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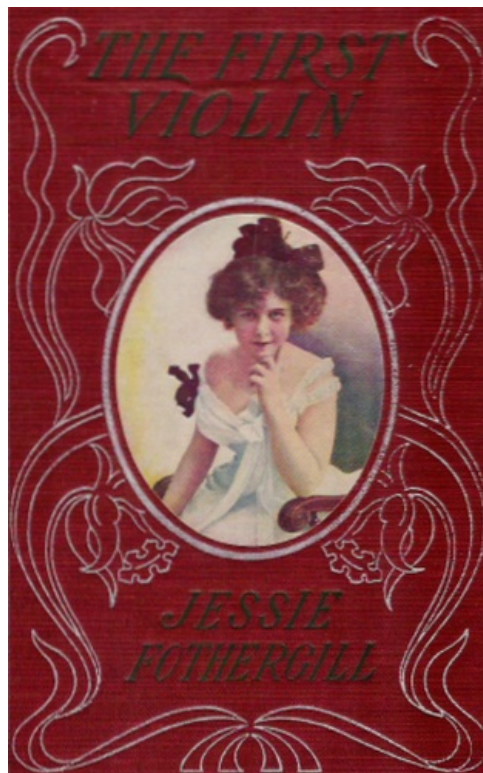
Author: Jessie Fothergill

Release Date: June 25, 2009 [EBook #29219]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Alicia Williams, D. Alexander and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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THE FIRST VIOLIN

A NOVEL.

By JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

Author of "A March in the Ranks," Etc.

NEW YORK
THE FEDERAL BOOK COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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THE FIRST VIOLIN.

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CHAPTER I.

MISS HALLAM.

“Wonderful weather for April!” Yes, it certainly was wonderful. I fully agreed with the sentiment expressed at different periods of the day by different members of my family; but I did not follow their example and seek enjoyment out-of-doors—pleasure in that balmy spring air. Trouble—the first trouble of my life—had laid her hand heavily upon me. The world felt disjointed and all upside-down; I very helpless and lonely in it. I had two sisters, I had a father and a mother; but none the less was I unable to share my grief with any one of them; nay, it had been an absolute relief to me when first one and then another of them had left the house, on business or pleasure intent, and I, after watching my father go down the garden-walk, and seeing the gate close after him, knew that, save for Jane, our domestic, who was caroling lustily to herself in the kitchen regions, I was alone in the house.

I was in the drawing-room. Once secure of solitude, I put down the sewing with which I had been pretending to employ myself, and went to the window—a pleasant, sunny bay. In that window stood a small work-table, with a flower-pot upon it containing a lilac primula. I remember it distinctly to this day, and I am likely to carry the recollection with me so long as I live. I leaned my elbows upon this table, and gazed across the fields, green with spring grass, tenderly lighted by an April sun, to where the river—the Skern—shone with a pleasant, homely, silvery glitter, twining through the smiling meadows till he bent round the solemn overhanging cliff crowned with mournful firs, which went by the name of the Rifted or Riven Scaur.

In some such delightful mead might the white-armed Nausicaa have tossed her cowslip balls among the other maids; perhaps by some such river might Persephone have paused to gather the daffodil—“the fateful flower beside the rill.” Light clouds flitted across the sky, a waft of wind

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danced in at the open window, ruffling my hair mockingly, and bearing with it the deep sound of a church clock striking four.

As if the striking of the hour had been a signal for the breaking of a spell, the silence that had prevailed came to an end. Wheels came rolling along the road up to the door, which, however, was at the other side of the house. "A visitor for my father, no doubt," I thought indifferently; "and he has gone out to read the funeral service for a dead parishioner. How strange! I wonder how clergymen and doctors can ever get accustomed to the grim contrasts amid which they live!"

I suffered my thoughts to wander off in some such track as this, but they were all through dominated by a heavy sense of oppression—the threatening hand of a calamity which I feared was about to overtake me, and I had again forgotten the outside world.

The door was opened. Jane held it open and said nothing (a trifling habit of hers, which used to cause me much annoyance), and a tall woman walked slowly into the room. I rose and looked earnestly at her, surprised and somewhat nervous when I saw who she was—Miss Hallam, of Hallam Grange, our near neighbor, but a great stranger to us, nevertheless, so far, that is, as personal intercourse went.

"Your servant told me that every one was out except Miss May," she remarked, in a harsh, decided voice, as she looked not so much at me as toward me, and I perceived that there was something strange about her eyes.

"Yes; I am sorry," I began, doubtfully.

She had sallow, strongly marked, but proud and aristocratic features, and a manner with more than a tinge of imperiousness. Her face, her figure, her voice were familiar, yet strange to me—familiar because I had heard of her, and been in the habit of occasionally seeing her from my very earliest childhood; strange, because she was reserved and not given to seeing her neighbors' houses for purposes either of gossip or hospitality. I was aware that about once in two years she made a call at our house, the vicarage, whether as a mark of politeness to us, or to show that, though she never entered a church, she still chose to lend her countenance and approval to the Establishment, or whether merely out of old use and habit, I knew not. I only knew that she came, and that until now it had never fallen to my lot to be present upon any of those momentous occasions.

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Feeling it a little hard that my coveted solitude should thus be interrupted, and not quite knowing what to say to her, I sat down and there was a moment's pause.

"Is your mother well?" she inquired.

"Yes, thank you, very well. She has gone with my sister to Darton."

"Your father?"

"He is well too, thank you. He has a funeral this afternoon."

"I think you have two sisters, have you not?"

"Yes; Adelaide and Stella."

"And which are you?"

"May; I am the second one."

All her questions were put in an almost severe tone, and not as if she took very much interest in me or mine. I felt my timidity increase, and yet—I liked her. Yes, I felt most distinctly that I liked her.

"May," she remarked, meditatively; "May Wedderburn. Are you aware that you have a very pretty north-country sounding name?"

"I have not thought about it."

"How old are you?"

"I am a little over seventeen."

"Ah! And what do you do all day?"

"Oh!" I began, doubtfully, "not much, I am afraid, that is useful or valuable."

"You are young enough yet. Don't begin to do things with a purpose for some time to come. Be happy while you can."

"I am not at all happy," I replied, not thinking of what I was saying, and then feeling that I could have bitten my tongue out with vexation. What could it possibly matter to Miss Hallam whether I were happy or not? She was asking me all these questions to pass the time, and in order to talk about something while she sat in our house.

"What makes you unhappy? Are your sisters disagreeable?"

"Oh, no!"

"Are your parents unkind?"

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"Unkind!" I echoed, thinking what a very extraordinary woman she was and wondering what kind of experience hers could have been in the past.

"Then I can not imagine what cause for unhappiness you can have," she said, composedly.

I made no answer. I repented me of having uttered the words, and Miss Hallam went on:

"I should advise you to forget that there is such a thing as unhappiness. You will soon succeed."

"Yes—I will try," said I, in a low voice, as the cause of my unhappiness rose up, gaunt, grim and forbidding, with thin lips curved in a mocking smile, and glittering, snake-like eyes fixed upon my face. I shivered faintly; and she, though looking quickly at me, seemed to think she had said enough about my unhappiness. Her next question surprised me much.

"Are you fair in complexion?" she inquired.

"Yes," said I. "I am very fair—fairer than either of my sisters. But are you near-sighted?"

"Near sight/ess," she replied, with a bitter little laugh. "Cataract. I have so many joys in my life that Providence has thought fit to temper the sunshine of my lot. I am to content myself with the store of pleasant remembrances with which my mind is crowded, when I can see nothing outside. A delightful arrangement. It is what pious people call a 'cross,' or a 'visitation,' or something of that kind. I am not pious, and I call it the destruction of what little happiness I had."

"Oh, I am very, very sorry for you," I answered, feeling what I spoke, for it had always been my idea of misery to be blind—shut away from the sunlight upon the fields, from the hue of the river, from all that "lust of the eye" which meets us on every side.

"But are you quite alone?" I continued. "Have you no one to—"

I stopped; I was about to add, "to be kind to you—to take care of you?" but I suddenly remembered that it would not do for me to ask such questions.

"No, I live quite alone," said she, abruptly. "Did you think of offering to relieve my solitude?"

I felt myself burning with a hot blush all over my face as I stammered out:

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"I am sure I never thought of anything so impertinent, but—but—if there was anything I could do—read or—"

I stopped again. Never very confident in myself, I felt a miserable sense that I might have been going too far. I wished most ardently that my mother or Adelaide had been there to take the weight of such a conversation from my shoulders. What was my surprise to hear Miss Hallam say, in a tone quite smooth, polished, and polite:

"Come and drink tea with me to-morrow afternoon—afternoon tea I mean. You can go away again as soon as you like. Will you?"

"Oh, thank you. Yes, I will."

"Very well. I shall expect you between four and five. Good-afternoon."

"Let me come with you to your carriage," said I, hastily. "Jane—our servant is so clumsy."

I preceded her with care, saw her seated in her carriage and driven toward the Grange, which was but a few hundred yards from our own gates, and then I returned to the house. And as I went in again, my companion-shadow glided once more to my side with soft, insinuating, irresistible importunity, and I knew that it would be my faithful attendant for—who could say how long?

CHAPTER II.

"Traversons gravement ce méchant mascarade qu'on appelle le monde"

The houses in Skernford—the houses of "the gentry," that is to say—lay almost all on one side an old-fashioned, sleepy-looking "green" toward which their entrances lay; but their real front, their pleasantest aspect, was on their other side, facing the river which ran below, and down to which their gardens sloped in terraces. Our house, the vicarage, lay nearest the church; Miss Hallam's house, the Grange, furthest from the church. Between these, larger and more imposing, in grounds beside which ours seemed to dwindle down to a few flower-beds, lay Deeplish Hall, whose owner, Sir Peter Le Marchant, had lately come to live there, at least for a time.

It was many years since Sir Peter Le Marchant, whose image at this time was fated to enter so largely and so much against my will into all my calculations, had lived at or even visited his estate at Skernford. He was a man of immense property, and report said that Deeplish Hall, which we innocent villagers looked upon as such an imposing mansion, was but one and not the grandest of his several country houses. All that I knew of his history—or rather, all that I had heard of it, whether truly or not, I was in no position to say—was but a vague and misty account; yet that little had given me a dislike to him before I ever met him.

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Miss Hallam, our neighbor, who lived in such solitude and retirement, was credited with having a history—if report had only been able to fix upon what it was. She was popularly supposed to be of a grim and decidedly eccentric disposition. Eccentric she was, as I afterward found—as I thought when I first saw her. She seldom appeared either in church or upon any other public occasion, and was said to be the deadly enemy of Sir Peter Le Marchant and all pertaining to him. There was some old, far-back romance connected with it—a romance which I did not understand, for up to now I had never known either her or Sir Peter sufficiently to take any interest in the story, but the report ran that in days gone by—how far gone by, too, they must have been!—Miss Hallam, a young and handsome heiress, loved very devotedly her one sister, and that sister—so much was known as a fact—had become Lady Le Marchant: was not her monument in the church between the Deeplish Hall and the Hallam Grange pews? Was not the tale of her virtues and her years—seven-and-twenty only did she count of the latter—there recorded? That Barbara Hallam had been married to Sir Peter was matter of history: what was not matter of history, but of tradition which was believed in quite as firmly, was that the baronet had ill-treated his wife—in what way was not distinctly specified, but I have since learned that it was true; she was a gentle creature, and he made her life miserable unto her. She was idolized by her elder sister, who, burning with indignation at the treatment to which her darling had been subjected, had become, even in disposition, an altered woman. From a cheerful, open-hearted, generous, somewhat brusque young person, she had grown into a prematurely old, soured, revengeful woman. It was to her that the weak and injured sister had fled; it was in her arms that she had died. Since her sister's death, Miss Hallam had withdrawn entirely from society, cherishing a perpetual grudge against Sir Peter Le Marchant. Whether she had relations or none, friends or acquaintance outside the small village in which she lived, none knew. If so, they limited their intercourse with her to correspondence, for no visitor ever penetrated to her damp old Grange, nor had she ever been known to leave it with the purpose of making any journey abroad. If perfect silence and perfect retirement could hush the tongues of tradition and report, then Miss Hallam's story should have been forgotten. But it was not forgotten. Such things never do become forgotten.

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It was only since Sir Peter had appeared suddenly some six weeks ago at Deeplish Hall, that these dry bones of tradition had for me quickened into something like life, and had acquired a kind of interest for me.

Our father, as vicar of the parish, had naturally called upon Sir Peter, and as naturally invited him to his house. His visits had begun by his coming to lunch one day, and we had speculated about him a little in advance, half jestingly, raking up old stories, and attributing to him various evil qualities of a hard and loveless old age. But after he had gone, the verdict of Stella and myself was, "Much worse than we expected." He was different from what we had expected. Perhaps that annoyed us. Instead of being able to laugh at him, we found something oppressive, chilling, to me frightful, in the cold, sneering smile which seemed perpetually hovering about his thin lips—in the fixed, snaky glitter of his still, intent gray eyes. His face was pale, his manners were polished, but to meet his eye was a thing I hated, and the touch of his hand made me shudder. While speaking in the politest possible manner, he had eyed over Adelaide and me in a manner which I do not think either of us had ever experienced before. I hated him from the moment in which I saw him looking at me with expression of approval. To be approved by Sir Peter Le Marchant, could fate devise anything more horrible? Yes, I knew now that it could; one might have to submit to the approval, to live in the approval. I had expressed my opinion on the subject with freedom to Adelaide, who to my surprise had not agreed with me, and had told me coldly that I had no business to speak disrespectfully of my father's visitors. I was silenced, but unhappy. From the first moment of seeing Sir Peter, I had felt an uncomfortable, uneasy feeling, which, had I been sentimental, I might have called a presentiment, but I was not sentimental. I was a healthy young girl of seventeen, believing in true love, and goodness, and gentleness very earnestly; "fancy free," having read few novels, and heard no gossip—a very baby in many respects. Our home might be a quiet one, a poor one, a dull one—our circle of acquaintance small, our distractions of the most limited description imaginable, but at least we knew no evil, and—I speak for Stella and myself—thought none. Our father and mother were persons with nothing whatever remarkable about them. Both had been handsome. My mother was pretty, my father good-looking yet. I loved them both dearly. It had never entered my head to do otherwise than love them, but the love which made the star and the poetry of my quiet and unromantic life was that I bore to Adelaide, my eldest sister. I believed in her devotedly, and accepted her judgment, given in her own peculiar proud, decided way, upon every topic on which she chose to express it. She was one-and-twenty, and I used to think I could lay down my life for her.

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It was consequently a shock to me to hear her speak in praise—yes, in praise of Sir Peter Le Marchant. My first impulse was to distrust my own judgment, but no; I could not long do so. He was repulsive; he was stealthy, hard, cruel, in appearance. I could not account for Adelaide's perversity in liking him, and passed puzzled days and racked my brain in conjecture as to why when Sir Peter came Adelaide should be always at home, always neat and fresh—not like me. Why was Adelaide, who found it too much trouble to join Stella and me in our homely concerts, always ready to indulge Sir Peter's taste for music, to entertain him with conversation?—and she *could* talk. She was unlike me in that respect. I never had a brilliant gift of conversation. She was witty about the things she did know, and never committed the fatal mistake of pretending to be up in the things she did not know. These gifts of mind, these social powers, were always ready for the edification of Sir Peter. By degrees the truth forced itself upon me. Some one said—I overheard it—that "that handsome Miss Wedderburn was undoubtedly setting her cap at Sir Peter Le Marchant." Never shall I forget the fury which at first possessed me, the conviction which gradually stole over me that it was true. My sister Adelaide, beautiful, proud, clever—and,

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I had always thought, good,—had distinctly in view the purpose of becoming Lady Le Marchant. I shed countless tears over the miserable discovery, and dared not speak to her of it. But that was not the worst. My horizon darkened. One horrible day I discovered that it was I, and not Adelaide, who had attracted Sir Peter's attentions. It was not a scene, not a set declaration. It was a word in that smooth voice, a glance from that hated and chilling eye, which suddenly aroused me to the truth.

Shuddering, dismayed, I locked the matter up within my own breast, and wished with a longing that sometimes made me quite wretched that I could quit Skernford, my home, my life, which had lost zest for me, and was become a burden to me. The knowledge that Sir Peter admired me absolutely degraded me in my own eyes. I felt as if I could not hold up my head. I had spoken to no one of what had passed within me, and I trusted it had not been noticed; but all my joy was gone. It was as if I stood helpless while a noisome reptile coiled its folds around me.

To-day, after Miss Hallam's departure, I dropped into my now chronic state of listlessness and sadness. They all came back; my father from the church; my mother and Adelaide from Darton, whither they had been on a shopping expedition; Stella from a stroll by the river. We had tea, and they dispersed quite cheerfully to their various occupations. I, seeing the gloaming gently and dim falling over the earth, walked out of the house into the garden, and took my way toward the river. I passed an arbor in which Stella and I had loved to sit and watch the stream, and talk and read Miss Austen's novels. Stella was there now, with a well-thumbed copy of "Pride and Prejudice" in her hand.

"Come and sit down, May," she apostrophized me. "Do listen to this about Bingley and Wickham."

"No, thank you," said I, abstractedly, and feeling that Stella was not the person to whom I could confide my woe. Indeed, on scanning mentally the list of my acquaintance, I found that there was not one in whom I could confide. It gave me a strange sense of loneliness and aloofness, and hardened me more than the reading of a hundred satires on the meannesses of society.

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I went along the terrace by the river-side, and looked up to the left—traces of Sir Peter again. There was the terrace of Deeplish Hall, which stood on a height just above a bend in the river. It was a fine old place. The sheen of the glass houses caught the rays of the sun and glanced in them. It looked rich, old, and peaceful. I had been many a time through its gardens, and thought them beautiful, and wished they belonged to me. Now I felt that they lay in a manner at my feet, and my strongest feeling respecting them was an earnest wish that I might never see them again.

Thus agreeably meditating, I insensibly left our own garden and wandered on in the now quickly falling twilight into a narrow path leading across a sort of No-Man's-Land into the demesne of Sir Peter Le Marchant. In my trouble I scarcely remarked where I was going, and with my eyes cast upon the ground was wishing that I could feel again as I once had felt, when

"I nothing had, and yet enough;"

and was sadly wondering what I could do to escape from the net in which I felt myself caught, when a shadow darkened the twilight in which I stood, and looking up I saw Sir Peter, and heard these words:

"Good-evening, Miss Wedderburn. Are you enjoying a little stroll?"

By, as it seemed to me, some strange miracle all my inward fears and tremblings vanished. I did not feel afraid of Sir Peter in the least. I felt that here was a crisis. This meeting would show me whether my fears had been groundless, and my own vanity and self-consciousness of unparalleled proportions, or whether I had judged truly, and had good reason for my qualms and anticipations.

It came. The alarm had not been a false one. Sir Peter, after conversing with me for a short time, did, in clear and unmistakable terms, inform me that he loved me, and asked me to marry him.

"I thank you," said I, mastering my impulse to cover my face with my hands, and run shuddering away from him. "I thank you for the honor you offer me, and beg to decline it."

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He looked surprised, and still continued to urge me in a manner which roused a deep inner feeling of indignation within me, for it seemed to say that he understood me to be overwhelmed with the honor he proposed to confer upon me, and humored my timidity about accepting it. There was no doubt in his manner; not the shadow of a suspicion that I could be in earnest. There was something that turned my heart cold within me—a cool, sneering tone, which not all his professions of affection could disguise. Since that time I have heard Sir Peter explicitly state his conception of the sphere of woman in the world; it was not an exalted one. He could not even now quite conceal that while he told me he wished to make me his wife and the partner of his heart and possessions, yet he knew that such professions were but words—that he did not sue for my love (poor Sir Peter! I doubt if ever in his long life he was blessed with even a momentary glimpse of the divine countenance of pure Love), but offered to buy my youth, and such poor beauty as I might have, with his money and his other worldly advantages.

Sir Peter was a blank, utter skeptic with regard to the worth of woman. He did not believe in their virtue nor their self-respect; he believed them to be clever actresses, and, taken all in all, the best kind of amusement to be had for money. The kind of opinion was then new to me; the effect of it upon my mind such as might be expected. I was seventeen, and an ardent believer in all things pure and of good report.

Nevertheless, I remained composed, sedate, even courteous to the last—till I had fairly made Sir Peter understand that no earthly power should induce me to marry him; till I had let him see that I fully comprehended the advantages of the position he offered me, and declined them.

“Miss Wedderburn,” said he, at last—and his voice was as unruffled as my own; had it been more angry I should have feared it less—“do you fear opposition? I do not think your parents would refuse their consent to our union.”

I closed my eyes for a moment, and a hand seemed to tighten about my heart. Then I said:

“I speak without reference to my parents. In such a matter I judge for myself.”

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“Always the same answer?”

“Always the same, Sir Peter.”

“It would be most ungentlemanly to press the subject any further.” His eyes were fixed upon me with the same cold, snake-like smile. “I will not be guilty of such a solecism. Your family affections, my dear young lady, are strong, I should suppose. Which—whom do you love best?”

Surprised at the blunt straightforwardness of the question, as coming from him, I replied thoughtlessly, “Oh, my sister Adelaide.”

“Indeed! I should imagine she was in every way worthy the esteem of so disinterested a person as yourself. A different disposition, though—quite. Will you allow me to touch your hand before I retire?”

Trembling with uneasy forebodings roused by his continual sneering smile, and the peculiar evil light in his eyes, I yet went through with my duty to the end. He took the hand I extended, and raised it to his lips with a low bow.

“Good-evening, Miss Wedderburn.”

Faintly returning his valediction, I saw him go away, and then in a dream, a maze, a bewilderment, I too turned slowly away and walked to the house again. I felt, I knew I had behaved well and discreetly, but I had no confidence whatever that the matter was at an end.

CHAPTER III.

“Lucifer, Star of the Morning! How art thou fallen!”

I found myself, without having met any one of my family, in my own room, in the semi-darkness, seated on a chair by my bedside, unnerved, faint, miserable with a misery such as I had never felt before. The window was open, and there came up a faint scent of sweetbrier and wall-flowers in soft, balmy gusts, driven into the room by the April night wind. There rose a moon and flooded the earth with radiance. Then came a sound of footsteps; the door of the next room, that belonging to Adelaide, was opened. I heard her come in, strike a match, and light her candle; the click of the catch as the blind rolled down. There was a door between her room and mine, and presently she passed it, and bearing a candle in her hand, stood in my presence. My sister was very beautiful, very proud. She was cleverer, stronger, more decided than I, or rather, while she had those qualities very strongly developed, I was almost without them. She always held her head up, and had one of those majestic figures which require no back-boards to teach them uprightness, no master of deportment to instill grace into their movements. Her toilet and mine were not, as may be supposed, of very rich materials or varied character; but while my things always looked as bad of their kind as they could—fitted badly, sat badly, were creased and crumpled—hers always had a look of freshness; she wore the merest old black merino as if it were velvet, and a muslin frill like a point-lace collar. There are such people in the world. I have always admired them, envied them, wondered at them from afar; it has never been my fate in the smallest degree to approach or emulate them.

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Her pale face, with its perfect outlines, was just illumined by the candle she held, and the light also caught the crown of massive plaits which she wore around her head. She set the candle down. I sat still and looked at her.

“You are there, May,” she remarked.

“Yes,” was my subdued response.

“Where have you been all evening?”

“It does not matter to any one.”

“Indeed it does. You were talking to Sir Peter Le Marchant. I saw you meet him from my bedroom window.”

“Did you?”

“Did he propose to you?” she inquired, with a composure which seemed to me frightful.

"Worldly," I thought, was a weak word to apply to her, and I was suffering acutely.

"He did."

"Well, I suppose it would be a little difficult to accept him."

"I did not accept him."

"What?" she inquired, as if she had not quite caught what I said.

"I refused him," said I, slightly raising my voice.

"What are you telling me?"

"The truth."

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"Sir Peter has fif—"

"Don't mention Sir Peter to me again," said I, nervously, and feeling as if my heart would break. I had never quarreled with Adelaide before. No reconciliation afterward could ever make up for the anguish which I was going through now.

"Just listen to me," she said, bending over me, her lips drawn together. "I ought to have spoken to you before. I don't know whether you have ever given any thought to our position and circumstances. If not, it would be as well that you should do so now. Papa is fifty-five years old, and has three hundred a year. In the course of time he will die, and as his life is not insured, and he has regularly spent every penny of his income—naturally it would have been strange if he hadn't—what is to become of us when he is dead?"

"We can work."

"Work!" said she, with inexpressible scorn. "Work! Pray what can we do in the way of work? What kind of education have we had? The village school-mistress could make us look very small in the matter of geography and history. We have not been trained to work, and, let me tell you, May, unskilled labor does not pay in these days."

"I am sure you can do anything, Adelaide, and I will teach singing. I can sing."

"Pooh! Do you suppose that because you can take C in alt. you are competent to teach singing? You don't know how to sing yourself yet. Your face is your fortune. So is mine my fortune. So is Stella's her fortune. You have enjoyed yourself all your life; you have had seventeen years of play and amusement, and now you behave like a baby. You refuse to endure a little discomfort, as the price of placing yourself and your family forever out of the reach of trouble and trial. Why, if you were Sir Peter's wife, you could do what you liked with him. I don't say anything about myself; but oh! May, I am ashamed of you, I am ashamed of you! I thought you had more in you. Is it possible that you are nothing but a romp—nothing but a vulgar tomboy? Good Heaven! If the chance had been mine!"

"What would you have done?" I whispered, subdued for the moment, but obstinate in my heart as ever.

"I am nobody now; no one knows me. But if I had had the chance that you have had to-night, in another year I would have been known and envied by half the women in England. Bah! Circumstances are too disgusting, too unkind!"

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"Oh! Adelaide, nothing could have made up for being tied to that man," said I, in a small voice; "and I am not ambitious."

"Ambitious! You are selfish—downright, grossly, inordinately selfish. Do you suppose no one else ever had to do what they did not like? Why did you not stop to think instead of rushing away from the thing like some unreasoning animal?"

"Adelaide! Sir Peter! To marry him?" I implored in tears. "How could I? I should die of shame at the very thought. Who could help seeing that I had sold myself to him?"

"And who would think any the worse of you? And what if they did? With fifteen thousand a year you may defy public opinion."

"Oh, don't! don't!" I cried, covering my face with my hands. "Adelaide, you will break my heart!"

Burying my face in the bed-quilt, I sobbed irrepressibly. Adelaide's apparent unconsciousness of, or callousness to, the stabs she was giving me, and the anguish they caused me, almost distracted me.

She loosed my arm, remarking, with bitter vexation:

"I feel as if I could shake you!"

She left the room. I was left to my meditations. My head—my heart too—ached distractingly; my arm was sore where Adelaide had grasped it; I felt as if she had taken my mind by the shoulders and shaken it roughly. I fastened both doors of my room, resolving that neither she nor any one else should penetrate to my presence again that night.

What was I to do? Where to turn? I began now to realize that the *Res dom*, which had always

seemed to me so abundant for all occasions, were really *Res Angusta*, and that circumstances might occur in which they would be miserably inadequate.

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 20]

“Zu Rathe gehen, und vom Rath zur That.”

Briefe BEETHOVEN'S.

There was surely not much in Miss Hallam to encourage confidences; yet within half an hour of the time of entering her house I had told her all that oppressed my heart, and had gained a feeling of greater security than I had yet felt. I was sure that she would befriend me. True, she did not say so. When I told her about Sir Peter Le Marchant's proposal to me, about Adelaide's behavior; when, in halting and stammering tones, and interrupted by tears, I confessed that I had not spoken to my father or mother upon the subject, and that I was not quite sure of their approval of what I had done, she even laughed a little, but not in what could be called an amused manner. When I had finished my tale, she said:

“If I understand you, the case stands thus: You have refused Sir Peter Le Marchant, but you do not feel at all sure that he will not propose to you again. Is it not so?”

“Yes,” I admitted.

“And you dread and shrink from the idea of a repetition of this business?”

“I feel as if it would kill me.”

“It would not kill you. People are not so easily killed as all that; but it is highly unfit that you should be subjected to a recurrence of it. I will think about it. Will you have the goodness to read me a page of this book?”

Much surprised at this very abrupt change of the subject, but not daring to make any observation upon it, I took the book—the current number of a magazine—and read a page to her.

“That will do,” said she. “Now, will you read this letter, also aloud?”

She put a letter into my hand, and I read:

“DEAR MADAME,—In answer to your letter of last week, I write to say that I could find the rooms you require, and that by me you will have many good agreements which would make your stay in Germany pleasanter. My house is a large one in the Alléestrasse. Dr. Mittendorf, the oculist, lives not far from here, and the Städtische Augenklinik—that is, the eye hospital—is quite near. The rooms you would have are upstairs—suite of salon and two bedrooms, with room for your maid in another part of the house. I have other boarders here at the time, but you would do as you pleased about mixing with them.

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“With all highest esteem,
“Your devoted,
“CLARA STEINMANN.”

“You don't understand it all, I suppose?” said she, when I had finished.

“No.”

“That lady writes from Elberthal. You have heard of Elberthal on the Rhine, I presume?”

“Oh, yes! A large town. There used to be a fine picture-gallery there; but in the war between the —”

“There, thank you! I studied Guy's geography myself in my youth. I see you know the place I mean. There is an eye hospital there, and a celebrated oculist—Mittendorf. I am going there. I don't suppose it will be of the least use; but I am going. Drowning men catch at straws. Well, what else can you do? You don't read badly.”

“I can sing—not very well, but I can sing.”

“You can sing,” said she, reflectively. “Just go to the piano and let me hear a specimen. I was once a judge in these matters.”

I opened the piano and sung, as well as I could, an English version of “Die Lotus-blume.”

My performance was greeted with silence, which Miss Hallam at length broke, remarking:

“I suppose you have not had much training?”

“Scarcely any.”

“Humph! Well, it is to be had, even if not in Skernford. Would you like some lessons?”

“I should like a good many things that I am not likely ever to have.”

"At Elberthal there are all kinds of advantages with regard to those things—music and singing, and so on. Will you come there with me as my companion?"

I heard, but did not fairly understand. My head was in a whirl. Go to Germany with Miss Hallam; leave Skernford, Sir Peter, all that had grown so weary to me; see new places, live with new people; learn something! No, I did not grasp it in the least. I made no reply, but sat breathlessly staring.

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"But I shall expect you to make yourself useful to me in many ways," proceeded Miss Hallam.

At this touch of reality I began to waken up again.

"Oh, Miss Hallam, is it really true? Do you think they will let me go?"

"You haven't answered me yet."

"About being useful? I would do anything you like—anything in the world."

"Do not suppose your life will be all roses, or you will be woefully disappointed. I do not go out at all; my health is bad—so is my temper very often. I am what people who never had any trouble are fond of calling peculiar. Still, if you are in earnest, and not merely sentimentalizing, you will take your courage in your hands and come with me."

"Miss Hallam," said I, with tragic earnestness, as I took her hand, "I will come. I see you half mistrust me; but if I had to go to Siberia to get out of Sir Peter's way, I would go gladly and stay there. I hope I shall not be very clumsy. They say at home that I am, very, but I will do my best."

"They call you clumsy at home, do they?"

"Yes. My sisters are so much cleverer than I, and can do everything so much better than I can. I am rather stupid, I know."

"Very well, if you like to call yourself so, do. It is decided that you come with me. I will see your father about it to-morrow. I always get my own way when I wish it. I leave in about a week."

I sat with clasped hands, my heart so full that I could not speak. Sadness and gladness struggled hard within me. The idea of getting away from Skernford was almost too delightful; the remembrance of Adelaide made my heart ache.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 23]

"Ade nun ihr Berge, ihr väterlich
Haus!
Es treibt in die Ferne mich
mächtig hinans."

VOLKSLIED.

Consent was given. Sir Peter was not mentioned to me by my parents, or by Adelaide. The days of that week flew rapidly by.

I was almost afraid to mention my prospects to Adelaide. I feared she would resent my good fortune in going abroad, and that her anger at having spoiled those other prospects would remain unabated. Moreover, a deeper feeling separated me from her now—the knowledge that there lay a great gulf of feeling, sentiment, opinion between us, which nothing could bridge over or do away with. Outwardly we might be amiable and friendly to each other, but confidence, union, was fled over. Once again in the future, I was destined, when our respective principles had been tried to the utmost, to have her confidence—to see her heart of hearts; but for the present we were effectually divided. I had mortally offended her, and it was not a case in which I could with decency even humble myself to her. Once, however, she mentioned the future.

When the day of our departure had been fixed, and was only two days distant; when I was breathless with hurried repairing of old clothes, and the equally hurried laying in of a small stock of new ones; while I was contemplating with awe the prospect of a first journey to London, to Ostend, to Brussels, she said to me, as I sat feverishly hemming a frill:

"So you are going to Germany?"

"Yes, Adelaide."

"What are you going to do there?"

"My duty, I hope."

"Charity, my dear, and duty too, begins at home. I should say you were going away leaving your duty undone."

I was silent, and she went on:

"I suppose you wish to go abroad, May?"

"You know I have always wished to go."

"So do I."

"I wish you were going too," said I, timidly.

"Thank you. My views upon the subject are quite different. When I go abroad I shall go in a different capacity to that you are going to assume. I will let you know all about it in due time." [Pg 24]

"Very well," said I, almost inaudibly, having a vague idea as to what she meant, but determined not to speak about it.

The following day the curtain rose upon the first act of the play—call it drama, comedy, tragedy, what you will—which was to be played in my absence. I had been up the village to the post-office, and was returning, when I saw advancing toward me two figures which I had cause to remember—my sister's queenly height, her white hat over her eyes, and her sunshade in her hand, and beside her the pale face, with its ragged eyebrows and hateful sneer, of Sir Peter Le Marchant.

Adelaide, not at all embarrassed by his company, was smiling slightly, and her eyes with drooped lids glanced downward toward the baronet. I shrunk into a cottage to avoid them as they came past, and waited. Adelaide was saying:

"Proud—yes, I am proud, I suppose. Too proud, at least, to—"

There! Out of hearing. They had passed. I hurried out of the cottage, and home.

