that would suddenly sound in her ears with that harsh, authoritative tone almost always adopted by him when alone with her.

"It has not rained for a long time,—see how dry the ground is," he quietly replied, as he walked slowly on and broke off a twig which threatened to brush Elizabeth's cheek. "This path is the shortest, and we can for a quarter of an hour at least escape from the buzz and clatter with which my friends and relatives are celebrating the completion of my thirty-seventh year. But perhaps you are afraid of meeting Linke in this sequestered spot?"

A shudder passed through the young girl's frame. She thought upon the criminal's desperate end, but she could not control herself sufficiently to impart her knowledge to Herr von Walde.

”I do not fear him any longer,” she said gravely.

”He has probably left the country, and if not, he would hardly be so discourteous as to intrude upon the pleasures of people who are seeking to indemnify themselves for the pains they have taken with their formal congratulations. By-the-way, you cannot have failed to observe that every member of the company to-day has honoured me with a few moments of special attention, even the youngest slip of a girl in white muslin has made me her courtesy and uttered her studied desire for my health and happiness. You, perhaps, do not think me old enough yet to need the wishes of others for a prolongation of my life?”

”I should suppose that such wishes were as appropriate to youth or the prime of life as to advanced age; the one possesses as little as the other a monopoly of existence.”

”Well, then, why did you not come to me? Yesterday you saved my life, and to-day you care so little about it that you do not even take the trouble to open your lips and say ’God protect it for the future.’”

”You have just said yourself ’every one of the company.’ I did not belong to the company, and therefore could not intrude myself among those who offered their congratulations.” She spoke quickly, for there was discontent in his tone, and the arm upon which her hand rested moved impatiently.

”But you were invited——”

”To entertain your guests.”

”Was that modest view of the case the only reason why you did not wish to come with me?”

”Yes; most certainly my refusal could not have had anything to do with the gentleman who had fallen to my lot, whose name I could not possibly know.”

”You can hardly persuade me of that; you must have seen at the first glance that all the gentlemen present, with the exception of myself, were already appropriated; you must have known that my sister, without drawing a paper, had requested Hollfeld to accompany her, as she can walk more easily leaning upon his arm than upon any other. Confess——”

”I knew and saw nothing. I was far too much troubled when I entered the ball-room to return the paper, for the hour at which I was expected to return home had been particularly mentioned to me yesterday. I had no idea that any special festivity was to follow the concert, and in taking the folded slip of paper I committed an indiscretion, for which I cannot forgive myself.”

He suddenly stood still.

”I pray you look at me,” he said, in a tone of command.

She raised her eyes, and although she felt her cheeks glow, she sustained unflinchingly the gaze which at first rested sternly upon her and then became indescribably gentle.

”No, no,” he muttered softly, as if to himself, ”it were a crime to suspect deceit here. Yes, double-dyed,” he continued in an altered, sarcastic tone; it sounded as though he wished to sneer away some momentary weakness,—”was I not the involuntary auditor of your declaration: ’It needs more courage to tell a lie boldly than to confess a fault?’”

”That is my conviction, I repeat it.”

”Ah, what a splendid thing strength of character is! But I should suppose that if one were too upright to soil the lips with deceit, a strict watch should be kept upon the eyes also, lest they lie. I know one moment in your life when you appeared what you were not.”

Elizabeth, wounded, attempted to withdraw her hand from his arm.

”Oh, no—you do not escape me so easily!” he cried, retaining it. ”You must either deny or acknowledge it. You looked indifferent lately, when I threw away my cousin’s tender token, the rose.”

”Should I have flown after it?”

”Certainly, if you had been true.”

Elizabeth knew now why he had entered this lonely path with her,—she was to confess her feelings towards Hollfeld. She was confirmed in her former suspicions,—Herr von Walde was evidently most anxious lest she should prize his cousin’s homage too highly and perhaps imagine that he could forget her social position. The moment had come when she could declare her sentiments. By a hasty movement she released her hand from his arm, and stepped a little aside.

”I grant you,” she said, ”that if my face that day expressed indifference, it was not in harmony with my thoughts.”

”I thought so!” he cried, but there was no triumph in the exclamation.

”I was in fact indignant.”

”At my interference?”

”At the unauthorized levity of Herr von Hollfeld.”

”He startled you greatly; but——”

”No, he insulted me! How dared he intrude upon me? I abhor him!”

She must have been right in her solution of his manner; but she had never dreamed that her declaration would be so highly prized by him. A weight seemed to fall from his heart. A ray of purest joy broke from the eyes which had gazed at her with a mixture of mistrust, contempt, and sarcasm. He drew a deep breath, and half extended his arms. Elizabeth involuntarily looked round to discover what it was that caused his eyes to flash and glow so. She saw nothing, but she felt his hand tremble as he laid hers once more upon his arm. They walked on a few paces without a word. Suddenly he stood still again.

”Now we are entirely alone,” he said, in the gentlest possible tone. ”See, only one small eye of heavenly blue looks down upon us,—no prying faces are

near to come between us,—I cannot,—I will not be deprived of a birthday greeting from you. Give it to me now, when no one can hear it but myself alone."

She was silent and confused.

"Well, do you not know how it is done?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she replied, and an arch smile hovered upon her lips. "I am well practised in such things. My parents, my uncle, Ernst——"

"All have birthdays," he interrupted her, smiling. "But you cannot wonder that I want a birthday greeting all to myself,—that I desire that it may sound quite different from any that you have hitherto uttered,—for I am neither your father, nor your bluff forester uncle, and certainly I cannot lay claim to the rights of the brother with whom you play. Come, speak!"

Still she said nothing. What should she say? Her eyes were cast down, for she could no longer endure that searching glance, that seemed to penetrate her very soul with its troubled expression of entreaty.

"Then come," he cried abruptly, drawing her forward, after waiting in vain for some moments for one word from her lips. "It was a foolish wish of mine. I know that your tongue, which is always ready to say what is kind and gentle to others, is dumb for me, or only ready with some rebuke."

At these words she grew pale, and involuntarily stood still.

"You will, then?" he asked more gently, "and cannot find the words?" he continued, shaking his head, as she was silent but looked up at him beseechingly. "Well, then, I have a plan. Let me say what I should like to hear from your lips, and you will repeat it after me word for word."

Again the smile played around Elizabeth's mouth, and she murmured assent.

"In the first place, you give your friend your hand," he began, and took her hand in his,—she trembled, but did not withdraw it,—"and then you say, 'You have hitherto been a wretched wanderer upon the face of the earth,—it is high time that the clouds above you should break, and be penetrated by the pure ray of light which has transformed your whole existence. It is my true and earnest wish that this light may never forsake you. Here is my hand, as the pledge of a happiness so inconceivable——"

So far she had repeated this strangely-worded greeting after him, but at the last words she hesitated. He seized her other hand also, and urged passionately, "Go on, go on!"

"Here is my——" she began at last.

"Oh, Herr von Walde," suddenly cried Cornelie's voice from the thicket, "what a delightful meeting! Now I shall enjoy in company with you the triumph of being received with a flourish of trumpets!"

Never in her life had Elizabeth seen such a sudden change take place in a

human countenance as now transformed Herr von Walde's features. One strong blue vein stood out upon his pale forehead, his eyes flashed, and he involuntarily stamped his foot. It really seemed as if he would have liked to hurl back into the thicket the unwelcome intruder, who, holding up her crape skirt, came hurrying through the bushes towards them. He could not command his emotion as quickly as usual; perhaps he did not wish to do so, for he frowned angrily as Hollfeld made his appearance behind the lady. As he came in sight, Herr von Walde drew Elizabeth's hand through his arm with gentle violence, as if he feared lest she should be snatched from him.

"Why, how you look, Herr von Walde," cried Fräulein von Quittelsdorf, stepping into the middle of the path; "actually as if we were bandits, with designs upon your life; or, at all events, upon your property!"

Without replying a word to this attack, he turned to his cousin and asked, "Where is my sister?"

"She was afraid of the long rough path," the latter replied, "and preferred to drive."

"Well, I suppose you will hardly leave Helene to be lifted out of the carriage by the old Count Wildenau; I cannot understand how, as her faithful knight, you could leave the principal path. A few, quick steps will enable you to rejoin her. I will not prevent you from doing so," said Herr von Walde sharply, while a sarcastic smile quivered around the corners of his mouth. He stepped aside with Elizabeth to allow the pair to pass.

"And pray, if one may ask, why did you leave the principal path yourself?" asked Fräulein von Quittelsdorf flippantly, much more like a pert chamber-maid than a maid of honour.

"That you can easily learn; simply because I hoped, by coming along this lonely path, to escape the eloquent tongues of certain ladies," replied Herr von Walde drily.

"Ah, how cross you are! Heaven shield us from such an irritable birthday hero!" cried the lady, shuddering, and retreating a few paces with a comical assumption of terror. "It was a mistake that we did not come to you to-day with funereal faces, and muffled to the eyes in black crape!"

She pouted, and, taking Hollfeld's arm, would have dragged him forward; but he, strangely enough, seemed inclined, for the first time in his life, to set his cousin's wishes at defiance. He walked on slowly, and as if weary of existence, peering right and left into the bushes, apparently intensely interested in every stone in the pathway, every squirrel that ran swiftly past. Then he began a conversation with his companion, whose answers absorbed his attention so entirely that he paused and stood still to listen to them.

Herr von Walde muttered something between his teeth; Elizabeth could not

understand it; but the hostile glance that he cast after his cousin showed how the behaviour of the latter incensed him. He said not another word to her. He turned slowly towards her, and she felt that he continued to regard her steadfastly, but she was unable to lift her eyes to his. Had she done so he must have discovered on the spot how greatly she was moved by the strange words that he had just whispered to her with so much emotion in his voice. One look would have betrayed the conflict within her, and then,—she could not pursue the thought,—he would doubtless have repented the simple wish that he had expressed. Thus deeply agitated, it was natural enough that the young girl's eyelids fell low over her eyes, and that she failed to observe the inaudible sigh that escaped her companion, or mark how all signs of irritation vanished from his features to give place to the shade of melancholy that was so wont to rest upon his brow.

A faint and dying trumpet note, which was doubtless the result of the impatience of the musicians who were waiting upon the roof of the tower, betrayed the close vicinity of the scene of festivity. And soon a buzz and noise, as of some neighbouring gypsy encampment, broke upon their ears; the path grew broader, gay throngs were seen fluttering through the bushes, and suddenly a loud flourish of bugles and trumpets sounded over their heads. Elizabeth availed herself of the opportunity to slip her hand from the arm of her conductor and to lose herself in the crowd that gathered around the lord of the feast; while a young girl, habited as a Dryad, and accompanied by four other wood-nymphs, approached, and, in limping hexameters, welcomed him to the forest.

"Well, von Walde has gotten rid of his Dulcinea at the right moment. I don't see the girl at all, now," the Countess Falkenberg whispered smilingly to Count Wildenau, who was sitting beside her upon a kind of raised dais, beneath the shade of a group of oaks. "He will never forgive the baroness and our flippant Cornelia for so stupidly forcing him into playing the knight, even for a few moments, to such a creature. My child," and she turned to Helene; seated at her right, who was anxiously searching the crowd with troubled eyes, "when those people release him we must take him in here among us, and do everything in our power to make him forget the provoking beginning of the festival."

Helene nodded mechanically. Apparently she had only heard half of what the lady had whispered in her ear. Her poor little figure, enveloped in a heavy, light-blue silk, leaned helplessly and wearily back in her huge armchair, and her cheeks were whiter than the lily-wreath that crowned her brow.'

Meanwhile Elizabeth had encountered in the throng Dr. Fels and his wife. The latter immediately took the young girl under her care, that they might not be separated again.

"Only stay until the dancing begins," she replied to Elizabeth's remark that the moment seemed to have arrived when she could slip away unnoticed, and go

home. ”I do not wonder that you wish to leave as soon as possible,” she added, with a smile. ”We, too, shall not stay long. I am anxious about my children at home. I made a great sacrifice to my husband’s position in coming at all. Herr von Walde, to whom you are assigned for the day by lot, does not dance. So never fear, you will be released.”

Suddenly the crowd separated. From the top of the tower sounded a grand march, and while the gentlemen sought the shade of the trees, the ladies, according to the rules of the feast, hastened to provide them with refreshments from the tent.

Herr von Walde walked slowly across the sward, his hands clasped behind him, talking with the military-inspector Busch, by his side.

”My dear Herr von Walde, now pray come to us!” the Countess Falkenberg cried out to him, extending her hand with an air almost caressing. ”I have kept such a charming place here for you. Come, rest upon your well-earned laurels. ’Tis true, all the young ladies present are disposed of by lot, but here are our fair and lovely wood-nymphs all ready to wreathe your goblet, and furnish you from the tent with all that your heart can desire.”

”I am deeply touched by your kindness and care for me, gracious lady,” the gentleman replied, ”but I cannot think that Fräulein Ferber will leave me to appeal to the general sympathy.”

He spoke loudly, and turned to Elizabeth, who was standing quite near. She had heard every word, and instantly walked quietly towards him, placing herself at his side, as though she were by no means inclined to delegate to others one jot of her duty. As he saw her approach him thus, something of a joyful surprise lit up his countenance. He cast an answering glance at the face that, unembarrassed now by those around, looked smilingly up at him. Strangely enough, he seemed entirely to forget the charming place that the countess had reserved for him, for, after a slight obeisance to her stately ladyship and her court of young ladies, he offered his arm to Elizabeth, and conducted her to the shade of a giant oak, where Doctor Fels had just provided comfortable places for his wife and himself.

”Now, that is carrying his revenge a little too far,” said the great lady, with irritation, turning for sympathy to Count Wildenau and the five disconcerted Dryads. ”He really throws scorn upon the entire fête by taking so much notice of that young person. I begin to be really vexed with him. No one is more ready than I to grant that he is entirely right to be angry, but I really think that he should not allow himself to be so carried away by his indignation as to forget those of his guests who have had no share in the absurdities of the baroness or of von Quittelsdorf. I’ll wager that that little fool there attributes his attentions to the influence of her beautiful eyes.”

The small band of amiable Dryads shot annihilating looks at Elizabeth, who

was quietly proceeding to the refreshment tent, whence she presently issued with a flask of champagne and four glasses, which she placed upon the table beneath the oak, where Herr von Walde was sitting with the doctor and his wife.

"Our young ladies to-day are wearing perfect flower gardens upon their heads," said Frau Fels, as the young girl approached the table. "Fräulein Ferber alone is as destitute of ornament as Cinderella. I cannot have it so."

She took two roses from the large bouquet which she held in her hand, and stood up to place them in Elizabeth's hair.

"Stop, I pray you," cried Herr von Walde, detaining her hand, "nothing should adorn that hair but orange blossoms."

"But they are only worn by brides," said the doctor's wife naively.

"I know that well," he replied quietly; and as if he had said the most natural thing in the world, he filled the glasses, and turned to Dr. Fels. "Clink glasses with me, doctor," he said; "I drink to the welfare of the saviour of my life—of Gold Elsie of Castle Gnadeck!"

The doctor smiled, and the glasses clinked with a loud ring. At this signal, a group of gentlemen approached, glasses in hand.

"You come at the right moment, gentlemen," the lord of the feast cried out to them. "Drink with me to the fulfilment of my dearest wish!"

A loud "vivat" resounded through the air, and the glasses clinked merrily.

"Scandalous!" cried the old court lady, and dropped her fork, with its choice morsel, upon her plate; "really, they are conducting themselves over there like students at a carouse! I am positively shocked! What an unseemly noise! Actually the mob in the street is better behaved when they shout 'vivats' to our gracious Prince. Apropos, my love," she continued, turning to Helene, "I observe that your brother seems quite intimate with Doctor Fels."

"He esteems him highly as a thoroughly upright man of great scientific attainments," replied Helene.

"That is all very well,—but he certainly cannot be aware that the man just now is in very bad odour at court. Only imagine, he has had the inconceivable insolence to refuse our beloved Princess Catharine——"

"Yes; I know that story," said Fräulein von Walde, interrupting the irritated lady; "my brother related the circumstance to me himself a few days ago."

"How!—is it possible that the facts are known to him, and that he has so little regard for the sentiments of the court,—which has always distinguished him so highly! Incredible! I assure you, dear child, my conscience pricks me sorely; I shall scarcely be able to lift my eyes in the presence of their Serene Highnesses, when they arrive in L——, at the thought of having been in the society here of that impertinent creature."

Helene shrugged her shoulders, and left the lady to her qualms of con-

science and a brimming glass of champagne, with which she probably intended to fortify herself in anticipation of the dreaded arrival.

In the society of this lady Fräulein von Walde suffered all the galling annoyance that conventionalities inflict;—she was obliged to listen, with an amiable and interested smile, to a thousand wretched trifles, while her heart was tortured with pain; indeed, only just such a person as the Countess Falkenberg, who sought and found her highest earthly happiness in a gracious glance from a Princely eye, a person whose whole intellectual capacity was exercised in standing sentinel before the domain of etiquette and in guarding religiously the hardly-won prestige of her social position,—only such a one could have been blind to the signs of the deepest suffering in the countenance of the younger lady.

Hollfeld had not only been so inattentive as to leave Helene, upon her arrival at this spot, to the care of Count Wildenau, he had even, upon his tardy appearance, omitted all explanation or apology for his delay, and had finally seated himself beside her in a sullen and abstracted mood. She thought him strangely altered, and she racked her restless heart and brain with vain surmises. At first her suspicions rested upon Cornelie, who, true to her mercurial temperament, fluttered hither and thither like a will-o'-the-wisp, talking and laughing incessantly. But she was soon reassured upon this point, for she could not catch a single glance of Hollfeld's directed towards the coquettish and graceful court beauty. The anxious inquiries that she made of him were answered in monosyllables. She beckoned to one of the servants who was bearing past a tray of delicacies, and herself placed them before Hollfeld,—but he did not eat a morsel, and only swallowed in quick succession several glasses of fiery wine which he procured for himself at the refreshment tent. This careless conduct, which she now observed for the first time, caused her unspeakable pain. At last she was silent, and closed her eyes as though fatigued; no one noticed the crystal drops trembling on their lashes.

Suddenly a shadow was cast upon the universal merriment, which had been all the more unrestrained from the fact that the lord of the feast, usually so grave and serious, had joined in it so cordially,—at least Elizabeth felt convinced that the face of the butler, Lorenz, who now appeared in the distance, boded no good. The old man took the greatest pains to attract his master's attention without being seen by the other guests. At last he succeeded. Herr von Walde arose, and stepped aside with him into the thicket, while the group of gentlemen around him dispersed. He soon returned, with marks of dismay in his countenance.

"I have just received sad news, which will compel me to leave you immediately," he said, in a low voice, to the doctor. "Herr von Hartwig, in Thalleben, one of my oldest friends, has met with a terrible accident; the injury is fatal; they write me that he cannot live a day longer. He summons me to him that he may

entrust his young children to my care. I pray you inform the Baroness Lessen of my departure, and its cause; she will see that the festivities are not interrupted. Let my sister and my guests suppose that I am called away for a few minutes by some trifling matter of business, and will return hither shortly. I shall not be missed after the dancing begins."

The doctor went instantly to find the baroness. His wife had strayed away from the spot a few moments before, so Elizabeth was left alone with Herr von Walde. He turned to her quickly:

"I thought we should not part from each other to-day without the conclusion of my birthday greeting," he said, while striving to meet her eyes, which shyly avoided his, "but I seem to be one of those unfortunate ones whose unlucky stars snatch from them the prize when it seems almost within their grasp." He endeavoured to give an air of humour to his words, but they only sounded the more bitter. "However, I submit," he continued, in a determined tone; "I must go. It cannot be helped, but my duty may be made easier and sweeter for me by a promise from you. Do you remember the words which you lately repeated after me?"

"I do not forget so quickly."

"Ah, that encourages me greatly! There is a fairy tale which tells of a realm of inexhaustible riches and endless delights, revealed by a single word. Such a word the conclusion of your greeting can be to me. Will you aid me in having it uttered?"

"How can I help you to the attainment of riches and delights?"

"That is my affair. I do most earnestly entreat you at this moment to make no further attempt at evasion, for time presses. Let me ask you,—will you endeavour to retain in your memory, during my absence, the beginning of that birthday greeting?"

"Yes."

"And will you be ready, when I return, to hear the conclusion?"

"Yes."

"Good; in the midst of the sorrow and gloom to which I am summoned there will be a glimpse of clear blue sky above me, and for you——may my good angel whisper in your ear the word that will unlock that fairy realm for me. Farewell!"

He gave her his hand, and disappeared upon the path leading directly to the castle.

Elizabeth stood still for a few moments in a state of delicious stupefaction, from which she was roused by the surprise of the doctor's wife at finding the gentlemen gone. Elizabeth told her what had happened, and the doctor shortly returned and related that the baroness had been greatly piqued that her cousin had not considered it worth his while to inform her in person of the cause of his

departure. The unlucky doctor had been obliged to bear the brunt of the lady's ill humour, which had vented itself in several biting remarks, but he had been so discourteous as to allow them to pass him by without in the least disturbing his serenity. He seated himself at the table and began to eat with an excellent appetite.

Meanwhile Elizabeth went to take leave of Fräulein von Walde. There was nothing now to detain her any longer. She longed to be alone with her thoughts, to recall undisturbed every word that he had spoken, and to ponder upon its meaning.

"Are you going?" asked Helene, as Elizabeth stood behind her chair and bade her farewell. "What does my brother say to that?"

"Rudolph has been summoned to the castle upon some business matter," the baroness, who just now appeared, answered in Elizabeth's stead. "Fräulein Ferber is released from all necessity of remaining any longer."

Helene cast a glance of displeasure at the speaker. "I cannot see why," she said. "His business cannot detain him long, he will certainly return."

"Probably," rejoined the baroness; "but he may be delayed quite late. Fräulein Ferber, meanwhile, will be very much fatigued in a circle where she is such an utter stranger."

"Has my brother released you?" Helene turned to Elizabeth, hardly allowing the baroness to complete her sentence.

"Yes," answered she, "and I pray you to allow me to take my departure."

During this short dialogue the Countess Falkenberg leaned back and measured Elizabeth from head to foot with her cold, piercing eyes; but Hollfeld arose and departed without saying a word. Fräulein von Walde looked after him with an air of anxious discontent, and at first did not reply to Elizabeth's request; but at last, with evident absence of mind, she held out her hand and said, "Well, then, go, dear child, and a thousand thanks for your kind assistance to-day."

Elizabeth took a hasty leave of Doctor Fels and his wife, and then entered the forest with a light heart.

She breathed more freely as the throng was left behind her, and as a few sounding chords concluded the waltz whose bewildering notes had for a short distance accompanied her. She could now yield herself up undisturbed to the magic that had laid so sweet a spell upon her entire mind and being, and forced her to listen still to the tones of that voice which had died upon her ear, ensnaring her heart with its thrilling melody, and at the sound of which all the suggestions of maidenly reserve, all the arguments of her understanding, vanished. She called to mind how passively she had followed him, although her deeply offended pride had prompted her instantly to leave the circle where she seemed to be so unwelcome a guest; she still experienced the delight with which she had hastened to his

side when he had so emphatically declared, before all present, that he belonged to her for the day, and would accept of no substitute in her place. He might have conducted her to the end of the world,—she would have followed him blindly with unhesitating reliance and the most entire abandonment of herself to his guidance. And her parents? She understood now how a daughter could forsake father and mother to follow a man whose path in life had been widely separated from her own, leading, perhaps, in directly an opposite direction,—a man who had known nothing of the inclinations, influences, occurrences great and small, by which every fibre of her life had been previously intertwined with the life of her family. Two months before, all this would have been an inexplicable riddle to her.

She turned into a path which she had often trodden with Miss Mertens. It led, by many a narrow winding, through the thicket, out upon the broad path which traversed the forest, and for some distance formed the boundary line between the Prince's domain and the estate of Herr von Walde. On the other side of this broad path opened the wide road which led through the forest to her uncle's Lodge.

Lost in her day-dreams, Elizabeth did not hear the sound of hasty footsteps approaching; she therefore started in alarm when she heard her name pronounced, close to her, by a man's voice. Hollfeld stood just behind her. She suspected why he had followed her, and she felt her heart beat quickly, but she collected herself, and, standing aside, made room for him to pass her in the narrow pathway.

"No, that was not what I wished, Fräulein Ferber," he said smiling, and in a tone of such familiarity as deeply offended her. "I wished to have the pleasure of accompanying you."

"I thank you," she coldly replied, "it would be giving you needless trouble; I always greatly prefer walking alone in the forest."

"And have you no fear?" he asked, stepping so close to her that she felt his hot breath upon her cheek.

"Only of unwelcome companionship," she replied, retaining her self-possession by an effort.

"Ah! here is the same dignified reserve again in which you always entrench yourself with me; and wherefore? I shall soon put an end to it, however. To-day, at least, I shall not respect it as I have hitherto been forced to do,—I must speak to you."

"Is what you have to say of such consequence as to require you to absent yourself from your friends and the fête?"

"Yes; it is a wish upon which my life depends; it pursues me day and night; I have been ill and wretched at the idea that it may never be gratified—I——"

In the mean time Elizabeth had accelerated her pace. It was hateful to her,—the presence of this man, in whose eyes glowed all the passion which he had hitherto partly repressed and which had already inspired her with such deep aversion and disgust; but she was perfectly conscious that absolute self-possession was her only weapon, and therefore she interrupted him, while her lips quivered with the sickly semblance of a smile.

"Ah!" she said, "our practisings, then, have had most desirable results; you wish my assistance in music, if I understand you rightly?"

"You misunderstand me intentionally," he exclaimed.

"Accept the misunderstanding as an act of forbearance on my part," said Elizabeth seriously; "I should else be obliged to say much to you which it might please you still less to hear."

"Go on, I pray. I know your sex sufficiently well to be quite aware that they delight in wearing the mask of coldness and reserve for awhile,—their favours are all the more welcome. I do not grudge you the pleasure of this innocent coquetry, but then——"

Elizabeth stood for one moment dumb and stupefied at his insolence; such hateful words had never before shocked her ears. Shame and indignation drove the blood to her face, and she sought in vain for terms in which to punish such unexampled temerity. He interpreted her silence otherwise.

"I knew it," he cried triumphantly. "I see through you; the blush of detection becomes you incomparably! You are beautiful as an angel! Never have I seen so perfect a form as yours! Ah! you know well enough that you made me your slave the first time I saw you; since then, I have languished at your feet. What shoulders and what arms! Why have you hitherto veiled them so enviously?"

An indignant exclamation broke from Elizabeth's lips:

"How dare you," she cried loudly and violently, "offer me these insults! If you have not understood me hitherto, let me tell you now, clearly and distinctly, that your society, which you force upon me thus, is hateful to me, and that I wish to be alone."

"Bravo! that authoritative tone becomes you excellently well," he said, with a sneer; "the noble blood that you inherit from your mother shows itself now. What have I done to make you suddenly play this indignant part? I have told you that you are beautiful, but your mirror must tell you the same thing fifty times a day, and I do not believe that you break it for the telling."

Elizabeth turned her back upon him contemptuously, and walked quickly onward. He kept pace with her, and seemed quite sure of a final victory. She had just reached the broad forest-road when a carriage dashed past. A man's head appeared at the window, but at sight of her was drawn back quickly, as though surprised. He looked out once more, as if to convince himself that he had seen

correctly, and then the carriage vanished around a sharp turn in the road.

Elizabeth involuntarily extended her arms after the retreating carriage. Its inmate well knew how she detested Hollfeld; after the declaration that she had made to him a few hours before, how could he doubt that she was most unwillingly in the society of this man? Could he not delay his journey for one moment, to free her from such odious importunity?

Hollfeld observed her action.

"Aha!" he cried, with a malicious laugh, "that looked almost tender. If it were not for my cousin's seven and thirty years, I might actually be jealous! Perhaps you supposed that he would immediately descend from his vehicle and gallantly offer you his arm to escort you to your home! You see he is too conscientious; he denies himself that indulgence, and prefers to fulfil a sacred duty. He is an iceberg, for whom no woman possesses a single charm. You owe his behaviour to you to-day, which was so very courteous, not to your enchanting eyes, O bewitching Gold Elsie, but to his desire to provoke my honoured mamma."

"And does nothing deter you from ascribing such mean motives to the man whose hospitality you enjoy so freely?" cried Elizabeth, provoked. She had determined not to reply to him again by a single syllable, in hopes that she might thus weary out his pertinacity; but the manner in which he spoke of Herr von Walde overcame her self-control.

"Mean?" he repeated. "You express yourself strongly. I only call it a little revenge which he was fully justified in taking. And as for his hospitality,—I am only using now what will be all my own at some future period; I cannot see that it should alter my opinion of my cousin. Besides, I am the one to sacrifice myself, I deserve all the gratitude. Is my devotion and attention to Fräulein von Walde to go for nothing?"

"It must be a hard task to pluck a few flowers and carry them to a poor invalid!" said Elizabeth ironically.

"Aha! you are, as I am happy to observe, jealous of these little attentions of mine," he cried triumphantly. "Did you seriously suppose for one moment that I could really be in love with her, while my sense of beauty was so perpetually outraged? I esteem my cousin, but I never forget for one instant that she is a year older than I, that she limps, is crooked, and——"

"Detestable!" Elizabeth interrupted him, beside herself with the abhorrence he inspired; she hastily crossed the broad forest-road. He followed her.

"Detestable, say I, too," he continued, endeavouring to keep pace with her; "especially when I see your Hebeform by her side. And now I beg you, do not run so fast; let there be the peace between us of which I dream day and night."

He suddenly passed his arm around her waist and forced her to stand still, while his glowing face, with eyes sparkling with unholy fire, approached her

own. At first she gazed at him speechless and stupefied, then a shudder convulsed her frame, and with a gesture of utter aversion she pushed him from her.

"Don't dare to touch me again!" she cried in a clear ringing voice,—and at the same moment she heard the loud barking of a dog near her. She turned her head in joyful surprise towards the spot whence the noise proceeded.

"Hector! Hector! here, good dog!" she called; and the forester's huge hound burst through the thicket and fawned upon her.

"My uncle is not far off," she turned coldly and quietly to her discomfited companion; "he will be here in a moment. As you can hardly desire that I should request him to rid me of your society, I advise you to return immediately to the castle."

And, in fact, he stood still like a coward, while she, accompanied by the dog, proceeded towards her home. Hollfeld stamped his feet in his rage, and cursed the blind passion that had robbed him of all prudence. He did not for one instant imagine that he could really be disagreeable to Elizabeth,—he, the pet of society, whose slightest word, were it only an invitation to dance, made such a sensation in the little world of L——, and was so often an occasion of envy and discord among the ladies! The idea was absurd. It was far more likely that the daughter of the forester's clerk was a coquette, who intended to make conquest as difficult as possible for him. He had no faith in the existence of that virgin purity of soul which made Elizabeth thus insensible, and the magic of which affected even him most powerfully, although he did not understand its influence. He had no faith in the sacred reserve of a young girl's inner life, and therefore could not possibly conceive of the instinctive aversion which his selfish, unprincipled nature inspired. He reproached himself angrily for having been too sudden and violent, thus defeating his own ends, and deferring indefinitely the accomplishment of his hopes. He wandered about in the forest for an hour before he could master his emotions; for the guests, who were still dancing on the green before the convent tower whence the gay music reached his ears, must not suspect the volcano seething beneath that cold and interesting exterior.

Elizabeth had apparently walked away with a firm, decided step, but she took care to look neither to the right nor the left, lest she should suddenly see his hated face beside her. At last she ventured to stand still and look around her. He had disappeared. With a sigh of relief, she leaned against the trunk of a tree to collect her thoughts, while Hector stood beside her sagely wagging his tail, seeming thoroughly to understand that he was playing the part of her protector. Doubtless he had been taking a forest walk for his own amusement, for there were no signs of his master. Elizabeth felt her knees tremble beneath her. Her terror, when Hollfeld had clasped her waist, had been extreme. In her innocence she had never imagined such rudeness, and hence his sudden touch had made her

for one moment rigid with horror. She shed bitter tears of shame as she recalled Herr von Walde's image, not clothed in the gentleness of the last few hours, but stern and reserved. She thought she should scarcely dare ever to look up at him again since that wretch had touched her. All her happy visions lay shattered at her feet. This unhappy encounter with Hollfeld had ruthlessly brought her back to reality. What he had said of Herr von Walde, coarse and slanderous as it was, had revived much in her mind which she had once believed, and considered as a bar to her growing interest in him. She thought of his invincible pride of descent, of his self-renouncing love for his sister, and of the universal opinion that his heart was cold as ice where women were concerned. All the gay brilliant dreams which had hovered around her path through the forest now folded their wings and vanished beneath the searching gaze of her awakened consciousness. She could hardly tell what it was that formerly made her so happy. Was it not most likely that only a strong sense of justice had induced him to show her such gentle kindness and consideration to-day,—to protect her from the insolent annoyance of his relatives? Had he not in like manner protected Miss Mertens, and endeavoured to indemnify her for the injustice that she had encountered beneath his roof? And the birthday greeting! Ah, she must not think of that, or its unfinished conclusion, for then all her dead visions would instantly celebrate a blissful resurrection!

As she entered the Lodge Sabina came towards her, pale as ashes, in great distress. She pointed mutely to the door of the dwelling-room. Within the apartment her uncle was speaking loudly, while he was pacing heavily to and fro.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" whispered Sabina, "everything is going wrong in there. Bertha has kept out of your uncle's way most carefully for the last few weeks, but a little while ago she was standing at the great door and did not see that he was coming into the yard. He gave her no time to run off, but took her by the hand and led her instantly into the room there. She was as white as the wall, in her fear of him,—but that didn't help her,—go she must. Ah, Lord have mercy upon me! I should not like to have the Herr Forester for a father confessor——"

A loud burst of sobbing, that sounded almost like a stifled shriek, interrupted Sabina's whispering.

"Better so!" they now heard the forester say in a far gentler tone of voice; "at least that is a sign that you are not quite hardened. And now speak out! Remember that I stand here in place of your good parents. If you have a sorrow confide it to me; be sure that if it has befallen you without fault on your part, I will faithfully assist you to bear it."

Only stifled sobs ensued.

"You cannot speak?" asked the forester after a short pause. "I know of a certainty that there is no physical obstacle in the way of your speaking, for you

talk to yourself continually when you believe yourself unobserved; you must be putting some force upon yourself,—have you made a vow against the use of your tongue?"

Probably an assenting nod must have confirmed him in this supposition, for he continued, with great irritation, "What an insane idea! Do you suppose that you can do your Heavenly Father good service by renouncing one of his best gifts, the power of speech? And are you going to be silent all your life long? No! You will speak, then, if that which you hope to effect by means of your vow fails to come to pass? Very well, I cannot force you to speak,—then endure alone what depresses you and makes you so unhappy, for that you are unhappy any one can read in your face. But let me tell you that you will find an inexorable judge in me, if it should ever appear that you have done anything that shuns the light and should not be told to honest men; for in your boundless arrogance you have hitherto rejected every well-meant piece of advice, every attempt to guide and direct you, making it impossible for me to care for you as it is my duty and desire, standing as I do in the place of your parents. I will bear with you a little longer; but should I find you once leaving the house after nightfall, this is your home no longer,—you must go. And let me tell you also, to-morrow I shall send for the doctor to tell me whether you are really ailing; you have looked wretchedly for the last few weeks. Now go!"

The door opened, and Bertha staggered out. She did not notice Sabina and Elizabeth, and when she heard the door close behind her, she suddenly wrung her hands above her head in the speechless agony of despair, and rushed up the stairs as though hunted by the furies.

"That girl has something on her conscience, whatever it may be," said Sabina, shaking her head. Elizabeth went in to her uncle. He was leaning against the window, and drumming upon one of the panes with his fingers, a common habit with him when irritated. He looked very gloomy, but his features lighted up as Elizabeth entered.

"I'm glad you are come, Gold Elsie!" he exclaimed; "I need to see some true, pure face beside me; I shudder at the black eyes of that girl who has just gone out. Never mind, I have taken up my domestic cross again, and shall bear it on for awhile; I cannot see the child cry, even though I were sure that the effect of every tear was exactly calculated."

Elizabeth was heartily glad that the dreaded encounter between Bertha and her uncle was well over. She hastened to divert his thoughts entirely from the unfortunate girl by describing to him the festivities she had just witnessed, telling him cursorily of Herr von Walde's sudden departure. She informed him also of Linke's dreadful end, at which, however, he was not greatly surprised, as he had expected some such termination to the affair.

He accompanied Elizabeth to the garden gate.

"Be very careful not to ring too loudly at the gate in the wall," he warned her as she left him. "Your mother had an attack of headache to-day, and has gone to bed. I was up there a little while ago."

Elizabeth ran up the mountain in some anxiety, but Miss Mertens, leading little Ernst by the hand, came to meet her on the sward before the castle, and soothed her fears. The attack was over, and her mother was enjoying a refreshing sleep when Elizabeth softly went to her bedside.

It was already twilight; the most profound quiet reigned throughout the house,—the striking clocks had been stopped,—the window shutters were closed that the rustling of the leaves without might not be heard,—not even a fly buzzed,—for Ferber had tenderly taken care that nothing should disturb the stillness that surrounded the sleeper.

If her mother had been sitting in her arm-chair in the window recess of the dwelling-room behind the protecting curtains, looking upon the green domain without, above which stretched the calm evening skies,—the dear familiar corner would have become a confessional, where Elizabeth, kneeling upon the cushion at her mother's feet, would have poured out her overcharged mind and heart. But now she thrust back her precious secret into the inmost recesses of her soul: and who knows whether she will ever find courage to reveal what must fill her mother's heart with the keenest anxiety?

CHAPTER XVI.

The ruins of Gnadeck might well listen in amazement to the strange noise which had resounded through their crumbling walls from the first peep of dawn. It was not the familiar sound of destruction caused by furious storms, or the melting of the snow when spring appeared. Then the water softly excavated little gutters between the stones, and lifted from its niche, without any other warning, one block of granite after another, that, the instant before its final downfall, looked proudly and threateningly down upon the world; for its overthrow had been planned more secretly than that of a royal favourite or an unpopular ministry. And then a violent storm would arise some midnight,—a mighty crash would come, and the rays of the rising sun would wander for the first time over walls and floors that they had never touched before. There would be a huge pile of

masonry heaped upon the pavement, and all through the day, with every gentle breeze, broken bits of mortar and little rills of sand would trickle down from the wound; but before long, tender grass would sprout from the jagged edges, and years, long years, would again ensue before the mischievous water beneath the green garment would prepare a new victim for the tempest. It was a slow, scarcely perceptible decline. The ruins might be as easy as the invalid whose disease, though incurable, may permit him to rival the Old Testament patriarchs in length of days.

It was human hands to-day that were effecting the work of destruction. With incredible speed and activity they dislodged stone after stone. The old jutty, which had advanced so boldly for years, like a valiant sentinel keeping watch before this wing of the castle, presented a most deplorable appearance. It had already been shorn of much of its height; its ivy mantle was torn, and dark window niches and mossy masonry came to light, which, perhaps, once were rich in stone carving. The workmen were very diligent. It interested them greatly, hazardous as was their task, to obtain a glimpse down into the dark nooks and corners of the old pile, that popular superstition had peopled with countless ghastly apparitions.

In the afternoon, Frau Ferber was sitting upon the shady rampart with Miss Mertens and Elizabeth, when Reinhard, who, always made his appearance at a certain hour of the day, interrupted their reading. He announced that Linke's body had been committed to the earth as privately as possible that morning, and that Fräulein von Walde had learned, through the carelessness of a servant, of the attempt upon her brother's life. But he remarked, with some bitterness, that Herr von Walde's anxiety, lest his sister's fright upon hearing of the assault should have disastrous consequences, had been wholly unnecessary, since the lady had heard of it with entire composure, and even the terrible accident that had befallen Herr von Hartwig, whose wife was one of her friends, had apparently produced very little impression upon her. "But if the life of her fair-haired favourite had been in danger," he declared angrily, "she would most certainly have torn her chestnut curls. That Herr von Hollfeld is utterly odious to me! He has been walking about the house to-day, looking as if he would like to poison us all. I'll wager that this charming mood of his is the cause of Fräulein von Walde's red and swollen eyes, which she tried to conceal from me when I met her in the garden just now."

At the mention of the hated name, Elizabeth bent low over her work. The blood rushed to her face at the thought of Hollfeld's insolence the day before, of which she had not yet told her mother, for fear that it might cause a return of her headache; and perhaps there were other reasons for her silence; but she would not acknowledge to herself how much she dreaded lest her parents, upon

learning of Hollfeld's rudeness, should prohibit her from going to Lindhof again, in which case all chance of seeing Herr von Walde would be at an end.

In the mean time, the destruction of the jutty was going on uninterruptedly. After awhile Ferber entered the garden. He had been to the Lodge, and had brought the forester home with him to take coffee. Ernst came running to them in a great state of excitement. The child had obediently forborne to transgress the bounds which his father had set for him, that he might not be exposed to danger; but he had been looking on from his post of observation, following the progress of the workmen with the greatest interest.

"Papa! papa!" he cried, "the mason wants to speak to you,—come right away; he says he has found something!"

And in fact one of the workmen made signs to the brothers to come nearer.

"We have come to what seems to be a small chamber," the man called down to them, "and, as well as I can see, there is a coffin in it. Will you not examine into the matter, Herr Ferber, before we proceed? You can come up here with entire safety; we have firm foothold."

Reinhard had heard the call and came hastily down the terrace steps. A concealed apartment, containing a coffin!—the words were music to his antiquarian ears.

The three men cautiously ascended the ladder.

The workmen were standing just where the huge jutty sprang forth from the main building, and they pointed down to a tolerably large opening at their feet. Until now they had come upon no room that had been closed; the roof of the main building was partly gone, and standing upon this spot, you could look in all directions through a labyrinth of open rooms, half ruinous passages, and through great gaps in the floors down into the castle chapel. The old ruins did not seem half so desolate from within as from without; the blue heavens peeped in everywhere, and the fresh breeze swept through as often as it would. But now a space suddenly appeared at their feet surrounded by firm walls, and covered by a tolerably well-preserved ceiling. As well as they could judge from where they stood, the room lay like a wedge between the chapel and the space behind. At all events, there must be a window somewhere at the extreme corner formed by the wall of the jutty and that of the main building, for from that direction a weak reflection streamed in through coloured glass, and flickered upon the object which was dimly visible, and which the masons took for a coffin.

Immediately a ladder of greater length was procured, as the room was quite a high one, and one by one all went down in a state of highly-wrought expectation. In descending, there was within reach a wainscoted wall almost black with age. The profusion of strange, rich carving that adorned it startled the eye. Close to the ceiling a plain strip of wood, of much more modern date, had been

nailed, upon which were still hanging some rags of black cloth; while the rest of what had once been the mourning drapery of the apartment lay in mouldering, shapeless heaps upon the floor.