The next day I met Miss Hallam and her maid (we three traveled alone) at the station, and soon we were whirling smoothly along our southward way—to York first, then to London, and so out into the world, thought I.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ein Held aus der Fremde, gar kühn."

We had left Brussels and Belgium behind, had departed from the regions of *Chemins de fer*, and entered those of *Eisenbahnen*. We were at Cologne, where we had to change and wait half an hour before we could go on to Elberthal. We sat in the wartsaal, and I had committed to my charge two bundles, with strict injunctions not to lose them.

Then the doors were opened, and the people made a mad rush to a train standing somewhere in the dim distance. Merrick, Miss Hallam's maid, had to give her whole attention to her mistress. I followed close in their wake, until, as we had almost come to the train, I cast my eyes downward and perceived that there was missing from my arm a gray shawl of Miss Hallam's, which had been committed to my charge, and upon which she set a fidgety kind of value, as being particularly warm or particularly soft. [Pg 25]

Dismayed, I neither hesitated nor thought, but turned, fought my way through the throng of people to the waiting-room again, hunted every corner, but in vain, for the shawl. Either it was completely lost, or Merrick had, without my observing it, taken it under her own protection. It was not in the waiting-room. Giving up the search I hurried to the door: it was fast. No one more, it would seem, was to be let out that way; I must go round, through the passages into the open hall of the station, and so on to the platform again. More easily said than done. Always, from my earliest youth up, I have had a peculiar fancy for losing myself. On this eventful day I lost myself. I ran through the passages, came into the great open place surrounded on every side by doors leading to the platforms, offices, or booking offices. Glancing hastily round, I selected the door which appeared to my imperfectly developed "locality" to promise egress upon the platform, pushed it open, and going along a covered passage, and through another door, found myself, after the loss of a good five minutes, in a lofty deserted wing of the station, gazing wildly at an empty platform, and feverishly scanning all the long row of doors to my right, in a mad effort to guess which would take me from this delightful *terra incognita* back to my friends.

Gepäck-Expedition, I read, and thought it did not sound promising. Telegraphs bureau. Impossible! *Ausgang*. There was the magic word, and I, not knowing it, stared at it and was none the wiser for its friendly sign. I heard a hollow whistle in the distance. No doubt it was the Elberthal train going away, and my heart sunk deep, deep within my breast. I knew no German word. All I could say was "Elberthal;" and my nearest approach to "first-class" was to point to the carriage doors and say "Ein," which might or might not be understood—probably not, when the universal stupidity of the German railway official is taken into consideration, together with his chronic state of gratuitous suspicion that a bad motive lurks under every question which is put to him. I heard a subdued bustle coming from the right hand in the distance, and I ran hastily to the other end of the great empty place, seeing, as I thought, an opening. Vain delusion! Deceptive dream of the fancy! There was a glass window through which I looked and saw a street thronged with passengers and vehicles. I hurried back again to find my way to the entrance of the station [Pg 26]

and there try another door, when I heard a bell ring violently—a loud groaning and shrieking, and then the sound, as it were, of a train departing. A porter—at least a person in uniform, appeared in a door-way. How I rushed up to him! How I seized his arm, and dropping my rugs gesticulated excitedly and panted forth the word “Elberthal!”

“Elberthal?” said he in a guttural bass; “*Wollt ihr nach Elberthal, Fräuleinchen!*”

There was an impudent twinkle in his eye, as it were impertinence trying to get the better of beer, and I reiterated “Elberthal,” growing very red, and cursing all foreign speeches by my gods—a process often employed, I believe, by cleverer persons than I, with reference to things they do not understand.

“*Schon fort, Fräulein,*” he continued, with a grin.

“But where—what—Elberthal!”

He was about to make some further reply, when, turning, he seemed to see some one, and assumed a more respectful demeanor. I too turned, and saw at some little distance from us a gentleman sauntering along, who, though coming toward us, did not seem to observe us. Would he understand me if I spoke to him? Desperate as I was, I felt some timidity about trying it. Never had I felt so miserable, so helpless, so utterly ashamed as I did then. My lips trembled as the new-comer drew nearer, and the porter, taking the opportunity of quitting a scene which began to bore him, slipped away. I was left alone on the platform, nervously snatching short glances at the person slowly, very slowly approaching me. He did not look up as if he beheld me or in any way remarked my presence. His eyes were bent toward the ground: his fingers drummed a tune upon his chest. As he approached, I heard that he was humming something. I even heard the air; it has been impressed upon my memory firmly enough since, though I did not know it then—the air of the march from Raff’s Fifth Symphonie, the “Lenore.” I heard the tune softly hummed in a mellow voice, as with face burning and glowing, I placed myself before him. Then he looked suddenly up as if startled, fixed upon me a pair of eyes which gave me a kind of shock; so keen, so commanding were they, with a kind of tameless freedom in their glance such as I had never seen before.

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Arrested (no doubt by my wild and excited appearance), he stood still and looked at me, and as he looked a slight smile began to dawn upon his lips. Not an Englishman. I should have known him for an outlander anywhere. I remarked no details of his appearance; only that he was tall and had, as it seemed to me, a commanding bearing. I stood hesitating and blushing. (To this very day the blood comes to my face as I think of my agony of blushes in that immemorial moment.) I saw a handsome—a very handsome face, quite different from any I had ever seen before: the startling eyes before spoken of, and which surveyed me with a look so keen, so cool, and so bright, which seemed to penetrate through and through me; while a slight smile curled the light mustache upward—a general aspect which gave me the impression that he was not only a personage, but a very great personage—with a flavor of something else permeating it all which puzzled me and made me feel embarrassed as to how to address him. While I stood inanely trying to gather my senses together, he took off the little cloth cap he wore, and bowing, asked:

“*Mein Fräulein,* in what can I assist you?”

His English was excellent—his bow like nothing I had seen before. Convinced that I had met a genuine, thorough fine gentleman (in which I was right for once in my life), I began:

“I have lost my way,” and my voice trembled in spite of all my efforts to steady it. “In a crowd I lost my friends, and—I was going to Elberthal, and I turned the wrong way—and—”

“Have come to destruction, *nicht wahr?*” He looked at his watch, raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. “The Elberthal train is already away.”

“Gone!” I dropped my rugs and began a tremulous search for my pocket-handkerchief. “What shall I do?”

“There is another—let me see—in one hour—two—*will ’mal nachsehen.* Will you come with me, Fräulein, and we will see about the trains.”

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“If you would show me the platform,” said I. “Perhaps some of them may still be there. Oh, what will they think of me?”

“We must go to the wartesaal,” said he. “Then you can look out and see if you see any of them.”

I had no choice but to comply.

My benefactor picked up my two bundles, and, in spite of my expostulations, carried them with him. He took me through the door inscribed *Ausgang*, and the whole thing seemed so extremely simple now, that my astonishment as to how I could have lost myself increased every minute. He went before me to the waiting-room, put my bundles upon one of the sofas, and we went to the door. The platform was almost as empty as the one we had left.

I looked round, and though it was only what I had expected, yet my face fell when I saw how utterly and entirely my party had disappeared.

“You see them not?” he inquired.

“No—they are gone,” said I, turning away from the window and choking down a sob, not very

effectually. Turning my damp and sorrowful eyes to my companion, I found that he was still smiling to himself as if quietly amused at the whole adventure.

"I will go and see at what time the trains go to Elberthal. Suppose you sit down—yes?"

Passively obeying, I sat down and turned my situation over in my mind, in which kind of agreeable mental legerdemain I was still occupied when he returned.

"It is now half past three, and there is a train to Elberthal at seven."

"Seven!"

"Seven: a very pleasant time to travel, *nicht wahr?* Then it is still quite light."

"So long! Three hours and a half," I murmured, dejectedly, and bit my lips and hung my head. Then I said, "I am sure I am much obliged to you. If I might ask you a favor?"

"*Bitte, mein Fräulein!*"

"If you could show me exactly where the train starts from, and—could I get a ticket now, do you think?"

"I'm afraid not, so long before," he answered, twisting his mustache, as I could not help seeing, to hide a smile. [Pg 29]

"Then," said I, with stoic calmness, "I shall never get to Elberthal—never, for I don't know a word of German, not one," I sat more firmly down upon the sofa, and tried to contemplate the future with fortitude.

"I can tell you what to say," said he, removing with great deliberation the bundles which divided us, and sitting down beside me. He leaned his chin upon his hand and looked at me, ever, as it seemed to me, with amusement tempered with kindness, and I felt like a very little girl indeed.

"You are exceedingly good," I replied, "but it would be of no use. I am so frightened of those men in blue coats and big mustaches. I should not be able to say a word to any of them."

"German is sometimes not unlike English."

"It is like nothing to me, except a great mystery."

"*Billet*, is 'ticket,'" said he persuasively.

"Oh, is it?" said I, with a gleam of hope. "Perhaps I could remember that. *Billet*," I repeated reflectively.

"*Billet*," he amended; "not *Bilit*."

"Bill-yet—Bill-yet," I repeated.

"And 'to Elberthal' may be said in one word, 'Elberthal.' '*Ein Billet—Elberthal—erster Classe*.'"

"*Ein Bill-yet*," I repeated, automatically, for my thoughts were dwelling more upon the charming quandary in which I found myself than upon his half-good-natured half-mocking instructions: "*Ein Bill-yet, erste—erste*—it is of no use. I can't say it. But"—here a brilliant idea struck me—"if you could write it out for me on a paper, and then I could give it to the man: he would surely know what it meant."

"A very interesting idea, but a *vivâ voce* interview is so much better."

"I wonder how long it takes to walk to Elberthal!" I suggested darkly.

"Oh, a mere trifle of a walk. You might do it in four or five hours, I dare say."

I bit my lips, trying not to cry.

"Perhaps we might make some other arrangement," he remarked. "I am going to Elberthal too."

"You! Thank Heaven!" was my first remark. Then as a doubt came over me: "Then why—why—" [Pg 30]

Here I stuck fast, unable to ask why he had said so many tormenting things to me, pretended to teach me German phrases, and so on. The words would not come out. Meanwhile he, without apparently feeling it necessary to explain himself upon these points, went on:

"Yes. I have been at a probe" (not having the faintest idea as to what a probe might be, and not liking to ask, I held my peace and bowed assentingly). He went on, "And I was delayed a little. I had intended to go by the train you have lost, so if you are not afraid to trust yourself to my care we can travel together."

"You—you are very kind."

"Then you are not afraid?"

"I—oh, no! I should like it very much. I mean I am sure it would be very nice."

Feeling that my social powers were as yet in a very undeveloped condition, I subsided into silence, as he went on:

"I hope your friends will not be very uneasy?"

"Oh, dear no!" I assured him, with a pious conviction that I was speaking the truth.

"We shall arrive at Elberthal about half past eight."

I scarcely heard. I had plunged my hand into my pocket, and found—a hideous conviction crossed my mind—I had no money! I had until this moment totally forgotten having given my purse to Merrick to keep; and she, as pioneer of the party, naturally had all our tickets under her charge. My heart almost stopped beating. It was unheard of, horrible, this possibility of falling into the power of a total, utter stranger—a foreigner—a—Heaven only knew what! Engrossed with this painful and distressing problem, I sat silent, and with eyes gloomily cast down.

"One thing is certain," he remarked. "We do not want to spend three hours and a half in the station. I want some dinner. A four hours' probe is apt to make one a little hungry. Come, we will go and have something to eat."

The idea had evidently come to him as a species of inspiration, and he openly rejoiced in it.

"I am not hungry," said I; but I was, very. I knew it now that the idea "dinner" had made itself conspicuous in my consciousness.

"Perhaps you think not; but you are, all the same," he said. "Come with me, Fräulein. You have put yourself into my hands; you must do what I tell you." [Pg 31]

I followed him mechanically out of the station and down the street, and I tried to realize that instead of being with Miss Hallam and Merrick, my natural and respectable protectors, safely and conventionally plodding the slow way in the slow continental train to the slow continental town, I was parading about the streets of Köln with a man of whose very existence I had half an hour ago been ignorant; I was dependent, too, upon him, and him alone, for my safe arrival at Elberthal. And I followed him unquestioningly, now and then telling myself, by way of feeble consolation, that he was a gentleman—he certainly was a gentleman—and wishing now and then, or trying to wish, with my usual proper feeling, that it had been some nice old lady with whom I had fallen in: it would have made the whole adventure blameless, and, comparatively speaking, agreeable.

We went along a street and came to a hotel, a large building, into which my conductor walked, spoke to a waiter, and we were shown into the restaurant, full of round tables, and containing some half dozen parties of people. I followed with stony resignation. It was the severest trial of all, this coming to a hotel alone with a gentleman in broad daylight. I caught sight of a reflection in a mirror of a tall, pale girl, with heavy, tumbled auburn hair, a brown hat which suited her, and a severely simple traveling-dress. I did not realize until I had gone past that it was my own reflection which I had seen.

"Suppose we sit here," said he, going to a table in a comparatively secluded window recess, partially overhung with curtains.

"How very kind and considerate of him!" thought I.

"Would you rather have wine or coffee, Fräulein?"

Pulled up from the impulse to satisfy my really keen hunger by the recollection of my "lack of gold," I answered hastily.

"Nothing, thank you—really nothing."

"*O doch!* You must have something," said he, smiling. "I will order something. Don't trouble about it."

"Don't order anything for me," said I, my cheeks burning. "I shall not eat anything."

"If you do not eat, you will be ill. Remember, we do not get to Elberthal before eight," said he. "Is it perhaps disagreeable to you to eat in the saal? If you like we can have a private room." [Pg 32]

"It is not that at all," I replied; and seeing that he looked surprised, I blurted out the truth. "I have no money. I gave my purse to Miss Hallam's maid to keep and she has taken it with her."

With a laugh, in which, infectious though it was, I was too wretched to join:

"Is that all? Kellner!" cried he.

An obsequious waiter came up, smiled sweetly and meaningly at us, received some orders from my companion, and disappeared.

He seated himself beside me at the little round table.

"He will bring something at once," said he, smiling.

I sat still. I was not happy, and yet I could not feel all the unhappiness which I considered appropriate to the circumstances.

My companion took up a "Kölnische Zeitung," and glanced over the advertisements, while I looked a little stealthily at him, and for the first time took in more exactly what he was like, and grew more puzzled with him each moment. As he leaned upon the table, one slight, long, brown hand propping his head, and half lost in the thick, fine brown hair which waved in large, ample

waves over his head, there was an indescribable grace, ease, and negligent beauty in the attitude. Move as he would, let him assume any possible or impossible attitude, there was still in the same grace, half careless, yet very dignified in the position he took.

All his lines were lines of beauty, but beauty which had power and much masculine strength; nowhere did it degenerate into flaccidity, nowhere lose strength in grace. His hair was long, and I wondered at it. My small experience in our delightful home and village circle had not acquainted me with that flowing style; the young men of my acquaintance cropped their hair close to the scalp, and called it the modern style of hair-dressing. It had always looked to me more like hair-undressing. This hair fell in a heavy wave over his forehead, and he had the habit, common to people whose hair does so, of lifting his head suddenly and shaking back the offending lock. His forehead was broad, open, pleasant, yet grave. Eyes, as I had seen, very dark, and with lashes and brows which enhanced the contrast to a complexion at once fair and pale. A light mustache, curving almost straight across the face, gave a smiling expression to lips which were otherwise grave, calm, almost sad. In fact, looking nearer, I thought he did look sad; and though when he looked at me his eyes were so piercing, yet in repose they had a certain distant, abstracted expression not far removed from absolute mournfulness. Broad-shouldered, long-armed, with a physique in every respect splendid, he was yet very distinctly removed from the mere handsome animal which I believe enjoys a distinguished popularity in the latter-day romance.

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Now, as his eyes were cast upon the paper, I perceived lines upon his forehead, signs about the mouth and eyes telling of a firm, not to say imperious, disposition; a certain curve of the lips, and of the full, yet delicate nostril, told of pride both strong and high. He was older than I had thought, his face sparer; there were certain hollows in the cheeks, two lines between the eyebrows, a sharpness, or rather somewhat worn appearance of the features, which told of a mental life, keen and consuming. Altogether, an older, more intellectual, more imposing face than I had at first thought; less that of a young and handsome man, more that of a thinker and student. Lastly, a cool ease, deliberation, and leisureliness about all he said and did, hinted at his being a person in authority, accustomed to give orders and see them obeyed without question. I decided that he was, in our graceful home phrase, "master in his own house."

His clothing was unremarkable—gray summer clothes, such as any gentleman or any shop-keeper might wear; only in scanning him no thought of shop-keeper came into my mind. His cap lay upon the table beside us, one of the little gray *Studentenmutzen* with which Elberthal soon made me familiar, but which struck me then as odd and outlandish. I grew every moment more interested in my scrutiny of this, to me, fascinating and remarkable face, and had forgotten to try to look as if I were not looking, when he looked up suddenly, without warning, with those bright, formidable eyes, which had already made me feel somewhat shy as I caught them fixed upon me.

"*Nun*, have you decided?" he asked, with a humorous look in his eyes, which he was too polite to allow to develop itself into a smile.

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"I—oh, I beg your pardon!"

"You do not want to," he answered, in imperfect idiom. "But have you decided?"

"Decided what?"

"Whether I am to be trusted?"

"I have not been thinking about that," I said, uncomfortably, when to my relief the appearance of the waiter with preparations for a meal saved me further reply.

"What shall we call this meal?" he asked, as the waiter disappeared to bring the repast to the table. "It is too late for the *Mittagessen*, and too early for the *Abendbrod*. Can you suggest a name?"

"At home it would be just the time for afternoon tea."

"Ah, yes! Your English afternoon tea is very—" He stopped suddenly.

"Have you been in England?"

"This is just the time at which we drink our afternoon coffee in Germany," said he, looking at me with his impenetrably bright eyes, just as if he had never heard me. "When the ladies all meet together to talk scan—*O, behüte!* What am I saying?—to consult seriously upon important topics, you know. There are some low-minded persons who call the whole ceremony a *Klatsch*—*Kaffeeklatsch*. I am sure you and I shall talk seriously upon important subjects, so suppose we call this our *Kaffeeklatsch*, although we have no coffee to it."

"Oh, yes, if you like."

He put a piece of cutlet upon my plate, and poured yellow wine into my glass. Endeavoring to conduct myself with the dignity of a grown-up person and to show that I did know something, I inquired if the wine were hock.

He smiled. "It is not *Hochheimer*—not *Rheinwein* at all—he—no, it, you say—it is *Moselle* wine—'Doctor.'"

"Doctor?"

"Doctorberger; I do not know why so called. And a very good fellow too—so say all his friends, of whom I am a warm one. Try him."

I complied with the admonition, and was able to say that I liked Doctorberger. We ate and drank in silence for some little time, and I found that I was very hungry. I also found that I could not conjure up any real feeling of discomfort or uneasiness, and that the prospective scolding from Miss Hallam had no terrors in it for me. Never had I felt so serene in mind, never more at ease in every way, than now. I felt that this was wrong—bohemian, irregular, and not respectable, and tried to get up a little unhappiness about something. The only thing that I could think of was:

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"I am afraid I am taking up your time. Perhaps you had some business which you were going to when you met me."

"My business, when I met you, was to catch the train to Elberthal, which was already gone, as you know. I shall not be able to fulfill my engagements for to-night, so it really does not matter. I am enjoying myself very much."

"I am very glad I did meet you," said I, growing more reassured as I found that my companion, though exceedingly polite and attentive to me, did not ask a question as to my business, my traveling companions, my intended stay or object in Elberthal—that he behaved as a perfect gentleman—one who is a gentleman throughout, in thought as well as in deed. He did not even ask me how it was that my friends had not waited a little for me, though he must have wondered why two people left a young girl, moneyless and ignorant, to find her way after them as well as she could. He took me as he found me, and treated me as if I had been the most distinguished and important of persons. But at my last remark he said, with the same odd smile which took me by surprise every time I saw it:

"The pleasure is certainly not all on your side, *mein Fräulein*. I suppose from that you have decided that I am to be trusted?"

I stammered out something to the effect that "I should be very ungrateful were I not satisfied with—with such a—" I stopped, looking at him in some confusion. I saw a sudden look flash into his eyes and over his face. It was gone again in a moment—so fleeting that I had scarce time to mark it, but it opened up a crowd of strange new impressions to me, and while I could no more have said what it was like the moment it was gone, yet it left two desires almost equally strong in me—I wished in one and the same moment that I had for my own peace of mind never seen him—and that I might never lose sight of him again: to fly from that look, to remain and encounter it. The tell-tale mirror in the corner caught my eye. At home they used sometimes to call me, partly in mockery, partly in earnest, "Bonny May." The sobriquet had hitherto been a mere shadow, a meaningless thing, to me. I liked to hear it, but had never paused to consider whether it were appropriate or not. In my brief intercourse with my venerable suitor, Sir Peter, I had come a little nearer to being actively aware that I was good-looking, only to anathematize the fact. Now, catching sight of my reflection in the mirror, I wondered eagerly whether I really were fair, and wished I had some higher authority to think so than the casual jokes of my sisters. It did not add to my presence of mind to find that my involuntary glance to the mirror had been intercepted—perhaps even my motive guessed at—he appeared to have a frightfully keen instinct.

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"Have you seen the Dom?" was all he said; but it seemed somehow to give a point to what had passed.

"The Dom—what is the Dom?"

"The *Kölner Dom*; the cathedral."

"Oh, no! Oh, should we have time to see it?" I exclaimed. "How I should like it!"

"Certainly. It is close at hand. Suppose we go now."

Gladly I rose, as he did. One of my most ardent desires was about to be fulfilled—not so properly and correctly as might have been desired, but—yes, certainly more pleasantly than under the escort of Miss Hallam, grumbling at every groschen she had to unearth in payment.

Before we could leave our seclusion there came up to us a young man who had looked at us through the door and paused. I had seen him; had seen how he said something to a companion, and how the companion shook his head dissentingly. The first speaker came up to us, eyed me with a look of curiosity, and turning to my protector with a benevolent smile, said:

"Eugen Courvoisier! *Also hatte ich doch Recht!*"

I caught the name. The rest was of course lost upon me. Eugen Courvoisier? I liked it, as I liked him, and in my young enthusiasm decided that it was a very good name. The new-corner, who seemed as if much pleased with some discovery, and entertained at the same time, addressed some questions to Courvoisier, who answered him tranquilly but in a tone of voice which was very freezing; and then the other, with a few words and an unbelieving kind of laugh, said something about a *schöne Geschichte*, and, with another look at me, went out of the coffee-room again.

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We went out of the hotel, up the street to the cathedral. It was the first cathedral I had ever been in. The shock and the wonder of its grandeur took my breath away. When I had found courage to look round, and up at those awful vaults the roofs, I could not help crying a little. The vastness,

coolness, stillness, and splendor crushed me—the great solemn rays of sunlight coming in slanting glory through the windows—the huge height—the impression it gave of greatness, and of a religious devotion to which we shall never again attain; of pure, noble hearts, and patient, skillful hands, toiling, but in a spirit that made the toil a holy prayer—carrying out the builder's thought—great thought greatly executed—all was too much for me, the more so in that while I felt it all I could not analyze it. It was a dim, indefinite wonder. I tried stealthily and in shame to conceal my tears, looking surreptitiously at him in fear lest he should be laughing at me again. But he was not. He held his cap in his hand—was looking with those strange, brilliant eyes fixedly toward the high altar, and there was some expression upon his face which I could not analyze—not the expression of a person for whom such a scene has grown or can grow common by custom—not the expression of a sight-seer who feels that he must admire; not my own first astonishment. At least he felt it—the whole grand scene, and I instinctively and instantly felt more at home with him than I had done before.

"Oh!" said I, at last, "if one could stay here forever, what would one grow to?"

He smiled a little.

"You find it beautiful?"

"It is the first I have seen. It is much more than beautiful."

"The first you have seen? Ah, well, I might have guessed that."

"Why? Do I look so countrified?" I inquired, with real interest, as I let him lead me to a little side bench, and place himself beside me. I asked in all good faith. About him there seemed such a cosmopolitan ease, that I felt sure he could tell me correctly how I struck other people—if he would.

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"Countrified—what is that?"

"Oh, we say it when people are like me—have never seen anything but their own little village, and never had any adventures, and—"

"Get lost at railway stations, *und so weiter*. I don't know enough of the meaning of 'countrified' to be able to say if you are so, but it is easy to see that you—have not had much contention with the powers that be."

"Oh, I shall not be stupid long," said I, comfortably. "I am not going back home again."

"So!" He did not ask more, but I saw that he listened, and proceeded communicatively:

"Never. I have—not quarreled with them exactly, but had a disagreement, because—because—"

"Because?"

"They wanted me to—I mean, an old gentleman—no, I mean—"

"An old gentleman wanted you to marry him, and you would not," said he, with an odd twinkle in his eyes.

"Why, how can you know?"

"I think, because you told me. But I will forget it if you wish."

"Oh, no! It is quite true. Perhaps I ought to have married him."

"Ought!" He looked startled.

"Yes. Adelaide—my eldest sister—said so. But it was no use. I was very unhappy, and Miss Hallam, who is Sir Peter's deadly enemy—he is the old gentleman, you know—was very kind to me. She invited me to come with her to Germany, and promised to let me have singing lessons."

"Singing lessons?"

I nodded. "Yes; and then when I know a good deal more about singing, I shall go back again and give lessons. I shall support myself, and then no one will have the right to want to make me marry Sir Peter."

"*Du lieber Himmel!*" he ejaculated, half to himself. "Are you very musical, then?"

"I can sing," said I. "Only I want some more training."

"And you will go back all alone and try to give lessons?"

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"I shall not only try, I shall do it," I corrected him.

"And do you like the prospect?"

"If I can get enough money to live upon, I shall like it very much. It will be better than living at home and being bothered."

"I will tell you what you should do before you begin your career," said he, looking at me with an expression half wondering, half pitying.

"What? If you could tell me anything."

“Preserve your voice, by all means, and get as much instruction as you can; but change all that waving hair, and make it into unobjectionable smooth bands of no particular color. Get a mask to wear over your face, which is too expressive; do something to your eyes to alter their—”

The expression then visible in the said eyes seemed to strike him, for he suddenly stopped, and with a slight laugh, said:

“*Ach, was rede ich für dummes Zeug! Excuse me, mein Fräulein.*”

“But,” I interrupted, earnestly, “what do you mean? Do you think my appearance will be a disadvantage to me?”

Scarcely had I said the words than I knew how intensely stupid they were, how very much they must appear as if I were openly and impudently fishing for compliments. How grateful I felt when he answered, with a grave directness, which had nothing but the highest compliment in it—that of crediting me with right motives:

“*Mein Fräulein*, how can I tell? It is only that I knew some one, rather older than you, and very beautiful, who had such a pursuit. Her name was Corona Heidelberger, and her story was a sad one.”

“Tell it me,” I besought.

“Well, no, I think not. But—sometimes I have a little gift of foresight, and that tells me that you will not become what you at present think. You will be much happier and more fortunate.”

“I wonder if it would be nice to be a great operatic singer,” I speculated.

“*O, behüte!* don’t think of it!” he exclaimed, starting up and moving restlessly. “You do not know —you an opera singer—” [Pg 40]

He was interrupted. There suddenly filled the air a sound of deep, heavenly melody, which swept solemnly adown the aisles, and filled with its melodious thunder every corner of the great building. I listened with my face upraised, my lips parted. It was the organ, and presently, after a wonderful melody, which set my heart beating—a melody full of the most wondrously sweet high notes, and a breadth and grandeur of low ones such as only two composers have ever attained to, a voice—a single woman’s voice—was upraised. She was invisible, and she sung till the very sunshine seemed turned to melody, and all the world was music—the greatest, most glorious of earthly things.

“Blute nur, liebes Herz!
Ach, ein Kind das du erzogen,
Das an deiner Brust gesogen,
Drohet den Pfleger zu ermorden
Denn es ist zur Schlange worden.”

“What is it?” I asked below my breath, as it ceased.

He had shaded his face with his hand, but turned to me as I spoke, a certain half-suppressed enthusiasm in his eyes.

“Be thankful for your first introduction to German music,” said he, “and that it was grand old Johann Sebastian Bach whom you heard. That is one of the soprano solos in the *Passions-musik*—that is music.”

There was more music. A tenor voice was singing a recitative now, and that exquisite accompaniment, with a sort of joyful solemnity, still continued. Every now and then, shrill, high, and clear, penetrated a chorus of boys’ voices. I, outer barbarian that I was, barely knew the name of Bach and his “Matthaus Passion,” so in the pauses my companion told me by snatches what it was about. There was not much of it. After a few solos and recitatives, they tried one or two of the choruses. I sat in silence, feeling a new world breaking in glory around me, till that tremendous chorus came; the organ notes swelled out, the tenor voice sang “Whom will ye that I give unto you?” and the answer came, crashing down in one tremendous clap, “Barrabam!” And such music was in the world, had been sung for years, and I had not heard it. Verily, there may be revelations and things new under the sun every day. [Pg 41]

I had forgotten everything outside the cathedral—every person but the one at my side. It was he who roused first, looking at his watch and exclaiming.

“*Herrgott!* We must go to the station, Fräulein, if we wish to catch the train.”

And yet I did not think he seemed very eager to catch it, as we went through the busy streets in the warmth of the evening, for it was hot, as it sometimes is in pleasant April, before the withering east winds of the “merry month” have come to devastate the land and sweep sickly people off the face of the earth. We went slowly through the moving crowds to the station, into the wartesaal, where he left me while he went to take my ticket. I sat in the same corner of the same sofa as before, and to this day I could enumerate every object in that wartesaal.

It was after seven o’clock. The outside sky was still bright, but it was dusk in the waiting-room and under the shadow of the station. When “Eugen Courvoisier” came in again, I did not see his features so distinctly as lately in the cathedral. Again he sat down beside me, silently this time. I

glanced at his face, and a strange, sharp, pungent thrill shot through me. The companion of a few hours—was he only that?

“Are you very tired?” he asked, gently, after a long pause. “I think the train will not be very long now.”

Even as he spoke, clang, clang, went the bell, and for the second time that day I went toward the train for Elberthal. This time no wrong turning, no mistake. Courvoisier put me into an empty compartment, and followed me, said something to a guard who went past, of which I could only distinguish the word *allein*; but as no one disturbed our privacy, I concluded that German railway guards, like English ones, are mortal.

After debating within myself for some time, I screwed up my courage and began:

“Mr. Courvoisier—your name is Courvoisier, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Will you please tell me how much money you have spent for me to-day?”

“How much money?” he asked, looking at me with a provoking smile.

The train was rumbling slowly along, the night darkening down. We sat by an open window, and I looked through it at the gray, Dutch-like landscape, the falling dusk, the poplars that seemed sedately marching along with us. [Pg 42]

“Why do you want to know how much?” he demanded.

“Because I shall want to pay you, of course, when I get my purse,” said I. “And if you will kindly tell me your address, too—but how much money did you spend?”

He looked at me, seemed about to laugh off the question, and then said:

“I believe it was about three thalers ten groschen, but I am not at all sure. I can not tell till I do my accounts.”

“Oh, dear!” said I.

“Suppose I let you know how much it was,” he went on, with a gravity which forced conviction upon me.

“Perhaps that would be the best,” I agreed. “But I hope you will make out your accounts soon.”

“Oh, very soon. And where shall I send my bill to?”

Feeling as if there were something not quite as it should be in the whole proceeding, I looked very earnestly at him, but could find nothing but the most perfect gravity in his expression. I repeated my address and name slowly and distinctly, as befitted so business-like a transaction, and he wrote them down in a little book.

“And you will not forget,” said I, “to give me your address when you let me know what I owe you.”

“Certainly—when I let you know what you owe me,” he replied, putting the little book into his pocket again.

“I wonder if any one will come to meet me,” I speculated, my mind more at ease in consequence of the business-like demeanor of my companion.

“Possibly,” said he, with an ambiguous half smile, which I did not understand.

“Miss Hallam—the lady I came with—is almost blind. Her maid had to look after her, and I suppose that is why they did not wait for me,” said I.

“It must have been a very strong reason, at any rate,” he said, gravely.

Now the train rolled into the Elberthal station. There were lights, movement, a storm of people all gabbling away in a foreign tongue. I looked out. No face of any one I knew. Courvoisier sprang down and helped me out.

“Now I will put you into a drosky,” said he, leading the way to where they stood outside the station. [Pg 43]

“Alléestrasse, thirty-nine,” he said to the man.

“Stop one moment,” cried I, leaning eagerly out. At that moment a tall, dark girl passed us, going slowly toward the gates. She almost paused as she saw us. She was looking at my companion; I did not see her face, and was only conscious of her as coming between me and him, and so annoying me.

“Please let me thank you,” I continued. “You have been so kind, so very kind—”

“*O, bitte sehr!* It was so kind in you to get lost exactly when and where you did,” said he, smiling. “*Adieu, mein Fräulein,*” he added, making a sign to the coachman, who drove off.

I saw him no more. “Eugen Courvoisier”—I kept repeating the name to myself, as if I were in the

very least danger of forgetting it—"Eugen Courvoisier." Now that I had parted from him I was quite clear as to my own feelings. I would have given all I was worth—not much, truly—to see him for one moment again.

Along a lighted street with houses on one side, a gleaming shine of water on the other, and trees on both, down a cross-way, then into another street, very wide, and gayly lighted, in the midst of which was an avenue.

We stopped with a rattle before a house door, and I read, by the light of the lamp that hung over it, "39."

CHAPTER VII.

ANNA SARTORIUS.

I was expected. That was very evident. An excited-looking *Dienstmädchen* opened the door, and on seeing me, greeted me as if I had been an old friend. I was presently rescued by Merrick, also looking agitated.

"Ho, Miss Wedderburn, at last you are here! How Miss Hallam has worried, to be sure."

"I could not help it, I'm very sorry," said I, following her upstairs—up a great many flights of stairs, as it seemed to me, till she ushered me into a sitting-room where I found Miss Hallam.

"Thank Heaven, child! you are here at last. I was beginning to think that if you did not come by this train, I must send some one to Köln to look after you." [Pg 44]

"By this train!" I repeated, blankly. "Miss Hallam—what—do you mean? There has been no other train."