Doubtless concealment had been the purpose of the room from the beginning, for there had been no heed paid to symmetry of form in its construction. It represented an irregular triangle, and in one somewhat rounded corner was the very small window whose existence they had suspected. It lay so close to the chapel that Reinhard's supposition that in old Catholic times the church treasures had been secreted here seemed most probable; all the more so as on one side five or six worn stone steps led down to a door in the chapel wall, which had been walled up from within. The window was just behind the evergreen oak, which pressed its thick branches against it, and the ivy had twined a tender lattice-work across the panes; but nevertheless the sun stole through the coloured glass in the graceful, delicate stone rosette, which was in a state of perfect preservation.

It was in fact a coffin,—a small, narrow, leaden coffin,—standing out in strong contrast with the black velvet covering of its pedestal, which was thus found lonely and forgotten within these three walls. At its head was a huge candelabrum, in the branches of which were still to be seen the remains of wax candles; but at its foot was a footstool, upon which lay a mandolin, its strings all broken. It had been an old instrument in the hands of its last possessor, for the black colour of its neck was worn away in spots, and the sounding-board was slightly hollowed where the player had pressed her little fingers. At the approach of the intruders the last fragments of the withered heap of flowers fluttered down from the coffin, upon whose lid in gilt letters was inscribed the name "Lila."

Set in the thick wall of the most extensive side of the apartment was a kind of press, of dark oak, which Reinhard at first supposed had been appropriated to the safe-keeping of the priestly robes and ornaments. He opened the doors, which stood ajar; as they shook in opening there was a rustle within, and little clouds of dust flew forth from a quantity of female garments hanging inside. They formed a strange, fantastic wardrobe,—gay, and most coquettish in fashion, they contrasted oddly enough with the grave solemnity of their surroundings.

She who had worn these garments must have been a wonderfully small and delicate creature, for the silk skirts,—most of them bordered with embroidery in gold thread,—were as short as though made for a child; and the shape of the black and violet velvet bodices, with their silken ribbons and tinsel trimmings, must have fitted an exquisite, pliant, maiden waist. Many, many years must have elapsed since a human being had breathed within these walls,—since any hand warm with life had touched these hidden objects. The hooks in the press had, in some cases, pierced the mouldering stuffs; and the threads, which had once confined the pearls and spangles of the trimming, hung loose and broken.

Against one wall was placed a little table with a stone top. Its legs, grown weak with age, appeared scarcely able to sustain it, and it leaned forward, endangering the safety of a casket that stood upon it. This casket was a master-piece of workmanship in ivory and gold. The cover did not seem to be locked; it looked rather as if it had been lightly closed, in order to preserve a broad parchment which projected from the box and had obviously been arranged with the view of attracting attention. It was yellow with age and covered deep,—as was all else,—with dust; but the large, stiff, black characters upon it were distinctly visible, and the name, "Jost von Gnadewitz," was perfectly legible.

"Good Heavens! what have we here?" cried the forester, whose speech almost failed him with amazement "Jost von Gnadewitz!—the hero of Sabina's tale of her great-grandmother!"

Ferber approached the table, and carefully raised the cover of the casket. Within, upon a dark velvet cushion, lay ornaments of antique workmanship, bracelets, brooches, a necklace of gold coins, and several strings of costly pearls.

The parchment had fallen to the ground. Reinhard picked it up, and offered to read the contents aloud. It was, even for the time when it had been composed,—about two hundred years before,—very clumsily written, and very badly spelled. The writer had evidently understood how to wield the hunting-spear better than the pen,—nevertheless an air of poesy breathed through the lines. They ran thus:

"Whoever you may be who are the first to enter this room, by all that is sacred to you, by everything that you love or that has a home in your heart, do not disturb her repose. She lies there sleeping like a child. The sweet face beneath the dark curls smiles again now that death has touched it. Once more, whoever you are, whether noble or beggar, descendant of hers or not, let my eyes be the last to rest upon her!

"I could not lay her in the dark, cold ground. Here the golden light will play around her, and birds will alight upon the branches of the tree outside with the breath of the forest ruffling their feathers, while the songs that hushed her in her cradle gush from their throats.

"The golden sunlight was quivering in the forest, and the birds were singing in the trees, when the graceful roe parted the bushes, and gazed with shy, startled eyes at the young huntsman who was lying in the shade. His heart beat quickly and wildly at sight of her; he threw his weapons from him, and pursued the maiden-form that fled before him. She, the child of the forest, a daughter of that people which the curse of God pursues making them wanderers upon the face of the earth, with no home for their weary feet, not a foot of land that they can call their own whereon to lay their dying heads,—she had vanquished the heart of the proud, fierce huntsman. Suing for her love, he haunted the camp of her tribe, day and night; he followed her footsteps like a dog, and entreated

her passionately until she was touched, to leave her people and fly with him in secret. In the silence of night he bore her away to his castle, and, alas! became her murderer. He did not heed her prayers, when she was suddenly seized by the uncontrollable longing for her forest liberty. As the prisoned bird flutters wildly about its cage, beating its delicate wings against the confining wires, so she wandered in despair through the halls which had once resounded to her intoxicating song and the delicious music of her lute, but which now only echoed to her sighs and complaints. He saw her cheeks grow pale, saw her eyes averted from him in hate; his heart died a thousand deaths when she thrust him from her, and shuddered at his touch; despair possessed him, but he doubly bolted every door, and guarded them in deadly terror, for he knew that she was lost to him forever if once again her foot should press the woodland turf. And then there came a time when she grew less restless,—'tis true she glided past him as though he were a shadow, a nothing,—she never lifted her eyes when he approached her and addressed her in the tenderest tones of entreaty,—it was long since she had spoken to him, and still no words passed her lips; but she no longer beat her tiny hands against the window-bars, tearing her hair, and calling with shrill shrieks upon those who passed through the forest without, enjoying all the sweets of liberty. She no longer fled madly, like some hunted thing, through halls and corridors, nor mounted the castle wall to throw her fair body into the gloomy waters of the moat. She sat beneath the evergreen oak with a sad, patient look upon her lily-white face; she knew of the life within her own,—she was about to become a mother. And when night came, and the huntsman bore her up the broad stairway in his arms,—she did not resist, but she turned her face from him, that his breath might not touch her cheek, that no glance of his loving eyes might fall upon her.

"And one day the pastor of Lindhof came to the castle. The people declared that Jost, a lamb of his flock, had dealings with the devil, and he came to rescue the lost soul. He was admitted, and saw the creature for whose sake the wild huntsman had renounced his merry life in the forest, and heaven itself. Her beauty and purity touched him. He spoke to her in gentle tones, and her heart, paralyzed with suffering, melted at his addresses. For the sake of the child that was to come, she was baptized, and the unholy tie that had bound her to her lover was hallowed by the sanction of the church. And when her dark hour of pain had passed, she pressed her cold lips upon the brow of her child, and, with that kiss, her spirit burst its bonds,—she was free, free! The triumph of that moment transfigured the earthly tenement from which the soul had departed. The wretched man saw those glorious eyes darken in death; he writhed at her feet in an agony of remorse and despair, and implored her in vain for only one last glance of love.

"The boy was christened, and received his father's name,—my baptismal

name. I gazed with a shudder into his eyes,—they are my eyes. Together we have murdered her. My old servant, Simon, has taken the boy away. I cannot live for him. Simon says, and the pastor also, that no woman can be found willing to nourish my child at her breast, for, in the eyes of the people I am lost,—doomed eternally to hell-torments. The wife of my forester, Ferber, has adopted the child without knowing whence it comes——"

Here the reader paused, and looked up over the parchment at the brothers. The forester, who, until now, had been leaning against the opposite wall listening with the greatest attention, suddenly stood by his side, and clutched his arm convulsively. The colour left his sun-burnt cheeks for one moment. It seemed as if his heart ceased to beat, so great was his agitation. And Ferber also drew near, testifying in his face and gestures extreme surprise.

"Go on, go on!" cried the forester at last, in stifled accents.

"Simon laid him upon the threshold of the forest lodge," Reinhard read further, "and to-day he saw Ferber's wife kissing and tending him like her own little girl. By the laws of my family, he has no claim upon the Gnadewitz estate, but my maternal inheritance will preserve him from want. My directions I have confided, in a sealed packet, deposited in the town-house at L——, to the public authorities. They will substantiate his claim to be my son and heir. May he, as Hans Jost von Gnadewitz, found a new race. The Almighty will provide kind hearts to protect his youth,—I cannot.

"Everything which adorned that lovely form in happier days shall surround it in death, and yield to the same decay. Her child has a claim upon her jewels, but my heart revolts at the thought that what has rested upon her dazzling brow, her pure neck, may perhaps be torn asunder and desecrated by faithless hands. Better to leave all here to fade and fall to ruin.

"Once more I implore you, whom chance may lead to this sanctuary, after the lapse of centuries perhaps,—honour the dead, and pray for me,

"JOST VON GNADEWITZ."

The two brothers clasped each other's hands, and, without a word, approached the coffin. In their veins flowed the blood of that strange being who had once kindled to a flame the heart of the fierce, proud lord of the castle,—of that woman whose ardent soul, thirsting for freedom, exultingly fled from the idolized body which had crumbled to a little heap of ashes here in its narrow leaden tomb. Two tall figures stood there, descendants of him who, with his dying mother's consecrating kiss upon his brow, was borne out into the forest, and laid upon the low threshold of a servant, while his nobly-born father, despair in his heart,

rushed madly to death.

"She was the mother of our race," Ferber said at last, with much emotion, to Reinhard. "We are the descendants of the foundling whose parentage has been a mystery until this hour, for the papers which would have established him in his rights were destroyed when the townhouse at L—— was burned down. We must suspend work here for a few days," he said, turning to one of the masons, who, prompted by a pardonable curiosity, had descended the ladder half way, and, from this post of observation, had listened in speechless amazement to the unfolding of a tale which would afford a subject for winter evenings in the large, peasant spinning-rooms, for a long time to come.

"Instead, you must prepare a grave to-morrow in the church-yard at Lindhof," the forester called up to him; "I will speak to the pastor about it afterwards."

He went again to the press, and looked at the garments that had once enveloped the delicate limbs of the gypsy maiden, and had evidently been adjusted with great care, that they might recall the times when they had been seen upon the beautiful Lila by the enraptured eyes of her lover. Upon the floor of the press were ranged shoes. The forester took up a pair of them; they were scarcely longer than the width of his broad hand,—only Cinderella's feet could ever have worn them.

"I will take these to Elsie," he said, smiling, holding them carefully between his forefinger and thumb, "she will be surprised to find what a Liliputian her ancestress was."

Meanwhile Ferber, after brushing the dust from the mandolin, took it carefully under his arm, while Reinhard closed the jewel-box and lifted it from the table by the exquisitely wrought handle on the lid. Thus the three men ascended the ladder again. Arrived at the top, all the boards that they could procure were placed over the opening, so as to afford a temporary protection from wind and rain, and then they descended from their perilous position upon the summit of the ruin.

Below, the ladies had been awaiting them for some time, in a state of great expectation, and were not a little surprised at the strange procession that descended the ladder. But not one word did they learn of what had been seen or heard, until the whole party were once more seated beneath the linden. Then Reinhard placed the casket upon the table, described minutely the hidden apartment and its contents, and, at last producing the parchment, read again what we have already learned; of course with far greater fluency than before.

In breathless silence the ladies listened to these outpourings of a passionate, burning heart. Elizabeth sat pale and still; but when Reinhard came to the words that suddenly threw such a glare of light upon the dim past of her family, she started up, and her eyes rested in speechless surprise upon the smiling face of

her uncle, who was observing her narrowly. Even Frau Ferber sat for awhile after the reader had finished, fairly dumb with amazement. To her clear, calm mind, accustomed to reason carefully, this romantic solution of family questions, which had been unanswered for centuries, was almost incomprehensible. But Miss Mertens, to whom the whole bearing of the discovery was explained by Ferber, as she did not even know the story of the foundling, clapped her hands above her head at such a revelation.

"And does not this parchment give you a claim to your inheritance?" she asked quickly and eagerly.

"Undoubtedly," replied Ferber, "but how can we tell in what that maternal inheritance consisted? The family has died out, the very name of Gnadewitz is extinct. Everything has passed into strange hands; who can tell to what we may lay claim?"

"No, let all that rest," said the forester with decision; "such matters cost money, and in the end we might come into possession of only a few thalers. Oh no! let it go! We have not starved yet."

Elizabeth musingly took up the shoes which her uncle had placed before her. The faded silk of which they were made was torn here and there, and showed perfectly the shape of the foot. They had been much worn, but not apparently upon the soil of the forest; the soles showed no traces of such contact; probably they had covered the restless feet at the time of her imprisonment, "when she fled madly through halls and corridors like some hunted thing."

"Aha! Elsie, now we know where you got your slender waist and those feet that trip over the sward, scarcely bending the blades of grass," said her uncle. "You are just such a forest-butterfly as your ancestress, and would flutter just so against the bars of your cage if you were shut up within locked doors; there is gypsy blood in your veins were you ten times Gold Elsie and though your skin is like a snowdrift. There, put on those things, you will find that you can dance in them easily."

"Oh no, uncle," cried Elizabeth deprecatingly, "they seem to me like sacred relics; I could not put them on without fearing that Jost's fiery black eyes might suddenly glare out at me."

Frau Ferber and Miss Mertens agreed with her, and the former declared that in her opinion the press, with all that it contained, ought to be carefully removed to some quiet, dry place, where it might be preserved untouched as a family relic until it fulfilled its destiny, which was to decay with all else that is mortal.

"Well, with regard to the press, let it be as you say," Reinhard here interposed; "but it seems to me that a different fate should await these articles."

He opened the casket. The sunlight penetrating, its interior came flashing back in a thousand sparkling rays, dazzling the eyes that looked on. Reinhard

took out a necklace,—it was very broad, and of admirable design.

”These are brilliants of the purest water,” he explained to the rest,—the necklace was set thick with precious stones,—”and these rubies here must have gleamed magnificently from the dark curls of the beautiful gypsy girl,” he continued, as he took two pins from their velvet cushion with heads formed like lily-cups of red stones, from which chains, set thick with rubies, fell like a glittering little shower.

Elizabeth, smiling, held a costly agraffe above her forehead.

”And so you think, Herr Reinhard,” she said, ”that we should let all reverence for the past go, and recklessly adorn ourselves with these jewels? What would my white muslin dress say if I should some day introduce it into such distinguished society?”

”The brilliants are exquisitely becoming to you,” replied Reinhard, smiling; ”but to my mind a nosegay of fresh flowers would be far more suitable with the white muslin; and therefore I should advise that these precious stones be transformed at the jeweller’s into shining coin.”

Ferber nodded assentingly.

”What! Reinhard,” cried Miss Mertens, ”do you think these family jewels should be sold?”

”Certainly,” he replied; ”it would be both foolish and sinful to let such capital lie idle. The stones alone must be worth full seven thousand thalers, and then there are these very fine pearls, and this wrought gold, which will bring a very clever little sum besides.”

”Zounds!” exclaimed the forester; ”let them go then on the spot,——See, Adolph,” he continued more gently, and rested his arm upon his brother’s shoulder, ”Heaven has been kind to you here. Did I not tell you that all would go smoothly with you in Thuringia, although I never dreamed that eight thousand thalers were waiting for you?”

”For me?” cried Ferber with surprise. ”Does it not all belong to you as the elder?”

”None of that! What, in Heaven’s name, should I do with the trash? Am I to begin to invest capital in my old days? I think I see myself at such work! I have neither chick nor child in the world, hold an excellent office,—and when my old bones fail me, there is a pension for me, which, try as I may, I shall never be able to spend. Therefore I resign my birthright in favour of the girl with the golden hair and Ernst, the rogue, who shall perpetuate our stock; I will not even have a mess of lentil pottage in exchange, for Sabina says it is not good with venison. Don’t touch me!” he cried, with a comic gesture of refusal, clasping his hands behind him, as Frau Ferber, with tears in her eyes, came to him with outstretched arms, and his brother would have remonstrated with him. ”It would

be much better for you, sister-in-law, to go and see about our coffee. It is really past hearing! four o'clock and not a drop of the usual refreshments, for the sake of which I dragged myself up here."

He accomplished his aim in diverting from himself all grateful acknowledgments. Frau Ferber hastened into the house, accompanied by Elizabeth, and the others laughed. The whole party were soon seated upon the terrace, busy with the brown, fragrant beverage.

"Yes, yes," said the forester, leaning comfortably back in his chair; "I never thought, when I awoke this morning, that I should lie down at night a Herr von Gnadewitz. I shall gain a step in my profession, of course, instantly; that yellow parchment, with its crooked letters, has done for me in an instant what thirty years of hard service have failed to accomplish. As soon as his Highness arrives in L—— I shall make my best bow, and introduce myself by my new name. Zounds! how those people will stare!"

A peculiar side glance was directed, as these words were spoken, towards Elizabeth, and at the same moment the speaker puffed away at his pipe so vigorously that his face was quite concealed by a thick cloud of smoke.

"Uncle," cried his niece, "say what you will, I know that you can never intend to patch up again the shattered crest of the Gnadewitzes."

"I can't see why not, 'tis a beautiful coat of arms, with chevrons, stars——"

"And a wheel covered with blood," interrupted Elizabeth. "God forbid that we should swell the number of those who revive the sins of their ancestors to prove the antiquity of their race, and thus make nobility ignoble,—nothing in the world seems to me more detestable. I should think that all those who have been tortured and hunted down in life by that pitiless, haughty race, would arise, like accusing ghosts, from their graves, if the name should ever be revived, beneath whose shelter such oppression and tyranny existed for centuries. When I compare the two fathers,—one seeking death like a coward, never considering for an instant that his poor child had the most sacred claims upon him; the other, a poor servant, taking the outcast compassionately to his heart, and bestowing upon it his own honest name,—then I know well which was the noble, which name deserves to be perpetuated. And think what sorrow that haughty race has caused my poor, dear mother."

"True enough, true enough," Frau Ferber declared with a sigh—"in the first place, I owe to it a stormy, unhappy childhood, for my mother was a beautiful, amiable girl, whom my father married against the will of his relatives, who could not forgive her ignoble extraction. This misalliance was a source of endless suffering and annoyance to my poor mother, for my father had not sufficient strength of character to break with the chief of the Gnadewitz family, and live only for his wife. This weakness on his part was the cause of constant strife be-

tween my parents, which I could not but be cognizant of. And we"—here she held out her hand across the table to her husband—"we can never forget all we had to contend with before we could belong to each other. I would not for the world return to the class who so often ruthlessly stifle every warm, humane sentiment, that outward rank and show may be preserved."

"And you never shall return, Marie," said her husband, with a smile, as he pressed her hand. He glanced mischievously at his brother, who was still puffing forth immense clouds of smoke, while he was doing his best, most unsuccessfully, to keep up the frown upon his brow.

"Ah! my fine plans," he sighed at last, with a comical look of disappointment. "Elsie, you are a cruel, foolish creature. You forget what a fine life we should lead, if I had a position at court, and you were a fine lady. There, does not that tempt you?"

Elizabeth shook her head, smilingly, but most decidedly

"And who knows," added Miss Mertens, "but that, before we could turn round, some noble knight, of stainless lineage, would bear away from old Gnadeck our high-born Elsie as his wife!"

"Do you think I would go with him?" cried Elizabeth, indignantly, her cheeks aglow.

"And why not?—if you loved him."

"No, never," replied the girl in a suppressed voice, "not even if I loved him,—for I should then be all the more wretched in the consciousness that the prestige of my name had weighed heavier in the balance than my heart, that in the eyes of that man all aspiration after spiritual elevation and moral excellence was worthless in comparison with a phantom, which the miserable prejudices of men had tricked out with tinsel."

Frau Ferber gazed with surprise at her daughter, whose face showed evident signs of deep emotion. The forester, on the other hand, held his pipe firmly between his teeth, and clapped his hands loudly.

"Elsie, child of gold!" he cried at last, "give me your hand! that's my brave girl! true metal, through and through! Yes, I say, too, God keep me from swelling the number of those who give up an honest name for the sake of their own personal advantage. No, Adolph, we will not cast scorn upon the parish register of the little Silesian village where we were christened; we will go on writing our names as they are written there."

"And as they have faithfully clung to us in joy and sorrow for half a century," added Ferber with his quiet smile, "I will keep this document for this fellow," and he laid his hand upon little Ernst's curly head, "until his judgment is clear and ripe. I cannot and must not decide for him, but I trust I shall train him so that he will prefer to carve out a path for himself by his own energy, rather than to

lie idly in the hot-bed of old traditions and wrongs enjoying privileges which should be the reward only of lofty endeavour. The Gnadewitzes in their long career added nothing to the world, but took much from it; let them moulder in their graves, and their high-sounding, undeserved titles with them!"

"Selah!" cried the forester, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "And now let us go," he said to his brother, "and advise with the Lindhof pastor. A spot beneath the beautiful lindens in our village church-yard seems to me infinitely preferable to those three gloomy walls, within which the mother of our line has lain for so long; and that the 'dark, cold ground' may not touch her coffin, let us have a grave built in the earth and closed with a tombstone."

He departed, accompanied by Ferber and Reinhard, and, whilst her mother and Miss Mertens were putting the jewel-box away in a place of security, Elizabeth climbed the ladder placed against the ruined jutty, pushed aside the boards, and descended into the secret chamber. A slender ray of the setting sun touched a ruby pane in the little window and threw a bloody stain upon the name "Lila," on the lid of the coffin. Elizabeth, with head bowed and hands clasped, stood for a long while beside the lonely bier, whereon that burning heart had slept undisturbed since the moment when death had stilled its wild beating and ended its sorrow. Centuries had flown by, effacing, as if they had never existed, all the transporting charm of that short life,—all the stormy emotion which had worked its ruin,—and yet the young heart that was throbbing restlessly in that chamber of death beside that bier, fancied that the emotions causing it to throb so wildly could never die.

CHAPTER XVII.

The news of the occurrence at Gnadeck had reached Lindhof Castle even before Reinhard returned thither. The masons on their way home to the village had related the wonderful story to a servant whom they met in the park, and the tale had flashed like lightning from mouth to mouth until it reached the boudoir of the ladies of the castle, where it produced the effect almost of a bombshell.

One of the favourite themes of the baroness had always been her own infallibility with regard to blue blood. She maintained that by means of a very delicate and sensitive organization she could recognize the existence of this life-giving stream even in people whose names she did not know. It was thus only

natural that she should be able to detect immediately every noble drop happening to flow in plebeian veins. She always had admitted that "the little Ferber" had something distinguished in her appearance in right of the noble descent of her mother. But with regard to the forester, that delicate perception of hers had been so much at fault that she had never dreamed of acknowledging his bow except by an almost imperceptible inclination of the head, which was all she deigned to bestow upon people of so low a rank in life. Why, in her noble rage at the rude blasphemer, who could forbid his ward, Bertha, to attend the Bible-class at the castle, she had often gone so far as to declare that she could detect his low origin a hundred paces off. And this was the man to bring to nought her reputation for this keen perception of aristocracy! He was the descendant of a lofty line,—the possessor of a name which, centuries back, had glowed in all the light of feudal splendour!

To be sure, there was great consolation for her in the thought that two centuries of ignoble marriages had rendered the noble blood very difficult to recognize. She declared as much very earnestly to Fräulein von Walde, who, reclining upon her lounge, was observing the baroness' agitation with a slight, rather contemptuous, smile. Personal interest in Fräulein Ferber, or the more unprejudiced mind of the younger lady, may have prompted some little reproof to her cousin; at all events she lifted her head and said quickly, not without a slight appearance of irritation: "Pardon me, Amalie, but that is a mistake. I know for a certainty that the wife of the forester's clerk is not the only nobly-born person who has married into the Ferber family. They have always been a fine, remarkably intellectual race, whose personal advantages have often conquered the prejudices of birth. I really do not believe that there have been more plebeian marriages in their family than can be found in the pedigree of the Lessens, and you would hardly maintain that there is not a drop of genuine noble blood in Bella's veins."

A delicate colour flickered over the elder lady's faded cheek, and the glance which she directed towards her companion from beneath her half-closed eyelids, was anything but gentle or amiable. A sickly smile still hovered upon her lips. Since the previous day she had, to her horror, frequently felt the ground tremble beneath her feet. It was actually terrifying suddenly to meet with contradiction in a quarter where for years she had found only complete adherence and blind submission.

She was, however, quite right in attributing the change in Helene's demeanour not only to the "unhappy" influence exercised upon her by her brother, but far more to her own son, who had conducted himself so strangely during the last few days. Helene's was, in reality, a noble nature, capable of appreciating all that was lofty and honourable, and animated by the purest desire for the good and true; but she had been accustomed from childhood to consider herself

as the centre of the loving care and attention of all around her. Notwithstanding her physical infirmity, she had never known the bitterness of being slighted. That she might forget her weakness, every one around her made her the object of marked attention. While she knew that she could never occupy a wife's position, her heart, overflowing with tenderness, had joyously welcomed a first love; and although, when alone, she might bewail with tears the neglect of nature, which had denied her the crowning joys of life, still she possessed the blissful conviction that her love was returned. Hollfeld's constant attentions, his frequent sojourn at Lindhof, his continual expressions of tenderness, were well calculated to plant this conviction ineradicably in her mind.

Suddenly he had appeared altered and constrained in her presence, and neglected her in the most unaccountable manner. She suffered greatly; her inner self revolted; insulted feminine dignity, an irritation hitherto unknown, and devoted affection, were all at war within her; she was yet far from that height to which, early or late, every noble nature attains: resignation and forgiveness. She grew bitter and violent, and she manifested this change less towards him who had caused her suffering than, by way of indemnifying herself, towards those whose tyranny she had endured for the sake of her love.

Hollfeld had been reading aloud to the ladies, when the old waiting-maid of the baroness entered the room upon some errand, and, before leaving, glibly narrated the remarkable discovery at Gnadeck. If Helene's eyes had not been riveted upon the lips of the speaker, the change in her cousin's features could not have escaped her. He listened breathlessly, with an expression of the intensest delight. In passing from mouth to mouth, the discovered jewels had come to be of "priceless value," and the beautiful Lila's coffin was now pure silver.

The baroness also had not observed the striking change in her son's sullen aspect; and in consequence of Helene's reproof, very naturally darted at him an angry glance, which was not seen by Fräulein von Walde. She was greatly amazed to see him suddenly approach his cousin. He smoothed the embroidered cushion beneath her head, and pushed the bouquet of flowers in the vase nearer to her, that she might more easily inhale their fragrance.

"Helene is quite right, mother," he said with a kindly glance at his cousin, who replied by a happy smile. "You should be the last to bring in question the nobility of that family."

Although the baroness was tortured by the thought that those who had been so far beneath her, might now be her equals,—nay, even rank considerably above her in wealth; still she wisely suppressed the bitter retort that rose to her lips, and contented herself with observing that the whole story at present had altogether too much the air of a legend or fable to be implicitly believed. For her part, she should require the testimony of more competent eye-witnesses than the

two masons, before she could consider it worthy of credit.

A competent eye-witness was just passing beneath the windows. It was Reinhard, who was returning from the mountain. He smiled as his attendance upon Fräulein von Walde was immediately required; for, from the curious looks of the servant, he guessed that the story of the discovery at Gnadeck had reached the castle, and that information from him upon the subject was what the ladies desired.

At his entrance he was immediately assailed by Helene with questions. He answered them in his usual calm manner, and took a malicious pleasure in detecting the keenest curiosity and the greatest irritation behind the apparently careless and indifferent remarks and questions of the baroness.

"And will the Ferbers venture to lay claim to the old name on the strength of that scrap of parchment?" she asked; taking a large dahlia from the vase of flowers, and smelling it.

"I should like to know who could dispute their claim," replied Reinhard. "It only remains to be proved that they are the descendants of Jost von Gnadewitz, and that can be done at any moment."

The lady leaned back in her large arm-chair, and dropped her eyelids, as if she were weary or bored.

"Indeed! and those treasures of Golconda, are they really as priceless as Dame Rumour reports them to be?" The tone of voice was meant to be contemptuous, but Reinhard's practised ear detected with great satisfaction that it betrayed great eagerness, and something like secret anxiety.

He smiled.

"Priceless?" he repeated. "Well, in such cases so much depends upon the estimation in which such things are held by their possessors, that I can hardly judge."

He might, we know, have told their value, but he thought, rather ungallantly, that a little uncertainty would prove a healthy excitement for the lady.

The examination would probably not have concluded here, if Bella had not suddenly burst into the room with her usual violence.

"Mamma, the new governess has come," she cried, out of breath, shaking back, with a toss of her head, the sandy locks that had fallen over her forehead; "why, she is uglier than Miss Mertens!" she went on, without taking the least notice of Reinhard's presence. "She has a bright red ribbon on her bonnet, and her mantilla is even more old-fashioned than Frau von Lehr's. I won't go to walk with her, you need not tell me to, mamma!"

The baroness put both hands to her ears.

"My child, I pray you, for Heaven's sake, do not speak so loud," she gasped; "your voice goes through and through me; and what nonsense you talk! you will

have to walk out with Mademoiselle Jamin whenever I bid you."

This reproof, uttered with considerable emphasis, causing Bella to pout angrily while she secretly tore a piece of the fringe from one of her mother's cushions, was the result of what might have been called the period of martyrdom that had followed Miss Mertens' departure. The baroness had been forced to take upon herself the care of Bella, and it was, as she declared, death to her nerves. To Fräulein von Walde she always maintained that all her trouble was in consequence of the defects of Miss Mertens' educational system; but in the depths of her soul she acknowledged, that her daughter strikingly resembled in disposition the deceased Lessen,—among whose characteristics an indomitable obstinacy and a determined proclivity to a perpetual *dolce far niente*, were the most prominent. She was, however, far from admitting that any injustice had been done to Miss Mertens; that person had been paid to educate her daughter, and consequently should have known, without ever acting in opposition to the mother's views, or reproving the child, how to correct all her faults. Therefore, the glimpse that she had just had perforce of Bella's character, was of no advantage for the new governess; the unfortunate French woman, with the gay ribbons on her bonnet, had no presentiment of the joyless days that awaited her. Just now, her arrival removed a weight from the mind of the baroness, to whom nothing could have been less desirable than a dispute at present between teacher and pupil, and hence her rebuke of Bella's impertinent remarks.

The baroness arose and went to her apartments, accompanied by her sullen daughter, to receive the stranger. At the same time, Reinhard departed.

"Do you wish me to go on reading, Helene?" asked Hollfeld, after the three had left the room. As he took up the newspaper his manner was almost caressing.

"By and by," she replied with hesitation, looking at him searchingly, with a kind of timid anxiety in her eyes. "I should like to ask you, now that we are once more alone together, to tell me what has changed you so during these last few days. You know, Emil, that it pains me deeply when you refuse to let me share in what delights or troubles you. You know that it is not idle curiosity which leads me to pry into your affairs, but a sincere and heartfelt interest in your weal or woe. You see how I suffer from your reserve. Tell me frankly if I have done anything to make you think me unworthy of your confidence."

She stretched out her hands towards him as if in entreaty. The gentle melancholy in the tones of her voice would have melted a stone.

Hollfeld crushed and twisted the rustling newspaper uneasily in his hands. He held down his head, and avoided meeting the pure, frank gaze of the poor girl. Any one with any knowledge of the world could not have failed to perceive in his attitude, and in the restless eyes that sought the ground, the crafty plotter endeavouring to hit upon some device by which to deceive. To Helene's innocent,

loving eyes, the lofty figure, slightly leaning forward, the face beneath the thick, light curls, rather suggested a thoughtful Apollo.

"You will always have my confidence, Helene," he broke silence at last. "You are indeed the only being in the world in whom I can confide,"—Helene's eyes sparkled at these words, the poor child was so proud of the distinction,—"but there are obligations in life whose existence we can hardly acknowledge to ourselves, far less have the courage to confess to others."

Fräulein von Walde sat upright, in eager expectation.

"I am forced," Hollfeld continued, with a stammer, "to adopt a certain resolution, and it has been weighing heavily upon me for days."

He looked up to see what impression his words had made.

Helene seemed to have no suspicion of what he was about to say, for she never changed her attitude, and looked as if she would have read the words upon his lips. He was therefore compelled to proceed without any assistance from her.

"You know, Helene," he slowly continued, "that for the last year I have had constant trouble with my housekeepers. They are continually leaving me, often without warning even, and I have no way of ordering my domestic affairs. The day before yesterday, the last one, who only entered my house two weeks ago, declared she would not stay. I cannot tell what to do about it; my house is nothing but an annoyance to me under these circumstances—"

"Ah, you want to sell Odenberg?" Helene interrupted him eagerly.

"No, that would be folly, for it is one of the finest estates in Thuringia; but I am forced to find some other way out of my troubles, and nothing is left for me but—to marry."

If some unseen and mysterious agency had suddenly opened a yawning abyss at Helene's feet, her face certainly could not have expressed more horror and amazement than at this moment. She opened her white, quivering lips, but no sound issued from them, and, entirely incapable of concealing her pain, she covered her face with her hands, and sank back among the cushions with a low cry.

Hollfeld hastened to her side, and took both her hands in his.

"Helene," he whispered, in a low, tender tone,—his manner was perfect,—"will you let me speak and show you how sore my heart is? You know only too well that I love, and that this love will be my first and only one as long as I live."

His tongue did not stammer over this odious lie; on the contrary, it aided his plans with such insinuating tones that the poor girl's heart was torn by a wild conflict of emotions. If some good angel would only have whispered to her to lift her eyes for one moment, she could not but have been undeceived, for the look that accompanied his protestations was utterly contemptuous as it glanced at her crippled figure; and perhaps, in the first moments of her indignation, she

might have found strength enough to have extricated herself from the snares of the wily egotist. But her eyes were closed as if she would shut out all the world, and revel only in the sound of the voice which for the first time spoke of love to her.

"Would to Heaven," he continued, "that I might follow the dictates of my heart, and live for this love only, for I desire nothing beyond the pleasure of constant intercourse with you, Helene. But you know I am the last of the Hollfelds and must marry. My sacrifice can be lessened only in one way,—I must choose a wife who knows you, and——"

"O tell me quickly!" cried Helene, giving way to her grief, while the tears burst from her eyes. "Your choice is already made! I know it,—it is Cornelie!"

"The Quittelsdorf?" he cried, with a laugh. "That will-o'-the-wisp? No, I would far rather leave the administration of my domestic affairs to the most repulsive of housekeepers! What should I do without an enormous income with such an extravagant, frivolous wife! Besides, let me tell you most emphatically, my sweet Helene, my choice is not yet made,—hear me, and do not weep so violently, you break my heart; I must have a wife who knows and loves you; a simple-hearted woman, of genuine understanding, to whom I can say: my heart belongs to another who never can be mine, be my friend and here."

"And do you imagine that any one could understand you?"

"Most certainly, if she loved me."

"No, I could not,—never, never!" She buried her face in the cushions, sobbing convulsively.

And now an ugly frown appeared on Hollfeld's smooth forehead. His lips were compressed, and for an instant the colour left his cheeks. He was evidently very angry. An expression of hatred lighted up the eyes that rested upon the young creature who was unexpectedly rendering his part so difficult to play. But he controlled himself, and lifted her face with a light, caressing touch. The poor thing trembled beneath his hypocritical contact, and let her delicate head rest passively upon his hand.

"And would you then forsake me, Helene," he asked sadly, "if I were compelled to fulfil so hard a duty? Would you turn away and leave me lonely, with a wife whom I did not love?"

She raised her swollen eyelids, and from beneath them broke a ray of inexpressible love. He had played his part admirably, and that glance told him that the game was in his own hands.

"You are now fighting the same battle," he continued, "which I have struggled through during the last few days, before I could arrive at any fixed determination. At first the thought that any third person may interfere with our relations to each other may well appall you, but I give you my word that shall not

be. Think, Helene, how much more I can do for you; how much more truly I can live for you then than now. You can come to me at Odenberg. I will guard your every footstep, and cherish you as the apple of my eye."

Hollfeld possessed very little intellect, but he had a vast amount of cunning, which, as we see, served his turn better than intellect could have done. His poor victim flew into the net, her heart torn and bleeding, her force of will utterly annihilated.

"I will try to endure the thought," Helene at last whispered almost inaudibly. "But what a being that woman must be who could bear with me, and whom I might at last learn to love like a sister! Do you know any such lofty-minded, self-sacrificing creature?"

"I have an idea,—it occurred to me just now quite suddenly,—at present it is vague and unformed. After due consideration I shall certainly unfold it to you. But you must first be more composed, dear Helene. Think for a moment. I place the choice of my future wife solely and entirely in your hands. It depends upon you to approve or condemn what I propose."

"And are you strong enough to pass your life with a woman to whom you cannot give your love?"

He suppressed a contemptuous smile, for Helene's eyes were riveted upon his lips.

"I can do all that I resolve to do," he answered; "and to have you near me will give me strength.—But let me entreat one favour of you,—say nothing as yet to my mother of this important matter, as you know she wishes to control everything and everybody, and I could not now endure her interference. She will learn all soon enough when I present my future wife to her."

At any other time, this heartless, unfilial speech would have disgusted Helene; but, at this moment, she scarcely heard it, for every thought and feeling had been thrown into the wildest uproar by the words, "future wife," which suggested, in spite of the multitude of unhappy wives, the idea of supreme contentment and bliss.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, wringing in an agony of grief the little hands that lay in her lap. "I always hoped to die before this; I was not, indeed I was not so selfish as to think you could lead a lonely life for my sake; but I hoped that the necessarily short period of my life might induce you to let this cup pass from me,—to wait until my eyes should be closed upon my misery."

"But, Helene, what do you mean?" cried Hollfeld, still controlling his temper with difficulty. "At your age, who would think of dying? We will live—live, and in time be, as I confidently hope, happy indeed. Think of the matter, and you will see it all as I do."

He pressed her hand affectionately to his lips, imprinted a kiss upon her

brow, for the first time,—took his hat, and left the room.

Outside, as the door closed upon the suffering girl, he gave full play to the expression of contempt that he had so long suppressed, and which gave place only to a look of self-satisfaction still more detestable. One hour before, his heart had been filled with rage. His passion for Elizabeth, fanned into a flame by her rejection of his advances, had been a consuming fire, and had robbed him of all his boasted self-control. But the idea of marriage with the daughter of the forester's clerk had never occurred to him,—such a thought would have seemed to him insane. He had exhausted his ingenuity in contriving plans to procure a return of affection from the object of his passion. The late occurrence at Gnadeck had given his thoughts another direction. Elizabeth was now a most desirable match, noble and wealthy. No wonder, then, that he exulted at the news, and immediately formed the magnanimous resolution of honouring the fair flower of Castle Gnadeck with an offer of marriage. There was, of course, no doubt that she would accept the offer, for although coquetry had led her to reject his advances hitherto, she could not possibly pursue such a line of conduct, in view of the brilliant prospect of becoming the envied wife of Herr von Hollfeld. He was so secure upon this point that not a cloud of distrust darkened the horizon of his future. It was not only his intense desire to possess Elizabeth that urged him on to act as quickly as possible,—the thought, that as soon as the discovery in the ruins became known, other suitors would present themselves for the hand of Gold Elsie, already so famous for her beauty,—this thought made his blood boil in his veins.

Only one obstacle stood between him and the fulfilment of his determination, and that was Helene. It was not that he hesitated, through sympathy, at the thought of how the fondly-loving girl would suffer,—he knew no pity with regard to her,—but he was in dread lest too hasty a marriage might cost him the inheritance which he looked for from her. It was a case for prudence and forethought. We have seen how, in cold blood, he made use of the unhappy girl's deep and blind affection, and, while pretending to submit to her decision the weightiest questions concerning his future life, riveted the chain that bound her to him.

As soon as he had left the room Helene tottered to the door, and bolted it after him. And then she resigned herself to utter despair.

They who have never known the hours of torture that ensue upon the sudden hearing of some unexpected misfortune,—hours when we would fain shriek out our misery into the ears of the universe, and when, needing the sympathy and support of others as never before, we are driven, as by some evil spirit, to darkness and loneliness, as though light and sound were deadly poison to our wound,—they, we say, who have never known the pangs that threaten to efface all the landmarks of a previously harmonious inner life, will scarcely be able to

conceive that Helene sank down upon the floor, with her little hands plucking wildly at her fair curls, and her frail, diminutive form shivering as from a fever fit. She had lived and breathed only in her absorbing affection for this man. If a few gloomy looks, some slight neglect of his, had sufficed to plunge her into the deepest melancholy, and make her utterly careless of an event that would once have wrung her sisterly affection to the very soul, how much greater must her agony now be in the conviction that she was about to lose him forever!

In the wild chaos of thought filling her brain, she was entirely incapable of one clear, decided conclusion. The humiliating consciousness of her physical infirmities, which caused her to be thrust out of an earthly paradise; Hollfeld's confession of love to which she had just listened, and which brought such infinite joy and woe; a frantic jealousy of the woman, whoever she might be, who was to stand beside him as a wife,—all these emotions were seething in her mind, threatening to sever the frail thread that bound together soul and body.

It was late, and night had already fallen, when she admitted her anxious maid, and yielded to her entreaties to retire to rest. She emphatically refused to see the physician, sent word to the baroness, who asked to come in to say good-night, that she could not be disturbed, her need of rest was so great,—and then passed the most wretched night of her life.

She grew a little more quiet, that is, the fearful tension of her nerves relaxed somewhat, when the first beam of morning light pierced the curtains of her room. The thin golden ray seemed to glide into her darkened soul, and illumine thoughts which had hitherto been hidden in the wild tumult of her mind. She began to believe that Hollfeld's course was one of the purest self-sacrifice. She had never been able to disguise or thrust from her the haunting conviction that his marriage might one day become an imperative necessity, and she could not fail to be conscious that her idea of his waiting until she should be no more had never occurred to him. Was not his sacrifice great? Loving her, and her only, he must belong to another; ought she to make the performance of a sacred duty difficult for him by her grief? He had asked her to tread a thorny path with him. Should she draw back like a coward when he set her such an example of strength and endurance? And if another woman could be found content with friendship instead of love, should she allow herself to be outdone in self-renunciation?

In feverish haste she rang the bell by her bedside, and summoned her maid. Yes, she would be strong; but she was conscious that only entire certainty could give her courage and the power of endurance; she must know, as soon as possible, the name of the woman whom Hollfeld thought capable of undertaking so hard a part in life. She had passed before her, in review, every unmarried woman of her acquaintance, but had rejected on the instant each and all.