"Two; there was one at four and one at six. I can not tell you how uneasy I have been at your non-appearance."

"Then—then—" I stammered, growing hot all over. "Oh, how horrible!"

"What is horrible?" she demanded. "And you must be starving. Merrick, go and see about something to eat for Miss Wedderburn. Now," she added, as her maid left the room, "tell me what you have been doing."

I told her everything, concealing nothing.

"Most annoying!" she remarked. "A gentleman, you say. My dear child, no gentleman would have done anything of the kind. I am very sorry for it all."

"Miss Hallam," I implored, almost in tears, "please do not tell any one what has happened to me. I will never be such a fool again. I know now—and you may trust me. But do not let any one know how—stupid I have been. I told you I was stupid—I told you several times. I am sure you must remember."

"Oh, yes, I remember. We will say no more about it."

"And the gray shawl," said I.

"Merrick had it."

I lifted my hands and shrugged my shoulders. "Just my luck," I murmured, resignedly, as Merrick came in with a tray.

Miss Hallam, I noticed, continued to regard me now and then as I ate with but small appetite. I was too excited by what had passed, and by what I had just heard, to be hungry. I thought it kind, merciful, humane in her to promise to keep my secret and not expose my ignorance and stupidity to strangers.

"It is evident," she remarked, "that you must at once begin to learn German, and then if you do get lost at a railway station again, you will be able to ask your way."

Merrick shook her head with an inexpressibly bitter smile.

"I'd defy any one to learn this 'ere language, ma'am. They call an accident a *Unglück*; if any one could tell me what that means, I'd thank them, that's all."

"Don't express your opinions, Merrick, unless you wish to seem deficient in understanding; but go and see that Miss Wedderburn has everything she wants—or rather everything that can be got—in her room. She is tired, and shall go to bed." [Pg 45]

I was only too glad to comply with this mandate, but it was long ere I slept. I kept hearing the organ in the cathedral, and that voice of the invisible singer—seeing the face beside me, and hearing the words, "Then you have decided that I am to be trusted?"

"And he was deceiving me all the time!" I thought, mournfully.

I breakfasted by myself the following morning, in a room called the speisesaal. I found I was late. When I came into the room, about nine o'clock, there was no one but myself to be seen. There was a long table with a white cloth upon it, and rows of the thickest cups and saucers it had ever been my fate to see, with distinct evidences that the chief part of the company had already breakfasted. Baskets full of *Brödchen* and pots of butter, a long India-rubber pipe coming from the gas to light a theemaschine—lots of cane-bottomed chairs, an open piano, two cages with canaries in them; the kettle gently simmering above the gas-flame; for the rest, silence and solitude.

I sat down, having found a clean cup and plate, and glanced timidly at the theemaschine, not daring to cope with its mysteries, until my doubts were relieved by the entrance of a young person with a trim little figure, a coquettishly cut and elaborately braided apron, and a white frilled morgenhaube upon her hair, surmounting her round, heavenward-aspiring visage.

"*Guten morgen, Fräulein,*" she said, as she marched up to the darkly mysterious theemaschine and began deftly to prepare coffee for me, and to push the *Brödchen* toward me. She began to talk to me in broken English, which was very pretty, and while I ate and drank, she industriously scraped little white roots at the same table. She told me she was Clara, the niece of Frau Steinmann, and that she was very glad to see me, but was very sorry I had had so long to wait in Köln yesterday. She liked my dress, and was it *echt Englisch*—also, how much did it cost?

She was a cheery little person, and I liked her. She seemed to like me too, and repeatedly said she was glad I had come. She liked dancing she said. Did I? And she had lately danced at a ball with some one who danced so well—*aber*, quite indescribably well. His name was Karl Linders, and he was, *ach!* really a remarkable person. A bright blush, and a little sigh accompanied the remark. Our eyes met, and from that moment Clara and I were very good friends.

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I went upstairs again, and found that Miss Hallam proposed, during the forenoon, to go and find the Eye Hospital, where she was to see the oculist, and arrange for him to visit her, and shortly after eleven we set out.

The street that I had so dimly seen the night before, showed itself by daylight to be a fair, broad way. Down the middle, after the pleasant fashion of continental towns, was a broad walk, planted with two double rows of lindens, and on either side this lindenallee was the carriage road, private houses, shops, exhibitions, boarding-houses. In the middle, exactly opposite our dwelling, was the New Theater, just drawing to the close of its first season. I looked at it without thinking much about it. I had never been in a theater in my life, and the name was but a name to me.

Turning off from the pretty allee, and from the green Hofgarten which bounded it at one end, we entered a narrow, ill-paved street, the aspect of whose gutters and inhabitants alike excited my liveliest disgust. In this street was the Eye Hospital, as was presently testified to us by a board bearing the inscription, "Städtische Augenklinik."

We were taken to a dimly lighted room in which many people were waiting, some with bandages over their eyes, others with all kinds of extraordinary spectacles on, which made them look like phantoms out of a bad dream—nearly all more or less blind, and the effect was surprisingly depressing.

Presently Miss Hallam and Merrick were admitted to an inner room, and I was left to await their return. My eye strayed over the different faces, and I felt a sensation of relief when I saw some one come in without either bandage or spectacles. The new-comer was a young man of middle height, and of proportions slight without being thin. There was nothing the matter with his eyes, unless perhaps a slight short-sightedness; he had, I thought, one of the gentlest, most attractive faces I had ever seen; boyishly open and innocent at the first glance; at the second, indued with a certain reticent calm and intellectual radiance which took away from the first youthfulness of his appearance. Soft, yet luminous brown eyes, loose brown hair hanging round his face, a certain manner which for me at least had a charm, were the characteristics of this young man. He carried a violin-case, removed his hat as he came in, and being seen by one of the young men who sat at desks, took names down, and attended to people in general, was called by him:

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"Herr Helfen—Herr Friedhelm Helfen!"

"*Ja—hier!*" he answered, going up to the desk, upon which there ensued a lively conversation, though carried on in a low tone, after which the young man at the desk presented a white card to "Herr Friedhelm Helfen," and the latter, with a pleasant "Adieu," went out of the room again.

Miss Hallam and Merrick presently returned from the consulting-room, and we went out of the dark room into the street, which was filled with spring sunshine and warmth; a contrast something like that between Miss Hallam's life and my own, I have thought since. Far before us, hurrying on, I saw the young man with the violin-case; he turned off by the theater, and went in at a side door.

An hour's wandering in the Hofgarten—my first view of the Rhine—a dull, flat stream it looked, too. I have seen it since then in mightier flow. Then we came home, and it was decided that we should dine together with the rest of the company at one o'clock.

A bell rang at a few minutes past one. We went down-stairs, into the room in which I had already breakfasted, which, in general, was known as the saal. As I entered with Miss Hallam I was conscious that a knot of lads or young men stood aside to let us pass, and then giggled and

scuffled behind the door before following us into the saal.

Two or three ladies were already seated, and an exceedingly stout lady ladled out soup at a side table, while Clara and a servant-woman carried the plates round to the different places. The stout lady turned as she saw us, and greeted us. She was Frau Steinmann, our hostess. She waited until the youths before spoken of had come in, and with a great deal of noise had seated themselves, when she began, aided by the soup-ladle, to introduce us all to each other.

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We, it seemed, were to have the honor and privilege of being the only English ladies of the company. We were introduced to one or two others, and I was assigned a place by a lady introduced as Fräulein Anna Sartorius, a brunette, rather stout, with large dark eyes which looked at me in a way I did not like, a head of curly black hair cropped short, an odd, brusque manner, and a something peculiar, or, as she said, *selten* in her dress. This young lady sustained the introduction with self-possession and calm. It was otherwise with the young gentlemen, who appeared decidedly mixed. There were some half dozen of them in all—a couple of English, the rest German, Dutch, and Swedish. I had never been in company with so many nationalities before, and was impressed with my situation—needlessly so.

All these young gentlemen made bows which were, in their respective ways, triumphs of awkwardness, with the exception of one of our compatriots, who appeared to believe that himself and his manners were formed to charm and subdue the opposite sex. We then sat down, and Fräulein Sartorius immediately opened a conversation with me.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch, Fräulein?*" was her first venture, and having received my admission that I did not speak a word of it, she continued, in good English:

"Now I can talk to you without offending you. It is so dreadful when English people who don't know German persist in thinking that they do. There was an English-woman here who always said *wer* when she meant where, and *wo* when she meant who. She said the sounds confused her."

The boys giggled at this, but the joke was lost upon me.

"What is your name?" she continued; "I didn't catch what Frau Steinmann said."

"May Wedderburn," I replied, angry with myself for blushing so excessively as I saw that all the boys held their spoons suspended, listening for my answer.

"May—*das heisst Mai*," said she, turning to the assembled youths, who testified that they were aware of it, and the Dutch boy, Brinks, inquired, gutturally:

"You haf one zong in your language what calls itself, 'Not always Mai,' haf you not?"

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"Yes," said I, and all the boys began to giggle as if something clever had been said. Taken all in all, what tortures have I not suffered from those dreadful boys. Shy when they ought to have been bold, and bold where a modest retiringness would better have become them. Giggling inanely at everything and nothing. Noisy and vociferous among themselves or with inferiors; shy, awkward and blushing with ladies or in refined society—distressing my feeble efforts to talk to them by their silly explosions of laughter when one of them was addressed. They formed the bane of my life for some time.

"Will you let me paint you?" said Fräulein Sartorius, whose big eyes had been surveying me in a manner that made me nervous.

"Paint me?"

"Your likeness, I mean. You are very pretty, and we never see that color of hair here."

"Are you a painter?"

"No, I'm only a *Studentin* yet; but I paint from models. Well, will you sit to me?"

"Oh, I don't know. If I have time, perhaps."

"What will you do to make you not have time?"

I did not feel disposed to gratify her curiosity, and said I did not know yet what I should do.

For a short time she asked no more questions, then

"Do you like town or country best?"

"I don't know. I have never lived in a town."

"Do you like amusements—concerts, and theater, and opera?"

"I don't know," I was reluctantly obliged to confess, for I saw that the assembled youths, though not looking at me openly, and apparently entirely engrossed with their dinners, were listening attentively to what passed.

"You don't know," repeated Fräulein Sartorius, quickly seeing through my thin assumption of indifference, and proceeding to draw me out as much as possible. I wished Adelaide had been there to beat her from the field. She would have done it better than I could.

"No; because I have never been to any."

"Haven't you? How odd! How very odd! Isn't it strange?" she added, appealing to the boys. [Pg 50]
"Fräulein has never been to a theater or a concert."

I disdained to remark that my words were being perverted, but the game instinct rose in me. Raising my voice a little, I remarked:

"It is evident that I have not enjoyed your advantages, but I trust that the gentlemen" (with a bow to the listening boys) "will make allowances for the difference between us."

The young gentlemen burst into a chorus of delighted giggles, and Anna, shooting a rapid glance at me, made a slight grimace, but looked not at all displeased. I was, though, mightily; but, elate with victory, I turned to my compatriot at the other end of the table, and asked him at what time of the year Elberthal was pleasantest.

"Oh," said he, "it's always pleasant to me, but that's owing to myself. I make it so."

Just then, several of the other lads rose, pushing their chairs back with a great clatter, bowing to the assembled company, and saying "Gesegnete Mahlzeit!" as they went out.

"Why are they going, and what do they say?" I inquired of Miss Sartorius, who replied, quite amiably:

"They are students at the Realschule. They have to be there at two o'clock, and they say, 'Blessed be the meal-time,' as they go out."

"Do they? How nice!" I could not help saying.

"Would you like to go for a walk this afternoon?" said she.

"Oh, very much!" I had exclaimed, before I remembered that I did not like her, and did not intend to like her. "If Miss Hallam can spare me," I added.

"Oh, I think she will. I shall be ready at half past two; then we shall return for coffee at four. I will knock at your door at the time."

On consulting Miss Hallam after dinner, I found she was quite willing for me to go out with Anna, and at the time appointed we set out.

Anna took me a tour round the town, showed me the lions, and gave me topographical details. She showed me the big, plain barrack, and the desert waste of the Exerzierplatz spreading before it. She did her best to entertain me, and I, with a childish prejudice against her abrupt manner, and the free, somewhat challenging look of her black eyes, was reserved, unresponsive, stupid. I took a prejudice against her—I own it—and for that and other sins committed against a woman who would have been my friend if I would have let her, I say humbly, *Mea culpa!* [Pg 51]

"It seems a dull kind of a place," said I.

"It need not be. You have advantages here which you can't get everywhere. I have been here several years, and as I have no other home I rather think I shall live here."

"Oh, indeed."

"You have a home, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Brothers and sisters?"

"Two sisters," I replied, mightily ruffled by what I chose to consider her curiosity and impertinence; though, when I looked at her, I saw what I could not but confess to be a real, and not unkind, interest in her plain face and big eyes.

"Ah! I have no brothers and sisters. I have only a little house in the country, and as I have always lived in a town, I don't care for the country. It is so lonely. The people are so stupid too—not always though. You were offended with me at dinner, *nicht wahr?*"

"Oh, dear, no!" said I, very awkwardly and very untruly. The truth was, I did not like her, and was too young, too ignorant and *gauche* to try to smooth over my dislike. I did not know the pain I was giving, and if I had, should perhaps not have behaved differently.

"*Doch!*" she said, smiling. "But I did not know what a child you were, or I should have let you alone."

More offended than ever, I maintained silence. If I were certainly touchy and ill to please, Fräulein Sartorius, it must be owned, did not know how to apologize gracefully. I have since, with wider knowledge of her country and its men and women, got to see that what made her so inharmonious was, that she had a woman's form and a man's disposition and love of freedom. As her countrywomen taken in the gross are the most utterly "in bonds" of any women in Europe, this spoiled her life in a manner which can not be understood here, where women in comparison are free as air, and gave no little of the brusqueness and roughness to her manner. In an enlightened English home she would have been an admirable, firm, clever woman; here she was that most dreadful of all abnormal growths—a woman with a will of her own. [Pg 52]

"What do they do here?" I inquired, indifferently.

"Oh, many things. Though it is not a large town there is a School of Art, which brings many painters here. There are a hundred and fifty—besides students."

"And you are a student?"

"Yes. One must have something to do—some *carrière*—though my countrywomen say not. I shall go away for a few months soon, but I am waiting for the last great concert. It will be the 'Paradise Lost' of Rubenstein."

"Ah, yes!" said I, politely, but without interest. I had never heard of Rubenstein and the "Verlorenes Paradies." Before the furor of 1876, how many scores of provincial English had?

"There is very much music here," she continued. "Are you fond of it?"

"Ye-es. I can't play much, but I can sing. I have come here partly to take singing lessons."

"So!"

"Who is the best teacher?" was my next ingenuous question.

She laughed.

"That depends upon what you want to learn. There are so many: violin, *Clavier*, that is piano, flute, 'cello, everything."

"Oh!" I replied, and asked no more questions about music; but inquired if it were pleasant at Frau Steinmann's.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Is it pleasant anywhere? I don't find many places pleasant, because I can not be a humbug, so others do not like me. But I believe some people like Elberthal very well. There is the theater—that makes another element. And there are the soldiers and *Kaufleute*—merchants, I mean, so you see there is variety, though it is a small place."

"Ah, yes!" said I, looking about me as we passed down a very busy street, and I glanced to right and left with the image of Eugen Courvoisier ever distinctly if unconfessedly present to my mental view. Did he live at Elberthal? and if so, did he belong to any of those various callings? What was he? An artist who painted pictures for his bread? I thought that very probable. There was something free and artist-like in his manner, in his loose waving hair and in his keen susceptibility to beauty. I thought of his emotion at hearing that glorious Bach music. Or was he a musician—what Anna Sartorius called *ein Musiker*? But no. My ideas of musicians were somewhat hazy, not to say utterly chaotic; they embraced only two classes: those who performed or gave lessons, and those who composed. I had never formed to myself the faintest idea of a composer, and my experience of teachers and performers was limited to one specimen—Mr. Smythe, of Darton, whose method and performances would, as I have since learned, have made the hair of a musician stand horrent on end. No—I did not think he was a musician. An actor? Perish the thought, was my inevitable mental answer. How should I be able to make any better one? A soldier, then? At that moment we met a mounted captain of Uhlans, harness clanking, accouterments rattling. He was apparently an acquaintance of my companion, for he saluted with a grave politeness which sat well upon him. Decidedly Eugen Courvoisier had the air of a soldier. That accounted for all. No doubt he was a soldier. In my ignorance of the strictness of German military regulations as regards the wearing of uniform, I overlooked the fact that he had been in civilian's dress, and remained delighted with my new idea; Captain Courvoisier. "What is the German for captain?" I inquired, abruptly.

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"*Hauptmann*."

"Thank you." Hauptmann Eugen Courvoisier—a noble and a gallant title, and one which became him. "How much is a thaler?" was my next question.

"It is as much as three shillings in your money."

"Oh, thank you," said I, and did a little sum in my own mind. At that rate then, I owed Herr Courvoisier the sum of ten shillings. How glad I was to find it came within my means.

As I took off my things, I wondered when Herr Courvoisier would "make out his accounts." I trusted soon.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 54]

"Probe zum verlorenen Paradiese."

Miss Hallam fulfilled her promise with regard to my singing lessons. She had a conversation with Fräulein Sartorius, to whom, unpopular as she was, I noticed people constantly and almost instinctively went when in need of precise information or a slight dose of common sense and clear-headedness.

Miss Hallam inquired who was the best master.

"For singing, the Herr Direktor," replied Anna, very promptly. "And then he directs the best of the musical vereins—the clubs—societies, whatever you name them. At least he might try Miss Wedderburn's voice."

"Who is he?"

"The head of anything belonging to music in the town—königlicher musik-direktor. He conducts all the great concerts, and though he does not sing himself, yet he is one of the best teachers in the province. Lots of people come and stay here on purpose to learn from him."

"And what are these vereins?"

"Every season there are six great concerts given, and a seventh for the benefit of the direktor. The orchestra and chorus together are called a verein—musik-verein. The chorus is chiefly composed of ladies and gentlemen—amateurs, you know—*Dilettanten*. The Herr Direktor is very particular about voices. You pay so much for admission, and receive a card for the season. Then you have all the good teaching—the *Proben*."

"What is a *Probe*?" I demanded, hastily, remembering that Courvoisier had used the word.

"What you call a rehearsal."

Ah! then he was musical. At last I had found it out. Perhaps he was one of the amateurs who sung at these concerts, and if so, I might see him again, and if so—But Anna went on:

"It is a very good thing for any one, particularly with such a teacher as von Francius."

"You must join," said Miss Hallam to me.

"There is a probe to-night to Rubinstein's 'Paradise Lost,'" said Anna. "I shall go, not to sing, but to listen. I can take Miss Wedderburn, if you like, and introduce her to Herr von Francius, whom I know." [Pg 55]

"Very nice! very much obliged to you. Certainly," said Miss Hallam.

The probe was fixed for seven, and shortly after that time we set off for the Tonhalle, or concert-hall, in which it was held.

"We shall be much too early," said she. "But the people are shamefully late. Most of them only come to *klatsch*, and flirt, or try to flirt, with the Herr Direktor."

This threw upon my mind a new light as to the Herr Direktor, and I walked by her side much impressed. She told me that if I accepted I might even sing in the concert itself, as there had only been four *proben* so far, and there were still several before the *haupt-probe*.

"What is the *haupt-probe*?" I inquired.

"General rehearsal—when Herr von Francius is most unmerciful to his stupid pupils. I always attend that. I like to hear him make sport of them, and then the instrumentalists laugh at them. Von Francius never flatters."

Inspired with nightmare-like ideas as to this terrible *haupt-probe*, I found myself, with Anna, turning into a low-fronted building inscribed "Städtische Tonhalle," the concert-hall of the good town of Elberthal.

"This way," said she. "It is in the rittersaal. We don't go to the large saal till the *haupt-probe*."

I followed her into a long, rather shabby-looking room, at one end of which was a low orchestra, about which were dotted the desks of the absent instrumentalists, and some stiff-looking Celli and Contrabassi kept watch from a wall. On the orchestra was already assembled a goodly number of young men and women, all in lively conversation, loud laughter, and apparently high good-humor with themselves and everything in the world.

A young man with a fuzz of hair standing off about a sad and depressed-looking countenance was stealing "in and out and round about," and distributing sheets of score to the company. In the conductor's place was a tall man in gray clothes, who leaned negligently against the rail, and held a conversation with a pretty young lady who seemed much pleased with his attention. It did not strike me at first that this was the terrible direktor of whom I had been hearing. He was young, had a slender, graceful figure, and an exceedingly handsome, though (I thought at first) an unpleasing face. There was something in his attitude and manner which at first I did not quite like. Anna walked up the room, and pausing before the estrade, said: [Pg 56]

"Herr Direktor!"

He turned: his eyes fell upon her face, and left it instantly to look at mine. Gathering himself together into a more ceremonious attitude, he descended from his estrade, and stood beside us, a little to one side, looking at us with a leisurely calmness which made me feel, I knew not why, uncomfortable. Meanwhile, Anna took up her parable.

"May I introduce the young lady? Miss Wedderburn, Herr Musik-Direktor von Francius. Miss Wedderburn wishes to join the verein, if you think her voice will pass. Perhaps you will allow her

to sing to-night?"

"Certainly, *mein Fräulein*," said he to me, not to Anna. He had a long, rather Jewish-looking face, black hair, eyes, and mustache. The features were thin, fine, and pointed. The thing which most struck me then, at any rate, was a certain expression which, conquering all others, dominated them—at once a hardness and a hardihood which impressed me disagreeably then, though I afterward learned, in knowing the man, to know much more truly the real meaning of that unflinching gaze and iron look.

"Your voice is what, *mein Fräulein*?" he asked.

"Soprano."

"Sopran? We will see. The soprani sit over there, if you will have the goodness."

He pointed to the left of the orchestra, and called out to the melancholy-looking young man, "Herr Schonfeld, a chair for the young lady!"

Herr von Francius then ascended the orchestra himself, went to the piano, and, after a few directions, gave us the signal to begin. Till that day—I confess it with shame—I had never heard of the "Verlorenes Paradies." It came upon me like a revelation. I sung my best, substituting *do, re, mi*, etc., for the German words. Once or twice, as Herr von Francius's forefinger beat time, I thought I saw his head turn a little in our direction, but I scarcely heeded it. When the first chorus was over, he turned to me:

"You have not sung in a chorus before?"

"No."

"So! I should like to hear you sing something *solà*." He pushed toward me a pile of music, and while the others stood looking on and whispering among themselves, he went on, "Those are all sopran songs. Select one, if you please, and try it." [Pg 57]

Not at all aware that the incident was considered unprecedented, and was creating a sensation, I turned over the music, seeking something I knew, but could find nothing. All in German, and all strange. Suddenly I came upon one entitled "Blute nur, liebes Herz," the sopran solo which I had heard as I sat with Courvoisier in the cathedral. It seemed almost like an old friend. I opened it, and found it had also English words. That decided me.

"I will try this," said I, showing it to him.

He smiled. "*S ist gut!*" Then he read the title off the song aloud, and there was a general titter, as if some very great joke were in agitation, and were much appreciated. Indeed I found that in general the jokes of the Herr Direktor, when he condescended to make any, were very keenly relished by at least the lady part of his pupils.

Not understanding the reason of the titter I took the music in my hand, and waiting for a moment until he gave me the signal, sung it after the best wise I could—not very brilliantly, I dare say, but with at least all my heart poured into it. I had one requisite at least of an artist nature—I could abstract myself upon occasion completely from my surroundings. I did so now. It was too beautiful, too grand. I remembered that afternoon at Köln—the golden sunshine streaming through the painted windows, the flood of melody poured forth by the invisible singer; above all, I remembered who had been by my side, and I felt as if again beside him—again influenced by the unusual beauty of his face and mien, and by his clear, strange, commanding eyes. It all came back to me—the strangest, happiest day of my life. I sung as I had never sung before—as I had not known I could sing.

When I stopped, the tittering had ceased; silence saluted me. The young ladies were all looking at me; some of them had put on their eye-glasses; others stared at me as if I were some strange animal from a menagerie. The young gentlemen were whispering among themselves and taking sidelong glances at me. I scarcely heeded anything of it. I fixed my eyes upon the judge who had been listening to my performance—upon von Francius. He was pulling his mustache and at first made no remark. [Pg 58]

You have sung that song before, *gnädiges Fräulein*?"

"No. I have heard it once. I have not seen the music before."

"So!" He bowed slightly, and turning once more to the others, said:

"We will begin the next chorus. 'Chorus of the Damned,' Now, *meine Herrschaften*, I would wish to impress upon you one thing, if I can, that is—Silence, *meine Herren!*" he called sharply toward the tenors, who were giggling inanely among themselves. "A chorus of damned souls," he proceeded, composedly, "would not sing in the same unruffled manner as a young lady who warbles, 'Spring is come—tra, la, la! Spring is come—lira, lira!' in her mamma's drawing-room. Try to imagine yourself struggling in the tortures of hell"—(a delighted giggle and a sort of "Oh, you dear, wicked man!" expression on the part of the young ladies; a nudging of each other on that of the young gentlemen), "and sing as if you were damned."

Scarcely any one seemed to take the matter the least earnestly. The young ladies continued to giggle, and the young gentlemen to nudge each other. Little enough of expression, if plenty of noise, was there in that magnificent and truly difficult passage, the changing choruses of the

condemned and the blessed ones—with its crowning “WEH!” thundering down from highest soprano to deepest bass.

“Lots of noise, and no meaning,” observed the conductor, leaning himself against the rail of the estrade, face to his audience, folding his arms and surveying them all one after the other with cold self-possession. It struck me that he despised them while he condescended to instruct them. The power of the man struck me again. I began to like him better. At least I venerated his thorough understanding of what was to me a splendid mystery. No softening appeared in the master’s eyes in answer to the rows of pretty appealing faces turned to him; no smile upon his contemptuous lips responded to the eyes—black, brown, gray, blue, yellow—all turned with such affecting devotion to his own. Composing himself to an insouciant attitude, he began in a cool, indifferent voice, which had, however, certain caustic tones in it which stung me at least to the quick:

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“I never heard anything worse, even from you. My honored Fräulein, my *gnädigen Herren*, just try once to imagine what you are singing about! It is not an exercise—it is not a love song, either of which you would no doubt perform excellently. Conceive what is happening! Put yourself back into those mythical times. Believe, for this evening, in the story of the forfeited Paradise. There is strife between the Blessed and the Damned; the obedient and the disobedient. There are thick clouds in the heavens—smoke, fire, and sulphur—a clashing of swords in the serried ranks of the angels: can not you see Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, leading the heavenly host? Can not some of you sympathize a little with Satan and his struggle?”

Looking at him, I thought they must indeed be an unimaginative set! In that dark face before them was Mephistopheles at least—*der Geist der stets verneint*—if nothing more violent. His cool, scornful features were lighted up with some of the excitement which he could not drill into the assemblage before him. Had he been gifted with the requisite organ he would have acted and sung the chief character in “Faust” *con amore*.

“*Ach, um Gotteswillen!*” he went on, shrugging his shoulders, “try to forget what you are! Try to forget that none of you ever had a wicked thought or an unholy aspiration—”

(“Don’t they see how he is laughing at them?” I wondered.)

“You, Chorus of the Condemned, try to conjure up every wicked thought you can, and let it come out in your voices—you who sing the strains of the blessed ones, think of what blessedness is. Surely each of you has his own idea! Some of you may agree with Lenore:

“Bei ihm, bei ihm ist Seligkeit,
Und ohne Wilhelm Holle!”

“If so, think of him; think of her—only sing it, whatever it is. Remember the strongest of feelings:

“Die Engel nennen es Himmelsfreude
Die Teufel nennen es Höllenqual,
Die Menschen nennen es—LIEBE!”

“And sing it!”

He had not become loud or excited in voice or gesticulation, but his words, flung at them like so many scornful little bullets, the indifferent resignation of his attitude, had their effect upon the crew of giggling, simpering girls and awkward, self-conscious young men. Some idea seemed vouchsafed to them that perhaps their performance had not been quite all that it might have been; they began in a little more earnest, and the chorus went better.

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For my own part, I was deeply moved. A vague excitement, a wild, and not altogether a holy one, had stolen over me. I understood now how the man might have influence. I bent to the power of his will, which reached me where I stood in the background, from his dark eyes, which turned for a moment to me now and then. It was that will of his which put me as it were suddenly into the spirit of the music, and revealed me depths in my own heart at which I had never even guessed. Excited, with cheeks burning and my heart hot within me, I followed his words and his gestures, and grew so impatient of the dull stupidity of the others that tears came to my eyes. How could that young woman, in the midst of a sublime chorus, deliberately pause, arrange the knot of her neck-tie, and then, after a smile and a side glance at the conductor, go on again with a more self-satisfied simper than ever upon her lips? What might not the thing be with a whole chorus of sympathetic singers? The very dullness which in face prevailed revealed to me great regions of possible splendor, almost too vast to think of.

At last it was over. I turned to the direktor, who was still near the piano, and asked timidly:

“Do you think I may join? Will my voice do?”

An odd expression crossed his face; he answered, dryly:

“You may join the verein, *mein Fräulein*—yes. Please come this way with me. Pardon, Fräulein Stockhausen—another time. I am sorry to say I have business at present.”

A black look from a pretty brunette, who had advanced with an engaging smile and an open score to ask him some question, greeted this very composed rebuff of her advance. The black look was directed at me—guiltless.

Without taking any notice of the other, he led Anna and me to a small inner room, where there was a desk and writing materials.

"Your name, if you will be good enough?"

"Wedderburn."

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"Your *Vorname*, though—your first name."

"My Christian name—oh, May."

"M—a—*na*! Perhaps you will be so good as to write it yourself, and the street and number of the house in which you live."

I complied.

"Have you been here long?"

"Not quite a week."

"Do you intend to make any stay?"

"Some months, probably."

"Humph! If you wish to make any progress in music, you must stay much longer."

"It—I—it depends upon other people how long I remain."

He smiled slightly, and his smile was not unpleasant; it lighted up the darkness of his face in an agreeable manner.

"So I should suppose. I will call upon you to-morrow at four in the afternoon. I should like to have a little conversation with you about your voice. *Adieu, meine Damen.*"

With a slight bow which sufficiently dismissed us, he turned to the desk again, and we went away.

Our homeward walk was a somewhat silent one. Anna certainly asked me suddenly where I had learned to sing.

"I have not learned properly. I can't help singing."

"I did not know you had a voice like that," said she again.

"Like what?"

"Herr von Francius will tell you all about it to-morrow," said she, abruptly.

"What a strange man Herr von Francius is!" said I. "Is he clever?"

"Oh, very clever."

"At first I did not like him. Now I think I do, though."

She made no answer for a few minutes; then said:

"He is an excellent teacher."

CHAPTER IX.

HERR VON FRANCIUS.

When Miss Hallam heard from Anna Sartorius that my singing had evidently struck Herr von Francius, and of his intended visit, she looked pleased—so pleased that I was surprised.

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He came the following afternoon, at the time he had specified. Now, in the broad daylight, and apart from his official, professional manner, I found the Herr Direktor still different from the man of last night, and yet the same. He looked even younger now than on the estrade last night, and quiet though his demeanor was, attuned to a gentlemanly calm and evenness, there was still the one thing, the cool, hard glance left, to unite him with the dark, somewhat sinister-looking personage who had cast his eyes round our circle last night, and told us to sing as if we were damned.

"Miss Hallam, this is Herr von Francius," said I. "He speaks English," I added.

Von Francius glanced from her to me with a somewhat inquiring expression.

Miss Hallam received him graciously, and they talked about all sorts of trifles, while I sat by in seemly silence, till at last Miss Hallam said:

"Can you give me any opinion upon Miss Wedderburn's voice?"

"Scarcely, until I have given it another trial. She seems to have had no training."

"No, that is true," she said, and proceeded to inform him casually that she wished me to have every advantage I could get from my stay in Elberthal, and must put the matter into his hands. Von Francius looked pleased.

For my part, I was deeply moved. Miss Hallam's generosity to one so stupid and ignorant touched me nearly.

Von Francius, pausing a short time, at last said:

"I must try her voice again, as I remarked. Last night I was struck with her sense of the dramatic point of what we were singing—a quality which I do not too often find in my pupils. I think, *mein Fräulein*, that with care and study you might take a place on the stage."

"The stage!" I repeated, startled, and thinking of Courvoisier's words.

But von Francius had been reckoning without his host. When Miss Hallam spoke of "putting the matter into his hands," she understood the words in her own sense.

"The stage!" said she, with a slight shiver. "That is quite out of the question. Miss Wedderburn is a young lady—not an actress." [Pg 63]

"So! Then it is impossible to be both in your country?" said he, with polite sarcasm. "I spoke as simple *Künstler*—artist—I was not thinking of anything else. I do not think the *gnädiges Fräulein* will ever make a good singer of mere songs. She requires emotion to bring out her best powers—a little passion—a little scope for acting and abandon before she can attain the full extent of her talent."

He spoke in the most perfectly matter-of-fact way, and I trembled. I feared lest this display of what Miss Hallam would consider little short of indecent laxity and Bohemianism, would shock her so much that I should lose everything by it. It was not so, however.

"Passion—abandon! I think you can not understand what you are talking about!" said she. "My dear sir, you must understand that those kind of things may be all very well for one set of people, but not for that class to which Miss Wedderburn belongs. Her father is a clergyman"—von Francius bowed, as if he did not quite see what that had to do with it—"in short, that idea is impossible. I tell you plainly. She may learn as much as she likes, but she will never be allowed to go upon the stage."

"Then she may teach?" said he, inquiringly.

"Certainly. I believe that is what she wishes to do, in case—if necessary."

"She may teach, but she may not act," said he, reflectively. "So be it, then! Only," he added as if making a last effort, "I would just mention that, apart from artistic considerations, while a lady may wear herself out as a poorly paid teacher, a *prima donna*—"

Miss Hallam smiled with calm disdain.

"It is not of the least use to speak of such a thing. You and I look at the matter from quite different points of view, and to argue about it would only be to waste time."

Von Francius, with a sarcastic, ambiguous smile, turned to me:

"And you, *mein Fräulein*?"