The hour had not yet arrived at which she was accustomed to take break-

fast with the baroness and Hollfeld; her brother always avoided this early meeting of his household, but she could not remain in her lonely room, and, as she was greatly exhausted, was pushed in her wheeled chair into the dining-room. To her surprise, she heard from one of the servants that the baroness had gone to walk half an hour previously,—a very strange piece of news, but one that she was most glad to learn, for just as she was wheeled into a recess of one of the windows she discovered Hollfeld pacing to and fro upon the lawn without. He seemed to have no suspicion that he was observed. His fine, manly figure moved with elastic grace. Now and then he put a cigar to his lips with evident enjoyment, and the delicate aroma floating through the air reached Helene at her window. At first the little lady was painfully impressed by his unusually gay and cheerful expression; she could not but confess to herself that youthful exuberance of spirits, love of life, and an unwonted exhilaration of mind were manifest in his every look and motion, even in the half-unconscious smile that now and then parted his lips, discovering his wonderfully white teeth. There was no trace there of those struggles which she had passed through during the night; he certainly did not look much like the victim of an inexorable combination of circumstances. But was not his self-possession the result of great mental force and a strong manly will? He must have reached a height almost too lofty for human nature to attain.

The little lady's brow contracted in a frown.

"Emil!" she cried loudly, almost harshly.

Hollfeld was evidently startled, but in a second he stood beneath her window, and waved a "good-morning" to her.

"What!" he cried, "are you there already? May I come up?"

"Yes," she replied more gently.

And in a few moments he entered the room. Helene had reason to be better pleased with his present air and manner; there was an expression of great gravity upon his countenance as he threw his hat upon the table and pushed a chair close to her side. Taking both her hands tenderly within his own, he gazed into her face, and really seemed struck by her ashy cheeks and the lustreless eyes that met his.

"You look ill, Helene," he said pityingly.

"Do you wonder at it?" she asked, with a bitterness that she was unable to conceal. "Unfortunately I am denied the gift of such perfect self control as could enable me in a few hours after a crushing experience to look forward with content and gaiety to the future. I envy you."

"You are unjust, Helene," he replied quickly, "if you judge me from my exterior. Is it the part of a man to whine and cry when he submits to the inevitable?"

"You certainly do not seem inclined to any such course."

He was provoked beyond measure. The puny, little creature at his side,

who, with her crippled figure, ought to be thankful to God if a man could so far control himself as not to treat her with absolute rudeness and aversion, and who had previously been so grateful for the smallest attention, had suddenly taken upon herself to reprove him! Although he had done all he could to inspire her with faith in his ardent love for her, in his soul he thought it showed a measureless vanity in the child to imagine herself capable of inspiring any man with such a passion, and with great irritation he acknowledged to himself that in her case he had to contend with most determined obstinacy and disgusting sentimentality. It cost him great pains to control himself, but he even accomplished a melancholy smile, which became him infinitely.

"When I tell you of the cause of my cheerful looks you will repent your reproaches," he said. "I was just picturing to myself the moment when I could go to your brother and say, 'Helene has decided to live in my family for the future,' and I cannot deny that the thought gave me satisfaction, for he has always regarded my love for you with an eye of disfavour."

They say Love is blind, but in most cases he closes his eyes voluntarily; knowing that perfect vision would kill him, he fights desperately against annihilation.

Helene did her best to reconcile what he said with his previous appearance, and succeeded excellently. With a deep sigh she held out her hand to him.

"I believe and have faith in you," she said fervently. "The loss of this faith would be my death-blow. Ah, Emil, you must never, never deceive me, not even although you think it would be for my good. I would rather learn the harshest truth than harbour the faintest suspicion that you were not perfectly true to me. I have had a terrible night, but now I am composed, and I beg you to tell me more of what you spoke of yesterday. I am but too sure that I shall not regain entire self-command until I know with certainty who it is that is to stand between us. At present she is a phantom, and in her unreality lies the cause of the tormenting anxiety that is consuming me. Tell me the name, Emil, I entreat you."

Hollfeld's eyes sought the ground. Affairs just then did not look very promising.

"Do you know, Helene," he began at last, "that I hesitate to discuss this subject with you to-day? You are greatly agitated. I am afraid that such a conversation will make you ill. And, as I must say that the project which I spoke of yesterday seems more and more feasible to me the more I ponder it, I fear much lest in your agitation you should overlook its great advantages."

"Indeed I will not!" cried Helene, as, sitting upright she riveted her unnaturally bright eyes full upon him. "I have overcome myself, and am ready to submit to the inevitable. I promise you I will be thoroughly impartial; as impartial as if I—did not love." She blushed as the confession escaped her for the first time.

”Well, then,” said Hollfeld, with hesitation,—he could not quite master his emotion,—”what do you think of the young girl of Castle Gnadeck?”

”Elizabeth Ferber?” cried Helene, in the greatest astonishment.

”Elizabeth von Gnadewitz,” he hastily corrected her. ”The sudden change in her social position first suggested the girl to me. Hitherto I have scarcely noticed her, except that her modest demeanour and the repose of her countenance impressed me favourably.”

”What! did you see nothing to admire in that lovely, wondrously-gifted creature, except repose and a modest demeanour?”

”Well, yes,” he replied, with an air of indifference, ”I remember that several times, when you were provoked at some mistake that you had made, she never altered a muscle, but patiently went over the passage with you again and again, until you were perfect in it. That pleased me. I believe her to possess great equanimity of mind, and that is the characteristic that my wife will need above all others. I know, too, that she fairly adores you, and that is the chief consideration. Besides, she has been educated in the strictest economy, her requirements will be few, and she will readily assume her right position with regard to you and me. I believe that she has a certain amount of tact, and she has been notably brought up,—a great advantage to——”

Helene had sunk back upon her pillows, and covered her eyes with her hand.

”No, no,” she cried, sitting up once more, and interrupting his eager flow of panegyric,—”not that poor, darling child! Elizabeth deserves to be truly loved.”

A loud and sudden howl here caused her to give a little cry of fright. Hollfeld had just stepped upon the paw of his pointer, Diana, who had accompanied him into the room, and was lying stretched out at her master’s feet. The interruption was most welcome to him,—for Helene’s last words sounded to him so comical, in connection with his own vehement desires, that he could hardly restrain his laughter. He opened the door and sent the limping brute from the room. When he returned to the young girl he was all grave composure again.

”Well, we will both love the girl, Helene,” he said with apparent indifference, as he resumed his seat. Helene was in a state of too great excitement to notice the flippancy of his tone and manner. ”Let her only leave you the first place in my affections. She must do that. She certainly has enough coolness and presence of mind; she testified those qualities abundantly the day she saved Rudolph’s life.”

”Oh, how?” cried Helene, opening wide her eyes in amazement.

The servant, who had on the previous day involuntarily let slip some mention of the occurrence in the forest, had, in terror at his oversight, instantly refrained from all further particulars relating to it, simply asserting that the bullet intended for Herr von Walde had fortunately fallen wide of its mark. Hollfeld

had heard the exact account of the murderous attempt only an hour before from the gardener. Elizabeth's fearless conduct naturally lent her a new charm in his eyes, and goaded afresh his desire to win her as soon as possible. He related the story, which he had just heard, to Helene, concluding his account by saying: "You now have one more reason to love the girl, and her conduct strengthens my conviction that she is the only one whom I should select."

This was his last round of ammunition. He stroked back the hair from his brow with his delicate white hand, and from beneath it narrowly and eagerly watched the little lady, whose head was so sunk amid the pillows that only her profile was visible. The tears were gushing from her closed eyelids; she said not a word; perhaps she was struggling with herself for the last time.

But why did it never occur to her that Elizabeth might fail to accede to Hollfeld's wishes? Any loving woman can answer this question for herself, if she will only reflect that the loving heart believes the object of its passion irresistible, and learns with difficulty that all the world does not share its conviction.

The silence, which began to be painful, was interrupted by the return of the baroness from her walk. Helene started, and quickly dried her tears. With evident impatience she submitted to the caresses with which the lady overwhelmed her, replying in monosyllables to the tender inquiries with regard to her health.

"Ah!" cried the baroness, as she shook the scarf from her shoulders and left it in her son's hands, while she sank clumsily into an arm-chair. "How very warm I am! That path up the mountain is terrible! No power upon earth shall take me over it again!"

"Did you go up the mountain, mother?" asked Hollfeld incredulously.

"Why, yes; you know the physician prescribed an early morning walk for me."

"Oh yes; but that was so many years ago, and I thought you always maintained that the trouble with your heart made any such exercise impossible."

"Still, everything ought to have a fair trial," replied his mother, a little embarrassed, "and as I could not sleep last night, I determined to try once more; but it will do no good,—I have just had fresh cause for vexation. Only think, Helene, just outside in the gravel walk I met Bella with her new governess,—would you believe it, the woman had the impertinence to let the child walk by her left side! And she looks, too, like a perfect simpleton. I was really angry, and defined her position to her as clearly as I could. But tell me yourself, is it not hard that I cannot even attempt to refresh myself with a walk without encountering what makes me miserable and ill?"

Just as she leaned her forehead in a melancholy manner upon her hand, she discovered that the false curls upon her temples had been pushed considerably awry by her bonnet. She arose hastily, and begged for a little time before

breakfast that she might arrange her dress.

"By the way," she said carelessly, turning round to her son and cousin as she reached the door, while she set her bonnet firmly upon the rebellious front, "that fellow, Reinhard, imposed upon us finely yesterday. I accidentally encountered the forester's clerk, Ferber, up there near the ruins,—I congratulated him——"

"Ah! now I understand the ascent of the mountain!" Hollfeld interrupted his mother ironically. "And you actually spoke to the man, mother?"

"Oh! now there is no reason why I should not. The jewels principally interested me."

"Did you wish to buy them?" asked her son contemptuously, remembering the constant ebb in her finances.

"Hardly," she replied with an angry glance; "but I have always had a perfect passion for precious stones; and if your father had not died so suddenly, I should now have had a charming set of diamonds, which he had promised me, and you would have been six thousand thalers the poorer. But to return to the discovered jewels. Ferber told me just what they were, and, when I asked him, frankly replied that they would bring about eight thousand thalers,—that is what that fellow, Reinhard, calls inestimable wealth. Once more adieu for a few minutes."

The contemptuous smile disappeared from Hollfeld's face, as he listened to his mother's words, and gave place to a decided expression of disappointment; he had suddenly experienced a sensation like the shock of a shower-bath.

Scarcely was the door closed behind the baroness, when Helene aroused herself from her apparent apathy, and stretched out both hands to Hollfeld.

"Emil," she said quickly, in a low voice, with trembling lips, "if you succeed in gaining Elizabeth's love, and I cannot doubt that you will, I agree to your plan, but I must always live with you at Odenberg."

"Of course," he replied, although with some hesitation; his voice had lost its former decision of tone, "but let me warn you that you will have to resign many luxuries. My income is not large, and as you have just heard, Elizabeth has nothing."

"She shall not come to you poor, Emil,—rely upon that," the little lady rejoined in a tender voice, and with eyes unnaturally bright. "From the moment she promises to be yours I regard her in the light of a sister; I will share faithfully with her, and will instantly make over to her the rents of my estate of Neuborn, in Saxony; I will talk to Rudolph about it as soon as he returns, and when death closes my eyes, all that I possess will be hers and yours. Are you content with me?"

"You are an angel, Helene," he cried; "you shall never repent your magnanimity,—your generous devotion."

And this time there was no dissimulation in his delight, for the rents of

Neuborn made Elizabeth a very wealthy bride.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two days had passed since the morning upon which Helene had, as she thought, won such a victory over herself, and had been convinced that the conflict within her would be quieted by absolute certainty. But she had been far from fathoming the depths of her sentiments; she had snatched at a straw in the whirling flood, and it had afforded her not one instant's support. Only two days!—but they outweighed in suffering her whole previous life. She constantly repeated to herself that the long desired repose that she had dreamed of was close at hand, and yet she shuddered at the thought of the time that must intervene before death should bring her release, with the same horror with which the sceptic looks forward to the moment of dissolution. She became distinctly aware that her promise to pass her days at Odenberg converted her remaining years into a period of superhuman self-sacrifice, and yet, for worlds, she would not have retracted one iota of all that she had vowed to Hollfeld. She would be worthy of his love. No sacrifice was too great that was rewarded by his esteem. Poor dupe!

Her nerves suffered intensely during this protracted mental conflict. She had constant fever, and could scarcely sleep at all. The subject that occupied her whole mind was constantly hovering upon her lips, but she refrained from all mention of it in accordance with Hollfeld's request. He had also entreated her to forego Elizabeth's society for a few days; he feared that, in her agitation, she might stand in the way of his wishes. He himself had already taken the first steps towards a continuation of his pursuit of Elizabeth. He had twice presented himself at Gnadeck at the gate in the wall, to make inquiries after the health of the "von Gnadewitzes," but although he had nearly pulled off the bell-handle the door had not been opened. The first time no one had been in the house, and upon the last occasion Elizabeth had observed him coming. Her parents had gone with little Ernst to the Lodge, and Miss Mertens had agreed to Elizabeth's idea of not admitting the unwelcome visitor. They sat together in the dwelling-room, laughing, while the little bell rang till it was quite hoarse. Of the conspiracy against his admission the visitor of course had no suspicion.

It was seven o'clock in the morning; Helene was already lying dressed upon her lounge, she had passed a restless, sleepless night. The baroness was still in

bed, and Hollfeld had not yet made his appearance; but the little lady could not be alone, and therefore her maid was sitting sewing in the room. Her replies to Helena's remarks were unheard by the poor sufferer, but there was something soothing in the mere sound of a human voice after her wretched, lonely night.

The noise of an approaching carriage was heard. Helene opened the window and leaned out. Her brother's travelling carriage was just driving up the sweep, its wheels sinking deep in the smooth gravel; but it was empty.

"Where is your master?" Helene cried out to the coachman, as the vehicle passed beneath her window.

"My master got out at the entrance of the park road," the old man replied, taking off his hat, "and is coming home on foot over the mountain, past Castle Gnadeck."

The little lady shut the window, and shivered as though she were cold; the single word "Gnadeck" had acted upon her nerves like an electric shock. Every word that brought Elizabeth to her mind produced the same effect upon her that one's imagination would experience from some sudden apparition.

She arose, and leaning upon the arm of her maid, went down to her brother's apartments. She ordered breakfast to be served in the room opening with glass doors upon the grand staircase, and seated herself in an armchair to await the traveller's return. She took up one of the gorgeously bound books that were lying about, and mechanically turned over the leaves; but, although her eyes rested upon the engravings that filled its pages, she could not have told whether it were portrait or landscape that lay open before her.

After she had waited half an hour, her brother's tall form appeared behind the glass door. The book slipped from her lap as she held out her hands to welcome him. He seemed surprised at this reception; but he was evidently much pleased at finding his sister alone and glad to see him. He hurried towards her, but started in alarm at a nearer view of her face.

"Do you feel worse, Helene?" he asked with anxious tenderness, as he seated himself beside her. He put his arm around her and raised her head a little, that he might see her face more closely. There was so much kindness and caressing sympathy in his accent and manner that suddenly it was as if the warm air of spring breathed over her heart, that had been as it were congealed with pain. Two large tears rolled down her cheeks as she leaned her head upon her brother's shoulder.

"Has not Fels been to see you while I have been away?" he asked anxiously. The little lady's aspect evidently caused him great alarm.

"No. I gave express orders that he should not be sent for. I am taking the drops that he prescribed for my nervous attacks, and he can do nothing more for me. Don't be concerned, Rudolph, I shall be better soon. You have had a sad time

at Thalleben?"

"Yes," he answered, but his eyes still rested anxiously upon his sister's altered features. "Poor Hartwig died before I arrived; he suffered fearfully. He was buried yesterday afternoon. You would scarcely know his unfortunate wife, Helene; this blow has added twenty years to her life!"

He imparted to her some further particulars concerning the sad event, and then passed his hand across his eyes, as though desirous of banishing from his mind all the trouble and sorrow that he had witnessed during the last few days.

"Well, and is all going on here as usual?" he asked after a short pause.

"Not quite," Helene replied with some hesitation. "Möhring left us yesterday."

"Ah, Heaven speed him! I am glad that I escaped a final interview with him. Well, I have one more enemy in the world, but I cannot help it; he belongs to a class of men whom I despise."

"And at Gnadeck a piece of good fortune has befallen the Ferbers," Helene continued in an unnaturally quiet voice, averting her face.

The arm-chair in which she was sitting was suddenly pushed aside by the arm upon which her brother had been leaning. She did not look up, and therefore could not see the livid pallor that overspread his face for a moment, while his quivering lips essayed twice to frame the simple monosyllable "Well?"

Helene related the story of the ruins, to which her brother listened breathlessly. Every word that she spoke seemed to lift a weight from his heart, but he never dreamed how it cut into the very soul of the narrator like a two-edged sword, and that all this was only the prelude to her announcement of the terrible sacrifice that she was about to make.

"This is, indeed, a most wonderful solution of an old riddle," he said, when Helene had finished. "But I question whether the family will think it great good fortune to belong to the von Gnadewitz race."

"Ah! you think so," Helene interrupted him quickly, "because Elizabeth has always spoken so slightingly of the name. I cannot help, however, in such cases, thinking of the fable of the fox and the grapes." She spoke these last words with cutting severity. Her passionate excitement and agitation had brought her to the point of denying her nobler nature and of attributing mean motives to one who had never injured her, and whom, in cooler moments, she knew to be all purity and honour.

An expression of intense amazement appeared upon Herr von Walde's countenance. He stooped and looked keenly into his sister's averted face, as if to convince himself that her lips had actually spoken such harsh words.

Just at this moment Hollfeld's large hound rushed up the staircase and into the room, where he made two or three playful bounds, and then vanished again

at the sound of a shrill whistle from the lawn without. His master was passing by, who apparently did not know of Herr von Walde's return, or he would certainly have appeared to welcome him. He walked on quickly, and turned into the path that led up the mountain to Gnadeck. Helene's gaze followed the retreating form until it was lost to sight, and then, clasping her hands convulsively, she sank back in her chair. It seemed as if for a moment all strength failed her.

Herr von Waldo poured a little wine into a glass, and held it to her lips. She looked up gratefully, and tried to smile.

"I am not yet at the end of all I have to tell," she began again, rising from her half-reclining position. "I am like all novelists,—I reserve my most interesting facts until the last." She could not hide her struggle for firmness and composure beneath the mask of playfulness which she attempted to assume in these words. Her gaze was riveted upon the trees outside the window, as she said: "A happy event is about to take place among us,—Emil's betrothal."

She had certainly expected some instant expression of astonishment from her auditor, for, after a moment's silence, she turned around to him in surprise. His brow and eyes were covered by his hand, and the uncovered portion of his face was deadly pale. At Helene's touch he dropped his hand, arose hastily, and went to the open window, as if for a breath of fresh air.

"Are you ill, Rudolph?" she cried, with anxiety.

"A passing faintness, nothing more," he replied, again approaching her. His face looked strangely altered as he walked several times up and down the room, and then resumed his seat.

"I told you of Emil's approaching betrothal, Rudolph," Helene began again, emphasizing each word.

"I heard you," he replied mechanically.

"Do you approve this step on his part?"

"It is no affair of mine. Hollfeld is his own master, and can do as he pleases."

"I believe his choice is made. If I dared, I would tell you the young girl's name."

"There is no need to do so. It will be time enough to hear it when the banns are published in church."

His expression was icy; the tone of his voice sounded rough and harsh; the blood seemed to have forsaken his cheeks.

"Rudolph, I implore you not to be so rough," Helene begged, in a tone of entreaty; "I know that you are no friend to much speaking, and I am accustomed to your laconic replies; but now you are too cold and silent, just, too, when I have a request to make of you."

"Tell me what it is; am I to have the honour of playing the part of groomsman to Herr von Hollfeld?"

Helene recoiled at the bitter contempt expressed in these words.

”You do not like poor Emil, it is more evident to-day than ever before,” she said reproachfully, after a little pause, during which Herr von Walde had arisen and traversed the room with hasty steps; ”I entreat you earnestly, dear Rudolph, listen to me patiently; I must talk over this matter with you to-day.”

He folded his arms and stood still, leaning against a window-frame, whilst he said briefly: ”You see I am ready to listen.”

”The young girl,” she began, with a hesitation which was the result less of her own internal agitation than of her brother’s icy demeanour, ”the young girl whom Emil has selected is poor.”

”Very disinterested on his part; proceed.”

”Emil’s income is not large.”

”The poor man has only ten thousand a year; starvation in his case seems unavoidable.”

She paused, evidently surprised. Her brother never exaggerated; the sum, then, which he had mentioned, must be correct to a farthing.

”Well, he may be wealthier than I thought,” she went on after a short pause; ”that is not the question at present; his choice is a girl who is very dear to me, very dear.” What effort this cost her! ”She has done what must forever fill my sisterly heart with gratitude.” Herr von Walde unfolded his arms, and drummed with such force upon the window-pane with the fingers of his left hand, that Helene thought the glass would be broken.

”She will be as a sister to me,” she continued, ”and I do not wish that she should come into Hollfeld’s house without a dowry. I desire to make over to her the rents of Neuborn. May I?”

”The estate belongs to you,—you are of age. I have no right either to consent or refuse.”

”Oh yes, Rudolph, you are my next of kin, and should inherit all that I have. Then I may be sure of your consent?”

”Perfectly so, if you really think it necessary——”

”Oh, thank you, thank you!” she interrupted him, extending to him her hand. But he did not seem to notice it, although he was looking fixedly at her. ”You are not angry with me for this?” she asked, anxiously, after a few moments.

”I am never angry when you are striving to make others happy. You must remember how I have always encouraged and assisted you in such efforts. But here I do think you are in too great haste. You seem to me very ready to plunge that young creature into misery.”

She started up as though a viper had stung her. ”That is a cruel accusation!” she cried. ”Your prejudice against poor Emil, which is founded, Heaven only knows upon what, leads you beyond all bounds. You know the man far too

slightly."