"I—no. I agree with Miss Hallam," I murmured, not really having found myself able to think about it at all, but conscious that opposition was useless. And, besides, I did shrink away from the ideas conjured up by that word, the "stage." [Pg 64]

"So!" said he, with a little bow and a half smile. "Also, I must try to make the round man fit into the square hole. The first thing will be another trial of your voice; then I must see how many lessons a week you will require, and must give you instructions about practicing. You must understand that it is not pleasure or child's play which you are undertaking. It is a work in order to accomplish which you must strain every nerve, and give up everything which in any way interferes with it."

"I don't know whether I shall have time for it," I murmured, looking doubtfully toward Miss Hallam.

"Yes, May; you will have time for it," was all she said.

"Is there a piano in the house?" said von Francius. "But, yes, certainly. Fräulein Sartorius has one; she will lend it to us for half an hour. If you were at liberty, *mein Fräulein*, just now—"

"Certainly," said I, following him, as he told Miss Hallam that he would see her again.

As he knocked at the door of Anna's sitting-room she came out, dressed for walking.

"*Ach, Fräulein!* will you allow us the use of your piano for a few minutes?"

"*Bitte!*" said she, motioning us into the room. "I am sorry I have an engagement, and must leave you."

"Do not let us keep you on any account," said he, with touching politeness; and she went out.

"*Desto besser!*" he observed, shrugging his shoulders.

He pulled off his gloves with rather an impatient gesture, seated himself at the piano, and struck some chords, in an annoyed manner.

"Who is that old lady?" he inquired, looking up at me. "Any relation of yours?"

"No—oh, no! I am her companion."

"So! And you mean to let her prevent you from following the career you have a talent for?"

"If I do not do as she wishes, I shall have no chance of following any career at all," said I. "And, besides, how does any one know that I have a talent—for—for—what you say?"

"I know it; that is why I said it. I wish I could persuade that old lady to my way of thinking!" he added. "I wish you were out of her hands and in mine. *Na!* we shall see!"

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It was not a very long "trial" that he gave me; we soon rose from the piano.

"To-morrow at eleven I come to give you a lesson," said he. "I am going to talk to Miss Hallam now. You please not come. I wish to see her alone; and I can manage her better by myself, *nicht wahr!*"

"Thank you," said I in a subdued tone.

"You must have a piano, too," he added; "and we must have the room to ourselves. I allow no third person to be present in my private lessons, but go on the principle of Paul Heyse's hero, Edwin, either in open lecture, or *unter vier Augen.*"

With that he held the door open for me, and as I turned into my room, shook hands with me in a friendly manner, bidding me expect him on the morrow.

Certainly, I decided, Herr von Francius was quite unlike any one I had ever seen before; and how awfully cool he was and self-possessed. I liked him well, though.

The next morning Herr von Francius gave me my first lesson, and after that I had one from him nearly every day. As teacher and as acquaintance he was, as it were, two different men. As teacher he was strict, severe, gave much blame and little praise; but when he did once praise me, I remember, I carried the remembrance of it with me for days as a ray of sunshine. He seemed never surprised to find how much work had been prepared for him, although he would express displeasure sometimes at its quality. He was a teacher whom it was impossible not to respect, whom one obeyed by instinct. As man, as acquaintance, I knew little of him, though I heard much—idle tales, which it would be as idle to repeat. They chiefly related to his domineering disposition and determination to go his own way and disregard that of others. In this fashion my life became busy enough.

CHAPTER X.

"LOHENGRIN."

As time went on, the image of Eugen Courvoisier, my unspoken of, unguessed at, friend, did not fade from my memory. It grew stronger. I thought of him every day—never went out without a distinct hope that I might see him; never came in without vivid disappointment that I had not seen him. I carried three thalers ten groschen so arranged in my purse that I could lay my hand upon them at a moment's notice, for as the days went on it appeared that Herr Courvoisier had not made up his accounts, or if he had, had not chosen to claim that part of them owed by me.

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I did not see him. I began dismally to think that after all the whole thing was at an end. He did not live at Elberthal—he had certainly never told me that he did, I reminded myself. He had gone about his business and interests—had forgotten the waif he had helped one spring afternoon, and I should never see him again. My heart fell and sunk with a reasonless, aimless pang. What did it, could it, ought it to matter to me whether I ever saw him again or not? Nothing, certainly, and yet I troubled myself about it a great deal. I made little dramas in my mind of how he and I were to meet, and how I would exert my will and make him to take the money. Whenever I saw an unusually large or handsome house, I instantly fell to wondering if it were his, and sometimes made inquiries as to the owner of any particularly eligible residence. I heard of Brauns, Müllers, Piepers, Schmidts, and the like, as owners of the same—never the name Courvoisier. He had disappeared—I feared forever.

Coming in weary one day from the town, where I had been striving to make myself understood in shops, I was met by Anna Sartorius on the stairs. She had not yet ceased to be civil to me—civil, that is, in her way—and my unreasoning aversion to her was as great as ever.

"This is the last opera of the season," said she, displaying a pink ticket. "I am glad you will get to see one, as the theater closes after to-night."

"But I am not going."

"Yes, you are. Miss Hallam has a ticket for you. I am going to chaperon you."

"I must go and see about that," said I, hastily rushing upstairs.

The news, incredible though it seemed, was quite true. The ticket lay there. I picked it up and gazed at it fondly. Stadttheater zu Elberthal. Parquet, No. 16. As I had never been in a theater in my life, this conveyed no distinct idea to my mind, but it was quite enough for me that I was going. The rest of the party, I found, were to consist of Vincent, the Englishman, Anna Sartorius, and the Dutch boy, Brinks.

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It was Friday evening, and the opera was "Lohengrin." I knew nothing, then, about different operatic styles, and my ideas of operatic music were based upon duets upon selected airs from "La Traviata," "La Somnambula," and "Lucia." I thought the story of "Lohengrin," as related by Vincent, interesting. I was not in the least aware that my first opera was to be a different one from that of most English girls. Since, I have wondered sometimes what would be the result upon the musical taste of a person who was put through a course of Wagnerian opera first, and then turned over to the Italian school—leaving Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, to take care of themselves, as they may very well do—thus exactly reversing the usual (English) process.

Anna was very quiet that evening. Afterward I knew that she must have been observing me. We were in the first row of the parquet, with the orchestra alone between us and the stage. I was fully occupied in looking about me—now at the curtain hiding the great mystery, now behind and above me at the boxes, in a youthful state of ever-increasing hope and expectation.

"We are very early," said Vincent, who was next to me, "very early, and very near," he added, but he did not seem much distressed at either circumstance.

Then the gas was suddenly turned up quite high. The bustle increased cheerfully. The old, young, and middle-aged ladies who filled the *Logen* in the *Erster Rang*—hardened theater-goers, who came as regularly every night in the week during the eight months of the season as they ate their breakfasts and went to their beds, were gossiping with the utmost violence, exchanging nods and odd little old-fashioned bows with other ladies in all parts of the house, leaning over to look whether the parquet was well filled, and remarking that there were more people in the *Balcon* than usual. The musicians were dropping into the orchestra. I was startled to see a fair face I knew—that pleasant-looking young violinist with the brown eyes, whose name I had heard called out at the eye hospital. They all seemed very fond of him, particularly a man who struggled about with a violoncello, and who seemed to have a series of jokes to relate to Herr Helfen, exploding with laughter, and every now and then shaking the loose thick hair from his handsome, genial face. Helfen listened to him with a half smile, screwing up his violin and giving him a quiet look now and then. The inspiring noise of tuning up had begun, and I was on the very tiptoe of expectation.

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As I turned once more and looked round, Vincent said, laughing, "Miss Wedderburn, your hat has hit me three times in the face." It was, by the by, the brown hat which had graced my head that day at Köln.

"Oh, has it? I beg your pardon!" said I, laughing too, as I brought my eyes again to bear on the stage. "The seats are too near toge—"

Further words were upon my lips, but they were never uttered. In roving across the orchestra to the foot-lights my eyes were arrested. In the well of the orchestra immediately before my eyes was one empty chair, that by right belonging to the leader of the first violins. Friedhelm Helfen sat in the one next below it. All the rest of the musicians were assembled. The conductor was in his place, and looked a little impatiently toward that empty chair. Through a door to the left of the orchestra there came a man, carrying a violin, and made his way, with a nod here, a half smile there, a tap on the shoulder in another direction. Arrived at the empty chair, he laid his hand upon Helfen's shoulder, and bending over him, spoke to him as he seated himself. He kept his hand on that shoulder, as if he liked it to be there. Helfen's eyes said as plainly as possibly that he liked it. Fast friends, on the face of it, were these two men. In this moment, though I sat still, motionless, and quiet, I certainly realized as nearly as possible that impossible sensation, the turning upside down of the world. I did not breathe. I waited, spell-bound, in the vague idea that my eyes might open and I find that I had been dreaming. After an earnest speech to Helfen the new-comer raised his head. As he shouldered his violin his eyes traveled carelessly along the first row of the parquet—our row. I did not awake; things did not melt away in a mist before my eyes. He was Eugen Courvoisier, and he looked braver, handsomer, gallanter, and more apart from the crowd of men now, in this moment, than even my sentimental dreams had pictured him. I felt it all: I also know now that it was partly the very strength of the feeling that I had—the very intensity of the admiration which took from me the reflection and reason for the moment. I felt as if every one must see how I felt. I remembered that no one knew what had happened; I dreaded lest they should. I did the most cowardly and treacherous thing that circumstances permitted to me—displayed to what an extent my power of folly and stupidity could carry me. I saw these strange bright eyes, whose power I felt, coming toward me. In one second they would be upon me. I felt myself white with anxiety. His eyes were coming—coming—slowly, surely. They had fallen upon Vincent, and he nodded to him. They fell upon me. It was for the tenth of a second only. I saw a look of recognition flash into his eyes—upon his face. I saw that he was going to bow to me. With (as it seemed to me) all the blood in my veins rushing to my face, my head swimming, my heart beating, I dropped my eyes to the play-bill upon my lap, and stared at the crabbed German characters—the names of the players, the characters they took. "Elsa—Lohengrin." I

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read them again and again, while my ears were singing, my heart beating so, and I thought every one in the theater knew and was looking at me.

“Mind you listen to the overture, Miss Wedderburn,” said Vincent, hastily, in my ear, as the first liquid, yearning, long-drawn notes sounded from the violins.

“Yes,” said I, raising my face at last, looking or rather feeling a look compelled from me, to the place where he sat. This time our eyes met fully. I do not know what I felt when I saw him look at me as unrecognizingly as if I had been a wooden doll in a shop window. Was he looking past me? No. His eyes met mine direct—glance for glance; not a sign, not a quiver of the mouth, not a waver of the eyelids. I heard no more of the overture. When he was playing, and so occupied with his music, I surveyed him surreptitiously; when he was not playing, I kept my eyes fixed firmly upon my play-bill. I did not know whether to be most distressed at my own disloyalty to a kind friend, or most appalled to find that the man with whom I had spent a whole afternoon in the firm conviction that he was outwardly, as well as inwardly, my equal and a gentleman—(how the tears, half of shame, half of joy, rise to my eyes now as I think of my poor, pedantic little scruples then!) the man of whom I had assuredly thought and dreamed many and many a time and oft was—a professional musician, a man in a band, a German band, playing in the public orchestra of a provincial town. Well! well!

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In our village at home, where the population consisted of clergymen’s widows, daughters of deceased naval officers, and old women in general, and those old women ladies of the genteel description—the Army and the Church (for which I had been brought up to have the deepest veneration and esteem, as the two head powers in our land—for we did not take Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool into account at Skernford)—the Army and the Church, I say, look down a little upon Medicine and the Law, as being perhaps more necessary, but less select factors in that great sum—the Nation, Medicine and the Law looked down very decidedly upon commercial wealth, and Commerce in her turn turned up her nose at retail establishments, while one and all—Church and Army, Law and Medicine, Commerce in the gross and Commerce in the little—united in pointing the finger at artists, musicians, literati, *et id omne genus*, considering them, with some few well-known and orthodox exceptions, as bohemians, and calling them “persons.” They were a class with whom we had and could have nothing in common; so utterly outside our life that we scarcely ever gave a thought to their existence. We read of pictures, and wished to see them; heard of musical wonders, and desired to hear them—as pictures, as compositions. I do not think it ever entered our heads to remember that a man with a quick life throbbing in his veins, with feelings, hopes, and fears and thoughts, painted the picture, and that in seeing it we also saw him—that a consciousness, if possible, yet more keen and vivid produced the combinations of sound which brought tears to our eyes when we heard “the band”—beautiful abstraction—play them! Certainly we never considered the performers as anything more than people who could play—one who blew his breath into a brass tube; another into a wooden pipe; one who scraped a small fiddle with fine strings, another who scraped a big one with coarse strings.

I was seventeen, and not having an original mind, had up to now judged things from earlier teachings and impressions. I do not ask to be excused. I only say that I was ignorant as ever even a girl of seventeen was. I did not know the amount of art and culture which lay among those rather shabby-looking members of the Elberthal *städtische Kapelle*—did not know that that little cherubic-faced man, who drew his bow so lovingly across his violin, had played under Mendelssohn’s conductorship, and could tell tales about how the master had drilled his band, and what he had said about the first performance of the “Lobgesang.” The young man to whom I had seen Courvoisier speaking was—I learned it later—a performer to ravish the senses, a conductor in the true sense—not a mere man who waves the stick up and down, but one who can put some of the meaning of the music into his gestures and dominate his players. I did not know that the musicians before me were nearly all true artists, and some of them undoubted gentlemen to boot, even if their income averaged something under that of a skilled Lancashire operative. But even if I had known it as well as possible, and had been aware that there could be nothing derogatory in my knowing or being known by one of them, I could not have been more wretched than I was in having been, as it were, false to a friend. The dreadful thing was, or ought to be—I could not quite decide which—that such a person should have been my friend.

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“How he must despise me!” I thought, my cheeks burning, my eyes fastened upon the play-bill. “I owe him ten shillings. If he likes he can point me out to them all and say, ‘That is an English girl—lady I can not call her. I found her quite alone and lost at Köln, and I did all I could to help her. I saved her a great deal of anxiety and inconvenience. She was not above accepting my assistance; she confided her story very freely to me; she is nothing very particular—has nothing to boast of—no money, no knowledge, nothing superior; in fact, she is simple and ignorant to quite a surprising extent; but she has just cut me dead. What do you think of her?’”

Until the curtain went up, I sat in torture. When the play began, however, even my discomfort vanished in my wonder at the spectacle. It was the first I had seen. Try to picture it, oh, worn-out and *blasé* frequenter of play and opera! Try to realize the feelings of an impressionable young person of seventeen when “Lohengrin” was revealed to her for the first time—Lohengrin, the mystic knight, with the glamour of eld upon him—Lohengrin, sailing in blue and silver like a dream, in his swan-drawn boat, stepping majestic forth, and speaking in a voice of purest melody, as he thanks the bird and dismisses it:

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“Dahin, woher mich trug dein Kahn

Kehr wieder mir zu unserm Glück!
Drum sei getreu dein Dienst gethan,
Leb wohl, leb wohl, mein lieber Schwan."

Elsa, with the wonder, the gratitude, the love, and alas! the weakness in her eyes! The astonished Brabantine men and women. They could not have been more astonished than I was. It was all perfectly real to me. What did I know about the stage? To me, yonder figure in blue mantle and glittering armor was Lohengrin, the son of Percivale, not Herr Siegel, the first tenor of the company, who acted stiffly, and did not know what to do with his legs. The lady in black velvet and spangles, who gesticulated in a corner, was an "Edelfrau" to me, as the programme called her, not the chorus leader, with two front teeth missing, an inartistically made-up countenance, and large feet. I sat through the first act with my eyes riveted upon the stage. What a thrill shot through me as the tenor embraced the soprano, and warbled melodiously, "*Elsa, ich liebe Dich!*" My mouth and eyes were wide open, I have no doubt, till at last the curtain fell. With a long sigh I slowly brought my eyes down and "Lohengrin" vanished like a dream. There was Eugen Courvoisier standing up—he had resumed the old attitude—was twirling his mustache and surveying the company. Some of the other performers were leaving the orchestra by two little doors. If only he would go too! As I nervously contemplated a graceful indifferent remark to Herr Brinks, who sat next to me, I saw Courvoisier step forward. Was he, could he be going to speak to me? I should have deserved it, I knew, but I felt as if I should die under the ordeal. I sat preternaturally still, and watched, as if mesmerized, the approach of the musician. He spoke again to the young man whom I had seen before, and they both laughed. Perhaps he had confided the whole story to him, and was telling him to observe what he was going to do. Then Herr Courvoisier tapped the young man on the shoulder and laughed again, and then he came on. He was not looking at me; he came up to the boarding, leaned his elbow upon it, and said to Eustace Vincent:

"Good-evening: *wie geht's Ihnen?*"

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Vincent held out his hand. "Very well, thanks. And you? I haven't seen you lately."

"Then you haven't been at the theater lately," he laughed. He never testified to me by word or look that he had ever seen me before. At last I got to understand as his eyes repeatedly fell upon me without the slightest sign of recognition, that he did not intend to claim my acquaintance. I do not know whether I was most wretched or most relieved at the discovery. It spared me a great deal of embarrassment; it filled me, too, with inward shame beyond all description. And then, too, I was dismayed to find how totally I had mistaken the position of the musician. Vincent was talking eagerly to him. They had moved a little nearer the other end of the orchestra. The young man, Helfen, had come up, others had joined them. I, meanwhile, sat still—heard every tone of his voice, and took in every gesture of his head or his hand, and I felt as I trust never to feel again—and yet I lived in some such feeling as that for what at least seemed to me a long time. What was the feeling that clutched me—held me fast—seemed to burn me? And what was that I heard? Vincent speaking:

"Last Thursday week, Courvoisier—why didn't you come? We were waiting for you?"

"I missed the train."

Until now he had been speaking German, but he said this distinctly in English and I heard every word.

"Missed the train?" cried Vincent in his cracked voice.

"Nonsense, man! Helfen, here, and Alekotte were in time and they had been at the probe as much as you."

"I was detained in Köln and couldn't get back till evening," said he. "Come along, Friedel; there's the call-bell."

I raised my eyes—met his. I do not know what expression was in mine. His never wavered, though he looked at me long and steadily—no glance of recognition—no sign still. I would have risked the astonishment of every one of them now, for a sign that he remembered me. None was given.

"Lohengrin" had no more attraction for me. I felt in pain that was almost physical, and weak with excitement as at last the curtain fell and we left our places.

"You were very quiet," said Vincent, as we walked home. "Did you not enjoy it?"

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"Very much, thank you. It was very beautiful," said I, faintly.

"So Herr Courvoisier was not at the *soirée*," said the loud, rough voice of Anna Sartorius.

"No," was all Vincent said.

"Did you have anything new? Was Herr von Francius there too?"

"Yes; he was there too."

I pondered. Brinks whistled loudly the air of Elsa's "Brautzug," as we paced across the Lindenallée. We had not many paces to go. The lamps were lighted, the people were thronging

thick as in the daytime. The air was full of laughter, talk, whistling and humming of the airs from the opera. My ear strained eagerly through the confusion. I could have caught the faintest sound of Courvoisier's voice had it been there, but it was not. And we came home; Vincent opened the door with his latch-key, said, "It has not been very brilliant, has it? That tenor is a stick," and we all went to our different rooms. It was in such wise that I met Eugen Courvoisier for the second time.

CHAPTER XI.

"Will you sing?"

The theater season closed with that evening on which "Lohengrin" was performed. I ran no risk of meeting Courvoisier face to face again in that alarming, sudden manner. But the subject had assumed diseased proportions in my mind. I found myself confronted with him yet, and week after week. My business in Elberthal was music—to learn as much music and hear as much music as I could: wherever there was music there was also Eugen Courvoisier—naturally. There was only one *städtische Kapelle* in Elberthal. Once a week at least—each Saturday—I saw him, and he saw me at the unfailing instrumental concert to which every one in the house went, and to absent myself from which would instantly set every one wondering what could be my motive for it. My usual companions were Clara Steinmann, Vincent, the Englishman, and often Frau Steinmann herself. Anna Sartorius and some other girl students of art usually brought sketch-books, and were far too much occupied in making studies or caricatures of the audience to pay much attention to the music. The audience were, however, hardened; they were used to it. Anna and her friends were not alone in the practice. There were a dozen or more artists or *soi-disant* artists busily engaged with their sketch-books. The concert-room offered a rich field to them. One could at least be sure of one thing—that they were not taking off the persons at whom they looked most intently. There must be quite a gallery hidden away in some old sketch-books—of portraits or wicked caricatures of the audience that frequented the concerts of the Instrumental Musik Verein. I wonder where they all are? Who has them? What has become of the light-hearted sketchers? I often recall those homely Saturday evening concerts; the long, shabby saal with its faded out-of-date decorations; its rows of small tables with the well-known groups around them; the mixed and motley audience. How easy, after a little while, to pick out the English, by their look of complacent pleasure at the delightful ease and unceremoniousness of the whole affair; their gladness at finding a public entertainment where one's clothes were not obliged to be selected with a view to outshining those of every one else in the room; the students shrouded in a mystery, secret and impenetrable, of tobacco smoke. The spruce-looking school-boys from the Gymnasium and Realschule, the old captains and generals, the Fräulein their daughters, the *gnädigen Frauen* their wives; dressed in the disastrous plaids, checks, and stripes, which somehow none but German women ever got hold of. Shades of Le Follet! What costumes there were on young and old for an observing eye! What bonnets, what boots, what stupendously daring accumulation of colors and styles and periods of dress crammed and piled on the person of one substantial Frau Generalin, or Doctorin or Professorin! The low orchestra—the tall, slight, yet commanding figure of von Francius on the estrade; his dark face with its indescribable mixture of pride, impenetrability and insouciance; the musicians behind him—every face of them well known to the audience as those of the audience to them: it was not a mere "concert," which in England is another word for so much expense and so much vanity—it was a gathering of friends. We knew the music in which the Kapelle was most at home; we knew their strong points and their weak ones; the passage in the Pastoral Symphony where the second violins were a little weak; that overture where the blaseninstrumente came out so well—the symphonies one heard—the divine wealth of undying art and beauty! Those days are past: despite what I suffered in them they had their joys for me. Yes; I suffered at those concerts. I must ever see the one face which for me blotted out all others in the room, and endure the silent contempt which I believed I saw upon it. Probably it was my own feeling of inward self-contempt which made me believe I saw that expression there. His face had for me a miserable, basilisk-like attraction. When I was there he was there, I must look at him and endure the silent, smiling disdain which I at least believed he bestowed upon me. How did he contrive to do it? How often our eyes met, and every time it happened he looked me full in the face, and never would give me the faintest gleam of recognition! It was as though I looked at two diamonds, which returned my stare unwinkingly and unseeingly. I managed to make myself thoroughly miserable—pale and thin with anxiety and self-reproach I let this man, and the speculation concerning him, take up my whole thoughts, and I kept silence, because I dreaded so intensely lest any question should bring out the truth. I smiled drearily when I thought that there certainly was no danger of any one but Miss Hallam ever knowing it, for the only person who could have betrayed me chose now, of deliberate purpose, to cut me as completely as I had once cut him.

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As if to show very decidedly that he did intend to cut me, I met him one day, not in the street, but in the house, on the stairs. He sprung up the steps, two at a time, came to a momentary pause on the landing, and looked at me. No look of surprise, none of recognition. He raised his hat; that was nothing; in ordinary politeness he would have done it had he never seen me in his life before. The same cold, bright, hard glance fell upon me, keen as an eagle's, and as devoid of every gentle influence as the same.

I silently held out my hand.

He looked at it for a moment, then with a grave coolness which chilled me to the soul, murmured something about "not having the honor," bowed slightly, and stepping forward, walked into Vincent's room.

I was going to the room in which my piano stood, where I had my music lessons, for they had told me that Herr von Francius was waiting. I looked at him as I went into the room. How different he was from that other man; darker, more secret, more scornful-looking, with not less power, but so much less benevolence. [Pg 77]

I was *distract*, and sung exceedingly ill. We had been going through the solo soprano parts of the "Paradise Lost." I believe I sang vilely that morning. I was not thinking of Eva's sin and the serpent, but of other things, which, despite the story related in the Book of Genesis, touched me more nearly. Several times already had he made me sing through Eva's stammering answer to her God's question:

"Ah, Lord!... The Serpent!
The beautiful, glittering Serpent,
With his beautiful, glittering words,
He, Lord, did lead astray
The weak Woman!"

"Bah!" exclaimed von Francius, when I had sung it some three or four times, each time worse, each time more distractedly. He flung the music upon the floor, and his eyes flashed, startling me from my uneasy thoughts back to the present. He was looking at me with a dark cloud upon his face. I stared, stooped meekly, and picked up the music.

"Fräulein, what are you dreaming about?" he asked, impatiently. "You are not singing Eva's shame and dawning terror as she feels herself undone. You are singing—and badly, too—a mere sentimental song, such as any school-girl might stumble through. I am ashamed of you."

"I—I," stammered I, crimsoning, and ashamed for myself too.

"You were thinking of something else," he said, his brow clearing a little. "*Na!* it comes so sometimes. Something has happened to distract your attention. The amiable Miss Hallam has been a little *more* amiable than usual."

"No."

"Well, well. '*S ist mir egal.* But now, as you have wasted half an hour in vanity and vexation, will you be good enough to let your thoughts return here to me and to your duty? or else—I must go, and leave the lesson till you are in the right voice again." [Pg 78]

"I am all right—try me," said I, my pride rising in arms as I thought of Courvoisier's behavior a short time ago.

"Very well. Now. You are Eva, please remember, the first woman, and you have gone wrong. Think of who is questioning you, and—"

"Oh, yes, yes, I know. Please begin."

He began the accompaniment, and I sang for the fifth time Eva's scattered notes of shame and excuse.

"Brava!" said he, when I had finished, and I was the more startled as he had never before given me the faintest sign of approval, but had found such constant fault with me that I usually had a fit of weeping after my lesson; weeping with rage and disappointment at my own shortcomings.

"At last you know what it means," said he. "I always told you your forte was dramatic singing."

"Dramatic! But this is an oratorio."

"It may be called an oratorio, but it is a drama all the same. What more dramatic, for instance, than what you have just sung, and all that goes before? Now suppose we go on. I will take Adam."

Having given myself up to the music, I sang my best with earnestness. When we had finished von Francius closed the book, looked at me, and said:

"Will you sing the 'Eva' music at the concert?"

"I?"

He bowed silently, and still kept his eyes fixed upon my face, as if to say, "Refuse if you dare."

"I—I'm afraid I should make such a mess of it," I murmured at last.

"Why any more than to-day?"

"Oh! but all the people!" said I, expostulating; "it is so different."

He gave a little laugh of some amusement.

"How odd! and yet how like you!" said he. "Do you suppose that the people who will be at the

concert will be half as much alive to your defects as I am? If you can sing before me, surely you can sing before so many rows of—”

“Cabbages? I wish I could think they were.”

“Nonsense! What would be the use, where the pleasure, in singing to cabbages? I mean simply inhabitants of Elberthal. What can there be so formidable about them?” [Pg 79]

I murmured something.

“Well, will you do it?”

“I am sure I should break down,” said I, trying to find some sign of relenting in his eyes. I discovered none. He was not waiting to hear whether I said “yes” or “no,” he was waiting until I said “yes.”

“If you did,” he replied, with a friendly smile, “I should never teach you another note.”

“Why not?”

“Because you would be a coward, and not worth teaching.”

“But Miss Hallam?”

“Leave her to me.”

I still hesitated.

“It is the *premier pas qui coûte*,” said he, keeping a friendly but determined gaze upon my undecided face.

“I want to accustom you to appearing in public,” he added. “By degrees, you know. There is nothing unusual in Germany for one in your position to sing in such a concert.”

“I was not thinking of that; but that it is impossible that I can sing well enough—”

“You sing well enough for my purpose. You will be amazed to find what an impetus to your studies, and what a filip to your industry will be given by once singing before a number of other people. And then, on the stage—”

“But I am not going on the stage.”

“I think you are. At least, if you do otherwise you will do wrong. You have gifts which are in themselves a responsibility.”

“I—gifts—what gifts?” I asked, incredulously. “I am as stupid as a donkey. My sisters always said so, and sisters are sure to know; you may trust them for that.”

“Then you will take the soprano solos?”

“Do you think I can?”

“I don’t think you can; I say you must. I will call upon Miss Hallam this afternoon. And the *gage*—fee—what you call it?—is fifty thalers.”

“What!” I cried, my whole attitude changing to one of greedy expectation. “Shall I be paid?” [Pg 80]

“Why, *natürlich*,” said he, turning over sheets of music, and averting his face to hide a smile.

“Oh! then I will sing.”

“Good! Only please to remember that it is my concert, and I am responsible for the soloists; and pray think rather more about the beautiful glittering serpent than about the beautiful glittering thalers.”

“I can think about both,” was my unholy, time-serving reply.

Fifty thalers. Untold gold!

CHAPTER XII.

“Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter.”

It was the evening of the haupt-probe, a fine moonlight night in the middle of May—a month since I had come to Elberthal, and it seemed so much, so very much more.

To my astonishment—and far from agreeable astonishment—Anna Sartorius informed me of her intention to accompany me to the probe. I put objections in her way as well as I knew how, and said I did not think outsiders were admitted. She laughed, and said:

“That is too funny, that you should instruct me in such things. Why, I have a ticket for all the proben, as any one can have who chooses to pay two thalers at the *sasse*. I have a mind to hear

this. They say the orchestra are going to rebel against von Francius. And I am going to the concert to-morrow, too. One can not hear too much of such fine music; and when one's friend sings, too—"

"What friend of yours is going to sing?" I inquired, coldly.

"Why, you, you *allerliebster kleiner Engel*," said she, in a tone of familiarity, to which I strongly objected.

I could say no more against her going, but certainly displayed no enthusiastic desire for her company.

The probe, we found, was to be in the great saal; it was half lighted, and there were perhaps some fifty people, holders of probe-tickets, seated in the parquet.

"You are going to sing well to-night," said von Francius, as he handed me up the steps—"for my sake and your own, *nicht wahr?*"

"I will try," said, I, looking round the great orchestra, and seeing how full it was—so many fresh faces, both in chorus and orchestra. [Pg 81]

And as I looked, I saw Courvoisier come in by the little door at the top of the orchestra steps and descend to his place. His face was clouded—very clouded; I had never seen him look thus before. He had no smile for those who greeted him. As he took his place beside Helfen, and the latter asked him some question, he stared absently at him, then answered with a look of absence and weariness.

"Herr Courvoisier," said von Francius—and I, being near, heard the whole dialogue—"you always allow yourself to be waited for."

Courvoisier glanced up. I with a new, sudden interest, watched the behavior of the two men. In the face of von Francius I thought to discover dislike, contempt.

"I beg your pardon; I was detained," answered Courvoisier, composedly.

"It is unfortunate that you should be so often detained at the time when your work should be beginning."

Unmoved and unchanging, Courvoisier heard and submitted to the words, and to the tone in which they were spoken—sarcastic, sneering, and unbelieving.

"Now we will begin," pursued von Francius, with a disagreeable smile, as he rapped with his baton upon the rail. I looked at Courvoisier—looked at his friend, Friedhelm Helfen. The former was sitting as quietly as possible, rather pale, and with the same clouded look, but not deeper than before; the latter was flushed, and eyed von Francius with no friendly glance.

There seemed a kind of slumbering storm in the air. There was none of the lively discussion usual at the proben. Courvoisier, first of the first violins, and from whom all the others seemed to take their tone, sat silent, grave and still. Von Francius, though quiet, was biting. I felt afraid of him. Something must have happened to put him into that evil mood.

My part did not come until late in the second part of the oratorio. I had almost forgotten that I was to sing at all, and was watching von Francius and listening to his sharp speeches. I remembered what Anna Sartorius had said in describing this *haupt-probe* to me. It was all just as she had said. He was severe; his speeches roused the phlegmatic blood, set the professional instrumentalists laughing at their amateur co-operators, but provoked no reply or resentment. It was extraordinary, the effect of this man's will upon those he had to do with—upon women in particular. [Pg 82]

There was one haughty-looking blonde—a Swede—tall, majestic, with long yellow curls, and a face full of pride and high temper, who gave herself decided airs, and trusted to her beauty and insolence to carry off certain radical defects of harshness of voice and want of ear. I never forgot how she stared me down from head to foot on the occasion of my first appearance alone, as if to say, "What do you want here?"

It was in vain that she looked haughty and handsome. Addressing her as *Fräulein Hulstrom*, von Francius gave her a sharp lecture, and imitated the effect of her voice in a particularly soft passage with ludicrous accuracy. The rest of the chorus was tittering audibly, the musicians, with the exception of Courvoisier and his friend, nudging each other and smiling. She bridled haughtily, flashed a furious glance at her mentor, grew crimson, received a sarcastic smile which baffled her, and subsided again.

So it was with them all. His blame was plentiful; his praise so rare as to be almost an unknown quantity. His chorus and orchestra were famed for the minute perfection and precision of their play and singing. Perhaps the performance lacked something else—passion, color. Von Francius, at that time at least, was no genius, though his talent, his power, and his method were undeniably great. He was, however, not popular—not the Harold, the "beloved leader" of his people.

It was to-night that I was first shown how all was not smooth for him; that in this art union there were splits—"little rifts within the lute," which, should they extend, might literally in the end "make the music mute." I heard whispers around me. "Herr von Francius is angry."—"Nicht

wahr?"—"Herr Courvoisier looks angry too."—"Yes, he does."—"There will be an open quarrel there soon."—"I think so."—"They are both clever; one should be less clever than the other."—"They are so opposed."—"Yes. They say Courvoisier has a party of his own, and that all the orchestra are on his side."—"So!" in accents of curiosity and astonishment—"Ja wohl! And that if von Francius does not mind, he will see Herr Courvoisier in his place," etc., etc., without end. All which excited me much, as the first glimpse into the affairs of those about whom we think much and know little (a form of life well known to women in general) always does interest us.

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These things made me forget to be nervous or anxious. I saw myself now as part of the whole, a unit in the sum of a life which interested me. Von Francius gave me a sign of approval when I had finished, but it was a mechanical one. He was thinking of other things.

The probe was over. I walked slowly down the room looking for Anna Sartorius, more out of politeness than because I wished for her company. I was relieved to find that she had already gone, probably not finding all the entertainment she expected, and I was able, with a good conscience, to take my way home alone.

My way home! not yet. I was to live through something before I could take my way home.

I went out of the large saal through the long veranda into the street. A flood of moonlight silvered it. There was a laughing, chattering crowd about me—all the chorus; men and girls, going to their homes or their lodgings, in ones or twos, or in large cheerful groups. Almost opposite the Tonhalle was a tall house, one of a row, and of this house the lowest floor was used as a shop for antiquities, curiosities, and a thousand odds and ends useful or beautiful to artists, costumes, suits of armor, old china, anything and everything. The window was yet lighted. As I paused for a moment before taking my homeward way, I saw two men cross the moonlit street and go in at the open door of the shop. One was Courvoisier; in the other I thought to recognize Friedhelm Helfen, but was not quite sure about it. They did not go into the shop, as I saw by the bright large lamp that burned within, but along the passage and up the stairs. I followed them, resolutely beating down shyness, unwillingness, timidity. My reluctant steps took me to the window of the antiquity shop, and I stood looking in before I could make up my mind to enter. Bits of rococo ware stood in the window, majolica jugs, chased metal dishes and bowls, bits of Renaissance work, tapestry, carpet, a helm with the vizor up, gaping at me as if tired of being there. I slowly drew my purse from my pocket, put together three thalers and a ten groschen piece, and with lingering, unwilling steps, entered the shop. A pretty young woman in a quaint dress, which somehow harmonized with the place, came forward. She looked at me as if wondering what I could possibly want. My very agitation gave calmness to my voice as I inquired,

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"Does Herr Courvoisier, a musiker, live here?"

"Ja wohl!" answered the young woman, with a look of still greater surprise. "On the third *étage*, straight upstairs. The name is on the door."

I turned away, and went slowly up the steep wooden uncarpeted staircase. On the first landing a door opened at the sound of my footsteps, and a head was popped out—a rough, fuzzy head, with a pale, eager-looking face under the bush of hair.

"Ugh!" said the owner of this amiable visage, and shut the door with a bang. I looked at the plate upon it; it bore the legend, "Hermann Duntze, Maler." To the second *étage*. Another door—another plate: "Bernhardt Knoop, Maler." The house seemed to be a resort of artists. There was a lamp burning on each landing; and now, at last, with breath and heart alike failing, I ascended the last flight of stairs, and found myself upon the highest *étage* before another door, on which was roughly painted up, "Eugen Courvoisier." I looked at it with my heart beating suffocatingly. Some one had scribbled in red chalk beneath the Christian name, "Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter." Had it been done in jest or earnest? I wondered, and then knocked. Such a knock!

"*Herein!*"

I opened the door, and stepped into a large, long, low room. On the table, in the center, burned a lamp, and sitting there, with the light falling upon his earnest young face, was Helfen, the violinist, and near to him sat Courvoisier, with a child upon his knee, a little lad with immense dark eyes, tumbled black hair, and flushed, just awakened face. He was clad in his night-dress and a little red dressing-gown, and looked like a spot of almost feverish, quite tropic brightness in contrast with the grave, pale face which bent over him. Courvoisier held the two delicate little hands in one of his own, and was looking down with love unutterable upon the beautiful, dazzling child-face. Despite the different complexion and a different style of feature too, there was so great a likeness in the two faces, particularly in the broad, noble brow, as to leave no doubt of the relationship. My musician and the boy were father and son.

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Courvoisier looked up as I came in. For one half moment there leaped into his eyes a look of surprise and of something more. If it had lasted a second longer I could have sworn it was welcome—then it was gone. He rose, turned the child over to Helfen, saying, "One moment, Friedel," then turned to me as to some stranger who had come on an errand as yet unknown to him, and did not speak. The little one, from Helfen's knee, stared at me with large, solemn eyes, and Helfen himself looked scarcely less impressed.

I have no doubt I looked frightened—I felt so—frightened out of my senses. I came tremulously forward, and offering my pieces of silver, said, in the smallest voice which I had ever used:

"I have come to pay my debt. I did not know where you lived, or I should have done it long before."

He made no motion to take the money, but said—I almost started, so altered was the voice from that of my frank companion at Köln, to an icy coldness of ceremony:

"*Mein Fräulein*, I do not understand."

"You—you—the things you paid for. Do you not remember me?"

"Remember a lady who has intimated that she wishes me to forget her? No, I do not."

What a horribly complicated revenge! thought I, as I said, ever lower and lower, more and more shamedfacedly, while the young violinist sat with the child on his knee, and his soft brown eyes staring at me in wonder:

"I think you must remember. You helped me at Köln, and you paid for my ticket to Elberthal, and for something that I had at the hotel. You told me that was what I owed you."

I again tendered the money; again he made no effort to receive it, but said:

"I am sorry that I do not understand to what you refer. I only know it is impossible that I could ever have told you you owed me three thalers, or three anything, or that there could, under any circumstances, be any question of money between you and me. Suppose we consider the topic at an end."

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Such a voice of ice, and such a manner, to chill the boldest heart, I had never yet encountered. The cool, unspeakable disdain cut me to the quick.

"You have no right to refuse the money," said I, desperately. "You have no right to insult me by—by—" An appropriate peroration refused itself.

Again the sweet, proud, courteous smile; not only courteous, but courtly; again the icy little bow of the head, which would have done credit to a prince in displeasure, and which yet had the deference due from a gentleman to a lady.

"You will excuse the semblance of rudeness which may appear if I say that if you unfortunately are not of a very decided disposition, I am. It is impossible that I should ever have the slightest intercourse with a lady who has once unequivocally refused my acquaintance. The lady may honor me by changing her mind; I am sorry that I can not respond. I do not change my mind."

"You must let us part on equal terms," I reiterated. "It is unjust—"

"Yourself closed all possibility of the faintest attempt at further acquaintance, *mein Fräulein*. The matter is at an end."

"Herr Courvoisier, I—"

"At an end," he repeated, calmly, gently, looking at me as he had often looked at me since the night of "Lohengrin," with a glance that baffled and chilled me.

"I wish to apologize—"

"For what?" he inquired, with the faintest possible look of indifferent surprise.

"For my rudeness—my surprise—I—"

"You refer to one evening at the opera. You exercised your privilege, as a lady, of closing an acquaintance which you did not wish to renew. I now exercise mine, as a gentleman, of saying that I choose to abide by that decision, now and always."

I was surprised. Despite my own apologetic frame of mind, I was surprised at his hardness; at the narrowness and ungenerosity which could so determinedly shut the door in the face of an humble penitent like me. He must see how I had repented the stupid slip I had made; he must see how I desired to atone for it. It was not a slip of the kind one would name irreparable, and yet he behaved to me as if I had committed a crime; froze me with looks and words. Was he so self-conscious and so vain that he could not get over that small slight to his self-consequence, committed in haste and confusion by an ignorant girl? Even then, even in that moment I asked myself these questions, my astonishment being almost as great as my pain, for it was the very reverse, the very opposite of what I had pictured to myself. Once let me see him and speak to him, I had said to myself, and it would be all right; every lineament of his face, every tone of his voice, bespoke a frank, generous nature—one that could forgive. Alas! and alas! this was the truth!

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He had come to the door; he stood by it now, holding it open, looking at me so courteously, so deferentially, with a manner of one who had been a gentleman and lived with gentlemen all his life, but in a way which at the same time ordered me out as plainly as possible.

I went to the door. I could no longer stand under that chilling glance, nor endure the cool, polished contempt of the manner. I behaved by no means heroically; neither flung my head back, nor muttered any defiance, nor in any way proved myself a person of spirit. All I could do was to look appealingly into his face; to search the bright, steady eyes, without finding in them any hint of softening or relenting.

"Will you not take it, please?" I asked, in a quivering voice and with trembling lips.

"Impossible, *mein Fräulein*," with the same chilly little bow as before.

Struggling to repress my tears, I said no more, but passed out, cut to the heart. The door was closed gently behind me. I felt as if it had closed upon a bright belief of my youth. I leaned for a moment against the passage wall and pressed my hand against my eyes. From within came the sound of a child's voice, "*Mein vater*," and the soft, deep murmur of Eugen's answer; then I went down-stairs and into the open street.

That hated, hateful three thalers ten groschen were still clasped in my hand. What was I to do with it? Throw it into the Rhine, and wash it away forever? Give it to some one in need? Fling it into the gutter? Send it him by post? I dismissed that idea for what it was worth. No; I would obey his prohibition. I would keep it—those very coins, and when I felt inclined to be proud and conceited about anything on my own account, or disposed to put down superhuman charms to the account of others, I would go and look at them, and they would preach me eloquent sermons.

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As I went into the house, up the stairs to my room, the front door opened again and Anna Sartorius overtook me.

"I thought you had left the probe?" said I, staring at her.

"So I had, *Herzchen*," said she, with her usual ambiguous, mocking laugh; "but I was not compelled to come home, like a good little girl, the moment I came out of the Tonhalle. I have been visiting a friend. But where have you been, for the probe must have been over for some time? We heard the people go past; indeed, some of them were staying in the house where I was. Did you take a walk in the moonlight?"

"Good-night," said I, too weary and too indifferent even to answer her.

"It must have been a tiring walk; you seem weary, quite *ermüdet*," said she, mockingly, and I made no answer.

"A haupt-probe is a dismal thing after all," she called out to me from the top of the stairs.

From my inmost heart I agreed with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

KAFFEEKLATSCH.

Phillis. I want none o' thy
friendship!

Lesbia. Then take my enmity!"

"When a number of ladies meet together to discuss matters of importance, we call it 'Kaffeeklatsch,'" Courvoisier had said to me on that never-forgotten afternoon of my adventure at Köln.

It was my first kaffeeklatsch which, in a measure, decided my destiny. Hitherto, that is, up to the end of June, I had not been at any entertainment of this kind. At last there came an invitation to Frau Steinmann and to Anna Sartorius, to assist at a "coffee" of unusual magnitude, and Frau Steinmann suggested that I should go with them and see what it was like. Nothing loath, I consented.

"Bring some work," said Anna Sartorius to me, "or you will find it *langweilig*—slow, I mean."

"Shall we not have some music?"

"Music, yes, the sweetest of all—that of our own tongues. You shall hear every one's candid opinion of every one else—present company always excepted, and you will see what the state of Elberthal society really is—present company still excepted. By a very strange chance the ladies who meet at a klatsch are always good, pious, virtuous, and, above all, charitable. It is wonderful how well we manage to keep the black sheep out, and have nothing but lambs immaculate."

"Oh, don't!"

"Oh, bah! I know the Elberthal *Klatscherei*. It has picked me to pieces many a time. After you have partaken to-day of its coffee and its cakes, it will pick you to pieces."

"But," said I, arranging the ruffles of my very best frock, which I had been told it was *de rigueur* to wear, "I thought women never gossiped so much among men."

Fräulein Sartorius laughed loud and long.

"The men! *Du meine Güte!* Men at a kaffeeklatsch! Show me the one that a man dare even look

into, and I'll crown you—and him too—with laurel, and bay, and the wild parsley. A man at a kaffee—*mag Gott es bewahren!*”

“Oh!” said I, half disappointed, and with a very poor, mean sense of dissatisfaction at having put on my pretty new dress for the first time only for the edification of a number of virulent gossips.

“Men!” she reiterated with a harsh laugh as we walked toward the Goldsternstrasse, our destination. “Men—no. We despise their company, you see. We only talk about them directly or indirectly from the moment of meeting to that of parting.”

“I'm sorry there are no gentlemen,” said I, and I was. I felt I looked well.

Arrived at the scene of the kaffee, we were conducted to a bedroom where we laid aside our hats and mantles. I was standing before the glass, drawing a comb through my upturned hair, and contemplating with irrepressible satisfaction the delicate lavender hue of my dress, when I suddenly saw reflected behind me the dark, harshly cut face of Anna Sartorius. She started slightly; then said, with a laugh which had in it something a little forced:

“We are a contrast, aren't we? Beauty and the Beast, one might almost say. *Na! 's schad' t nix.*”

I turned away in a little offended pride. Her familiarity annoyed me. What if she were a thousand times cleverer, wittier, better read than I? I did not like her. A shade crossed her face.

“Is it that you are thoroughly unamiable?” said she, in a voice which had reproach in it, “or are all English girls so touchy that they receive a compliment upon their good looks as if it were an offense?”

“I wish you would not talk of my ‘good looks’ as if I were a dog or a horse!” said I, angrily. “I hate to be flattered. I am no beauty, and do not wish to be treated as if I were.”

“Do you always hate it?” said she from the window, whither she had turned. “*Ach!* there goes Herr Courvoisier!”

The name startled me like a sudden report. I made an eager step forward before I had time to recollect myself—then stopped.

“He is not out of sight yet,” said she, with a curious look, “if you wish to see him.”

I sat down and made no answer. What prompted her to talk in such a manner? Was it a mere coincidence?

“He is a handsome fellow, *nicht wahr?*” she said, still watching me, while I thought Frau Steinmann never would manage to arrange her cap in the style that pleased her. “But a *Taugenichts* all the same,” pursued Anna as I did not speak. “Don't you think so?” she added.

“A *Taugenichts*—I don't know what that is.”

“What you call a good-for-nothing.”

“Oh.”

“*Nicht wahr?*” she persisted.

“I know nothing about it.”

“I do. I will tell you all about him some time.”

“I don't wish to know anything about him.”

“So!” said she, with a laugh.

Without further word or look I followed Frau Steinmann down-stairs.

The lady of the house was seated in the midst of a large concourse of old and young ladies, holding her own with a well-seasoned hardihood in the midst of the awful Babel of tongues. What a noise! It smote upon and stunned my confounded ear. Our hostess advanced and led me with a wave of the hand into the center of the room, when she introduced me to about a dozen ladies: and every one in the room stopped talking and working, and stared at me intently and unwinkingly until my name had been pronounced, after which some continued still to stare at me, and commenting openly upon it. Meanwhile I was conducted to a sofa at the end of the room, and requested in a set phrase, “*Bitte, Fräulein, nehmen sie platz auf dem sofa,*” with which long custom has since made me familiar, to take my seat upon it. I humbly tried to decline the honor, but Anna Sartorius, behind me, whispered:

“Sit down directly, unless you want to be thought an utter barbarian. The place has been kept for you.”

Deeply impressed, and very uncomfortable, I sat down. First one and then another came and spoke and talked to me. Their questions and remarks were much in this style:

“Do you like Elberthal? What is your Christian name? How old are you? Have you been or are you engaged to be married? They break off engagements in England for a mere trifle, don't they? *Schrecklich!* Did you get your dress in Elberthal? What did it cost the *elle*? Young English ladies wear silk much more than young German ladies. You never go to the theater on Sunday in

England—you are all *pietistisch*. How beautifully you speak our language! Really no foreign accent!" (This repeatedly and unblushingly, in spite of my most flagrant mistakes, and in the face of my most feeble, halting, and stammering efforts to make myself understood.) "Do you learn music? singing? From whom? Herr von Francius? *Ach, so!*" (Pause, while they all look impressively at me. The very name of von Francius calls up emotions of no common order.) "I believe I have seen you at the proben to the 'Paradise Lost.' Perhaps you are the lady who is to take the solos? Yes! *Du lieber Himmel!* What do you think of Herr von Francius? Is he not nice?" (*Nett*, though, signifies something feminine and finikin.) "No? How odd! There is no accounting for the tastes of English women. Do you know many people in Elberthal? No? *Schade!* No officers? not Hauptmann Sachse?" (with voice growing gradually shriller), "nor Lieutenant Pieper? Not know Lieutenant Pieper! *Um Gotteswillen!* What do you mean? He is so handsome! such eyes! such a mustache! *Herrgott!* And you do not know him? I will tell you something. When he went off to the autumn maneuvers at Frankfort (I have it on good authority), twenty young ladies went to see him off."

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"Disgusting!" I exclaimed, unable to control my feelings any longer. I saw Anna Sartorius malignantly smiling as she rocked herself in an American rocking-chair.

"How! disgusting? You are joking. He had dozens of bouquets. All the girls are in love with him. They compelled the photographer to sell them his photograph, and they all believe he is in love with them. I believe Luise Breidenstein will die if he doesn't propose to her."

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves."

"But he is so handsome, so delightful. He dances divinely, and knows such good riddles, and acts—*ach, himmlisch!*"

"But how absurd to make such a fuss of him!" I cried, hot and indignant. "The idea of going on so about a man!"

A chorus, a shriek, a Babel of expostulations.

"Listen, Thekla! Fräulein Wedderburn does not know Lieutenant Pieper, and does not think it right to *schwärm* for him."

"The darling! No one can help it who knows him!" said another.

"Let her wait till she does know him," said Thekla, a sentimental young woman, pretty in a certain sentimental way, and graceful too—also sentimentally—with the sentiment that lingers about young ladies' albums with leaves of smooth, various-hued note-paper, and about the sonnets which nestle within the same. There was a sudden shriek:

"There he goes! There is the Herr Lieutenant riding by. Just come here, *mein Fräulein!* See him! Judge for yourself!"

A strong hand dragged me, whether I would or not, to the window, and pointed out to me the Herr Lieutenant riding by. An adorable creature in a Hussar uniform; he had pink cheeks and a straight nose, and the loveliest little model of a mustache ever seen; tightly curling black hair, and the dearest little feet and hands imaginable.

"Oh, the dear, handsome, delightful fellow!" cried one enthusiastic young creature, who had scrambled upon a chair in the background and was gazing after him while another, behind me, murmured in tones of emotion:

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"Look how he salutes—divine, isn't it?"

I turned away, smiling an irrepressible smile. My musician, with his ample traits and clear, bold eyes, would have looked a wild, rough, untamable creature by the side of that wax-doll beauty—that pretty little being who had just ridden by. I thought I saw them side by side—Herr Lieutenant Pieper and Eugen Courvoisier. The latter would have been as much more imposing than the former as an oak is more imposing than a spruce fir—as Gluck than Lortzing. And could these enthusiastic young ladies have viewed the two they would have been true to their lieutenant; so much was certain. They would have said that the other was a wild man, who did not cut his hair often enough, who had large hands, whose collar was perhaps chosen more with a view to ease and the free movement of the throat than to the smallest number of inches within which it was possible to confine that throat; who did not wear polished kid boots, and was not seen off from the station by twenty devoted admirers of the opposite sex, was not deluged with bouquets. With a feeling as of something singing at my heart I went back to my place, smiling still.

"See! she is quite charmed with the Herr Lieutenant! Is he not delightful?"

"Oh, very; so is a Dresden china shepherd, but if you let him fall he breaks."

"*Wie komisch!* how odd!" was the universal comment upon my eccentricity. The conversation had wandered off to other military stars, all of whom were *reizend*, *hübsch*, or *nett*. So it went on until I got heartily tired of it, and then the ladies discussed their female neighbors, but I leave that branch of the subject to the intelligent reader. It was the old tune with the old variations, which were rattled over in the accustomed manner. I listened, half curious, half appalled, and thought of various speeches made by Anna Sartorius. Whether she were amiable or not, she had certainly a keen insight into the hearts and motives of her fellow-creatures. Perhaps the gift had

soured her.

Anna and I walked home alone. Frau Steinmann was, with other elderly ladies of the company, to spend the evening there. As we walked down the Königsallee—how well to this day do I remember it! the chestnuts were beginning to fade, the road was dusty, the sun setting gloriously, the people thronging in crowds—she said suddenly, quietly, and in a tone of the utmost composure:

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“So you don’t admire Lieutenant Pieper so much as Herr Courvoisier?”

“What do you mean?” I cried, astonished, alarmed, and wondering what unlucky chance led her to talk to me of Eugen.

“I mean what I say; and for my part I agree with you—partly. Courvoisier, bad though he may be, is a man; the other a mixture of doll and puppy.”

She spoke in a friendly tone; discursive, as if inviting confidence and comment on my part. I was not inclined to give either. I shrunk with morbid nervousness from owning to any knowledge of Eugen. My pride, nay, my very self-esteem, bled whenever I thought of him or heard him mentioned. Above all, I shrunk from the idea of discussing him, or anything pertaining to him, with Anna Sartorius.

“It will be time for you to agree with me when I give you anything to agree about,” said I, coldly. “I know nothing of either of the gentlemen, and wish to know nothing.”

There was a pause. Looking up, I found Anna’s eyes fixed upon my face, amazed, reproachful. I felt myself blushing fierily. My tongue had led me astray; I had lied to her: I knew it.

“Do not say you know nothing of either of the gentlemen. Herr Courvoisier was your first acquaintance in Elberthal.”

“What?” I cried, with a great leap of the heart, for I felt as if a veil had suddenly been rent away from before my eyes and I shown a precipice.

“I saw you arrive with Herr Courvoisier,” said Anna, calmly; “at least, I saw you come from the platform with him, and he put you into a drosky. And I saw you cut him at the opera; and I saw you go into his house after the general probe. Will you tell me again that you know nothing of him? I should have thought you too proud to tell lies.”

“I wish you would mind your own business,” said I, heartily wishing that Anna Sartorius were at the antipodes.

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“Listen!” said she, very earnestly, and, I remember it now, though I did not heed it then, with wistful kindness. “I do not bear malice—you are so young and inexperienced. I wish you were more friendly, but I care for you too much to be rebuffed by a trifle. I will tell you about Courvoisier.”

“Thank you,” said I, hastily, “I beg you will do no such thing.”

“I know his story. I can tell you the truth about him.”

“I decline to discuss the subject,” said I, thinking of Eugen, and passionately refusing the idea of discussing him, gossiping about him, with any one.

Anna looked surprised; then a look of anger crossed her face.

“You can not be in earnest,” said she.

“I assure you I am. I wish you would leave me alone,” I said, exasperated beyond endurance.

“You don’t wish to know what I can tell you about him?”

“No, I don’t. What is more, if you begin talking to me about him, I will put my fingers in my ears, and leave you.”

“Then you may learn it for yourself,” said she, suddenly, in a voice little more than a whisper. “You shall rue your treatment of me. And when you know the lesson by heart, then you will be sorry.”

“You are officious and impertinent,” said I, white with ire. “I don’t wish for your society, and I will say good-evening to you.”

With that I turned down a side street leading into the Alléestrasse, and left her.

CHAPTER XIV.

“So!
Another chapter read; with
doubtful hand

I turn the page, with doubtful
eye I scan
The heading of the next."

From that evening Anna let me alone, as I thought, and I was glad of it, nor did I attempt any reconciliation, for the very good reason that I wished for none.

Soon after our dispute I found upon my plate at breakfast, one morning, a letter directed in a bold though unformed hand, which I recognized as Stella's: [Pg 96]

"DEAR MAY,—I dare say Adelaide will be writing to you, but I will take time by the forelock, so to speak, and give you my views on the subject first.

"There is news, strange to say that there is some news to tell you. I shall give it without making any remarks. I shall not say whether I think it good, bad, or indifferent. Adelaide is engaged to Sir Peter Le Marchant. It was only made known two days ago. Adelaide thinks he is in love with her. What a strange mistake for her to make! She thinks she can do anything with him. Also a monstrous misapprehension on her part. Seriously, May, I am rather uncomfortable about it, or should be, if it were any one else but Adelaide. But she knows so remarkably well what she is about, that perhaps, after all, my fears are needless. And yet—but it is no use speculating about it—I said I wouldn't.

"She is a queer girl. I don't know how she can marry Sir Peter, I must say. I suppose he is awfully rich, and Adelaide has always said that poverty was the most horrible thing in the world. I don't know, I'm sure. I should be inclined to say that Sir Peter was the most horrible thing in the world. Write soon, and tell me what you think about it.

"Thine, speculatively,
"STELLA WEDDERBURN."

I did not feel surprise at this letter. Foreboding, grief, shame, I did experience at finding that Adelaide was bent upon her own misery. But then, I reflected, she can not be very sensible to misery, or she would not be able to go through with such a purpose. I went upstairs to communicate this news to Miss Hallam. Soon the rapid movement of events in my own affairs completely drove thoughts of Adelaide for a time, at least, out of my mind.

Miss Hallam received the information quietly and with a certain contemptuous indifference. I knew she did not like Adelaide, and I spoke of her as seldom as possible.

I took up some work, glancing at the clock, for I expected von Francius soon to give me my lesson, and Miss Hallam sat still. I had offered to read to her, and she had declined. I glanced at her now and then. I had grown accustomed to that sarcastic, wrinkled, bitter face, and did not dislike it. Indeed, Miss Hallam had given me abundant proofs that, eccentric though she might be, pessimist in theory, merciless upon human nature, which she spoke of in a manner which sometimes absolutely appalled me, yet in fact, in deed, she was a warm-hearted, generous woman. She had dealt bountifully by me, and I knew she loved me, though she never said so. [Pg 97]

"May," she presently remarked, "yesterday, when you were out, I saw Doctor Mittendorf."

"Did you, Miss Hallam?"

"Yes. He says it is useless my remaining here any longer. I shall never see, and an operation might cost me my life!"

Half-stunned, and not yet quite taking in the whole case, I held my work suspended, and looked at her. She went on:

"I knew it would be so when I came. I don't intend to try any more experiments. I shall go home next week."

Now I grasped the truth.

"Go home, Miss Hallam!" I repeated, faintly.

"Yes, of course. There is no reason why I should stay, is there?"

"N—no, I suppose not," I admitted; and contrived to stammer out, "and I am very sorry that Doctor Mittendorf thinks you will not be better."

Then I left the room quickly—I could not stay, I was overwhelmed. It was scarcely ten minutes since I had come upstairs to her. I could have thought it was a week.

Outside the room, I stood on the landing with my hand pressed to my forehead, for I felt somewhat bewildered. Stella's letter was still in my hand. As I stood there Anna Sartorius came past.

"Guten Tag, Fräulein," said she, with a mocking kind of good-nature when she had observed me for a few minutes. "What is the matter? Are you ill? Have you had bad news?"

"Good-morning, Fräulein," I answered, quietly enough, dropping my hand from my brow.

I went to my room. A maid was there, and the furniture might have stood as a type of chaos. I turned away, and went to the empty room, in which my piano stood, and where I had my music lessons. I sat down upon a stool in the middle of the room, folded my hands in my lap, and endeavored to realize what had happened—what was going to happen. There rang in my head nothing but the words, "I am going home next week."

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Home again! What a blank yawned before me at the idea! Leave Elberthal—leave this new life which had just begun to grow real to me! Leave it—go away; be whirled rapidly away back to Skernford—away from this vivid life, away from—Eugen. I drew a long breath, as the wretched, ignominious idea intruded itself, and I knew now what it was that gave terror to the prospect before me. My heart quailed and fainted at the bare idea of such a thing. Not even Hobson's choice was open to me. There was no alternative—I must go. I sat still, and felt myself growing gradually stiller and graver and colder as I looked mentally to every side of my horizon, and found it so bounded—myself shut in so fast.

There was nothing for it but to return home, and spend the rest of my life at Skernford. I was in a mood in which I could smile. I smiled at the idea of myself growing older and older, and this six weeks that I had spent fading back and back into the distance, and the people into whose lives I had a cursory glance going on their way, and soon forgetting my existence. Truly, Anna! if you were anxious for me to be miserable, this moment, could you know it, should be sweet to you!

My hands clasped themselves more closely upon my lap, and I sat staring at nothing, vaguely, until a shadow before me caused me to look up. Without knowing it, von Francius had come in, and was standing by, looking at me.

"Good-morning!" said I, with a vast effort, partially collecting my scattered thoughts.

"Are you ready for your lesson, *mein Fräulein*?"

"N—no. I think, Herr Direktor, I will not take any lesson to-day, if you will excuse it."

"But why? Are you ill?"

"No," said I. "At least—perhaps I want to accustom myself to do without music lessons."

"So?"

"Yes, and without many other pleasant things," said I, wryly and decidedly.

"I do not understand," said he, putting his hat down, and leaning one elbow upon the piano, while his deep eyes fixed themselves upon my face, and, as usual, began to compel my secrets from me.

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"I am going home," said I.

A quick look of feeling—whether astonishment, regret, or dismay, I should not like to have said—flashed across his face.

"Have you had bad news?"

"Yes, very. Miss Hallam returns to England next week."

"But why do you go? Why not remain here?"

"Gladly, if I had any money," I said, with a dry smile. "But I have none, and can not get any."

"You will return to England now? Do you know what you are giving up?"

"Obligation has no choice," said I, gracefully. "I would give anything if I could stay here, and not go home again." And with that I burst into tears. I covered my face with my hands, and all the pent-up grief and pain of the coming parting streamed from my eyes. I wept uncontrollably.

He did not interrupt my tears for some time. When he did speak, it was in a very gentle voice.

"Miss Wedderburn, will you try to compose yourself, and listen to something I have to say?"

I looked up. I saw his eyes fixed seriously and kindly upon me with an expression quite apart from their usual indifferent coolness—with the look of one friend to another—with such a look as I had seen and have since seen exchanged between Courvoisier and his friend Helfen.

"See," said he, "I take an interest in you, Fräulein May. Why should I hesitate to say so? You are young—you do not know the extent of your own strength, or of your own weakness. I do. I will not flatter—it is not my way—as I think you know."

I smiled. I remembered the plentiful blame and the scant praise which it had often fallen to my lot to receive from him.

"I am a strict, sarcastic, disagreeable old pedagogue, as you and so many of my other fair pupils consider," he went on, and I looked up in amaze. I knew that so many of his "fair pupils" considered him exactly the reverse.

"It is my business to know whether a voice is good for anything or not. Now yours, with training, will be good for a great deal. Have you the means, or the chance, or the possibility of getting that training in England?"

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"No."

"I should like to help you, partly from the regard I have for you, partly for my own sake, because I think you would do me credit."

He paused. I was looking at him with all my senses concentrated upon what he had said. He had been talking round the subject until he saw that he had fairly fixed my attention; then he said, sharply and rapidly:

"Fräulein, it lies with you to choose. Will you go home and stagnate there, or will you remain here, fight down your difficulties, and become a worthy artist?"

"Can there be any question as to which I should like to do?" said I, distracted at the idea of having to give up the prospect he held out. "But it is impossible. Miss Hallam alone can decide."

"But if Miss Hallam consented, you would remain?"

"Oh! Herr von Francius! You should soon see whether I would remain!"

"Also! Miss Hallam shall consent. Now to our singing!"

I stood up. A singular apathy had come over me; I felt no longer my old self. I had a kind of confidence in von Francius, and yet—Despite my recent trouble, I felt now a lightness and freedom, and a perfect ability to cast aside all anxieties, and turn to the business of the moment—my singing. I had never sung better. Von Francius condescended to say that I had done well. Then he rose.

"Now I am going to have a private interview with Miss Hallam," said he, smiling. "I am always having private interviews with her, *nicht wahr?* Nay, Fräulein May, do not let your eyes fill with tears. Have confidence in yourself and your destiny, as I have."

With that he was gone, leaving me to practice. How very kind von Francius was to me! I thought—not in the least the kind of man people called him. I had great confidence in him—in his will. I almost believed that he would know the right thing to say to Miss Hallam to get her to let me stay; but then, suppose she were willing, I had no possible means of support. Tired of conjecturing upon a subject upon which I was so utterly in the dark, I soon ceased that foolish pursuit. An hour had passed, when I heard von Francius' step, which I knew quite well, come down the stairs. My heart beat, but I could not move.

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Would he pass, or would he come and speak to me? He paused. His hand was on the lock. That was he standing before me, with a slight smile. He did not look like a man defeated—but then, could he look like a man defeated? My idea of him was that he held his own way calmly, and that circumstances respectfully bowed to him.

"The day is gained," said he, and paused; but before I could speak he went on: "Go to Miss Hallam; be kind to her. It is hard for her to part from you, and she has behaved like a Spartan. I felt quite sorry to have to give her so much pain."

Much wondering what could have passed between them, I left von Francius silently and sought Miss Hallam.

"Are you there, May?" said she. "What have you been doing all the morning?"

"Practicing—and having my lesson."

"Practicing—and having your lesson—exactly what I have been doing. Practicing giving up my own wishes, and taking a lesson in the act of persuasion, by being myself persuaded. Your singing-master is a wonderful man. He has made me act against my principles."

"Miss Hallam—"

"You were in great trouble this morning when you heard you were to leave Elberthal. I knew it instantly. However, you shall not go unless you choose. You shall stay."

Wondering, I held my tongue.

"Herr von Francius has showed me my duty."

"Miss Hallam," said I, suddenly, "I will do whatever you wish. After your kindness to me, you have the right to dispose of my doings. I shall be glad to do as you wish."

"Well," said she, composedly, "I wish you to write a letter to your parents, which I will dictate; of course they must be consulted. Then, if they consent, I intend to provide you with the means of carrying on your studies in Elberthal under Herr von Francius."

I almost gasped. Miss Hallam, who had been a by-word in Skernford, and in our own family, for eccentricity and stinginess, was indeed heaping coals of fire upon my head. I tried, weakly and ineffectually, to express my gratitude to her, and at last said:

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"You may trust me never to abuse your kindness, Miss Hallam."

"I have trusted you ever since you refused Sir Peter Le Marchant, and were ready to leave your home to get rid of him," said she, with grim humor.

She then told me that she had settled everything with von Francius, even that I was to remove to

different lodgings, more suited for a solitary student than Frau Steinmann's busy house.

"And," she added, "I shall ask Doctor Mittendorf to have an eye to you now and then, and to write to me of how you go on."

I could not find many words in which to thank her. The feeling that I was not going, did not need to leave it all, filled my heart with a happiness as deep as it was unfounded and unreasonable.

At my next lesson von Francius spoke to me of the future.

"I want you to be a real student—no play one," said he, "or you will never succeed. And for that reason I told Miss Hallam that you had better leave this house. There are too many distractions. I am going to put you in a very different place."

"Where? In which part of the town?"

"Wehrhahn, 39, is the address," said he.

I was not quite sure where that was, but did not ask further, for I was occupied in helping Miss Hallam, and wished to be with her as much as I could before she left.