"I know him far too well to wish to know him any better. He is a dishonourable villain, a miserable fellow of no character, by whose side a woman, let her claims for honour and uprightness in a man be ever so small, must be wretched. Woe to the poor creature when she finds him out!" His voice trembled with suppressed pain; but Helene heard in it only anger and violence.

"Oh Heavens! how unjust!" she cried, raising her tearful eyes to the ceiling. "Rudolph, you are committing a great sin. What has poor Emil done to you, that you should persecute him so unrelentingly?"

"Must a man be personally aggrieved in order to estimate correctly another's character?" he asked, angrily. "My child, you have been grossly deceived; but your eyes are blinded. The time will come when you will acknowledge it with shame. If I should try to remove this cup of suffering from your lips, it would avail nothing; you would repulse me, seeing in me only a barbarian treading under foot all your holiest affections. You force me to leave you to pursue your path alone, until the moment when you will fly to me for consolation and succour. My heart will always be open to you; but what will become of that other, bound irrevocably to her dreadful fate?"

He went into the next room, and locked the door after him. For awhile Helene sat as if paralyzed,—then she arose with difficulty, and supporting herself by the walls and the furniture, left the apartment.

Her soul was filled with bitterness, almost with hatred, towards her brother, who had to-day roughly and ruthlessly handled all that she had tenderly encircled with the most delicate fibres of her heart. That heart was well nigh broken as she called vividly to mind the self-sacrifice which her lover proposed. She seemed to herself to have already wronged him deeply in allowing such terrible abuse of him to fall upon her ears. He should never, never learn how her brother's prejudices had carried him away. No sacrifice, not the greatest, would now be sufficient to atone for the injustice which he was forced unconsciously to endure. And since her brother had so openly declared his opinion of Hollfeld, she would not allow that he should longer share the hospitality of Lindhof. She would herself request him to return to Odenberg, of course suppressing her reason for such a request. But first his engagement to Elizabeth should be concluded.

Occupied with these thoughts, she entered the dining-room, and when Hollfeld appeared shortly afterward, she received him with a quiet smile, and announced to him that her brother, without even hearing the name of the future bride, had approved of her resolution with regard to her dowry. She desired to see Elizabeth now as soon as possible, and Hollfeld, greatly rejoiced to observe her repose of manner, assented. It was agreed that the interview should take place at four o'clock that afternoon, in the pavilion. Hollfeld left the room to

despatch a servant to Gnadeck with a request, in Helene's name, to that effect. How surprised the little lady would have been, could she have heard it expressly enjoined upon the servant to name three, as the appointed hour, while the butler was ordered to have everything arranged in the pavilion at that time!

CHAPTER XIX.

When the servant from Lindhof rang the bell at the gate in the wall, Elizabeth was sitting in the hall. She was weaving a long garland of evergreens and ivy, and Miss Mertens, sitting beside her, had in her hand a half-finished wreath of asters. The grave had been made ready in the Lindhof church-yard, and in the afternoon, between five and six o'clock, the leaden coffin containing the mortal remains of the beautiful Lila was to be consigned to the earth. If Jost's dreaded eyes could have gazed upon his lovely descendant, they would certainly have beamed with a mild and tender light to see her engaged in preparing an offering of fresh flowers and green vines with which to adorn the bier of his idolized love.

After consulting her mother, Elizabeth accepted the invitation, all the more willingly as it referred only to "an hour's talk." Soon after the servant's departure, Reinhard appeared. He looked very grave, and told Miss Mertens that his master had returned from Thalleben in the strangest state of mind.

"He must have been greatly shocked by the misery that he witnessed in the desolate home," he remarked, "for I really do not recognize my kind master. I had several unavoidable communications to make to him, but I saw that I spoke in vain; he did not listen, but sat opposite me, looking utterly crushed, evidently lost in the most painful reflections. He started up hastily when I began at last to tell him of our discovery up here in the ruins, and interrupted me angrily with 'I have heard all about that matter already; I pray you leave me alone.'"

Miss Mertens plainly perceived that Reinhard was really wounded by Herr von Walde's manner towards him.

"Dear friend," she said soothingly, "in moments of great mental suffering we either are not aware of the external world, or the consciousness of it increases our pain; we cannot endure that all around us should pursue its customary course while all within has received such a shock, a shock that we cannot recover from. Herr von Walde was doubtless warmly attached to his unfortunate friend, and—but, good Heavens! Elizabeth, what are you doing?" she interrupted herself, "do

you really think that looks well?"

She pointed to the garland. In fact, whilst Reinhard had been speaking Elizabeth had, with trembling hands, picked up two or three large dahlias and woven them into her graceful green wreath. She now looked down, and was aware for the first time of what she had been doing. The poor flowers were instantly torn from the soft green pillow where they had laid their heavy heads so comfortably, and treated with as much severity as if they had insisted on going where they were not wanted.

Three o'clock had long since struck in the Lindhof church-tower when Elizabeth hurried down the mountain. Her uncle had detained her in conversation; he was provoked that she had accepted the invitation. "For," he said, and with some justice, "surely the poor creature whom we consign to her resting-place to-day deserves that we should consecrate at least one day to her memory." He had no idea of what was passing in the heart of his niece. He did not dream that for the last few days his darling had counted the hours which must pass before she could think, "He is at home again;" and, to his vexation, his usually obedient child slipped from him and vanished through the garden gate.

Her feet scarcely touched the ground. She hoped by walking quickly to overtake the time which she had lost, and could have cried, when her thin dress caught upon a bramble, and could only be extricated by patience and skill. At last, almost out of breath, she reached the pavilion. Both of the folding-doors were open; the room was still empty. Upon the table stood a salver of refreshments, and Helene's corner of the sofa was arranged for her.

Much relieved, Elizabeth entered, and was leaning against one of the opposite windows which looked out upon some tall shrubbery, when she heard, a slight noise behind her. Hollfeld had hitherto been concealed by one of the open folding-doors, and he now approached her. She turned to leave the apartment without even honouring the object of her aversion by a look; but he placed himself in her path, although his manner was no longer insolent,—on the contrary, it was respectful and even submissive, as he assured her that the ladies would appear directly. Elizabeth looked up surprised; there was not in his voice the faintest trace of that impertinent tone that had so irritated and outraged her.

"I give you my word that Fräulein von Walde will be here in one moment!" he repeated, as she again attempted to reach the door. "Is my presence, then, so disagreeable to you?" he added more gently, with a tinge of sadness.

"Most assuredly it is," Elizabeth replied coldly and decidedly; "if you will remember your late conduct towards me, you will know that to be left one moment alone with you must be odious to me."

"How stern and implacable that sounds! Must, then, my punishment for my thoughtless jest be so severe?"

”I advise you, in future, to be more prudent in your choice of those with whom you wish to jest.”

”Good Heavens! I see now that it was a mistake; I regret my impetuosity, but how could I dream——”

”That any respect was due to me?” Elizabeth interrupted him, with flashing eyes.

”No, no!——, I never doubted that!—Heavens! how angry you can be! But I could not possibly know that you possessed the right to claim more, far more, than mere respect.”

Elizabeth looked at him inquiringly; she evidently did not understand him.

”Can I do more than sue on my knees for pardon?” he continued.

”It shall be granted upon condition that you leave me instantly.”

”What cruel obstinacy! I should be a fool indeed to lose this precious moment. Elizabeth, I have told you already that I love you ardently,—that I am dying of love for you!”

”And I am quite aware of having distinctly told you that it is a matter of utter indifference to me.” She began to tremble, but her glance was, nevertheless, firm and composed.

”Elizabeth, do not drive me to extremities!” he cried in great agitation.

”I would especially request you to remember the common rules of politeness, which require us not to address strangers by their Christian names.”

”You are a very imp of coldness and malice!” he cried, now trembling with rage. ”Well, I grant that there is some show of reason for your irritation with me,” he added, controlling himself by an effort; ”my conduct towards you has not been what it should be, but I will atone for it abundantly. Listen to me quietly for one moment, and you will relax your severity. I offer you my hand. You must know that I can give a brilliant position, as far as rank and wealth are concerned, to my future wife.”

He looked down at her with a smile of triumph. It was so natural that his lovely opponent should be paralyzed with joyful surprise at this unexpected disclosure of his intentions; yet, strange to say, the result that he anticipated did not ensue. Elizabeth stood proudly erect, and retreated a pace or two.

”I regret this, Herr von Hollfeld,” she said with quiet dignity. ”You might have spared yourself this humiliating moment. After all that I have hitherto said to you, I scarcely comprehend what you have just declared. Since you force me to it, I must tell you most emphatically that our paths in life lie in opposite directions; and——”

”What!”

”And that nothing could induce me to connect my lot with yours.”

He stared at her for a moment vaguely, as though perfectly incapable of

understanding her words. His face grew livid, and his white teeth were buried in his underlip.

”And would you really carry the farce so far as to give me such an answer?” he asked at last in a hoarse voice.

Elizabeth smiled contemptuously, and turned away. Her behaviour transported him with rage.

”Your reasons? I will know your reasons!” he ejaculated, stepping between Elizabeth and the door which she was trying to reach. He caught at her dress to detain her. She shrunk from him, and retired a few steps farther into the room.

”Leave me!” she cried, gasping for breath. Terror almost choked her utterance; hut, nevertheless, she once more took courage, and raised her head proudly, with an air of command. ”If there is no spark of honour in you to which I can appeal, you force me to use the only weapons at my command, by declaring to you that I thoroughly despise you; I detest the sight of you; the hiss of a poisonous viper could not inspire me with the aversion and disgust with which I listen to the words by which you would awaken my affection. I have never harboured one sentiment of regard for you; but, if I had, it must have been instantly annihilated by your despicable conduct towards me. Let me go now in peace, and——”

He did not allow her to finish her sentence. ”That I shall certainly not do,” he hissed between his teeth; his face that had hitherto been so pale, flushed crimson, and his eyes flashed as he darted towards her, like some raging wild beast. She fled to the window, as she saw it was impossible to reach the door, and tried to lift the sash, hoping to be able to leap from the low sill to the ground without. But she stood still, transfixed with horror. A terrible face was looking into the room from the shrubbery outside. The features were deadly pale, and distorted by a fiendish grin, while the fire of madness gleamed in the eyes that were riveted upon Elizabeth’s face. She hardly recognized in the dreadful apparition dumb Bertha; shivering with terror, she recoiled; Hollfeld’s extended arms encircled her form,—blinded by passion, he did not perceive the ghastly face at the window. Elizabeth pressed her ice-cold fingers upon her closed eyes to shut out the horrible sight; she felt her persecutor’s hot breath upon her hands; his hair brushed her cheek; she shuddered, but her physical force failed her; she succumbed beneath the twofold horror,—no sound escaped her lips. At sight of Hollfeld, Bertha raised her clenched fists as though to dash them through the window panes,—then, suddenly she paused as if listening to some noise near, dropped her hands, and with a shrill laugh, vanished among the shrubbery.

All this was the work of a few seconds. The sound of the shrill laughter startled Hollfeld, and he looked up. For one moment, his gaze sought to penetrate the bushes, behind which Bertha had disappeared, and then it returned to the form which lay in his arms, and which he clasped to his heart. His cun-

ning foresight, his prudent hypocrisy, that had always enabled him to conceal his baseness from the eyes of the world, were all forgotten. He did not remember that the time that Helene had appointed had arrived,—that through the wide open door the gardener, or any of the servants, might enter the room; his passion had mastered him, and he never observed that, in fact, Fräulein von Walde was standing upon the threshold of the door, leaning on her brother's arm, while, behind them, the baroness was stretching out her long neck, with an unmistakable air of great displeasure.

"Emil!" she cried, her voice vibrating with anger. He started, and looked wildly around; involuntarily he opened his arms; Elizabeth's hands dropped from her eyes, and she staggered towards the nearest couch. The harsh, rude voice of the baroness sounded like sweet music in her ears, for it brought her succour. There too stood the tall, manly form, at sight of which her failing pulses throbbed wildly again. She could have thrown herself at his feet, and prayed him,—"Save me from that man, whom I detest and flee from, as I would from sin itself." But what a look met hers! Did that annihilating glance really come from the same eyes that a few days previously had so tenderly sought her own? Was this man, with the stern, erect head, and the pale, cold brow, the same who had bent over her, saying with such unutterable gentleness,—"may my good angel whisper in your ear the word that will unlock that fairy realm for me?" He stood there now like an evil angel, whose mission is to avenge and to crush to the dust some poor, quivering, human heart.

Helene, who had stood as though lifeless or rooted to the ground during the scene in the interior of the apartment, now withdrew her arm from her brother's and approached Elizabeth; she did not for one instant doubt that Hollfeld had prospered in his wooing, and that the matter had been happily concluded.

"A thousand welcomes to you, dearest Elizabeth!" she cried in great agitation, and, while tears broke from her eyes, she took the young girl's trembling hands between her own. "Emil brings me a dear sister,—love me as a sister, and I shall be grateful to you as long as I live. Do not look so stern, Amalie," she turned beseechingly to the baroness, who was standing like a pillar of stone just outside the pavilion; "Emil's future happiness is at stake. Look at Elizabeth! Does she not satisfy every desire that you can have with regard to the one who will occupy such a close relation to you? Young, richly endowed by nature, of an ancient family and distinguished name."

She stopped, startled. At last the life seemed to return to Elizabeth's stiffened limbs, and she was capable of understanding what was said. By a hasty movement she released her hands from Helene's, and stood erect before her.

"You are mistaken, gracious lady," she said in a clear ringing voice; "I have no claim to such distinction."

”What! have you not an undeniable claim to the name of von Gnadewitz?”

”Doubtless; but that claim will never be asserted.”

”Would you really reject such happiness?”

”I cannot see that true happiness has anything to do with an empty sound.” Her endeavour to lend firmness to her faithless voice was distinctly perceptible.

Meanwhile the baroness had drawn near. She was inwardly furious that her son had made his choice without in the faintest degree consulting her, or asking her maternal consent; besides, the object of his choice was detestable to her. But she knew well that her interference would accomplish nothing,—her son would shrug his shoulders, perhaps smile contemptuously, and be confirmed in his resolve. It was most fortunate, too, for her and her interests, that Helene had taken up the matter as she had, determined, as it seemed, to carry it through with an enthusiastic degree of self-sacrifice. Although she was thoroughly in the dark as to the little lady’s motives for such a line of conduct, she could not fail to perceive that she was in earnest, and therefore, however discontented at heart, she resolved to put a good face upon the matter, and to play the part of a forgiving and blessing parent. Elizabeth’s replies suddenly closed her lips. She conceived a hope that Elizabeth might put a stop to the matter by her own obstinacy; if so, she would pour oil on the flames.

”We have to contend here with a plebeian prejudice, my love,” she said to Helene, who had listened in amazement to Elizabeth’s answers. ”You may, however, have most excellent reasons for shunning the light of loftier realms,” the lady continued, in a cutting tone, turning to Elizabeth.

”I have no reason to shun that light,” the young girl replied, ”even should it suddenly reveal faults hitherto unsuspected, as it sheds a brilliant glare on the stains upon the crest of the Gnadewitzes. But we love our name because it is true and honest, and we would not exchange this stainless inheritance for a title made famous by the tears and toil of others!”

”Heavens, what exalted sentiments!” cried the baroness with a sneer.

”You cannot be serious, Elizabeth,” said Helene. ”Do not forget that the earthly happiness of two human beings hangs upon your decision.” She cast a meaning glance at Elizabeth, which of course was utterly incomprehensible to her. ”You must bring a noble name with you into the sphere to which you will now belong, and you certainly would not destroy your own hopes and those of others?”

”I am utterly at a loss to understand you,”’ said Elizabeth with some irritation. ”It never occurred to me to connect the name of von Gnadewitz with any hopes whatever; least of all can I conceive how the wishes or happiness of others can depend upon the resolution of such a poor, insignificant girl as I.”

”You are not poor, dear child,” rejoined Helene. ”Come,” she continued, with

emotion, ”let us from to-day be sisters indeed! You too, dear Rudolph,” and she turned with some embarrassment to her brother; ”you will welcome Emil’s bride into our family, and permit me to share everything with her like a sister?”

”Yes,” was the reply, spoken sternly, but firmly.

Elizabeth put her hand to her forehead; what she had heard sounded so incredible. ”Emil’s bride” was what Fräulein von Walde had said; was she speaking of her?—impossible! Had these people conspired to terrify her thus? And he,—he who knew how she detested Hollfeld, had sided with them; he was standing there with folded arms, the perfect image of implacable sternness and reserve. He had been, hitherto, quite silent, and had opened his lips only to utter the ”yes,” which had so crushed her. Had he not, previously, endeavoured almost rudely to prevent his cousin’s advances? At thought of that, it suddenly flashed upon her that she was now of noble rank,—that explained everything. Hollfeld’s nobility could not be dishonoured now by an alliance with her; his relatives were, therefore, all quite willing to accede to his suit, and Helene’s surprise at her announcement that she despised the name which they thought noble, was perfectly natural; still, how they could possibly imagine an understanding, upon her part, with the man whom she detested, was utterly beyond her comprehension, for her brain reeled with the wild uproar of her thoughts. One thing only was quite clear, she must immediately convince them of their error.

”I find myself the object of a misunderstanding, the origin of which I cannot possibly comprehend,” she said hastily. ”It is Herr von Hollfeld’s duty to make an explanation here; but as he prefers to be silent, I am forced to declare that he has had no encouragement whatever from me.”

”But, dear child,” said Helene, in great confusion, ”did we not see with our own eyes as we entered that——” she did not proceed.

These words sounded like a thunder clap in Elizabeth’s ears. The idea that that moment of helpless terror could be misunderstood by any one, had never entered her pure and innocent mind. And now she found, to her unutterable pain, that it had placed her in a hatefully false light. She turned, for an instant, toward Hollfeld, but one glance convinced her that she had no satisfaction,—no concern for her honour, to look for from him. With his back turned to the rest, he was standing at the window like a detected school-boy. If the ladies only had been present, he would doubtless have extricated himself by some bold and cunning lie; but Herr von Walde was there, and he was utterly at a loss. He contented himself by preserving an ambiguous silence, which gave unlimited scope for conjecture.

”God in heaven, how terrible!” cried the young girl, wringing her hands. ”As you entered you saw,” she continued, averting her face, and drawing a deep breath, ”a defenceless girl striving vainly to repel the insolence of a man lost to all

sense of honour. The reiterated declaration on my part that I thoroughly despise and utterly detest him was of no avail in freeing me from his presence. I have never concealed these sentiments from Herr von Hollfeld,—on the contrary——"

Here she was interrupted by a loud noise. Helene had sunk back upon the couch, and her right hand clutched the table near her, shaking it so that the china and glass upon it rattled. The little lady's face was ashy-pale,—her despairing glance sought Hollfeld. In vain she endeavoured to conquer her agitation. The light that suddenly revealed such a hateful web of intrigue was too lurid,—its glare had the annihilating effect upon her hitherto unsuspicious mind of a flash of lightning.

Elizabeth, although she was herself much agitated, and prepared to give further expression to her indignation, felt her heart melt with sympathy at sight of the little lady. In vindicating her own honour she had torn the bandage from Helene's eyes, and she was filled with sorrow for her, although she knew that she must have been undeceived sooner or later. She hastily approached her, and took the icy little hands, which had dropped from the table, between her own.

"Forgive me if I have terrified you by my hasty words," she said beseechingly, but firmly. "You can readily understand my position. A few explanatory words from Herr von Hollfeld would have sufficed to clear me from every degrading suspicion. I should not then have been forced to declare so emphatically what I thought of his character and conduct. I regret what has happened, but I cannot retract one word that I have said."

She kissed Helene's hand, and silently left the pavilion. She fancied that Herr von Walde extended his hand to her as she passed him, but she did not look up.

Outside, she followed the narrow, winding way that led through a grove to the pond. She passed by the castle, along the broad gravel-walk, and entered the little forest-path leading to the convent tower, without knowing whither she was going, or remembering that every step took her farther from her home.

She was in a state of fearful excitement. A wild chaos was seething in her brain. Hollfeld's offer of marriage,—his insolent passion,—Bertha's sudden appearance at the window of the pavilion,—the inconceivable fact that Helene had received her with joy as the bride of the man whom she herself loved,—all these things passed through her mind, and in the midst of the confusion she distinctly heard Herr von Walde's "yes." He too, then, would have welcomed her as Herr von Hollfeld's bride! It would have cost him nothing to see her his cousin's wife. This marriage had doubtless been decided upon in family conclave. Herr von Walde had weighed the for and against with his usual cool judgment, and had finally agreed with Helene that Emil's choice would not prove a blot upon the von Hollfeld escutcheon. She could be graciously received, and they would

themselves provide the dowry which the bride was deficient in.

At these thoughts Elizabeth set her teeth, as if she were enduring physical agony. She was filled with unutterable bitterness; her sincere and ardent sentiments had been misunderstood and crushed under foot by that cold-blooded, calculating aristocrat. How could she ever have imagined that he could sympathize in the least with a young, earnest heart, enamoured of freedom, and giving no heed to the belittling, often ridiculous institutions of the world,—he who found the pride and glory of woman only in the ruins and ashes of a long ancestral line?

Several times she paused, lost in thought, and then she walked on quickly, heedless that she was traversing the same path along which she had gone in such confusion by his side a few days before. The overhanging boughs and branches brushed her forehead; she forgot how he had bent them aside, lest they should annoy her. The underbrush was still trodden down, and the stripped leaves were not quite withered upon the spot where Fräulein von Quittelsdorf and Hollfeld had broken through the bushes to reach the two lonely wanderers. Here was the place where the unfinished birthday greeting had been whispered; Elizabeth passed unheeding by, and it was well that she did so, for there were no tears in her burning eyes; here where she could have wept her very heart out.