The day of parting came, as come it must. Miss Hallam was gone. I had cried, and she had maintained the grim silence which was her only way of expressing emotion.

She was going back home to Skernford, to blindness, now known to be inevitable, to her saddened, joyless life. I was going to remain in Elberthal—for what? When I look back I ask myself—was I not as blind as she, in truth? In the afternoon of the day of Miss Hallam's departure, I left Frau Steinmann's house. Clara promised to come and see me sometimes. Frau Steinmann kissed me, and called me *liebes Kind*. I got into the cab and directed the driver to go to Wehrhahn, 39. He drove me along one or two streets into the one known as the Schadowstrasse, a long, wide street, in which stood the Tonhalle. A little past that building, round a corner, and he stopped, on the same side of the road.

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"Not here!" said I, putting my head out of the window when I saw the window of the curiosity shop exactly opposite. "Not here!"

"Wehrhahn, 39, Fräulein?"

"Yes."

"This is it."

I stared around. Yes—on the wall stood in plainly to be read white letters, "Wehrhahn," and on the door of the house, 39. Yielding to a conviction that it was to be, I murmured "Kismet," and descended from my chariot. The woman of the house received me civilly. "The young lady for whom the Herr Direktor had taken lodgings? *Schon!* Please to come this way, Fräulein. The room was on the third *étage*." I followed her upstairs—steep, dark, narrow stairs, like those of the opposite house. The room was a bare-looking, tolerably large one. There was a little closet of a bedroom opening from it—a scrap of carpet upon the floor, and open windows letting in the air. The woman chatted good-naturedly enough.

"So! I hope the room will suit, Fräulein. It is truly not to be called richly furnished, but one doesn't need that when one is a *Sing-student*. I have had many in my time—ladies and gentlemen too—pupils of Herr von Francius often. *Na!* what if they did make a great noise? I have no children—thank the good God! and one gets used to the screaming just as one gets used to everything else." Here she called me to the window.

"You might have worse prospects than this, Fräulein, and worse neighbors than those over the way. See! there is the old furniture shop where so many of the Herren Maler go, and then there there is Herr Duntze, the landscape painter, and Herr Knoop who paints *Genrebilder* and does not make much by it—so a picture of a child with a raveled skein of wool, or a little girl making ear-rings for herself with bunches of cherries—for my part I don't see much in them, and wonder that there are people who will lay down good hard thalers for them. Then there is Herr Courvoisier, the musiker—but perhaps you know who he is."

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"Yes," I assented.

"And his little son!" Here she threw up her hands. "*Ach!* the poor man! There are people who speak against him, and every one knows he and the Herr Direktor are not the best friends, but *seh'n Sie wohl, Fräulein*, the Herr Direktor is well off, settled, provided for; Herr Courvoisier has his way to make yet, and the world before him; and what sort of a story it may be with the child, I don't know, but this I will say, let those dare to doubt it or question it who will, he is a good father—I know it. And the other young man with Herr Courvoisier—his friend, I suppose—he is a musiker too. I hear them practicing a good deal sometimes—things without any air or tune to them; for my part I wonder how they can go on with it. Give me a good song with a tune in it—'Drunten im Unterland,' or 'In Berlin, sagt er,' or something one knows. *Na!* I suppose the fiddling all lies in the way of business, and perhaps they can fall asleep over it sometimes, as I do now and then over my knitting, when I'm weary. The young man, Herr Courvoisier's friend, looked ill when they first came; even now he is not to call a robust-looking person—but formerly he looked as if he would go out of the fugue altogether. *Entschuldigen*, Fräulein, if I use a few professional proverbs. My husband, the sainted man! was a piano-tuner by calling, and I have

picked up some of his musical expressions and use them, more for his sake than any other reason—for I have heard too much music to believe in it so much as ignorant people do. *Nun!* I will send Fräulein her box up, and then I hope she will feel comfortable and at home, and send for whatever she wants.”

In a few moments my luggage had come upstairs, and when they who brought it had finally disappeared, I went to the window again and looked out. Opposite, on the same *étage*, were two windows, corresponding to my two, wide open, letting me see into an empty room, in which there seemed to be books and many sheets of white paper, a music-desk and a vase of flowers. I also saw a piano in the clare-obscure, and another door, half open, leading into the inner room. All the inhabitants of the rooms were out. No tone came across to me—no movement of life. But the influence of the absent ones was there. Strange concourse of circumstances which had placed me as the opposite neighbor, in the same profession too, of Eugen Courvoisier! Pure chance it certainly was, for von Francius had certainly had no motive in bringing me hither.

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“Kismet!” I murmured once again, and wondered what the future would bring.

CHAPTER XV.

“He looks his angel in the face
Without a blush: nor heeds
disgrace,
Whom naught disgraceful done
Disgraces. Who knows nothing
base
Fears nothing known.”

It was noon. The probe to “Tannhauser” was over, and we, the members of the kapelle, turned out, and stood in a knot around the orchestra entrance to the Elberthal Theater.

It was a raw October noontide. The last traces of the by-gone summer were being swept away by equinoctial gales, which whirled the remaining yellowing leaves from the trees, and strewed with them the walks of the deserted Hofgarten; a stormy gray sky promised rain at the earliest opportunity; our Rhine went gliding by like a stream of ruffled lead.

“Proper theater weather,” observed one of my fellow-musicians; “but it doesn’t seem to suit you, Friedhelm. What makes you look so down?”

I shrugged my shoulders. Existence was not at that time very pleasant to me; my life’s hues were somewhat of the color of the autumn skies and of the dull river. I scarcely knew why I stood with the others now; it was more a mechanical pause before I took my spiritless way home, than because I felt any interest in what was going on.

“I should say he will be younger by a long way than old Kohler,” observed Karl Linders, one of the violoncellists, a young man with an unfailling flow of good nature, good spirits, and eagerness to enjoy every pleasure which came in his way, which qualities were the objects of my deep wonder and mild envy. “And they say,” he continued, “that he’s coming to-night; so Friedhelm, my boy, you may look out. Your master’s on the way.”

“So!” said I, lending but an indifferent attention; “what is his name?”

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“That’s his way of gently intimating that he hasn’t got no master,” said Karl, jocosely, but the general answer to my question was, “I don’t know.”

“But they say,” said a tall man who wore spectacles and sat behind me in the first violins—“they say that von Francius doesn’t like the appointment. He wanted some one else, but Die Direktion managed to beat him. He dislikes the new fellow beforehand, whatever he may be.”

“So! Then he will have a roughish time of it!” agreed one or two others.

The “he” of whom they spoke was the coming man who should take the place of the leader of the first violins—it followed that he would be at least an excellent performer—possibly a clever man in many other ways, for the post was in many ways a good one. Our kapelle was no mean one—in our own estimation at any rate. Our late first violinist, who had recently died, had been on visiting terms with persons of the highest respectability, had given lessons to the very best families, and might have been seen bowing to young ladies and important dowagers almost any day. No wonder his successor was speculated about with some curiosity.

“*Alle Wetter!*” cried Karl Linders, impatiently—that young man was much given to impatience—“what does von Francius want? He can’t have everything. I suppose this new fellow plays a little too well for his taste. He will have to give him a solo now and then instead of keeping them all for himself.”

“*Weiss ’s nit,*” said another, shrugging his shoulders, “I’ve only heard that von Francius had a row with the Direction, and was outvoted.”

"What a sweet temper he will be in at the probe to-morrow!" laughed Karl. "Won't he give it to the *Mädchen* right and left!"

"What time is he coming?" proceeded one of the oboists.

"Don't know; know nothing about it; perhaps he'll appear in 'Tannhauser' to-night. Look out, Friedhelm."

"Here comes little Luischen," said Karl, with a winning smile, a straightening of his collar, and a general arming-for-conquest expression, as some of the "ladies of the chorus and ballet," appeared from the side door. "Isn't she pretty?" he went on, in an audible aside to me. "I've a crow to pluck with her too. *Tag, Fräulein!*" he added, advancing to the young lady who had so struck him.

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He was "struck" on an average once a week, every time with the most beautiful and charming of her sex. The others, with one or two exceptions, also turned. I said good-morning to Linders, who wished, with a noble generosity, to make me a partaker in his cheerful conversation with Fräulein Luise of the first soprans, slipped from his grasp and took my way homeward. Fräulein Luischen was no doubt very pretty, and in her way a companionable person. Unfortunately I never could appreciate that way. With every wish to accommodate myself to the only society with which fortune supplied me, it was but ill that I succeeded.

I, Friedhelm Helfen, was at that time a lonely, soured misanthrope of two-and-twenty. Let the announcement sound as absurd as it may, it is simply and absolutely true, I was literally alone in the world. My last relative had died and left me entirely without any one who could have even a theoretical reason for taking any interest in me. Gradually, during the last few months, I had fallen into evil places of thought and imagination. There had been a time before, as there has been a time since—as it is with me now—when I worshiped my art with all my strength as the most beautiful thing on earth; the art of arts—the most beautiful and perfect development of beauty which mankind has yet succeeded in attaining to, and when the very fact of its being so and of my being gifted with some poor power of expressing and interpreting that beauty was enough for me—gave me a place in the world with which I was satisfied, and made life understandable to me. At that time this belief—my natural and normal state—was clouded over; between me and the goddess of my idolatry had fallen a veil; I wasted my brain tissue in trying to philosophize—cracked my head, and almost my reason over the endless, unanswerable question, *Cui bono?* that question which may so easily become the destruction of the fool who once allows himself to be drawn into dallying with it. *Cui bono?* is a mental Delilah who will shear the locks of the most arrogant Samson. And into the arms and to the tender mercies of this Delilah I had given myself. I was in a fair way of being lost forever in her snares, which she sets for the feet of men. To what use all this toil? To what use—music? After by dint of hard twisting my thoughts and coping desperately with problems that I did not understand, having managed to extract a conviction that there was use in music—a use to beautify, gladden, and elevate—I began to ask myself further, "What is it to me whether mankind is elevated or not? made better or worse? higher or lower?"

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Only one who has asked himself that question, as I did, in bitter earnest, and fairly faced the answer, can know the horror, the blackness, the emptiness of the abyss into which it gives one a glimpse. Blackness of darkness—no standpoint, no vantage-ground—it is a horror of horrors; it haunted me then day and night, and constituted itself not only my companion but my tyrant.

I was in bad health too. At night, when the joyless day was over, the work done, the play played out, the smell of the foot-lights and gas and the dust of the stage dispersed, a deadly weariness used to overcome me; an utter, tired, miserable apathy; and alone, surrounded by loneliness, I let my morbid thoughts carry me whither they would. It had gone so far that I had even begun to say to myself lately:

"Friedhelm Helfen, you are not wanted. On the other side this life is a nothingness so large that you will be as nothing in it. Launch yourself into it. The story that suicide is wrong and immoral is, like other things, to be taken with reservation. There is no absolute right and wrong. Suicide is sometimes the highest form of right and reason."

This mood was strong upon me on that particular day, and as I paced along the Schadowstrasse toward the Wehrhahn, where my lodging was, the very stones seemed to cry out, "The world is weary, and you are not wanted in it."

A heavy, cold, beating rain began to fall. I entered the room which served me as living- and sleeping-room. From habit I ate and drank at the same restauration as that frequented by my *confrères* of the orchestra. I leaned my elbows upon the table, and listened drearily to the beat of the rain upon the pane. Scattered sheets of music containing, some great, others little thoughts, lay around me. Lately it seemed as if the flavor was gone from them. The other night Beethoven himself had failed to move me, and I accepted it as a sign that all was over with me. In an hour it would be time to go out and seek dinner, if I made up my mind to have any dinner. Then there would be the afternoon—the dreary, wet afternoon, the tramp through the soaking streets, with the lamp-light shining into the pools of water, to the theater; the lights, the people, the weary round of painted ballet-girls, and accustomed voices and faces of audience and performers. The same number of bars to play, the same to leave unplayed; the whole dreary story, gone through so often before, to be gone through so often again.

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The restauration did not see me that day; I remained in the house. There was to be a great

concert in the course of a week or two; the "Tower of Babel" was to be given at it. I had the music. I practiced my part, and I remember being a little touched with the exquisite loveliness of one of the choruses, that sung by the "Children of Japhet" as they wander sadly away with their punishment upon them into the *Waldeinsamkeit* (that lovely and untranslatable word) one of the purest and most pathetic melodies ever composed.

It was dark that afternoon. I had not stirred from my hole since coming in from the probe—had neither eaten nor drunk, and was in full possession of the uninterrupted solitude coveted by busy men. Once I thought that it would have been pleasant if some one had known and cared for me well enough to run up the stairs, put his head into the room, and talk to me about his affairs.

To the sound of gustily blowing wind and rain beating on the pane, the afternoon hours dragged slowly by, and the world went on outside and around me until about five o'clock. Then there came a knock at my door, an occurrence so unprecedented that I sat and stared at the said door instead of speaking, as if Edgar Poe's raven had put in a sudden appearance and begun to croak its "never-more" at me.

The door was opened. A dreadful, dirty-looking young woman, a servant of the house, stood in the door-way.

"What do you want?" I inquired.

A gentleman wished to speak to me.

"Bring him in then," said I, somewhat testily.

She turned and requested some one to come forward. There entered a tall and stately man, with one of those rare faces, beautiful in feature, bright in expression, which one meets sometimes, and, having once seen, never forgets. He carried what I took at first for a bundle done up in a dark-green plaid, but as I stood up and looked at him I perceived that the plaid was wrapped round a child. Lost in astonishment, I gazed at him in silence.

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"I beg you will excuse my intruding upon you thus," said he, bowing, and I involuntarily returned his bow, wondering more and more what he could be. His accent was none of the Elberthal one; it was fine, refined, polished.

"How can I serve you?" I asked, impressed by his voice, manner, and appearance; agreeably impressed. A little masterful he looked—a little imperious, but not unapproachable, with nothing ungenial in his pride.

"You could serve me very much by giving me one or two pieces of information. In the first place let me introduce myself; you, I think, are Herr Helfen?" I bowed. "My name is Eugen Courvoisier. I am the new member of your *städtisches Orchester*."

"O, was!" said I, within myself. "That our new first violin!"

"And this is my son," he added, looking down at the plaid bundle, which he held very carefully and tenderly. "If you will tell me at what time the opera begins, what it is to-night, and finally, if there is a room to be had, perhaps in this house, even for one night. I must find a nest for this *Vögelein* as soon as I possibly can."

"I believe the opera begins at seven," said I, still gazing at him in astonishment, with open mouth and incredulous eyes. Our orchestra contained among its sufficiently varied specimens of nationality and appearance nothing in the very least like this man, beside whom I felt myself blundering, clumsy, and unpolished. It was not mere natural grace of manner. He had that, but it had been cultivated somewhere, and cultivated highly.

"Yes?" he said.

"At seven—yes. It is 'Tannhauser' to-night. And the rooms—I believe they have rooms in the house."

"Ah, then I will inquire about it," said he, with an exceedingly open and delightful smile. "I thank you for telling me. Adieu, *mein Herr*."

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"Is he asleep?" I asked, abruptly, and pointing to the bundle.

"Yes; *armes Kerlchen!* just now he is," said the young man.

He was quite young, I saw. In that half light I supposed him even younger than he really was. He looked down at the bundle again and smiled.

"I should like to see him," said I, politely and gracefully, seized by an impulse of which I felt ashamed, but which I yet could not resist.

With that I stepped forward and came to examine the bundle. He moved the plaid a little aside and showed me a child—a very young, small, helpless child, with closed eyes, immensely long, black, curving lashes, and fine, delicate black brows. The small face was flushed, but even in sleep this child looked melancholy. Yet he was a lovely child—most beautiful and most pathetic to see.

I looked at the small face in silence, and a great desire came upon me to look at it oftener—to see it again, then up at that of the father. How unlike the two faces! Now that I fairly looked at the

man I found he was different from what I had thought; older, sparer, with more sharply cut features. I could not tell what the child's eyes might be—those of the father were piercing as an eagle's; clear, open, strange. There was sorrow in the face, I saw, as I looked so earnestly into it; and it was worn as if with a keen inner life. This glance was one of those which penetrate deep, not the glance of a moment, but a revelation for life.

"He is very beautiful," said I.

"*Nicht wahr?*" said the other, softly.

"Look here," I added, going to a sofa which was strewn with papers, books, and other paraphernalia; "couldn't we put him here, and then go and see about the rooms? Such a young, tender child must not be carried about the passages, and the house is full of draughts."

I do not know what had so suddenly supplied me with this wisdom as to what was good for a "young, tender child," nor can I account for the sudden deep interest which possessed me. I dashed the things off the sofa, beat the dust from it, desired him to wait one moment while I rushed to my bed to ravish it of its pillow. Then with the sight of the bed (I was buying my experience) I knew that that, and not the sofa, was the place for the child, and said so.

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"Put him here, do put him here!" I besought, earnestly. "He will sleep for a time here, won't he?"

"You are very good," said my visitor, hesitating a moment.

"Put him there!" said I, flushed with excitement, and with the hitherto unknown joy of being able to offer hospitality.

Courvoisier looked meditatively at me for a short time then laid the child upon the bed, and arranged the plaid around it as skillfully and as quickly as a woman would have done it.

"How clever he must be," I thought, looking at him with awe, and with little less awe contemplating the motionless child.

"Wouldn't you like something to put over him?" I asked, looking excitedly about. "I have an overcoat. I'll lend it you." And I was rushing off to fetch it, but he laughingly laid his hand upon my arm.

"Let him alone," said he; "he's all right."

"He won't fall off, will he?" I asked, anxiously.

"No; don't be alarmed. Now, if you will be so good, we will see about the rooms."

"Dare you leave him?" I asked, still with anxiety, and looking back as we went toward the door.

"I dare because I must," replied he.

He closed the door, and we went down-stairs to seek the persons in authority. Courvoisier related his business and condition, and asked to see rooms. The woman hesitated when she heard there was a child.

"The child will never trouble you, madame," said he, quietly, but rather as if the patience of his look were forced.

"No, never!" I added, fervently. "I will answer for that, Frau Schmidt."

A quick glance, half gratitude, half amusement, shot from his eyes as the woman went on to say that she only took gentlemen lodgers, and could not do with ladies, children, and nurse-maids. They wanted so much attending to, and she did not profess to open her house to them.

"You will not be troubled with either lady or nurse-maid," said he. "I take charge of the child myself. You will not know that he is in the house."

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"But your wife—" she began.

"There will be no one but myself and my little boy," he replied, ever politely, but ever, as it seemed, to me, with repressed pain or irritation.

"So!" said the woman, treating him to a long, curious, unsparing look of wonder and inquiry, which made me feel hot all over. He returned the glance quietly and unsmilingly. After a pause she said:

"Well, I suppose I must see about it, but it will be the first child I ever took into the house, in that way, and only as a favor to Herr Helfen."

I was greatly astonished, not having known before that I stood in such high esteem. Courvoisier threw me a smiling glance as we followed the woman up the stairs, up to the top of the house, where I lived. Throwing open a door, she said there were two rooms which must go together. Courvoisier shook his head.

"I do not want two rooms," said he, "or rather, I don't think I can afford them. What do you charge?"

She told him.

"If it were so much," said he, naming a smaller sum, "I could do it."

"*Nie!*" said the woman, curtly, "for that I can't do it. *Um Gotteswillen!* One must live."

She paused, reflecting, and I watched anxiously. She was going to refuse. My heart sunk. Rapidly reviewing my own circumstances and finances, and making a hasty calculation in my mind, I said:

"Why can't we arrange it? Here is a big room and a little room. Make the little room into a bedroom, and use the big room for a sitting-room. I will join at it, and so it will come within the price you wish to pay."

The woman's face cleared a little. She had listened with a clouded expression and her head on one side. Now she straightened herself, drew herself up, smoothed down her apron, and said:

"Yes, that lets itself be heard. If Herr Helfen agreed to that, she would like it."

"Oh, but I can't think of putting you to the extra expense," said Courvoisier.

"I should like it," said I. "I have often wished I had a little more room, but, like you, I couldn't afford the whole expense. We can have a piano, and the child can play there. Don't you see?" I added, with great earnestness and touching his arm. "It is a large airy room; he can run about there, and make as much noise as he likes."

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He still seemed to hesitate.

"I can afford it," said I. "I've no one but myself, unluckily. If you don't object to my company, let us try it. We shall be neighbors in the orchestra."

"So!"

"Why not at home too? I think it an excellent plan. Let us decide it so."

I was very urgent about it. An hour ago I could not have conceived anything which could make me so urgent and set my heart beating so.

"If I did not think it would inconvenience you," he began.

"Then it is settled?" said I. "Now let us go and see what kind of furniture there is in that big room."

Without allowing him to utter any further objection, I dragged him to the large room, and we surveyed it. The woman, who for some unaccountable reason appeared to have recovered her good-temper in a marvelous manner, said quite cheerfully that she would send the maid to make the smaller room ready as a bedroom for two. "One of us won't take much room," said Courvoisier with a laugh, to which she assented with a smile, and then left us. The big room was long, low, and rather dark. Beams were across the ceiling, and two not very large windows looked upon the street below, across to two similar windows of another lodging-house, a little to the left of which was the Tonhalle. The floor was carpetless, but clean; there was a big square table, and some chairs.

"There," said I, drawing Courvoisier to the window, and pointing across: "there is one scene of your future exertions, the Städtische Tonhalle."

"So!" said he, turning away again from the window—it was as dark as ever outside—and looking round the room again. "This is a dull-looking place," he added, gazing around it.

"We'll soon make it different," said I, rubbing my hands and gazing round the room with avidity. "I have long wished to be able to inhabit this room. We must make it more cheerful, though, before the child comes to it. We'll have the stove lighted, and we'll knock up some shelves, and we'll have a piano in, and the sofa from my room, *nicht wahr?* Oh, we'll make a place of it, I can tell you."

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He looked at me as if struck with my enthusiasm, and I bustled about. We set to work to make the room habitable. He was out for a short time at the station and returned with the luggage which he had left there. While he was away I stole into my room and took a good look at my new treasure; he still slept peacefully and calmly on. We were deep in impromptu carpentering and contrivances for use and comfort, when it occurred to me to look at my watch.

"Five minutes to seven!" I almost yelled, dashing wildly into my room to wash my hands and get my violin. Courvoisier followed me. The child was awake. I felt a horrible sense of guilt as I saw it looking at me with great, soft, solemn, brown eyes, not in the least those of its father, but it did not move. I said apologetically that I feared I had awakened it.

"Oh, no! He's been awake for some time," said Courvoisier. The child saw him, and stretched out its arms toward him.

"*Na! junger Taugenichts!*" he said, taking it up and kissing it. "Thou must stay here till I come back. Wilt be happy till I come?"

The answer made by the mournful-looking child was a singular one. It put both tiny arms around the big man's neck, laid its face for a moment against his, and loosed him again. Neither word nor sound did it emit during the process. A feeling altogether new and astonishing overcame me. I turned hastily away, and as I picked up my violin-case, was amazed to find my eyes dim. My

visitors were something unprecedented to me.

"You are not compelled to go to the theater to-night, you know, unless you like," I suggested, as we went down-stairs.

"Thanks, it is as well to begin at once."

On the lowest landing we met Frau Schmidt.

"Where are you going, *mein Herren?*" she demanded.

"To work, madame," he replied, lifting his cap with a courtesy which seemed to disarm her. [Pg 116]

"But the child?" she demanded.

"Do not trouble yourself about him."

"Is he asleep?"

"Not just now. He is all right, though."

She gave us a look which meant volumes. I pulled Courvoisier out.

"Come along, do!" cried I. "She will keep you there for half an hour, and it is time now."

We rushed along the streets too rapidly to have time or breath to speak, and it was five minutes after the time when we scrambled into the orchestra, and found that the overture was already begun.

Though there is certainly not much time for observing one's fellows when one is helping in the overture to "Tannhauser," yet I saw the many curious and astonished glances which were cast toward our new member, glances of which he took no notice, simply because he apparently did not see them. He had the finest absence of self-consciousness that I ever saw.

The first act of the opera was over, and it fell to my share to make Courvoisier known to his fellow-musicians. I introduced him to the director, who was not von Francius, nor any friend of his. Then we retired to one of the small rooms on one side of the orchestra.

"*Hundewetter!*" said one of the men, shivering. "Have you traveled far to-day?" he inquired of Courvoisier, by way of opening the conversation.

"From Köln only."

"Live there?"

"No."

The man continued his catechism, but in another direction.

"Are you a friend of Helfen's?"

"I rather think Helfen has been a friend to me," said Courvoisier, smiling.

"Have you found lodgings already?"

"Yes."

"So!" said his interlocutor, rather puzzled with the new arrival. I remember the scene well. Half a dozen of the men were standing in one corner of the room, smoking, drinking beer, and laughing over some not very brilliant joke; we three were a little apart. Courvoisier, stately and imposing-looking, and with that fine manner of his, politely answering his interrogator, a small, sharp-featured man, who looked up to him and rattled complacently away, while I sat upon the table among the fiddle-cases and beer-glasses, my foot on a chair, my chin in my hand, feeling my cheeks glow, and a strange sense of dizziness and weakness all over me, a lightness in my head which I could not understand. It had quite escaped me that I had neither eaten nor drunk since my breakfast at eight o'clock, on a cup of coffee and dry *Brödchen*, and it was now twelve hours later. [Pg 117]

The pause was not a long one, and we returned to our places. But "Tannhauser" is not a short opera. As time went on my sensations of illness and faintness increased. During the second pause I remained in my place. Courvoisier presently came and sat beside me.

"I'm afraid you feel ill," said he.

I denied it. But though I struggled on to the end, yet at last a deadly faintness overcame me. As the curtain went down amid the applause, everything reeled around me. I heard the bustle of the others—of the audience going away. I myself could not move.

"*Was ist denn mit ihm?*" I heard Courvoisier say as he stooped over me.

"Is that Friedhelm Helfen?" asked Karl Linders, surveying me. "*Potz blitz!* he looks like a corpse! he's been at his old tricks again, starving himself. I expect he has touched nothing the whole day."

"Let's get him out and give him some brandy," said Courvoisier. "Lend him an arm, and I'll give him one on this side."

Together they hauled me down to the retiring-room.

"*Ei!* he wants a schnapps, or something of the kind," said Karl, who seemed to think the whole affair an excellent joke. "Look here, *alter Narr!*" he added; "you've been going without anything to eat, *nicht?*"

"I believe I have," I assented, feebly. "But I'm all right; I'll go home."

Rejecting Karl's pressing entreaties to join him at supper at his favorite Wirthschaft, we went home, purchasing our supper on the way. Courvoisier's first step was toward the place where he had left the child. He was gone.

"*Verschwunden!*" cried he, striding off to the sleeping-room, whither I followed him. The little lad had been undressed and put to bed in a small crib, and was sleeping serenely. [Pg 118]

"That's Frau Schmidt, who can't do with children and nurse-maids," said I, laughing.

"It's very kind of her," said he, as he touched the child's cheek slightly with his little finger, and then, without another word, returned to the other room, and we sat down to our long-delayed supper.

"What on earth made you spend more than twelve hours without food?" he asked me, laying down his knife and fork, and looking at me.

"I'll tell you some time perhaps, not now," said I, for there had begun to dawn upon my mind, like a sun-ray, the idea that life held an interest for me—two interests—a friend and a child. To a miserable, lonely wretch like me, the idea was divine.

CHAPTER XVI.

Though nothing can bring back the
hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in
the flower.
We will grieve not—rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been, must ever be.
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering!
In the faith that looks through death
—
In years, that bring the philosophic
mind.

WORDSWORTH.

From that October afternoon I was a man saved from myself. Courvoisier had said, in answer to my earnest entreaties about joining housekeeping: "We will try—you may not like it, and if so, remember you are at liberty to withdraw when you will." The answer contented me, because I knew that I should not try to withdraw.

Our friendship progressed by such quiet, imperceptible degrees, each one knotting the past more closely and inextricably with the present, that I could by no means relate them if I wished it. But I do not wish it. I only know, and am content with it, that it has fallen to my lot to be blessed with that most precious of all earthly possessions, the "friend" that "sticketh closer than a brother." Our union has grown and remained not merely "*fest und treu,*" but immovable, unshakable. [Pg 119]

There was first the child. He was two years old; a strange, weird, silent child, very beautiful—as the son of his father could scarcely fail to be—but with a different kind of beauty. How still he was, and how patient! Not a fretful child, not given to crying or complaint; fond of resting in one place, with solemn, thoughtful eyes fixed, when his father was there, upon him; when his father was not there, upon the strip of sky which was to be seen, through the window above the house-tops.

The child's name was Sigmund; he displayed a friendly disposition toward me, indeed, he was passively friendly and—if one may say such a thing of a baby—courteous to all he came in contact with. He had inherited his father's polished manner; one saw that when he grew up he would be a "gentleman," in the finest outer sense of the word. His inner life he kept concealed from us. I believe he had some method of communicating his ideas to Eugen, even if he never spoke. Eugen never could conceal his own mood from the child; it knew—let him feign otherwise never so cunningly—exactly what he felt, glad or sad, or between the two, and no acting could deceive him. It was a strange, intensely interesting study to me; one to which I daily returned with fresh avidity. He would let me take him in my arms and talk to him; would sometimes, after looking at

me long and earnestly, break into a smile—a strange, grave, sweet smile. Then I could do no otherwise than set him hastily down and look away, for so unearthly a smile I had never seen. He was, though fragile, not an unhealthy child; though so delicately formed, and intensely sensitive to nervous shocks, had nothing of the coward in him, as was proved to us in a thousand ways; shivered through and through his little frame at the sight of a certain picture to which he had taken a great antipathy, a picture which hung in the public gallery at the Tonhalle; he hated it, because of a certain evil-looking man portrayed in it; but when his father, taking his hand, said to him, “Go, Sigmund, and look at that man; I wish thee to look at him,” went without turn or waver, and gazed long and earnestly at the low type, bestial visage portrayed to him. Eugen had trodden noiselessly behind him; I watched, and he watched, how his two little fists clinched themselves at his sides, while his gaze never wavered, never wandered, till at last Eugen, with a strange expression, caught him in his arms and half killed him with kisses.

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“*Mein lieblich!*” he murmured, as if utterly satisfied with him.

Courvoisier himself? There were a great many strong and positive qualities about this man, which in themselves would have set him somewhat apart from other men. Thus he had crotchety ideas about truth and honor, such as one might expect from so knightly looking a personage. It was Karl Linders, who, at a later period of our acquaintance, amused himself by chalking up, “Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter,” beneath his name. His musical talent—or rather genius, it was more than talent—was at that time not one fifth part known to me, yet even what I saw excited my wonder. But these, and a long list of other active characteristics, all faded into insignificance before the towering passion of his existence—his love for his child. It was strange, it was touching, to see the bond between father and son. The child’s thoughts and words, as told in his eyes and from his lips, formed the man’s philosophy. I believe Eugen confided everything to his boy. His first thought in the morning, his last at night, was for *der Kleine*. His leisure was—I can not say “given up” to the boy—but it was always passed with him.

Courvoisier soon gained a reputation among our comrades for being a sham and a delusion. They said that to look at him one would suppose that no more genial, jovial fellow could exist—there was kindness in his glance, *bon camaraderie* in his voice, a genial, open, human sympathetic kind of influence in his nature, and in all he did. “And yet,” said Karl Linders to me, with gesticulation, “one never can get him to go anywhere. One may invite him, one may try to be friends with him, but, no! off he goes home! What does the fellow want at home? He behaves like a young miss of fifteen, whose governess won’t let her mix with vulgar companions.”

I laughed, despite myself, at this tirade of Karl. So that was how Eugen’s behavior struck outsiders!

“And you are every bit as bad as he is, and as soft—he has made you so,” went on Linders, vehemently. “It isn’t right. You two ought to be leaders outside as well as in, but you walk yourselves away, and stay at home! At home, indeed! Let green goslings and grandfathers stay at home.”

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Indeed, Herr Linders was not a person who troubled home much; spending his time between morning and night between the theater and concert-room, restauration and verein.

“What do you do at home?” he asked, irately.

“That’s our concern, *mein lieber,*” said I, composedly, thinking of young Sigmund, whose existence was unknown except to our two selves, and laughing.

“Are you composing a symphony? or an opera buffa? You might tell a fellow.”

I laughed again, and said we led a peaceable life, as honest citizens should; and added, laying my hand upon his shoulder, for I had more of a leaning toward Karl, scamp though he was, than to any of the others, “You might do worse than follow our example, old fellow.”

“Bah!” said he, with unutterable contempt. “I’m a man; not a milksop. Besides, how do I know what your example is? You say you behave yourselves; but how am I to know it? I’ll drop upon you unawares and catch you, some time. See if I don’t.”

The next evening, by a rare chance with us, was a free one—there was no opera and no concert; we had had probe that morning, and were at liberty to follow the devices and desires of our own hearts that evening.

These devices and desires led us straight home, followed by a sneering laugh from Herr Linders, which vastly amused me. The year was drawing to a close. Christmas was nigh; the weather was cold and unfriendly. Our stove was lighted; our lamp burned pleasantly on the table; our big room looked homely and charming by these evening lights. Master Sigmund was wide awake in honor of the occasion, and sat upon my knee while his father played the fiddle. I have not spoken of his playing before—it was, in its way, unique. It was not a violin that he played—it was a spirit that he invoked—and a strange answer it sometimes gave forth to his summons. To-night he had taken it up suddenly, and sat playing, without book, a strange melody which wrung my heart—full of minor cadences, with an infinite wail and weariness in it. I closed my eyes and listened. It was sad, but it was absorbing. When I opened my eyes again and looked down, I found that tears were running from Sigmund’s eyes. He was sobbing quietly, his head against my breast.

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“I say, Eugen! Look here!”

"Is he crying? Poor little chap! He'll have a good deal to go through before he has learned all his lessons," said Eugen, laying down his violin.

"What was that? I never heard it before."

"I have, often," said he, resting his chin upon his hand, "in the sound of streams—in the rush of a crowd—upon a mountain—yes, even alone with the woman I—" He broke off abruptly.

"But never on a violin before?" said I, significantly.

"No, never."

"Why don't you print some of those impromptus that you are always making?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. Ere I could pursue the question some one knocked at the door, and in answer to our *herein!* appeared a handsome, laughing face, and a head of wavy hair, which, with a tall, shapely figure, I recognized as those of Karl Linders.

"I told you fellows I'd hunt you up, and I always keep my word," said he, composedly. "You can't very well turn me out for calling upon you."

He advanced. Courvoisier rose, and with a courteous cordiality offered his hand and drew a chair up. Karl came forward, looking round, smiling and chuckling at the success of his experiment, and as he came opposite to me his eyes fell upon those of the child, who had raised his head and was staring gravely at him.

Never shall I forget the start—the look of amaze, almost of fear, which shot across the face of Herr Linders. Amazement would be a weak word in which to describe it. He stopped, stood stock-still in the middle of the room; his jaw fell—he gazed from one to the other of us in feeble astonishment, then said, in a whisper:

"*Donnerwetter!* A child!"

"Don't use bad language before the little innocent," said I, enjoying his confusion.

"Which of you does it belong to? Is it he or she?" he inquired in an awe-struck and alarmed manner.

"His name is Sigmund Courvoisier," said I, with difficulty preserving my gravity.

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"Oh, indeed! I—I wasn't aware—" began Karl, looking at Eugen in such a peculiar manner—half respectful, half timid, half ashamed—that I could no longer contain my feelings, but burst into such a shout of laughter as I had not enjoyed for years. After a moment, Eugen joined in; we laughed peal after peal of laughter, while poor Karl stood feebly looking from one to the other of the company—speechless—crestfallen.

"I beg your pardon," he said, at last, "I won't intrude any longer. Good—"

He was making for the door, but Eugen made a dash after him, turned him round, and pushed him into a chair.

"Sit down, man," said he, stifling his laughter. "Sit down, man; do you think the poor little chap will hurt you?"

Karl cast a distrustful glance sideways at my nursling and spoke not.

"I'm glad to see you," pursued Eugen. "Why didn't you come before?"

At that Karl's lips began to twitch with a humorous smile; presently he too began to laugh, and seemed not to know how or when to stop.

"It beats all I ever saw or heard or dreamed of," said he, at last. "That's what brought you home in such a hurry every night. Let me congratulate you, Friedel! You make a first-rate nurse; when everything else fails I will give you a character as *Kindermädchen*; clean, sober, industrious, and not given to running after young men." With which he roared again, and Sigmund surveyed him with a somewhat severe, though scarcely a disapproving, expression. Karl seated himself near him, and, though not yet venturing to address him, cast various glances of blandishment and persuasion upon him.

Half an hour passed thus, and a second knock was followed by the entrance of Frau Schmidt.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she remarked, in a tone which said unutterable things—scorn, contempt, pity—all finely blended into a withering sneer, as she cast her eyes around, and a slight but awful smile played about her lips. "Half past eight, and that blessed baby not in bed yet. I knew how it would be. And you all smoking, too—*natürlich!* You ought to know better, Herr Courvoisier—you ought, at any rate," she added, scorn dropping into heart-piercing reproach. "Give him to me," she added, taking him from me, and apostrophizing him. "You poor, blessed lamb! Well for you that I'm here to look after you, that have had children of my own, and know a little about the sort of way that you ought to be brought up in."

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Evident signs of uneasiness on Karl's part, as Frau Schmidt, with the same extraordinary contortion of the mouth—half smile, half sneer—brought Sigmund to his father, to say good-night. That process over, he was brought to me, and then, as if it were a matter which "understood

itself," to Karl. Eugen and I, like family men, as we were, had gone through the ceremony with willing grace. Karl backed his chair a little, looked much alarmed, shot a queer glance at us, at the child, and then appealingly up into the woman's face. We, through our smoke, watched him.

"He looks so very—very—" he began.

"Come, come, *mein Herr*, what does that mean? Kiss the little angel, and be thankful you may. The innocent! You ought to be delighted," said she, standing with grenadier-like stiffness beside him.

"He won't bite you, Karl," I said, reassuringly. "He's quite harmless."

Thus encouraged, Herr Linders stooped forward and touched the cheek of the child with his lips; then, as if surprised, stroked it with his finger.

"*Lieber Himmel!* how soft! Like satin, or rose leaves!" he murmured, as the woman carried the child away, shut the door and disappeared.

"Does she tackle you in that way every night?" he inquired next.

"Every evening," said Eugen. "And I little dare open my lips before her. You would notice how quiet I kept. It's because I am afraid of her."

Frau Schmidt, who had at first objected so strongly to the advent of the child, was now devoted to it, and would have resented exceedingly the idea of allowing any one but herself to put it to bed, dress or undress it, or look after it in general. This state of things had crept on very gradually; she had never said how fond she was of the child, but put her kindness upon the ground that as a Christian woman she could not stand by and see it mishandled by a couple of *men*, and oh! the unutterable contempt upon the word "men." Under this disguise she attempted to cover the fact that she delighted to have it with her, to kiss it, fondle it, admire it, and "do for it." We knew now that no sooner had we left the house than the child would be brought down, and would never leave the care of Frau Schmidt until our return, or until he was in bed and asleep. She said he was a quiet child, and "did not give so much trouble." Indeed, the little fellow won a friend in whoever saw him. He had made another conquest to-night. Karl Linders, after puffing away for some time, inquired, with an affectation of indifference:

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"How old is he—*der kleine Bengel?*"

"Two—a little more."

"Handsome little fellow!"

"Glad you think so."

"Sure of it. But I didn't know, Courvoisier—so sure as I live, I knew nothing about it!"

"I dare say not. Did I ever say you did?"

I saw that Karl wished to ask another question; one which had trembled upon my own lips many a time, but which I had never asked—which I knew that I never should ask. "The mother of that child—is she alive or dead? Why may we never hear one word of her? Why this silence, as of the grave? Was she your wife? Did you love her? Did she love you?"

Questions which could not fail to come to me, and about which my thoughts would hang for hours. I could imagine a woman being very deeply in love with Courvoisier. Whether he would love very deeply himself, whether love would form a mainspring of his life and actions, or whether it took only a secondary place—I speak of the love of woman—I could not guess. I could decide upon many points of his character. He was a good friend, a high-minded and a pure-minded man; his every-day life, the turn of his thoughts and conversation, showed me that as plainly as any great adventure could have done. That he was an ardent musician, an artist in the truest and deepest sense, of a quixotically generous and unselfish nature—all this I had already proved. That he loved his child with a love not short of passion was patent to me every day. But upon the past, silence so utter as I never before met with. Not a hint; not an allusion; not one syllable.

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Little Sigmund was not yet two and a half. The story upon which his father maintained so deep a silence was not, could not, be a very old one. His behavior gave me no clue as to whether it had been a joyful or a sorrowful one. Mere silence could tell me nothing. Some men are silent about their griefs; some about their joys. I knew not in which direction his disposition lay.

I saw Karl look at him that evening once or twice, and I trembled lest the blundering, good-natured fellow should make the mistake of asking some question. But he did not; I need not have feared. People were not in the habit of putting obtrusive questions to Eugen Courvoisier. The danger was somehow quietly tided over, the delicate ground avoided.

The conversation wandered quietly off to commonplace topics—the state of the orchestra; tales of its doings; the tempers of our different conductors—Malperg of the opera; Woelff of the ordinary concerts, which took place two or three times a week, when we fiddled and the public ate, drank, and listened; lastly, von Francius, *königlicher Musik-direktor*.

Karl Linders gave his opinion freely upon the men in authority. He had nothing to do with them, nothing to hope or fear from them; he filled a quiet place among the violoncellists, and had

attained his twenty-eighth year without displaying any violent talent or tendency to distinguish himself, otherwise than by getting as much mirth out of life as possible and living in a perpetual state of "carlesse contente."

He desired to know what Courvoisier thought of von Francius; for curiosity—the fault of those idle persons who afterward develop into busybodies—was already beginning to leave its traces on Herr Linders. It was less known than guessed that the state of things between Courvoisier and von Francius was less peace than armed neutrality. The intense politeness of von Francius to his first violinist, and the punctilious ceremoniousness of the latter toward his chief, were topics of speculation and amusement to the whole orchestra.

"I think von Francius would be a fiend if he could," said Karl, comfortably. "I wouldn't stand it if he spoke to me as he speaks to some people." [Pg 127]

"Oh, they like it!" said Courvoisier; and Karl stared. "Girls don't object to a little bullying; anything rather than be left quite alone," Courvoisier went on, tranquilly.

"Girls!" ejaculated Karl.

"You mean the young ladies in the chorus, don't you?" asked Courvoisier, unmovedly. "He does bully them, I don't deny; but they come back again."

"Oh, I see!" said Karl, accepting the rebuff.

He had not referred to the young ladies of the chorus.

"Have you heard von Francius play?" he began next.

"*Natürlich!*"

"What do you think of it?"

"I think it is superb!" said Courvoisier.

Baffled again, Karl was silent.

"The power and the daring of it are grand," went on Eugen, heartily. "I could listen to him for hours. To see him seat himself before the piano, as if he were sitting down to read a newspaper, and do what he does, without moving a muscle, is simply superb—there's no other word. Other men may play the piano; he takes the key-board and plays with it, and it says what he likes."

I looked at him, and was satisfied. He found the same want in von Francius' "superb" manipulation that I did—the glitter of a diamond, not the glow of a fire.

Karl had not the subtlety to retort, "Ay, but does it say what we like?" He subsided again, merely giving a meek assent to the proposition, and saying, suggestively:

"He's not liked, though he is such a popular fellow."

"The public is often a great fool."

"Well, but you can't expect it to kiss the hand that slaps it in the face, as von Francius does," said Karl, driven to metaphor, probably for the first time in his life, and seeming astonished at having discovered a hitherto unknown mental property pertaining to himself.

Courvoisier laughed.

"I'm certain of one thing: von Francius will go on slapping the public's face. I won't say how it will end; but it would not surprise me in the least to see the public at his feet, as it is now at those of—"

"Humph!" said Karl, reflectively.

He did not stay much longer, but having finished his cigar, rose. He seemed to feel very apologetic, and out of the fullness of his heart his mouth spake. [Pg 128]

"I really wouldn't have intruded if I had known—"

"Known what?" inquired Eugen, with well-assumed surprise.

"I thought you were just by yourselves, you know, and—"

"So we are; but we can do with other society. Friedel here gets very tedious sometimes—in fact, *langweilig*. Come again, *nicht wahr?*"

"If I sha'n't be in your way," said Karl, looking round the room with somewhat wistful eyes.

We assured him to the contrary, and he promised, with unnecessary emphasis, to come again.

"He will return; I know he will!" said Eugen, after he had gone.

The next time that Herr Linders arrived, which was ere many days had passed, he looked excited and important; and after the first greetings were over, he undid a great number of papers which wrapped and infolded a parcel of considerable dimensions, and displayed to our enraptured view of a white woolly animal of stupendous dimensions, fastened upon a green stand, which stand, when pressed, caused the creature to give forth a howl like unto no lowing of oxen nor bleating of

sheep ever heard on earth. This inviting-looking creature he held forth toward Sigmund, who stared at it.

"Perhaps he's got one already?" said Karl, seeing that the child did not display any violent enthusiasm about the treasure.

"Oh, no!" said Eugen, promptly.

"Perhaps he doesn't know what it is," I suggested, rather unkindly, scarcely able to keep my countenance at the idea of that baby playing with such a toy.

"Perhaps not," said Karl, more cheerfully, kneeling down by my side—Sigmund sat on my knee—and squeezing the stand, so that the woolly animal howled. "*Sieh!* Sigmund! Look at the pretty lamb!"

"Oh, come, Karl! Are you a lamb? Call it an eagle at once," said I, skeptically.

"It is a lamb, ain't it?" said he, turning it over. "They called it a lamb at the shop."

"A very queer lamb; not a German breed, anyhow."

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"Now I think of it, my little sister has one, but she calls it a rabbit, I believe."

"Very likely. You might call that anything, and no one could contradict you."

"Well, *der Kleine* doesn't know the difference; it's a toy," said Karl, desperately.

"Not a toy that seems to take his fancy much," said I, as Sigmund, with evident signs of displeasure, turned away from the animal on the green stand, and refused to look at it. Karl looked despondent.

"He doesn't like the look of it," said he, plaintively.

"I thought I was sure to be right in this. My little sister" (Karl's little sister had certainly never been so often quoted by her brother before) "plays for hours with that thing that she calls a rabbit."

Eugen had come to the rescue, and grasped the woolly animal which Karl had contemptuously thrown aside. After convincing himself by near examination as to which was intended for head and which for tail, he presented it to his son, remarking that it was "a pretty toy."

"I'll pray for you after that, Eugen—often and earnestly," said I.

Sigmund looked appealingly at him, but seeing that his father appeared able to endure the presence of the beast, and seemed to wish him to do the same, from some dark and inscrutable reason not to be grasped by so young a mind—for he was modest as to his own intelligence—he put out his small arm, received the creature into it, and embracing it round the body, held it to his side, and looked at Eugen with a pathetic expression.

"Pretty plaything, *nicht wahr?*" said Eugen, encouragingly.

Sigmund nodded silently. The animal emitted a howl; the child winced, but looked resigned. Eugen rose and stood at some little distance, looking on. Sigmund continued to embrace the animal with the same resigned expression, until Karl, stooping, took it away.

"You mustn't *make* him, just because I brought it," said he. "Better luck next time. I see he's not a common child. I must try to think of something else."

We commanded our countenances with difficulty, but preserved them. Sigmund's feelings had been severely wounded. For many days he eyed Karl with a strange, cold glance, which the latter used every art in his power to change, and at last succeeded. Woolly lambs became a forbidden subject. Nothing annoyed Karl more than for us to suggest, if Sigmund happened to be a little cross or mournful, "Suppose you just go home, Karl, and fetch the 'lamb-rabbit-lion.' I'm sure he would like it." From that time the child had another worshiper, and we a constant visitor in Karl Linders.

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We sat together one evening—Eugen and I, after Sigmund had been in bed a long time, after the opera was over—chatting, as we often did, or as often remained silent. He had been reading, and the book from which he read was a volume of English poetry. At last, laying the book aside, he said:

"The first night we met, you fainted away from exhaustion and long fasting. You said you would tell me why you had allowed yourself to do so, but you have never kept your word."

"I didn't care to eat. People eat to live—except those who live to eat, and I was not very anxious to live, I didn't care for my life, in fact, I wished I was dead."

"Why? An unlucky love?"

"*I, bewahre!* I never knew what it was to be in love in my life," said I, with perfect truth.

"Is that true, Friedel?" he asked, apparently surprised.

"As true as possible. I think a timely love affair, however unlucky, would have roused me and brought me to my senses again."

"General melancholy?"

"Oh, I was alone in the world. I had been reading, reading, reading; my brain was one dark and misty muddle of Kant, Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and a few others. I read them one after another, as quickly as possible; the mixture had the same effect upon my mind as the indiscriminate contents of taffy-shop would have upon Sigmund's stomach—it made it sick. In my crude, ungainly, unfinished fashion I turned over my information, laying down big generalizations upon a foundation of experience of the smallest possible dimensions, and all upon one side."

He nodded. "*Ei!* I know it."

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"And after considering the state of the human race—that is to say the half dozen people I knew, and the miseries of the human lot as set forth in the books I had read, and having proved to myself, all up in that little room, you know"—I pointed to my bedroom—"that there neither was nor could be heaven or hell or any future state, and having decided, also from that room, that there was no place for me in the world, and that I was very likely actually filling the place of some other man, poorer than I was, and able to think life a good thing" (Eugen was smiling to himself in great amusement), "I came to the conclusion that the best thing I could do was to leave the world."

"Were you going to starve yourself to death? That is rather a tedious process, *nicht wahr?*"

"Oh, no! I had not decided upon any means of effacing myself; and it was really your arrival which brought on that fainting fit, for if you hadn't turned up when you did I should probably have thought of my interior some time before seven o'clock. But you came. Eugen, I wonder what sent you up to my room just at that very time, on that very day!"

"Von Francius," said Eugen, tranquilly. "I had seen him, and he was very busy and referred me to you—that's all."

"Well—let us call it von Francius."

"But what's the end of it? Is that the whole story?"

"I thought I might as well help you a bit," said I, rather awkwardly. "You were not like other people, you see—it was the child, I think. I was as much amazed as Karl, if I didn't show it so much, and after that—"

"After that?"

"Well. There was the child, you see, and things seemed quite different somehow. I've been very comfortable" (this was my way of putting it) "ever since, and I am curious to see what the boy will be like in a few years. Shall you make him into a musician too?"

Courvoisier's brow clouded a little.

"I don't know," was all he said. Later, I learned the reason of that "don't know."

"So it was no love affair," said Eugen again. "Then I have been wrong all the time. I quite fancied it was some girl—"

"What could make you think so?" I asked, with a whole-hearted laugh. "I tell you I don't know what it is to be in love. The other fellows are always in love. They are in a constant state of *Schwärmerei* about some girl or other. It goes in epidemics. They have not each a separate passion. The whole lot of them will go mad about one young woman. I can't understand it. I wish I could, for they seem to enjoy it so much."

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"You heathen!" said he, but not in a very bantering tone.

"Why, Eugen, do you mean to say that you are so very susceptible? Oh, I beg your pardon," I added, hastily, shocked and confused to find that I had been so nearly overstepping the boundary which I had always marked out for myself. And I stopped abruptly.

"That's like you, Friedhelm," said he, in a tone which was in some way different from his usual one. "I never knew such a ridiculous, chivalrous, punctilious fellow as you are. Tell me something—did you never speculate about me?"

"Never impertinently, I assure you, Eugen," said I, earnestly.

He laughed.

"You impertinent! That is amusing, I must say. But surely you have given me a thought now and then, have wondered whether I had a history, or sprung out of nothing?"

"Certainly, and wondered what your story was; but I do not need to know it to—"

"I understand. Well, but it is rather difficult to say this to such an unsympathetic person; you won't understand it. I have been in love, Friedel."

"So I can suppose."

I waited for the corollary, "and been loved in return," but it did not come. He said, "And received as much regard in return as I deserved—perhaps more."

As I could not cordially assent to this proposition, I remained silent.

After a pause he went on: "I am eight-and-twenty, and have lived my life. The story won't bear raking up now—perhaps never. For a long time I went on my own way, and was satisfied with it—blindly, inanely, densely satisfied with it; then all at once I was brought to reason—" He laughed, not a very pleasant laugh. "Brought to reason," he resumed, "but how? By waking one morning to find myself a spoiled man, and spoiled by myself, too."

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A pause, while I turned this information over in my mind, and then said, composedly:

"I don't quite believe in your being a spoiled man. Granted that you have made some *fiasco*—even a very bad one—what is to prevent your making a life again?"

"Ha, ha!" said he, ungenially. "Things not dreamed of, Friedel, by your straightforward philosophy. One night I was, take it all in all, straight with the world and my destiny; the next night I was an outcast, and justly so. I don't complain. I have no right to complain."

Again he laughed.

"I once knew some one," said I, "who used to say that many a good man and many a great man was lost to the world simply because nothing interrupted the course of his prosperity."

"Don't suppose that I am an embryo hero of any description," said he, bitterly. "I am merely, as I said, a spoiled man, brought to his senses and with life before him to go through as best he may, and the knowledge that his own fault has brought him to what he is."

"But look here! If it is merely a question of name or money," I began.

"It is not merely that; but suppose it were, what then?"

"It lies with yourself. You may make a name either as a composer or performer—your head or your fingers will secure you money and fame."

"None the less should I be, as I said, a spoiled man," he said, quietly. "I should be ashamed to come forward. It was I myself who sent myself and my prospects *caput*,^[A] and for that sort of obscurity is the best taste and the right sphere."

"But there's the boy," I suggested. "Let him have the advantage."

"Don't, don't!" he said, suddenly, and wincing visibly, as if I had touched a raw spot. "No; my one hope for him is that he may never be known as my son."

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"But—but—"

"Poor little beggar! I wonder what will become of him," he uttered, after a pause, during which I did not speak again.

Eugen puffed fitfully at his cigar, and at last knocking the ash from it and avoiding my eyes, he said, in a low voice:

"I suppose some time I must leave the boy."

"Leave him!" I echoed, intelligently.

"When he grows a little older—before he is old enough to feel it very much, though, I must part from him. It will be better."

Another pause. No sign of emotion, no quiver of the lips, no groan, though the heart might be afaint. I sat speechless.

"I have not come to the conclusion lately. I've always known it," he went on, and spoke slowly. "I have known it—and have thought about it—so as to get accustomed to it—see?"

I nodded.

"At that time—as you seem to have a fancy for the child—will you give an eye to him—sometimes, Friedel—that is, if you care enough for me—"

For a moment I did not speak. Then I said:

"You are quite sure the parting must take place?"

He assented.

"When it does, will you give him to me—to my charge altogether?"

"What do you mean?"

"If he must lose one father, let me grow as like another to him as I can."

"Friedhelm—"

"On no other condition," said I. "I will not 'have an eye' to him occasionally. I will not let him go out alone among strangers, and give a look in upon him now and then."

Eugen had covered his face with his hands, but spoke not.

"I will have him with me altogether, or not at all," I finished, with a kind of jerk.

"Impossible!" said he, looking up with a pale face, and eyes full of anguish—the more intense in that he uttered not a word of it. "Impossible! You are no relation—he has not a claim—there is not a reason—not the wildest reason for such a—"

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"Yes, there is; there is the reason that I won't have it otherwise," said I, doggedly.

"It is fantastic, like your insane self," he said, with a forced smile, which cut me, somehow, more than if he had groaned.

"Fantastic! I don't know what you mean. What good would it be to me to see him with strangers? I should only make myself miserable with wishing to have him. I don't know what you mean by fantastic."

He drew a long breath. "So be it, then," said he, at last. "And he need know nothing about his father. I may even see him from time to time without his knowing—see him growing into a man like you, Friedel; it would be worth the separation, even if one had not to make a merit of necessity; yes, well worth it."

"Like me? *Nie, mein lieber*; he shall be something rather better than I am, let us hope," said I; "but there is time enough to talk about it."

"Oh, yes! In a year or two from now," said he, almost inaudibly. "The worst of it is that in a case like this, the years go so fast, so cursedly fast."

I could make no answer to this, and he added, "Give me thy hand upon it, Friedel."

I held out my hand. We had risen, and stood looking steadfastly into each other's eyes.

"I wish I were—what I might have been—to pay you for this," he said, hesitatingly, wringing my hand and laying his left for a moment on my shoulder; then, without another word, went into his room, shutting the door after him.

I remained still—sadder, gladder than I had ever been before. Never had I so intensely felt the deep, eternal sorrow of life—that sorrow which can be avoided by none who rightly live; yet never had life towered before me so rich and so well worth living out, so capable of high exultation, pure purpose, full satisfaction, and sufficient reward. My quarrel with existence was made up.

CHAPTER XVII.

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"The merely great are, all in
all,
No more than what the
merely small
Esteem them. Man's
opinion
Neither conferred nor can
remove
This man's dominion."

Three years passed—an even way. In three years there happened little of importance—little, that is, of open importance—to either of us. I read that sentence again, and can not help smiling; "to either of us." It shows the progress that our friendship has made. Yes, it had grown every day.

I had no past, painful or otherwise, which I could even wish to conceal; I had no thought that I desired hidden from the man who had become my other self. What there was of good in me, what of evil, he saw. It was laid open to him, and he appeared to consider that the good predominated over the bad; for, from that first day of meeting, our intimacy went on steadily in one direction—increasing, deepening. He was six years older than I was. At the end of this time of which I speak he was one-and-thirty, I five-and-twenty; but we met on equal ground—not that I had anything approaching his capacities in any way. I do not think that had anything to do with it. Our happiness did not depend on mental supremacy. I loved him—because I could not help it; he me, because—upon my word, I can think of no good reason—probably because he did.

And yet we were as unlike as possible. He had habits of reckless extravagance, or what seemed to me reckless extravagance, and a lordly manner (when he forgot himself) of speaking of things, which absolutely appalled my economical burgher soul. I had certain habits, too, the outcomes of my training, and my sparing, middle-class way of living, which I saw puzzled him very much. To cite only one insignificant incident. We were both great readers, and, despite our sometimes arduous work, contrived to get through a good amount of books in the year. One evening he came home with a brand-new novel, in three volumes, in his hands.

"Here, Friedel; here is some mental dissipation for to-night. Drop that Schopenhauer, and study

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Heyse. Here is 'Die Kinder der Welt;' it will suit our case exactly, for it is what we are ourselves."

"How clean it looks!" I observed, innocently.

"So it ought, seeing that I have just paid for it."

"Paid for it!" I almost shouted. "Paid for it! You don't mean that you have bought the book!"

"Calm thy troubled spirit! You don't surely mean that you thought me capable of stealing the book?"

"You are hopeless. You have paid at least eighteen marks for it."

"That's the figure to a pfennig."

"Well," said I, with conscious superiority, "you might have had the whole three volumes from the library for five or six groschen."

"I know. But their copy looked so disgustingly greasy I couldn't have touched it; so I ordered a new one."

"Very well. Your accounts will look well when you come to balance and take stock," I retorted.

"What a fuss about a miserable eighteen marks!" said he, stretching himself out, and opening a volume. "Come, Sig, learn how the children of the world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, and leave that low person to prematurely age himself by beginning to balance his accounts before they are ripe for it."

"I don't know whether you are aware that you are talking the wildest and most utter rubbish that was ever conceived," said I, nettled. "There is simply no sense in it. Given an income of—"

"*Aber, ich bitte Dich!*" he implored, though laughing; and I was silent.

But his three volumes of "Die Kinder der Welt" furnished me with many an opportunity to "point a moral or adorn a tale," and I believe really warned him off one or two other similar extravagances. The idea of men in our position recklessly ordering three-volume novels because the circulating library copy happened to be greasy, was one I could not get over for a long time.

We still inhabited the same rooms at No. 45, in the Wehrhahn. We had outstayed many other tenants; men had come and gone, both from our house and from those rooms over the way whose windows faced ours. We passed our time in much the same way—hard work at our profession, and, with Eugen at least, hard work out of it; the education of his boy, whom he made his constant companion in every leisure moment, and taught, with a wisdom that I could hardly believe—it seemed so like inspiration—composition, translation, or writing of his own—inconstant employment of some kind. He never seemed able to pass an idle moment; and yet there were times when, it seemed to me, his work did not satisfy him, but rather seemed to disgust him.

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Once when I asked him if it were so, he laid down his pen and said, "Yes."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Because—for no reason that I know; but because I am an unreasonable fool."

"An unreasonable fool to work hard?"

"No; but to go on as if hard work now can ever undo what years of idleness have done."

"Do you believe in work?" I asked.

"I believe it is the very highest and holiest thing there is, and the grandest purifier and cleanser in the world. But it is not a panacea against every ill. I believe that idleness is sometimes as strong as work, and stronger. You may do that in a few years of idleness which a life-time of afterwork won't cover, mend, or improve. You may make holes in your coat from sheer laziness, and then find that no amount of stitching will patch them up again."

I seldom answered these mystic monologues. Love gives a wonderful sharpness even to dull wits; it had sharpened mine so that I often felt he indulged in those speeches out of sheer desire to work off some grief or bitterness from his heart, but that a question might, however innocent, overshoot the mark, and touch a sore spot—the thing I most dreaded. And I did not feel it essential to my regard for him to know every item of his past.

In such cases, however, when there is something behind—when one knows it, only does not know what it is (and Eugen had never tried to conceal from me that something had happened to him which he did not care to tell)—then, even though one accept the fact, as I accepted it, without dispute or resentment, one yet involuntarily builds theories, has ideas, or rather the ideas shape themselves about the object of interest, and take their coloring from him, one can not refrain from conjectures, surmises. Mine were necessarily of the most vague and shadowy description; more negative than active, less theories as to what he had been or done than inferences from what he let fall in talk or conduct as to what he had not been or done.

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In our three years' acquaintance, it is true, there had not been much opportunity for any striking display on his part of good or bad qualities; but certainly ample opportunity of testing whether he were, taken all in all, superior, even with, or inferior to the average man of our average

acquaintance. And, briefly speaking, to me he had become a standing model of a superior man.

I had by this time learned to know that when there were many ways of looking at a question, that one, if there were such an one, which was less earthly practical, more ideal and less common than the others, would most inevitably be the view taken by Eugen Courvoisier, and advocated by him with warmth, energy, and eloquence to the very last. The point from which he surveyed the things and the doings of life was, taken all in all, a higher one than that of other men, and was illumined with something of the purple splendor of that "light that never was on sea or land." A less practical conduct, a more ideal view of right and wrong—sometimes a little fantastic even—always imbued with something of the knightliness which sat upon him as a natural attribute. *Ritterlich*, Karl Linders called him, half in jest, half in earnest; and *ritterlich* he was.

In his outward demeanor to the world with which he came in contact, he was courteous to men; to a friend or intimate, as myself, an ever-new delight and joy; to all people, truthful to fantasy; and to women, on the rare occasions on which I ever saw him in their company, he was polite and deferential—but rather overwhelmingly so; it was a politeness which raised a barrier, and there was a glacial surface to the manner. I remarked this, and speculated about it. He seemed to have one manner to every woman with whom he had anything to do; the maid-servant who, at her leisure or pleasure, was supposed to answer our behests (though he would often do a thing himself, alleging that he preferred doing so to "seeing that poor creature's apron"), old Frau Henschel who sold the programmes at the kasse at the concerts, to the young ladies who presided behind a counter, to every woman to whom he spoke a chance word, up to Frau Sybel, the wife of the great painter, who came to negotiate about lessons for the lovely Fräulein, her daughter, who wished to play a different instrument from that affected by every one else. The same inimitable courtesy, the same unruffled, unruffleable quiet indifference, and the same utter unconsciousness that he, or his appearance, or behavior, or anything about him, could possibly interest them. And yet he was a man eminently calculated to attract women, only he never to this day has been got to believe so, and will often deprecate his poor power of entertaining ladies.

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I often watched this little by-play of behavior from and to the fairer sex with silent amusement, more particularly when Eugen and I made shopping expeditious for Sigmund's benefit. We once went to buy stockings—winter stockings for him; it was a large miscellaneous and smallware shop, full of young women behind the counters and ladies of all ages before them.

We found ourselves in the awful position of being the only male creatures in the place. Happy in my insignificance and plainness, I survived the glances that were thrown upon us; I did not wonder that they fell upon my companions. Eugen consulted a little piece of paper on which Frau Schmidt had written down what we were to ask for, and, marching straight up to a disengaged shop-woman, requested to be shown colored woolen stockings.

"For yourself, *mein Herr*?" she inquired, with a fascinating smile.

"No, thank you; for my little boy," says Eugen, politely, glancing deferentially round at the piles of wool and packets of hosen around.

"Ah, so! For the young gentleman? *Bitte, meine Herren*, be seated." And she gracefully pushes chairs for us; on one of which I, unable to resist so much affability, sit down.

Eugen remains standing; and Sigmund, desirous of having a voice in the matter, mounts upon his stool, kneels upon it, and leans his elbows on the counter.

The affable young woman returns, and with a glance at Eugen that speaks of worlds beyond colored stockings, proceeds to untie a packet and display her wares. He turns them over. Clearly he does not like them, and does not understand them. They are striped; some are striped latitudinally, others longitudinally. Eugen turns them over, and the young woman murmurs that they are of the best quality.

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"Are they?" says he, and his eyes roam round the shop. "Well, Sigmund, wilt thou have legs like a stork, as these long stripes will inevitably make them, or wilt thou have legs like a zebra's back?"

"I should like legs like a little boy, please," is Sigmund's modest expression of a reasonable desire.

Eugen surveys them.

"*Von der besten Qualität*," repeats the young woman, impressively.

"Have you no blue ones?" demands Eugen. "All blue, you know. He wears blue clothes."

"Assuredly, *mein Herr*, but of a much dearer description; real English, magnificent."

She retires to find them, and a young lady who has been standing near us turns and observes:

"Excuse me—you want stockings for your little boy?"

We both assent. It is a joint affair, of equal importance to both of us.

"I wouldn't have those," says she, and I remark her face.

I have seen her often before—moreover, I have seen her look very earnestly at Eugen. I learned later that her name was Anna Sartorius. Ere she can finish, the shop-woman with wreathed smiles still lingering about her face, returns and produces stockings—fine, blue-ribbed stockings,

such as the children of rich English parents wear. Their fineness, and the smooth quality of the wool, and the good shape appear to soothe Eugen's feelings. He pushes away his heap of striped ones, which look still coarser and commoner now, observing hopefully and cheerily:

"*Ja wohl!* That is more what I mean." (The poor dear fellow had meant nothing, but he knew what he wanted when he saw it.) "These look more like thy legs, Sigmund, *nicht wahr?* I'll take—"

I dug him violently in the ribs.

"Hold on, Eugen! How much do they cost the pair, Fräulein?"

"Two thalers twenty-five; the very best quality," she says, with a ravishing smile.

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"There! eight shillings a pair!" say I. "It is ridiculous."

"Eight shillings!" he repeats, ruefully. "That is too much."

"They are real English, *mein Herr,*" she says, feelingly.

"But, *um Gotteswillen!* don't we make any like them in Germany?"

"Oh, sir!" she says, reproachfully.

"Those others are such brutes," he remarks, evidently wavering.

I am in despair. The young woman is annoyed to find that he does not even see the amiable looks she has bestowed upon him, so she sweeps back the heap of striped stockings and announces that they are only three marks the pair—naturally inferior, but you can not have the best article for nothing.

Fräulein Sartorius, about to go, says to Eugen:

"*Mein Herr,* ask for such and such an article. I know they keep them, and you will find it what you want."

Eugen, much touched and much surprised (as he always is and has been) that any one should take an interest in him, makes a bow, and a speech, and rushes off to open the door for Fräulein Sartorius, thanking her profusely for her goodness. The young lady behind the counter smiles bitterly, and now looks as if butter would not melt in her mouth. I, assuming the practical, mention the class of goods referred to by Fräulein Sartorius, which she unwillingly brings forth, and we straightway purchase. The errand accomplished, Eugen takes Sigmund by the hand, makes a grand bow to the young woman, and instructs his son to take off his hat, and, this process being complete, we sally forth again, and half-way home Eugen remarks that it was very kind of that young lady to help us.