At last she looked around her with surprise. She stood before the convent tower. Hers was perhaps the first human foot that had pressed this turf since the place had been deserted by the latest guests or the weary servants on the night of the fête.

It looked sadly out of order; the grass had been trodden down by the dancers, whose tread had not been fairy-like. The two hemlocks, which had sustained the refreshment tent, lay prostrate upon the ground in the midst of fragments of broken bottles and the remains of the fireworks. Above, the shrivelled garlands were still hanging between the tower and the oaks, while a gentle breeze swept whispering among the poor flowers, which hung crushed together in the air, their short season of triumph long since ended.

It was already twilight beneath the oaks, although a golden light illumined their topmost boughs, and played upon the gray roof of the tower.

It was with a slight shudder that Elizabeth became aware of her loneliness in the heart of the dim, silent forest; nevertheless she was irresistibly drawn towards the spot where Herr von Walde had taken leave of her. She stepped across the trampled sward,—then stood for an instant as if rooted to the earth,—for the evening breeze brought to her ear single broken tones of a human voice. At first she seemed to hear something like a distant ejaculatory cry for help; then gradually the sounds grew more connected, and rapidly drew near. It was a shrill, piercing, female voice, shouting, rather than singing, a hymn. Elizabeth could hear that the singer, whoever she might be, was running quickly as she sang.

All at once the melody ceased, or rather it was interrupted by a burst of horrid laughter, and then by a shriek, which ran through a perfect scale of scorn, triumph, and bitter agony.

A foreboding of evil filled Elizabeth's mind. She looked anxiously in the direction, in the dark wood, whence the noise was approaching. It was hushed for a moment, and then the hymn began again, while the singer came rushing on like the wind.

Elizabeth stepped within the open door of the tower, for she did not wish to encounter the strange singer; scarcely had she crossed the threshold, when the laughter was repeated close at hand.

On the opposite side of the open sward Bertha rushed out of the thicket, and by her side ran Wolf, the forester's savage watch-dog.

"Wolf, seize her!" she shrieked, pointing with both hands to Elizabeth. The animal came tearing, barking, across the open space.

Elizabeth shut the door behind her, and ran up the tower stairs. She thus gained a moment's advantage; but before she had reached the roof of the tower the door below was opened. The growling dog rushed up the stairs followed by the maniac cheering him on.

The terrified and hunted girl reached the topmost stair,—she heard the growl of the savage brute behind her,—he was just at her heels,—with one last effort she stepped out upon the roof, closed the oaken door, and leaned her whole weight against it.

For a few moments Bertha rattled at the latch upon the other side,—it did not yield. She raved, and threw herself against the oaken panels, while Wolf, barking and growling, scratched at the threshold.

"Amber witch out there!" she shrieked. "I'll throttle you! I'll drag you through the thicket by your long, yellow hair! You have stolen his heart from me, with your moonshine face,—vile hypocrite that you are! Seize her, Wolf, seize her!"

The dog whined, and tore at the door with his paws.

"Tear her in pieces, Wolf; bury your teeth in her white fingers that have bewitched him with their devilish music! curse her! cursed be the tones that come from her fingers! may they turn to poisonous arrows, and bury themselves in her own heart and destroy it!"

Again she threw herself against the door; the old oaken planks creaked and groaned, but it did not yield to the little powerless feet.

Elizabeth meanwhile leaned against the door on the other side, with lips tightly closed and a face pale as death. She had seized a piece of wood that lay at her feet that she might defend herself, if need should be, against the dog. Her whole frame shuddered at the curses which Bertha shrieked out, but she nerved

herself with new resolution.

Had she only glanced at the latch of the door, she would have seen that any effort upon her part to keep it closed was wholly needless,—a huge bolt had slipped forward, against which the maniac's utmost strength could avail nothing.

"Open the door!" Bertha shouted again. "Transparent, brittle creature! Ha! ha! Old Bruin, whom I hate, calls her Gold Elsie. The old fellow despises heaven, and may go to hell for all I care, for I shall be blessed, eternally blessed. He calls her Gold Elsie because she has hair of amber. Fie! how ugly you are! my hair is black as the raven's wing. I am a thousand times the fairer. Do you hear me, moonlight face?"

She paused exhausted, and Wolf, too, ceased his whining and scratching at the threshold.

At the same moment the tolling of a distant bell broke the evening silence of the forest. Elizabeth well knew what it signified,—a funeral train was descending the mountain from the ruins of old Castle Gnadeck. Lila's mortal remains were leaving the walls which had once echoed the sighs and groans of the lovely gypsy girl. She was borne through the forest, in longing for which her heart had broken two centuries before.

Bertha, too, seemed to listen to the sound of the bell; for a moment she did not stir.

"They are ringing," she cried suddenly; "come, Wolf, let us go to church; let her stay up here with the clouds that will fall upon her in the night,—the tempest will tear her hair, and the ravens will come and pick out her eyes, for she is accursed, accursed!"

And then she began the hymn again. Her terrible voice echoed eerily against the narrow walls of the tower. She ran down and out of the door below, then rushed singing across the open space, and disappeared in the thicket whence she had issued at first,—the dog following her. She never once turned round towards the tower. As soon as she turned her back upon it she seemed to forget entirely that the object of her hatred was standing up there upon the gray stone platform. Elizabeth caught a last glimpse of her scarlet jacket among the dark bushes, and then, with her savage companion, she was seen no more. Gradually her song died away, and soon the gentle breeze wafted only the tolling of the bell to the ears of the lonely girl upon the roof of the tower.

With a deep-drawn breath of relief she relinquished her constrained position, which she had until now retained mechanically, and tried to lift the latch of the door. It was rusty and resisted her efforts as it had Bertha's. She now discovered with alarm that the bolt had sprung,—it had, indeed, defended and protected her, but it was also her jailer,—for she could not possibly stir it; worn out at last with her fruitless attempts to withdraw it, she dropped her hands at her sides.

What was to be done? She thought with distress of her parents who had probably been made anxious by her prolonged absence,—for they knew that she fully intended to be present at the interment of her ancestress.

Around her were grouped the mighty monarchs of the forest, their topmost boughs still tipped here and there by the fading western light. Far in the distance gleamed a strip of light,—there lay L—— with its lofty castle, whose long rows of windows glittered for a few moments, and then disappeared in gloom. And there towered the mountain crowned by the ruin of Gnadeck; but the forest hid from her her dear home, she could not even see the lofty flagstaff.

Elizabeth soon relinquished all hope of being seen by passers-by,—and she knew that her feeble cry for help must die away unheard, for the tower lay hidden in the depths of the forest; no frequented road passed near it; and who would be likely to be walking at nightfall in the quiet path which led nowhere except to the convent tower?

Nevertheless she made one attempt, and uttered a loud cry. But how weak it sounded! It seemed to her that the boughs of the nearest tree absorbed it entirely; it only startled some ravens in the vicinity, and they flew croaking away overhead; then all was still again,—fearfully still. The Lindhof church bells were silent. A faint red yet glimmered in the west, tinging a few little floating clouds,—the forest lay in deep shadow.

Utterly at a loss, Elizabeth walked to and fro upon the flat roof. Sometimes she stood still at the corner looking toward Castle Lindhof, which was the nearest inhabited mansion, and raised her voice in a vain cry for help. At last she ceased all such efforts, and seated herself upon the bench which was set into the outer wall of the small landing, at the top of the stairs, and which was tolerably protected by the projecting roof from wind and weather.

She was not afraid of passing the night here, for she did not doubt that search would be made for her in the forest; but how many anxious hours her friends must pass before she could be found!

This thought troubled her greatly and increased her nervous agitation. She had passed through so much during the day, and had had no assistance, nothing but her own force of character to sustain her. She was still trembling from the terror of the last shock. What could have caused poor Bertha's outbreak of insanity? She had spoken of a heart which Elizabeth had stolen from her,—was it possible that Hollfeld had played some part in this sad story, as Frau Ferber had lately so often insisted?

Such a suspicion revived all the painful sensations that had before possessed her. But now, sitting motionless against the old wall, while the darkening heavens seemed to draw near her, and nothing spoke of life around save the damp night air that swept soothingly across her hot cheek,—now her moistened eyes

bore witness that the stern stoicism with which her crushed heart had armed itself, had vanished. All, all was over; she had broken with the inmates of Lindhof forever. She had shattered Helene's ideal, and she had thrown back to Herr von Walde the gift of his consent to her marriage which he had offered her; doubtless his pride had been mortally wounded. Most probably she should never see him again. He would soon set out upon his travels, glad to efface the impression made upon him by the ingratitude of the poor music-teacher.

She covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled through the slender white fingers.

In the mean time the night had fallen, still it was not quite dark. The crescent moon was reigning in the skies, where all the other shining wanderers appeared and went their way, never heeding that their sister planet, the earth, careering in space with them, contained millions of little worlds, each inclosing in its sphere heights and depths, tossing waves with their ebb and flow, mighty storms, and only too rarely a sacred repose.

And now life began to stir in the old tower. There was a low murmur and moaning upon the stairs; slight blows were struck from within upon the oaken door, and wings brushed the inner wall; the owls and bats were longing to be abroad, and could not find their accustomed place of egress. And in the forest below there arose a rustling and crackling,—the deer broke through the thicket and roamed about in entire security. From the distant east, where the forest almost in its primeval luxuriance descended into the valley and then again climbed an opposing range of mountains, a faint shot was occasionally heard. Every time Elizabeth heard the sound she nestled closer against the wall beneath the protecting roof, as if in fear lest she should be discerned by some unfriendly eye gazing thence;—those hunting there were outlaws.

Still no succour came. Her fear, then, lest her parents should be anxious, had been unfounded. Of course, they supposed her to be yet at the castle,—perhaps they were displeased at her long absence from home; but they would possibly wait until ten o'clock for her return. It might be midnight before she was released.

It grew quite cold. With a shiver, she drew her thin shawl close about her, and tied a handkerchief around her throat. She was obliged to leave her seat, and walk to and fro on the roof, to prevent herself from becoming chilled. Occasionally she leaned over the balustrade and looked down.

White cloud-like phantoms were hovering hither and thither over the open space beneath,—the mists rising from the damp ground. Elizabeth no longer thought of the motley spectacle,—the ostentation and vanity that had filled this place a few days before. She forgot the countless idle words that had filled the air, causing such a confusion of tongues that the old tower, instead of standing

upon honest Thuringian soil, might have challenged the skies upon the banks of the Euphrates. Forth from the billows of mist floated the shadowy forms of the nuns buried under these walls, their features pale and passionless, their desolate hearts stilled within their long-flowing robes, and their waxen brows, beneath their white bands, haunted no longer by restless doubts and longings. They would fain have trodden the path leading from the world to heaven, had they not been so often dragged down to earth again.

Elizabeth thought of those dark times, when these gloomy walls were erected in expiation of the crime of a knightly assassin,—cold stone walls to appease Him from whom has come the Word made life,—who is the source of Eternal Love. Could all the prayers, breathed by the inmates of that living tomb,—all the masses,—the organs rolling thunder, blot out the stain of blood which the criminal carried to the foot of the eternal throne? No, a thousand times no! He heeds no incense wafted before the shrine of Baal. His eternal edicts are not reversed by the creatures whom He has made.

What a terrible episode in the family history of the Gnadewitzes those crumbling ruins commemorated! And could it be possible that a being, conscious of a fervent desire for moral elevation and spiritual growth, should be duly respected only when permitted to bear that name? Must she learn that a spotless life was nought, laid in the balance with a human device, which was, in fact, a phantom of the brain,—an absolute nothing?

Was the superstition that committed witches to the flames darker than this delusion of the privileges of birth, by which many a true and richly-gifted human life is as ruthlessly destroyed as by the faggot of the executioner,—the delusion, that flatly contradicts the Almighty decree, which declares all God's children to come alike from His creating hand,—alike in outward form, in physical structure, in the possession of senses, whereby both king and beggar enjoy and suffer, alike in the possession of that vital spark that animates these outward shapes? Where is there a soul, even although it has attained the summit of human perfection, that is not conscious of some weakness, or a human being so depraved, that one good quality at least does not glimmer forth from the slough of vice into which he has sunk?—And can he be influenced by such narrow prejudice,—he, whose brow bears the impress of high intelligence, whose glance and voice can melt with a tenderness that reveals a soul alive to the best and deepest emotions of our nature? Could he rank the hollow form above the immortal rights of humanity, which accord freedom of thought and action to all? Did not that false system continually crush out the highest and holiest sentiment of the human heart, love? If Elizabeth had loved Hollfeld, what would her lot have been without the discovery in the ruins? And if,—here a sarcastic smile hovered upon her quivering lips,—if one thought of affection for her had ever stirred Herr von Walde's heart,

and he should come now and offer his hand?——Never, never would she consent to give herself to him, with the consciousness that her unutterable love had only been returned when such return was no longer forbidden by the old worn-out laws of society. The pain of renunciation lost much of its torture, contrasted with the torment that would be the result of such a life.

With looks full of gloom, Elizabeth once more walked to the corner of the balustrade looking towards Castle Lindhof, and stood gazing in that direction. One and the same star rose above that graceful pile and the poorest hut in the neighbouring village, casting its mild light impartially upon each,—or was there really a stronger gleam upon the spot where the park opened into the forest? No; that light came from below, and penetrating quickly farther and farther into the forest, faintly tinged the boughs above with its rays. It was most certainly a torch borne along the narrow path by which Elizabeth had reached the convent tower.

Once the light was, for an instant, immovable, and a faint shout reached her ears. She felt convinced now that help was at hand,—that search was made for her,—and she raised her voice in reply, although she knew that the faint sound could not reach the bearer of the torch. The light hesitated but for a moment, and then quickly came nearer and nearer. She could soon plainly distinguish the flame of the torch, and see the shower of sparks that fell from it to the ground.

"Elizabeth!" suddenly resounded through the forest.

The voice thrilled through her every nerve,—for it was his voice. Herr von Walde was calling her in tones of unutterable anxiety.

"Here," she called down to him; "I am here, upon the convent tower."

The torch-bearer plunged through the thickets and hurried across the open sward. In a few moments he stood upon the landing without, shaking the door with a powerful hand. Several stout blows followed, and the old planks were burst open.

Herr von Walde stepped out upon the roof. In his left hand he held the torch, while with his right he drew Elizabeth within the circle of its light. His head was uncovered, his dark hair lay in dishevelled locks upon his forehead, and his face was very pale. He hastily scanned her figure, as if to convince himself that she was unhurt. He was evidently in a state of great agitation, the hand which grasped her arm trembled violently, and for a moment he could not speak.

"Elizabeth, poor child!" he ejaculated at last, with a gasping sigh, "did the insult that you received in my house to-day drive you hither to this dreary ruin, and the gloomy night?"

Elizabeth explained to him that her stay here had not been voluntary on her part, as the bolted door testified, and related in a few words, as she descended the stairs, all that had occurred. He went before and offered her his hand to support her, but she took hold of the rope which served for a hand-rail, and turned away

her eyes that she might ignore his proffered aid.

At this moment a strong draught of air extinguished the torch, which had burnt only dimly, and all was enveloped in darkness.

"Now give me your hand!" he said, in the tone of command which she knew so well.

"I can take hold of the rope, I need no other support," she replied.

The last word had scarcely left her lips when she felt herself lifted from the ground like a feather by two strong arms and carried down the steps.

"Foolish child!" he said, as he set her down upon the grass outside. "I will not have you dashed to pieces upon the stone pavement of that dreary tower."

She entered the path which led directly to Castle Lindhof,—it was the shortest. Herr von Walde walked silently by her side.

"Do you intend to leave me to-night without saying one kind word to me?" he suddenly asked, standing still. Pain and suppressed auger strove in his voice for the mastery. "Have I had the misfortune to offend you?"

"Yes, you have wounded me grievously."

"Because I did not instantly chastise my cousin?"

"You could not,—his suit had your entire approbation. You, as well as the others, would have forced me to accept Herr von Hollfeld."

"I force you? Oh, child, how little you understand a man's heart? I was the victim of a terrible error when I uttered that 'yes.' I longed to try if it were a delusion, and to free myself from it. Now you shall learn that I will banish everything that can remind you of to-day's terror. You like Lindhof?"

"Yes."

"The Baroness Lessen is about to leave the castle. Let me entreat you to be my sister's stay and support when I leave her again, when I begin my wanderings anew. Will you consent?"

"I cannot promise to do so."

"And why not?"

"Fräulein von Walde will not desire my society, and even if——. I have already declared once to-day that I shall not bear the new name."

"What a strange reply! What has that to do with the matter? Ah, now I understand. At last I begin to see clearly. Then you think that I agreed to Hollfeld's suit because you suddenly had a right to an ancient name? Speak, is not this the fact?"

"Yes, I believe this to be the fact."

"And you suppose further, that the same reason leads me to desire your companionship for my sister. You are convinced that aristocratic pride prompts all my thoughts and actions?"

"Yes, yes."

”Pray let me inquire of you what name you bore when I asked you for a birthday greeting, when we last walked together here in this path?”

”Then we did not know of the secret hidden in the ruins,” said Elizabeth, in an almost inaudible tone.

”Have you forgotten the words which I dictated to you that afternoon?”

”No,—I remember every syllable of them with the greatest distinctness,” she replied quickly.

”And do you think it possible that such words can end with, ’I hope the coming year will prove a happy one,’ or the like?”

The girl did not speak, but looked up at him with a crimson blush.

”Listen to me quietly for one moment, Elizabeth,” he continued, but he himself was so far from quiet that his voice sounded faint and faltering, as though half stifled by the throbbing of his heart, ”a man who might have been regarded as fortune’s favourite, so richly did she endow him in his cradle with rank and wealth, mistrusted these advantages when he arrived at years of discretion. He feared that they would stand in the way of what he considered the true happiness of his life. He had created for himself an ideal of her by whose side alone he could find real peace,—not that he required extraordinary physical beauty or intellectual power,—he sought a pure, true heart, that should be influenced by no consideration of worldly advantages, but should give herself to him for his own sake alone. He gradually arrived at the conviction that his ideal must remain an ideal, for in his search for its realization, he came to be thirty-seven years old. When hope has folded her wings, and night is falling around us, there is something overpowering in the sudden flushing of a morning light, at the eleventh hour. The mind is unhinged, the long, weary waiting has rendered it almost incapable of believing in great, unexpected happiness. At last, Elizabeth, he found the heart he had sought,—a heart accompanied by a clear, well-balanced intellect that was infinitely superior to all narrow, sordid considerations,—but this heart throbbed in a youthful form adorned with every imaginable grace. Was it to be wondered at that the man of riper years, possessing, as he knew, no personal advantages, regarded with mistrust another who could lay in the balance youth and a fine person? Was it to be wondered at that he allowed himself to be carried away one moment, inspired by the boldest hopes, by some word, some act on the young girl’s part, only to be cast down utterly the next, when he saw that other in her society? Was it not natural that he should fear that youth only could attract youth? Never did heart of man long more wildly than his for the accomplishment of his desire,—never was there a man more possessed, in moments of despair, by a cowardly doubt as to its fulfilment. And when they told him that his little idolized darling belonged to that other, he emptied the bitter cup to the dregs, and said ’yes’ because he imagined that she had already said it. Elizabeth,

I stood on the threshold of the pavilion to-day in a state of utter despair. You do not know what it is, when a merchant heaps all his treasure, every jewel that he possesses, in a single ship, and sees it sink before his eyes. Shall I try to tell you what I felt when you so decidedly rejected the rank which you might have claimed, and so made an alliance with Hollfeld impossible? Shall I tell you that my sister's condition, and consideration for you yourself, alone prevented me from chastising that scoundrel upon the spot? He has already left Lindhof, and will never cross your path again. Will you forget the insult that you received in my house to-day?"

He had taken her hands in his, and held them pressed close to his breast. Without withdrawing them she assented to his question with trembling lips.

"And shall we not forget everything, my darling little Gold Elsie, that has occurred between the beginning and the conclusion of the birthday wish? My golden darling, the delight of my eyes, my own Elizabeth Ferber stands again before me, and will repeat after me what I say, will she not? The last sentence which was so cruelly interrupted—tell me what it was."

"Here is my hand as the pledge of an unutterable bliss," faltered Elizabeth.

"In life, in death, and for all eternity, I will be your own."

But she opened her lips in vain to repeat after him the words which he uttered so solemnly, with the most profound emotion. She burst into tears and threw her arms around the neck of her lover, who clasped her to his heart.

"This divine dream must not fade," he said with a sigh, as Elizabeth gently extricated herself from his embrace. "Leave me your hand at least, Elizabeth, I must learn to believe in my bliss. If you leave me now, I shall be crushed by doubt again to-night. You are thoroughly conscious that you are irrevocably mine? Do you know that you must leave father and mother, and the dear home upon the mountain, for my sake?"

"I know it, and will do so gladly, Rudolph," she said smiling, but firm.

"God bless you, my darling, for those words! But you must know the depths of my doubt. Is it not pity for my boundless love that induces you to yield your consent to my suit?"

"No, Rudolph, it is love,—a love which first awoke in my heart,—does not this sound strangely,—when I saw in your angry eyes, and heard in the tones of your voice, how you detested cruelty and injustice! And since that moment it has never left me; on the contrary, it has increased and grown stronger, in spite of all my efforts to destroy it, notwithstanding all the harsh words that have so often wounded it sorely."

"Who spoke such words?"

"You, yourself; you were harsh and unkind to me."

"Oh, child, those were the outbreaks of insane jealousy! I have struggled

for and exercised self-control all my life long, but I could not conceal how I was tortured then. And would you, on that account, have closed upon me the heaven that is opening before me?"

"Not on that account,—for one kind look from you made me happy again; but another obstinate opponent entered the lists,—my reason. It had grown well aware of everything that report declared concerning your incredible aristocratic arrogance, and, at every wild throb of my heart, dinned into my ears your reasons for refusing the alliance which the prince proposed to you."

"Ah! those sixteen quarterings!" cried Herr von Walde, smiling, "But see, my little Gold Elsie, what a Nemesis that was!" he continued more gravely. "To avoid annoyance, I seized upon the first means at hand, and, as I now know, it almost cost me the happiness of my life. I like the Prince of L——, but any residence at his court was rendered, for a time, utterly odious to me, by the matrimonial alliances proposed for me, principally by the Princess Catharine. She had taken it into her head that I must marry one of the ladies of her court. No one could believe that the girl was entirely indifferent to me, for she passed for a brilliant beauty, and had broken many a heart. All that I could say was of no avail; they continued to plot and intrigue, and so one day I cut the whole matter short by declaring to her Highness that her plan for me would cost me one of my estates, since, as is true, by my uncle's will it was devised to the State if I should marry a wife who could not show sixteen quarterings in her escutcheon. This declaration put an end to my torment; no such person was to be found in the length and breadth of the little kingdom, and all thought it natural that I should wish to retain my estate."

"And will you suffer this loss for my sake?" cried Elizabeth, in surprise.

"It is no loss, Elizabeth; it is an exchange,—an exchange by which I gain a priceless treasure,—the happiness of an entire existence."

A torch glimmered through the thicket.

"Halt! this way!" cried Herr von Walde.

In a few moments one of the servants appeared, and was ordered to hasten as quickly as possible to Gnadeck and announce Fräulein Ferber's safety.

The servant hurried away.

"I have been very selfish, Elizabeth," said Herr von Walde, putting her hand within his arm, and no longer loitering. "I knew that your family was most anxious about you; that your father and uncle were ranging the forest in search of you, while my people, and many of the Lindhof peasants, were traversing the country in all directions upon the same errand, and yet I forgot everything when I found you."

"My poor father and mother!" sighed Elizabeth, not without a slight twinge of conscience; the whole world had ceased to exist for her when he appeared.

”Friedrich runs quickly,” von Walde said, soothingly; ”he will reach the summit of the mountain long before us, and tell them you are safe.”

They entered the park and passed by the castle. It lay in darkness and silence. Only from Helena’s chamber window gleamed a faint light.

”There is a life-and-death struggle going on there,” murmured Herr von Walde, looking up. ”She loved that wretch devotedly; how fearful her awakening must be!”

”Go and comfort her,” begged Elizabeth.

”Comfort her? At such a moment? My child, who could have come to me with comfort when I thought I had lost you? Helene shut herself in her room when I ordered Herr von Hollfeld’s horse to be brought to the door; her maid is near her. A long time must elapse before she wishes to see me; when we have been grossly deceived we do not immediately turn to those who warned us of the deceit. Besides, I will not enter my house again until I am sure that your parents will not snatch you from me.”

The path branched aside to the well-known bank in the forest.

”Do you remember?” asked Elizabeth, smiling, as she pointed to it.

”Yes, yes. There you told me so bravely of your determination to go out into the world as a governess, and I took the liberty of declaring to myself that I never would permit it. I had to exert all my self-control to prevent myself from then and there clasping my little bird in my arms and pressing its golden head, filled with such bold resolve, to my breast. And there I drew from you the unconscious naive confession that your parents still held the first place in your heart. But you adopted a cold, repellant demeanour, as soon as I attempted to be confidential.”

”It was shyness,—and I am not yet quite sure that to-morrow, when I see your stern face by daylight, I shall not fall into the same embarrassment.”

”It will never be stern again, my child; joy has touched it with its gentle finger.”

Soon afterwards, the old beeches which look in at the windows of the Ferber’s dwelling-room saw a strange sight. A man of fine presence, his face pale with profound emotion, conducted the daughter to her parents, and then asked them to give her back to him as his future wife,—his other self. The old beeches saw him take his young love in his arms, and receive the blessing of her agitated parents. They saw the mother’s face, smiling through tears, raised gratefully to Heaven, and little Ernst shaking the canary’s cage, that he might awaken that sleepy songster and announce to him, with great solemnity, that Elsie was be-

trothed.

CHAPTER XX.

While happiness was reigning in the home upon old Gnadeck, a sad event occurred in the valley.

Two peasants from Lindhof, who, provided with torches, had been looking for Elizabeth, heard, as they were proceeding from their village to the forest, a loud growling at a little distance,—it sounded like an angry dog. Not far from them lay stretched across the road a human form, while a large dog lying beside it, as if to defend it, had placed both his forepaws upon its breast. The animal became infuriated at the approach of the men, and, gnashing its teeth, threatened to fly at them. They were afraid, and ran back to the village, where they met a party bearing torches, and among them the forester, who had just heard from Herr von Walde's servant of Elizabeth's safety.

Instantly all hastened to the spot which the frightened peasants described. This time the dog did not growl. He whined, and crept to the forester's feet; it was Wolf, his watch-dog, and there lay Bertha, apparently lifeless. She was bleeding profusely from a wound in her head, and her face was as pale as death.

The forester did not speak, he shunned the sympathetic glances of the bystanders; anger and pain strove for the mastery in his features. He raised Bertha from the ground, and carried her into the first house in the village; it was the poor weaver's. Then he sent a messenger for Sabina. Fortunately, the Waldheim physician was with one of his patients in the village. He was sent for, and soon brought the poor girl to herself. She recognized him, and asked for water. Her wound was not dangerous, but the physician shook his head and looked meaningly at the forester, who was anxiously watching him.

The doctor was a blunt man, with rather rude manners. He suddenly approached the forester, and said a few words to him in a slight undertone. The old man staggered back as though from a mortal blow, stared absently at the doctor without replying a word,—and then left the house without looking at the sick girl.

"Uncle, uncle, forgive me!" she cried after him in heart-breaking tones, but he had already vanished into the dark night.

And now Sabina made her appearance in the doorway. A maid followed

her, bearing a huge bundle of linen upon her head, and a basket upon her arm, containing bandages, provisions, and all manner of necessary articles.

"Gracious Powers! what have you been doing with yourself, Bertha?" cried the old woman with tears in her eyes, as she saw the pale face, and the bandaged head lying upon the pillow. "And to-day, too, when I thought you went out looking so much better,—you had such beautiful red cheeks!"

The girl buried her face in the bedclothes, and began to sob convulsively.

The physician told Sabina what was to be done, and strictly forbade the invalid to converse or even to speak.

"Must I be silent?" cried Bertha, raising herself in bed. "Ah! silence may be easy for such an old man, whose blood runs cool and calm in his veins. But I must speak, Sabina, and if it kills me,—so much the better!"

She drew the old housekeeper towards her upon the bed, and, weeping bitterly, confessed all to her.

She had had a love affair with Hollfeld, who had promised to marry her, and had induced her to swear solemnly that she would keep silent concerning their relations to each other, and not claim her rights until he should authorize her to do so; for, as he told her, he must first influence his mother and his relatives at Lindhof to accede to his wishes. The unthinking girl promised all that he asked,—and in addition vowed solemnly that no human being should hear one word from her lips until she could proclaim her proud secret to the world. The meetings of the pair usually took place in the convent-tower or in the pavilion in the park. No one discovered them. The baroness' suspicions were aroused by some slight circumstance,—she fell into a violent rage, and forbade Bertha ever to show her face at Lindhof Castle.

Still Bertha's lofty hopes were unshaken, for Hollfeld consoled her, and referred to the future. But then came Elizabeth Ferber, and he was an altered man from that moment. He avoided Bertha, and when she compelled him by threats to an interview, he treated her with a coldness and contempt that excited the girl's passionate nature to frenzy.

When at last she became convinced that she had to do with a man utterly devoid of honour, the whole horror of her situation was laid bare before her. She fell into a state of the wildest despair, and then began her nightly escapades. Sleep scarcely visited her eyes, and she grew more composed only when she could shriek out her agony and woe in the lonely forest.

At last came the end to the tragedy,—the same end that has befallen such tragedies hundreds of times before, and that will continue to befall them,—for the warning example convinces the understanding but never touches an unsuspecting, loving heart. Hollfeld offered the poor girl a sum of money if she would relinquish her claims and leave that part of the country. He pretended that his

mother and his Lindhof relatives forced him to marry the newly-made Fräulein von Gnadewitz. Bertha denounced him as an unprincipled liar, and rushed from his presence. In a frenzy of rage she presented herself before his mother and told her all.

Thus far Bertha continued her sad tale connectedly, only interrupted by her violent gestures, sobs, and tears. She paused for a moment, and an expression of inextinguishable hatred distorted her countenance.

"That horrible woman," she cried at last, gasping for breath, "has the Bible always upon her lips. She knits and sews night and day for missionaries, who are to carry the word of God to the heathen, that they may be converted; but they cannot in their ignorance be more inhuman and cruel than this Christian in her pride. She wishes to root out idol-worship, and sets up herself for an idol, surrounding herself by a crowd of fawning, flattering hypocrites, who declare that she is one of the elect,—not as other people are. Woe to the upright, honest man who refuses to consider her as such,—his crime is blasphemy! She thrust me from her doors, and threatened to have the dogs hunt me from the park, if I ever showed my face there again. From that time I do not know what became of me," she said, sinking back exhausted among the pillows, and pressing her hands upon her aching forehead. "I only know that I awaked and saw the doctor's face bending over me. He told my uncle of my disgrace,—I heard him. What will become of me!"

Sabina had listened to this confession with horror and grief. She had always advocated the strictest purity and decorum, and had been, as Bertha well knew, a stern and inflexible judge in such unhappy cases as that of the wretched girl. But her heart was full of love and pity. She looked down upon the crushed sinner before her with tears of compassion, and soothed the weary head upon her kind old breast. She was rewarded by seeing the poor girl fall asleep in her arms, like a child worn out with weeping.

Soon nothing was heard in the little room but the quiet breathing of the sick girl and the ticking of the clock. Sabina put on her spectacles, drew an old worn copy of the New Testament from her basket, and watched faithfully by the bedside until the bright dawn looked in at the windows.

Bertha did not die, as she had hoped to do in consequence of her agitating confession. On the contrary, she recovered very quickly, nursed and tended by Sabina and Frau Ferber. There was no return of her insanity. The wound in her head, which had been caused by a fall upon a sharp stone, had produced a most beneficial result in the copious loss of blood which had ensued.

The forester was beside himself at the disgrace which Bertha had brought beneath his honest roof. For some days he would not even listen to his brother's calm, soothing words. After Sabina had communicated to him Bertha's confes-

sion, he rode to Odenberg to call ”the worthless scoundrel to account;” but the servants there informed him, shrugging their shoulders, that their master had started upon a journey; they could not tell whither, or when he would return. Herr von Walde’s search for him was also without result.

Bertha herself declared that she would never again hear of her betrayer, whom she now regarded with a hate as fervent as had been her love. A few weeks after her recovery she left the weaver’s hut,—she never again entered the Lodge,—to go to America. But she did not go alone. One of her uncle’s assistants, a fine young fellow, begged for his dismissal, because he had always loved Bertha in silence, and could not find it in his heart to let her go alone into the wide world. She had promised to be his. They were to be married in Bremen, and sail thence for the New World, where he would lead a farmer’s life. Herr von Walde provided the pair with a considerable sum of money; and, at Frau Ferber’s and Elizabeth’s request, the forester silently consented that Sabina should rob the overflowing store of linen that his deceased wife had accumulated, to furnish the household of the emigrants.

* * * * *

Upon a gloomy autumn day a well-packed travelling carriage left Castle Lindhof and slowly rolled towards L——. Her haughty arrogance all vanished, the baroness sat huddled together in one corner of it. Her brilliant part at Lindhof was played; she was reluctantly returning to her small rooms and reduced circumstances.

”Mamma,” said Bella, in her shrill, childish accents, as she opened and shut the carriage window and drummed against the seat with her feet, ”does the castle belong now to Elizabeth Ferber? Will she drive in our beautiful carriage with the white damask cushions? Can she go into your room whenever she pleases and sit in the embroidered arm-chairs? Old Lorenz says that she will be the mistress there now, and that all her orders must be obeyed.”

”Child, do not torment me so with your chatter,” groaned the baroness, burying her face in her pocket-handkerchief.

”It is very unkind of Uncle Rudolph to send us away,” the child continued, without heeding what her mother said. ”You know we have no silver dishes to eat from in B——, have we, mamma? Shall we dine at a restaurant, mamma? and will you dress your own hair while Caroline washes and irons? Why——”

”Silence!” her mother interrupted the flood of speech that so tormented her.

Bella cowered terrified in a corner, and did not look up until the carriage was rolling over the stone pavement of L——. The baroness cast a hasty glance at the Princely castle, then drew her veil over her face and burst into tears.

In consequence of Bertha's confession there had been a stormy interview between Herr von Walde and the baroness, which had ended in the departure of the latter. Helene repulsed her with aversion when she appealed to her, and she was forced to enter the travelling carriage, which appeared punctually before the castle at the hour appointed by its master. There was one consoling drop in her cup of misfortune,—Herr von Walde had provided the means for Bella's education, upon condition that it should be more sensibly conducted than heretofore.

Almost at the same hour in which the Baroness Lessen was leaving Lindhof forever, the Countess von Falkenberg presented herself in the boudoir of the princess, who had returned with her husband a few days before from the baths.

The countess made as profound an obeisance as her uncertain limbs would permit, but showed a degree of haste that she would have stigmatized in another as contrary to all rules of etiquette. She held an open letter in her hand, which had been somewhat crushed by her trembling fingers.

"I am most unhappy," she began in an unnatural tone of voice, "to be obliged to impart to your highnesses a most scandalous piece of news. Oh, mon Dieu, who would have thought it! Well, if even in our own sphere all sense of shame, all dignified self-consciousness, is at an end,—if every one is to heed the dictates of low and vulgar impulses,—no wonder that the halo surrounding us is dimmed, and the mob ventures to attack the throne itself!"

"Calm yourself, my dear Falkenberg," said the prince, who was present, with evident amusement. "Your preface is somewhat after the magnificent style of a Cassandra. But as yet I see no signs of earthquake; and to my great satisfaction I observe,"—and he glanced out of the window at the quiet market-square with a smile,—"that my faithful subjects are quite composed. What have you to tell us?"

She looked up surprised,—his sarcastic tone made her falter.

"Oh, if your highness only knew!" she cried at last. "That man, upon whose pride of birth I so relied, Herr von Walde, informs me that he is betrothed. And to whom? to whom?"

"To Fräulein Ferber, the niece of my brave, old forester," the prince, smiling, replied. "Yes, yes, I have heard something of this; Walde knows what he is about, I see. The little girl is a miracle of beauty and loveliness they say. Well, I hope he will not keep us waiting long to make her acquaintance, but will present her to us soon."

"Your highness," cried the paralyzed countess, "she is the daughter of your highness' forester's clerk!"

"Yes, yes, my good Falkenberg," chimed in the princess, "we know that. But be calm; she is I assure you of noble rank."

"Will your highness graciously permit me," rejoined the old lady, her face

crimson, as she pointed to the crumpled letter, ”here it stands in black and white,—his betrothal with a person of low birth,—here is the name, Ferber, and no other, and just so it will be written upon von Walde’s genealogical tree forever. It actually seems as if the man paraded it with a sort of ostentation. The inconceivable indifference of these people in refusing to assume the name of von Gnadewitz shows plainly enough that they have nothing in common with that aristocratic family. Their noble blood has utterly degenerated in the course of years, and, according to my notions of nobility, the girl is and always will be of low birth. I sincerely pity poor Hollfeld, who is, as your highness knows, of stainless descent; by this misalliance he will lose at least half a million,—and the poor Lessen, too, from whom I have just had a few sad lines,—she leaves Lindhof to-day, of course to escape from such scandalous proceedings.”

”Those are matters affecting your own personal feeling, and of course I say nothing with regard to them,” rejoined the prince, not without severity. ”But I herewith request you to announce to the princess and myself the fact, as soon as Herr von Walde wishes to present his bride to us.”

In the next room, the door of which was open, Cornelie was merrily turning upon her heels and snapping her fingers.

”Aha! and that was why Sir Bruin wished to escape the tongues of certain eloquent ladies!” she cried, with a stifled laugh. ”Cornelie, where was your usual penetration with regard to the masculine heart? Oh, the thing delights me for old Falkenberg’s sake,” she said, in a whisper, to another young lady who sat at the window embroidering. ”Now for at least two weeks we shall have the pleasure of seeing how the loyal creature will look daggers at their highnesses whenever their backs are turned, while all the honey of the promised land will overflow her withered lips as soon as the sun of their royal smile shines upon her. I could wish that every man whom we know would follow Herr von Walde’s silly example!”

”Good Heavens! Cornelie, are you insane?” cried her companion at the window, dropping her needle from her fingers.

At the same time that every drop of blood in the Falkenberg’s aristocratic veins was so outraged, Doctor Fels returned to his home, and went to the nursery, where his wife was bathing her baby and superintending the knitting fingers of her two little daughters.

”Rejoice with me, dear love!” he cried, with sparkling eyes, as he stood upon the threshold of the door. ”Lindhof will have a mistress, and such a mistress! Gold Elsie, our beautiful Gold Elsie! Do you hear, my darling? Now the sun will shine brightly there. The healthy atmosphere has conquered, and the evil spirit that actually dropped mildew upon poor human souls has fled. I have just seen it drive past in Herr von Walde’s travelling carriage. The announcement of the betrothal has fallen upon our worthy town like a bomb-shell. I tell you it is wonderful to

see the long, incredulous faces! But the news has not surprised me at all. I have known what must happen ever since Linke's murderous attempt. Since I drove that evening to Lindhof by Herr von Walde's side, to see whether the excitement had produced no ill effects upon the brave child, I have known well that his hour had struck, that he had a heart indeed, a heart full of fervent, passionate love."

* * * * *

Let us pass over a space of two years, and once more enter the old Gnadeck ruins. We shall ascend the mountain by a broad well-kept road, leading to the castle gate, which has exchanged its rusty bolts and bars for more convenient fastenings.

We remember with a shiver the cold, damp court-yard behind this gate, shut in by gloomy colonnades on three sides, while the crumbling buildings threatened to bury us beneath their ruins. We remember the lonely basin in the centre, that, surrounded by the lions of stone, has waited in vain during so many years for the silver stream that should fill it.

Remembering all this, we ring the bell. At its clear sound, a fresh, trim maiden opens the massive gate, and invites us to enter. But we start back almost dazzled, for from the open gate what a flood of light and colour greets us! The ruins have vanished, the high wall that surrounded them alone remains, and we are for the first time aware how extensive is the space which it encloses.

We do not tread upon the echoing pavement of a courtyard, a smooth gravel-walk is beneath our feet; before us stretches a level, well-kept lawn. In its centre stands the granite basin, and from the threatening jaws of the lions are pouring four powerful streams of water. The chestnuts still remain the faithful guardians of the fountain, but since their boughs have been bathed in heaven's air and light they have grown strong and young again, and are now covered with a wealth of fan-like blossoms. We wind among the gravel paths that intersect the lawn, delight our eyes with the groups of shrubbery, still very young, that are so tastefully scattered here and there, and with the gay beds of carefully tended flowers.

Before us lies the home. Its four walls are free now to the air and light, and have put on a fresh bright garment; but its front is far more stately than it used to be. New windows are seen on every side. Ferber has had four rooms added to it; for when the forester retires to private life, he and Sabina are to live there also. In the family dwelling-room,—from whose two high windows can now be seen the same view formerly seen only from Elizabeth's room above,—Herr von Walde has had the trees thinned so that her parents might always have the home of their darling before their eyes,—stands the young Frau von Walde.

She has been kept in the house for several weeks, and her first expedition has been to carry her first-born to her parents' home. There he lies in her arms. Miss Mertens, or rather the happily married Frau Reinhard, has just removed the veil from the little thing. The minute, plump, red face shows, in the eyes of the mother, an unmistakable resemblance to Herr von Walde. Ernst is laughing loudly at the vague movements of the fat little fists, which are stretching out in all directions. But the forester stands with his own powerful hands behind him, and an expression of great anxiety, as if he feared that if he moved he might do the frail atom an injury. He is no less delighted with his grand-nephew than are Elizabeth's parents with their grandchild. He has outlived his distress concerning Bertha, and basks in Elizabeth's happiness, which was a great surprise to him at first, and which he maintained he was obliged to become accustomed to anew every morning. Not, indeed, that he thought such good fortune one whit too great for his darling,—he would have thought the richest of earthly crowns well placed upon Elizabeth's head; but it was so strange to him to see his sunny Gold Elsie by the side of her grave, thoughtful husband.

Elizabeth is happy in the fullest sense of the word. Her husband adores her, and his words have proved true,—the expression of stern melancholy has faded forever from his brow.

Just now the young wife is looking tenderly at the little creature in her arms, and then down into the valley, whence Herr von Walde will soon appear to conduct her to her home. Her glance grows sad for a moment, and tears fill her eyes, as they rest upon a lofty gilded cross, glimmering among the trees upon the shore of the lake,—beneath those rustling boughs Helene has slept for a year. She died in Elizabeth's arms, praying God to bless the dear sister who had so helped her to bear her burden of woe until her spirit could soar away from its frail mortal tenement.

Hollfeld has sold Odenberg, and no one knows in what corner of the earth he hides his discontent at the overthrow of all his plots.

THE END.

* * * * * * * *

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