"Very," I assent, dryly, and when Sigmund has contributed the artless remark that all the ladies laughed at us and looked at us, and has been told by his father not to be so self-conceited, for that no one can possibly wish to look at us, we arrive at home, and the stockings are tried on.

Constantly I saw this willingness to charm on the part of women; constantly the same utter ignorance of any such thought on the part of Eugen, who was continually expressing his surprise at the kindness of people, and adding with the gravest simplicity that he had always found it so, at which announcement Karl laughed till he had to hold his sides.

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And Sigmund? Since the day when Courvoisier had said to me, slowly and with difficulty, the words about parting, he had mentioned the subject twice—always with the same intention expressed. Once it was when I had been out during the evening, and he had not. I came into our sitting-room, and found it in darkness. A light came from the inner room, and, going toward it, I found that he had placed the lamp upon a distant stand, and was sitting by the child's crib, his arms folded, his face calm and sad. He rose when he saw me, brought the lamp into the parlor again, and said:

"Pardon, Friedel, that I left you without light. The time of parting will come, you know, and I was taking a look in anticipation of the time when there will be no one there to look at."

I bowed. There was a slight smile upon his lips, but I would rather have heard a broken voice and seen a mien less serene.

The second, and only time, up to now, and the events I am coming to, was once when he had been giving Sigmund a music lesson, as we called it—that is to say, Eugen took his violin and played a melody, but incorrectly, and Sigmund told him every time a wrong note was played, or false time kept. Eugen sat, giving a look now and then at the boy, whose small, delicate face was bright with intelligence, whose dark eyes blazed with life and fire, and whose every gesture betrayed spirit, grace, and quick understanding. A child for a father to be proud of. No meanness there; no littleness in the fine, high-bred features; everything that the father's heart could wish, except perhaps some little want of robustness; one might have desired that the limbs were less exquisitely graceful and delicate—more stout and robust.

As Eugen laid aside his violin, he drew the child toward him, and asked (what I had never heard him ask before):

"What wilt thou be, Sigmund, when thou art a man?"

"*Ja, lieber Vater*, I will be just like thee."

"How just like me?"

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"I will do what thou dost."

"So! Thou wilt be a musiker like me and Friedel?"

"*Ja wohl!*" said Sigmund, but something else seemed to weigh upon his small mind. He eyed his father with a reflective look, then looked down at his own small hands and slender limbs (his legs were cased in the new stockings).

"How?" inquired his father.

"I should like to be a musician," said Sigmund, who had a fine confidence in his sire, and confided his every thought to him.

"I don't know how to say it," he went on, resting his elbows upon Eugen's knee, and propping his chin upon his two small fists, he looked up into his father's face.

"Friedhelm is a musician, but he is not like thee," he pursued. Eugen reddened; I laughed.

"True as can be, Sigmund," I said.

"I would I were as honest a man," said Eugen, slightly altering "*Hamlet*," but as he spoke English I contented myself with shaking my head at him.

"I like Friedel," went on Sigmund. "I love him; he is good. But thou, *mein Vater*—"

"Well?" asked Eugen again.

"I will be like thee," said the boy, vehemently, his eyes filling with tears. "I will. Thou saidst that men who try can do all they will—and I will, I will."

"Why, my child?"

It was a long earnest look that the child gave the man. Eugen had said to me some few days before, and I had fully agreed with him:

"That child's life is one strife after the beautiful in art, and nature, and life—how will he succeed in the search?"

I thought of this—it flashed subtly through my mind as Sigmund gazed at his father with a childish adoration—then, suddenly springing round his neck, said, passionately:

"Thou art so beautiful—so beautiful! I must be like thee."

Eugen bit his lip momentarily, saying to me in English:

"I am his God, you see, Friedel. What will he do when he finds out what a common clay figure it was he worshiped?"

But he had not the heart to banter the child; only held the little clinging figure to his breast; the breast which Sigmund recognized as his heaven.

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It was after this that Eugen said to me when we were alone:

"It must come before he thinks less of me than he does now, Friedel."

To these speeches I could never make any answer, and he always had the same singular smile—the same paleness about the lips and unnatural light in the eyes when he spoke so.

He had accomplished one great feat in those three years—he had won over to himself his comrades, and that without, so to speak, actively laying himself out to do so. He had struck us all as something so very different from the rest of us, that, on his arrival and for some time afterward, there lingered some idea that he must be opposed to us. But I very soon, and the rest by gradual degrees, got to recognize that though in, not of us, yet he was no natural enemy of ours; if he made no advances, he never avoided or repulsed any, but on the very contrary, seemed surprised and pleased that any one should take an interest in him. We soon found that he was extremely modest as to his own merits and eager to acknowledge those of other people.

"And," said Karl Linders once, twirling his mustache, and smiling in the consciousness that his own outward presentment was not to be called repulsive, "he can't help his looks; no fellow can."

At the time of which I speak, his popularity was much greater than he knew, or would have believed if he had been told of it.

Only between him and von Francius there remained a constant gulf and a continual coldness. Von Francius never stepped aside to make friends; Eugen most certainly never went out of his way to ingratiate himself with von Francius. Courvoisier had been appointed contrary to the wish of von Francius, which perhaps caused the latter to regard him a little coldly—even more coldly than was usual with him, and he was never enthusiastic about any one or anything, while to Eugen there was absolutely nothing in von Francius which attracted him, save the magnificent power of his musical talent—a power which was as calm and cold as himself.

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Max von Francius was a man about whom there were various opinions, expressed and unexpressed; he was a person who never spoke of himself, and who contrived to live a life more isolated and apart than any one I have ever known, considering that he went much into society, and mixed a good deal with the world. In every circle in Elberthal which could by any means be called select, his society was eagerly sought, nor did he refuse it. His days were full of engagements; he was consulted, and his opinion deferred to in a singular manner—singular, because he was no sayer of smooth things, but the very contrary; because he hung upon no patron, submitted to no dictation, was in his way an autocrat. This state of things he had brought about entirely by force of his own will and in utter opposition to precedent, for the former directors had been notoriously under the thumb of certain influential outsiders, who were in reality the directors of the director. It was the universal feeling that though the Herr Direktor was the busiest man, and had the largest circle of acquaintance of any one in Elberthal, yet that he was less really known than many another man of half his importance. His business as musik-direktor took up much of his time; the rest might have been filled to overflowing with private lessons, but von Francius was not a man to make himself cheap; it was a distinction to be taught by him, the more so as the position or circumstances of a would-be pupil appeared to make not the very smallest impression upon him. Distinguished for hard, practical common sense, a ready sneer at anything high-flown or romantic, discouraging not so much enthusiasm as the outward manifestation of it, which he called melodrama, Max von Francius was the cynosure of all eyes in Elberthal, and bore the scrutiny with glacial indifference.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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FRIEDHELM'S STORY.

JOACHIM, RAFF. *Op.* 177.



"Make yourself quite easy, Herr Concertmeister. No child that was left to my charge was ever known to come to harm."

Thus Frau Schmidt to Eugen, as she stood with dubious smile and folded arms in our parlor, and harangued him, while he and I stood, violin-cases in our hands, in a great hurry, and anxious to be off.

"You are very kind, Frau Schmidt, I hope he will not trouble you."

"He is a well-behaved child, and not nearly so disagreeable and bad to do with as most. And at what time will you be back?" [Pg 148]

"That is uncertain. It just depends upon the length of the probe."

"Ha! It is all the same. I am going out for a little excursion this afternoon, to the Grafenberg, and I shall take the boy with me."

"Oh, thank you," said Eugen; "that will be very kind. He wants some fresh air, and I've had no time to take him out. You are very kind."

"Trust to me, Herr Concertmeister—trust to me," said she, with the usual imperial wave of her hand, as she at last moved aside from the door-way which she had blocked up and allowed us to pass out. A last wave of the hand from Eugen to Sigmund, and then we hurried away to the station. We were bound for Cologne, where that year the Lower Rhine Musikfest was to be held. It was then somewhat past the middle of April, and the fest came off at Whitsuntide, in the middle of May. We, among others, were engaged to strengthen the Cologne orchestra for the occasion, and we were bidden this morning to the first probe.

We just caught our train, seeing one or two faces of comrades we knew, and in an hour were in Köln.

"The Tower of Babel," and Raff's Fifth Symphonie, that called "Lenore," were the subjects we had been summoned to practice. They, together with Beethoven's "Choral Fantasia" and some solos were to come off on the third evening of the fest.

The probe lasted a long time; it was three o'clock when we left the concert-hall, after five hours' hard work.

"Come along, Eugen," cried I, "we have just time to catch the three-ten, but only just."

"Don't wait for me," he answered, with an absent look. "I don't think I shall come by it. Look after yourself, Friedel, and *auf wiedersehen!*"

I was scarcely surprised, for I had seen that the music had deeply moved him, and I can understand the wish of any man to be alone with the remembrance or continuance of such emotions. Accordingly I took my way to the station, and there met one or two of my Elberthal comrades, who had been on the same errand as myself, and, like me, were returning home.

Lively remarks upon the probable features of the coming fest, and the circulation of any amount of loose and hazy gossip respecting composers and soloists followed, and we all went to our usual restauration and dined together. There was an opera that night to which we had probe that afternoon, and I scarcely had time to rush home and give a look at Sigmund before it was time to go again to the theater. [Pg 149]

Eugen's place remained empty. For the first time since he had come into the orchestra he was absent from his post, and I wondered what could have kept him.

Taking my way home, very tired, with fragments of airs from "Czar und Zimmermann," in which I had just been playing, the "March" from "Lenore," and scraps of choruses and airs from the "Thurm zu Babel," all ringing in my head in a confused jumble, I sprung up the stairs (up which I used to plod so wearily and so spiritlessly), and went into the sitting-room. Darkness! After I had stood still and gazed about for a time, my eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity. I perceived that a dim gray light still stole in at the open window, and that some one reposing in an easy-chair was faintly shadowed out against it.

"Is that you, Friedhelm?" asked Eugen's voice.

"*Lieber Himmel!* Are you there? What are you doing in the dark?"

"Light the lamp, my Friedel! Dreams belong to darkness, and facts to light. Sometimes I wish light and facts had never been invented."

I found the lamp and lighted it, carried it up to him, and stood before him, contemplating him curiously. He lay back in our one easy-chair, his hands clasped behind his head, his legs outstretched. He had been idle for the first time, I think, since I had known him. He had been sitting in the dark, not even pretending to do anything.

"There are things new under the sun," said I, in mingled amusement and amaze. "Absent from your post, to the alarm and surprise of all who know you, here I find you mooning in the darkness, and when I illuminate you, you smile up at me in a somewhat imbecile manner, and say nothing. What may it portend?"

He roused himself, sat up, and looked at me with an ambiguous half smile.

"Most punctual of men! most worthy, honest, fidgety old friend," said he, with still the same suppressed smile, "how I honor you! How I wish I could emulate you! How I wish I were like you! and yet, Friedel, old boy, you have missed something this afternoon." [Pg 150]

"So! I should like to know what you have been doing. Give an account of yourself."

"I have erred and gone astray, and have found it pleasant. I have done that which I ought not to have done, and am sorry, for the sake of morality and propriety, to have to say that it was delightful; far more delightful than to go on doing just what one ought to do. Say, good Mentor, does it matter? For this occasion only. Never again, as I am a living man."

"I wish you would speak plainly," said I, first putting the lamp and then myself upon the table. I swung my legs about and looked at him.

"And not go on telling you stories like that of Munchausen, in Arabesks, eh? I will be explicit; I will use the indicative mood, present tense. Now then. I like Cologne; I like the cathedral of that town; I like the Hotel du Nord; and, above all, I love the railway station."

"Are you raving?"

"Did you ever examine the Cologne railway station?" he went on, lighting a cigar. "There is a great big waiting-room, which they lock up; there is a delightful place in which you may get lost, and find yourself suddenly alone in a deserted wing of the building, with an impertinent porter, who doesn't understand one word of Eng—of your native tongue—"

"Are you mad?" was my varied comment.

“And while you are in the greatest distress, separated from your friends, who have gone on to Elberthal (like mine), and struggling to make this porter understand you, you may be encountered by a mooning individual—a native of the land—and you may address him. He drives the fumes of music from his brain, and looks at you, and finds you charming—more than charming. My dear Friedhelm, the look in your eyes is quite painful to see. By the exercise of a little diplomacy, which, as you are charmingly naïve, you do not see through, he manages to seal an alliance by which you and he agree to pass three or four hours in each other’s society, for mutual instruction and entertainment. The entertainment consists of cutlets, potatoes—the kind called *kartoffeln frites*, which they give you very good at the Nord—and the wine known to us as Doctorberger. The instruction is varied, and is carried on chiefly in the aisle of the Kölner Dom, to the sound of music. And when he is quite spell-bound, in a magic circle, a kind of golden net or cloud, he pulls out an earthly watch, made of dust and dross (‘More fool he,’ your eye says, and you are quite right), and sees that time is advancing. A whole army of horned things with stings, called feelings of propriety, honor, correctness, the right thing, etc., come in thick battalions in *sturmschritt* upon him, and with a hasty word he hurries her—he gets off to the station. There is still an hour, for both are coming to Elberthal—an hour of unalloyed delight; then”—he snapped his fingers—“a drosky, an address, a crack of the whip, and *ade!*”

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I sat and stared at him while he wound up this rhodomontade by singing:

“Ade, ade, ade!
Ja, Scheiden und Meiden thut Weh!”

“You are too young and fair,” he presently resumed, “too slight and sober for apoplexy; but a painful fear seizes me that your mental faculties are under some slight cloud. There is a vacant look in your usually radiant eyes; a want of intelligence in the curve of your rosy lips—”

“Eugen! Stop that string of fantastic rubbish! Where have you been, and what have you been doing?”

“I have not deserved that from you. Haven’t I been telling you all this time where I have been and what I have been doing? There is a brutality in your behavior which is to a refined mind most lamentable.”

“But where have you been, and what have you done?”

“Another time, *mein lieber*—another time!”

With this misty promise I had to content myself. I speculated upon the subject for that evening, and came to the conclusion that he had invented the whole story, to see whether I would believe it (for we had all a reprehensible habit of that kind), and very soon the whole circumstance dropped from my memory.

On the following morning I had occasion to go to the public eye hospital. Eugen and I had interested ourselves to procure a ticket for free, or almost free, treatment as an out-patient for a youth whom we knew—one of the second violins—whose sight was threatened, and who, poor boy, could not afford to pay for proper treatment. Eugen being busy, I went to receive the ticket.

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It was the first time I had been in the place. I was shown into a room with the light somewhat obscured, and there had to wait some few minutes. Every one had something the matter with his or her eyes—at least so I thought, until my own fell upon a girl who leaned, looking a little tired and a little disappointed, against a tall desk at one side of the room.

She struck me on the instant as no feminine appearance had ever struck me before. She, like myself, seemed to be waiting for some one or something. She was tall and supple in figure, and her face was girlish and very innocent-looking; and yet, both in her attitude and countenance there was a little pride, some hauteur. It was evidently natural to her, and sat well upon her. A slight but exquisitely molded figure, different from those of our stalwart Elberthaler *Mädchen*—finer, more refined and distinguished, and a face to dream of. I thought it then, and I say it now. Masses, almost too thick and heavy, of dark auburn hair, with here and there a glint of warmer hue, framed that beautiful face—half woman’s, half child’s. Dark-gray eyes, with long dark lashes and brows; cheeks naturally very pale, but sensitive, like some delicate alabaster, showing the red at every wave of emotion; something racy, piquant, unique, enveloped the whole appearance of this young girl. I had never seen anything at all like her before.

She looked wearily round the room, and sighed a little. Then her eyes met mine; and seeing the earnestness with which I looked at her, she turned away, and a slight, very slight, flush appeared in her cheek.

I had time to notice (for everything about her interested me) that her dress was of the very plainest and simplest kind, so plain as to be almost poor, and in its fashion not of the newest, even in Elberthal.

Then my name was called out. I received my ticket, and went to the probe at the theater.

“Wishes are pilgrims to the vale of tears.”

A week—ten days passed. I did not see the beautiful girl again—nor did I forget her. One night at the opera I found her. It was “Lohengrin”—but she has told all that story herself—how Eugen came in late (he had a trick of never coming in till the last minute, and I used to think he had some reason for it)—and the recognition and the cut direct, first on her side, then on his.

Eugen and I walked home together, arm in arm, and I felt provoked with him.

“I say, Eugen, did you see the young lady with Vincent and the others in the first row of the parquet?”

“I saw some six or eight ladies of various ages in the first row of the parquet. Some were old and some were young. One had a knitted shawl over her head, which she kept on during the whole of the performance.”

“Don’t be so maddening. I said the young lady with Vincent and Fräulein Sartorius. By the bye, Eugen, do you know, or have you ever known her?”

“Who?”

“Fräulein Sartorius.”

“Who is she?”

“Oh, bother! The young lady I mean sat exactly opposite to you and me—a beautiful young girl; an *Engländerin*—fair, with that hair that we never see here, and—”

“In a brown hat—sitting next to Vincent. I saw her—yes.”

“She saw you too.”

“She must have been blind if she hadn’t.”

“Have you seen her before?”

“I have seen her before—yes.”

“And spoken to her?”

“Even spoken to her.”

“Do tell me what it all means.”

“Nothing.”

“But, Eugen—”

“Are you so struck with her, Friedel? Don’t lose your heart to her, I warn you.”

“Why?” I inquired, wilily, hoping the answer would give me some clew to his acquaintance with her. [Pg 154]

“Because, *mein Bester*, she is a cut above you and me, in a different sphere, one that we know nothing about. What is more, she knows it, and shows it. Be glad that you can not lay yourself open to the snub that I got to-night.”

There was so much bitterness in his tone that I was surprised. But a sudden remembrance flushed into my mind of his strange remarks after I had left him that day at Cologne, and I laughed to myself, nor, when he asked me, would I tell him why. That evening he had very little to say to Karl Linders and myself.

Eugen never spoke to me of the beautiful girl who had behaved so strangely that evening, though we saw her again and again.

Sometimes I used to meet her in the street, in company with the dark, plain girl, Anna Sartorius, who, I fancied, always surveyed Eugen with a look of recognition. The two young women formed in appearance an almost startling contrast. She came to all the concerts, as if she made music a study—generally she was with a stout, good-natured-looking German Fräulein, and the young Englishman, Vincent. There was always something rather melancholy about her grace and beauty.

Most beautiful she was; with long, slender, artist-like hands, the face a perfect oval, but the features more piquant than regular; sometimes a subdued fire glowed in her eyes and compressed her lips, which removed her altogether from the category of spiritless beauties—a genus for which I never had the least taste.

One morning Courvoisier and I, standing just within the entrance to the theater orchestra, saw two people go by. One, a figure well enough known to every one in Elberthal, and especially to us—that of Max von Francius. Did I ever say that von Francius was an exceedingly handsome fellow, in a certain dark, clean-shaved style? On that occasion he was speaking with more animation than was usual with him, and the person to whom he had unbent so far was the fair English woman—that enigmatical beauty who had cut my friend at the opera. She also was looking animated and very beautiful; her face turned to his with a smile—a glad, gratified smile.

He was saying:

"But in the next lesson, you know—"

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They passed on. I turned to ask Eugen if he had seen. I needed not to put the question. He had seen. There was a forced smile upon his lips. Before I could speak he had said:

"It's time to go in, Friedel; come along!" With which he turned into the theater, and I followed thoughtfully.

Then it was rumored that at the coming concert—the benefit of von Francius—a new soprano was to appear—a young lady of whom report used varied tones; some believable facts at least we learned about her. Her name, they said was Wedderburn; she was an English woman, and had a most wonderful voice. The Herr Direktor took a very deep interest in her; he not only gave her lessons; he had asked to give her lessons, and intended to form of her an artiste who should one day be to the world a kind of Patti, Lucca, or Nilsson.

I had no doubt in my own mind as to who she was, but for all that I felt considerable excitement on the evening of the haupt-probe to the "Verlorenes Paradies."

Yes, I was right. Miss Wedderburn, the pupil of von Francius, of whom so much was prophesied, was the beautiful, forlorn-looking English girl. The feeling which grew upon me that evening, and which I never found reason afterward to alter, was that she was modest, gentle, yet spirited, very gifted, and an artiste by nature and gift, yet sadly ill at ease and out of place in that world into which von Francius wished to lead her.

She sat quite near to Eugen and me, and I saw how alone she was, and how she seemed to feel her loneliness. I saw how certain young ladies drew themselves together, and looked at her (it was on this occasion that I first began to notice the silent behavior of women toward each other, and the more I have observed, the more has my wonder grown and increased), and whispered behind their music, and shrugged their shoulders when von Francius, seeing how isolated she seemed, bent forward and said a few kind words to her.

I liked him for it. After all, he was a man. But his distinguishing the child did not add to the delights of her position—rather made it worse. I put myself in her place as well as I could, and felt her feelings when von Francius introduced her to one of the young ladies near her, who first stared at him, then at her, then inclined her head a little forward and a little backward, turned her back upon Miss Wedderburn, and appeared lost in conversation of the deepest importance with her neighbor. And I thought of the words which Karl Linders had said to us in haste and anger, and after a disappointment he had lately had, "*Das weib ist der teufel.*" Yes, woman is the devil sometimes, thought I, and a mean kind of devil too. A female Mephistopheles would not have damned Gretchen's soul, nor killed her body, she would have left the latter on this earthly sphere, and damned her reputation.

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Von Francius was a clever man, but he made a grand mistake that night, unless he were desirous of making his protégée as uncomfortable as possible. How could those ladies feel otherwise than insulted at seeing the man of ice so suddenly attentive and bland to a nobody, an upstart, and a beautiful one?

The probe continued, and still she sat alone and unspoken to, her only acquaintance or companion seeming to be Fräulein Sartorius, with whom she had come in. I saw how, when von Francius called upon her to do her part, and the looks which had hitherto been averted from her were now turned pitilessly and unwinkingly upon her, she quailed. She bit her lip; her hand trembled. I turned to Eugen with a look which said volumes. He sat with his arms folded, and his face perfectly devoid of all expression, gazing straight before him.

Miss Wedderburn might have been satisfied to the full with her revenge. That was a voice! such a volume of pure, exquisite melody as I had rarely heard. After hearing that, all doubts were settled. The gift might be a blessing or a curse—let every one decide that for himself, according to his style of thinking—but it was there. She possessed the power which put her out of the category of commonplace, and had the most melodious "Open, Sesame!" with which to besiege the doors of the courts in which dwell artists—creative and interpretative.

The performance finished the gap between her and her companions. Their looks said, "You are not one of us." My angry spirit said, "No; you can never be like her."

She seemed half afraid of what she had done when it was over, and shrunk into herself with downcast eyes and nervous quivering of the lips at the subdued applause of the men. I wanted to applaud too, but I looked at Eugen. I had instinctively given him some share in the affairs of this lovely creature—a share, which he always strenuously repudiated, both tacitly and openly.

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Nevertheless, when I saw him I abstained from applauding, knowing, by a lightning-quick intuition, that it would be highly irritating to him. He showed no emotion; if he had done, I should not have thought the occasion was anything special to him. It was his absurd gravity, stony inexpressiveness, which impressed me with the fact that he was moved—moved against his will and his judgment. He could no more help approving both of her and her voice than he could help admiring a perfect, half-opened rose.

It was over, and we went out of the saal, across the road, and home.

Sigmund, who had not been very well that day, was awake, and restless. Eugen took him up, wrapped him in a little bed-gown, carried him into the other room, and sat down with him. The child rested his head on the loved breast, and was soothed.

She had gone; the door had closed after her. Eugen turned to me, and took Sigmund into his arms again.

"*Mein Vater*, who is the beautiful lady, and why did you speak so harshly to her? Why did you make her cry?"

The answer, though ostensibly spoken to Sigmund, was a revelation to me.

"That I may not have to cry myself," said Eugen, kissing him.

"Could the lady make thee cry?" demanded Sigmund, sitting up, much excited at the idea.

Another kiss and a half laugh was the answer. Then he bade him go to sleep, as he did not understand what he was talking about.

By and by Sigmund did drop to sleep. Eugen carried him to his bed, tucked him up, and returned. We sat in silence—such an uncomfortable constrained silence, as had never before been between us. I had a book before me. I saw no word of it. I could not drive the vision away—the lovely, pleading face, the penitence. Good heavens! How could he repulse her as he had done? Her repeated request that he would take that money—what did it all mean? And, moreover, my heart was sore that he had concealed it all from me. About the past I felt no resentment; there was a secret there which I respected; but I was cut up at this. The more I thought of it, the keener was the pain I felt.

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"Friedel!"

I looked up. Eugen was leaning across the table and his hand was stretched toward me; his eyes looked full into mine. I answered his look, but I was not clear yet.

"Forgive me!"

"Forgive thee what?"

"This playing with thy confidence."

"Don't mention it," I forced myself to say, but the sore feeling still remained. "You have surely a right to keep your affairs to yourself if you choose."

"You will not shake hands? Well, perhaps I have no right to ask it; but I should like to tell you all about it."

I put my hand into his.

"I was wounded," said I, "it is true. But it is over."

"Then listen, Friedel."

He told me the story of his meeting with Miss Wedderburn. All he said of the impression she had made upon him was:

"I thought her very charming, and the loveliest creature I had ever seen. And about the trains. It stands in this way. I thought a few hours of her society would make me very happy, and would be like—oh, well! I knew that in the future, if she ever should see me again, she would either treat me with distant politeness as an inferior, or, supposing she discovered that I had cheated her, would cut me dead. And as it did not matter, as I could not possibly be an acquaintance of hers in the future, I gave myself that pleasure then. It has turned out a mistake on my part, but that is nothing new; my whole existence has been a monstrous mistake. However, now she sees what a churl's nature was under my fair-seeming exterior, her pride will show her what to do. She will take a wrong view of my character, but what does that signify? She will say that to be deceitful first and uncivil afterward are the main features of the German character, and when she is at Cologne on her honey-moon, she will tell her bride-groom about this adventure, and he will remark that the fellow wanted horsewhipping, and she—"

"There! You have exercised your imagination quite sufficiently. Then you intend to keep up this farce of not recognizing her. Why?"

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He hesitated, looked as nearly awkward as he could, and said, a little constrainedly:

"Because I think it will be for the best."

"For you or for her?" I inquired, not very fairly, but I could not resist it.

Eugen flushed all over his face.

"What a question!" was all he said.

"I do not think it such a remarkable question. Either you have grown exceedingly nervous as to your own strength of resistance or your fear for hers."

"Friedhelm," said he, in a cutting voice, "that is a tone which I should not have believed you capable of taking. It is vulgar, my dear fellow, and uncalled for; and it is so unlike you that I am astonished. If you had been one of the other fellows—"

I fired up.

"Excuse me, Eugen, it might be vulgar if I were merely chaffing you, but I am not; and I think, after what you have told me, that I have said very little. I am not so sure of her despising you. She looks much more as if she were distressed at your despising her."

"Pre—pos—ter—ous!"

"If you can mention an instance in her behavior this evening which looked as if she were desirous of snubbing you, I should be obliged by your mentioning it," I continued:

"Well—well—"

"Well—well. If she had wished to snub you she would have sent you that money through the post, and made an end of it. She simply desired, as was evident all along, to apologize for having been rude to a person who had been kind to her. I can quite understand it, and I am not sure that your behavior will not have the very opposite effect to that you expect."

"I think you are mistaken. However, it does not matter; our paths lie quite apart. She will have plenty of other things to take up her time and thoughts. Anyhow I am glad that you and I are quits once more."

So was I. We said no more upon the subject, but I always felt as if a kind of connecting link existed between my friend and me, and that beautiful, solitary English girl.

The link was destined to become yet closer. The concert was over at which she sung. She had a success. I see she has not mentioned it; a success which isolated her still more from her companions, inasmuch as it made her more distinctly professional and them more severely virtuous. [Pg 160]

One afternoon when Eugen and I happened to have nothing to do, we took Sigmund to the Grafenberg. We wandered about in the fir wood, and at last came to a pause and rested. Eugen lay upon his back and gazed up into the thickness of brown-green fir above, and perhaps guessed at the heaven beyond the dark shade. I sat and stared before me through the straight red-brown stems across the ground,

"With sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged,"

to an invisible beyond which had charms for me, and was a kind of symphonic beauty in my mind. Sigmund lay flat upon his stomach, kicked his heels and made intricate patterns with the fir needles, while he hummed a gentle song to himself in a small, sweet voice, true as a lark's, but sadder. There was utter stillness and utter calm all round.

Presently Eugen's arm stole around Sigmund and drew him closer and closer to him, and they continued to look at each other until a mutual smile broke upon both faces, and the boy said, his whole small frame as well as his voice quivering (the poor little fellow had nerves that vibrated to the slightest emotion): "I love thee."

A light leaped into the father's eyes; a look of pain followed it quickly.

"And I shall never leave thee," said Sigmund.

Eugen parried the necessity of speaking by a kiss.

"I love thee too, Friedel," continued he, taking my hand. "We are very happy together, aren't we?" And he laughed placidly to himself.

Eugen, as if stung by some tormenting thought, sprung up and we left the wood.

Oh, far back, by-gone day! There was a soft light over you shed by a kindly sun. That was a time in which joy ran a golden thread through the gray homespun of every-day life.

Back to the restauration at the foot of the *berg*, where Sigmund was supplied with milk and Eugen and I with beer, where we sat at a little wooden table in a garden and the pleasant clack of friendly conversation sounded around; where the women tried to make friends with Sigmund, and the girls whispered behind their coffee-cups or (*pace*, elegant fiction!) their beer-glasses, and always happened to be looking up if our eyes roved that way. Two poor musiker and a little boy; persons of no importance whatever, who could scrape their part in the symphony with some intelligence and feel they had done their duty. Well, well! it is not all of us who can do even so much. I know some instruments that are always out of tune. Let us be complacent where we justly can. The opportunities are few. [Pg 161]

We took our way home. The days were long, and it was yet light when we returned and found the reproachful face of Frau Schmidt looking for us, and her arms open to receive the weary little lad who had fallen asleep on his father's shoulder.

I went upstairs, and, by a natural instinct, to the window. Those facing it were open; some one moved in the room. Two chords of a piano were struck. Some one came and stood by the window, shielded her eyes from the rays of the setting sun which streamed down the street and looked

westward. Eugen was passing behind me. I pulled him to the window, and we both looked—silently, gravely.

The girl dropped her hand; her eyes fell upon us. The color mounted to her cheek; she turned away and went to the interior of the room. It was May Wedderburn.

“Also!” said Eugen, after a pause. “A new neighbor; it reminds me of one of Andersen’s ‘Märchen,’ but I don’t know which.”

CHAPTER XX.

“For though he lived aloof
from ken,
The world’s unwitnessed
denizen,
The love within him stirs
Abroad, and with the hearts
of men
His own confers.”

The story of my life from day to day was dull enough, same enough for some time after I went to live at the Wehrhahn. I was studying hard, and my only variety was the letters I had from home; not very cheering, these. One, which I received from Adelaide, puzzled me somewhat. After speaking of her coming marriage in a way which made me sad and uncomfortable, she condescended to express her approval of what I was doing, and went on:

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“I am catholic in my tastes. I suppose all our friends would faint at the idea of there being a ‘singer’ in the family. Now, I should rather like you to be a singer—only be a great one—not a little twopenny-halfpenny person who has to advertise for engagements.

“Now I am going to give you some advice. This Herr von Francius—your teacher or whatever he is. Be cautious what you are about with him. I don’t say more, but I say that again. Be cautious! Don’t burn your fingers. Now, I have not much time, and I hate writing letters, as you know. In a week I am to be married, and then—*nous verrons*. We go to Paris first, and then on to Rome, where we shall winter—to gratify my taste, I wonder, or Sir Peter’s for moldering ruins, ancient pictures, and the Coliseum by moonlight? I have no doubt that we shall do our duty by the respectable old structures. Remember what I said, and write to me now and then.

“A.”

I frowned and puzzled a little over this letter. Be cautious? In what possible way could I be cautious? What need could there be for it when all that passed between me and von Francius was the daily singing lesson at which he was so strict and severe, sometimes so sharp and cutting with me. I saw him then; I saw him also at the constant proben to concerts whose season had already begun; proben to the “Passions-musik,” the “Messiah,” etc. At one or two of these concerts I was to sing. I did not like the idea, but I could not make von Francius see it as I did. He said I must sing—it was part of my studies, and I was fain to bend to his will.

Von Francius—I looked at Adelaide’s letter, and smiled again. Von Francius had kept his word; he had behaved to me as a kind elder brother. He seemed instinctively to understand the wish, which was very strong on my part, not to live entirely at Miss Hallam’s expense—to provide, partially at any rate, for myself, if possible. He helped me to do this. Now he brought me some music to be copied; now he told me of a young lady who wanted lessons in English—now of one little thing—now of another, which kept me, to my pride and joy, in such slender pocket-money as I needed. Truly, I used to think in those days, it does not need much money nor much room for a person like me to keep her place in the world. I wished to trouble no one—only to work as hard as I could, and do the work that was set for me as well as I knew how. I had my wish and so far was not unhappy.

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But what did Adelaide mean? True, I had once described von Francius to her as young, that is youngish, clever and handsome. Did she, remembering my well-known susceptibility, fear that I might fall in love with him and compromise myself by some silly *Schwärmerei*? I laughed about all by myself at the very idea of such a thing. Fall in love with von Francius, and—my eyes fell upon the two windows over the way. No; my heart was pure of the faintest feeling for him, save that of respect, gratitude, and liking founded at that time more on esteem than spontaneous growth. And he—I smiled at that idea, too.

In all my long interviews with von Francius throughout our intercourse he maintained one unvaried tone, that of a kind, frank, protecting interest, with something of the patron on his part. He would converse with me about Schiller and Goethe, true; he would also caution me against such and such shop-keepers as extortioners, and tell me the place where they gave the largest

discount on music paid for on the spot; would discuss the "Waldstein" or "Appassionata" with me, or the beauties of Rubinstein or the deep meanings of Schumann, also the relative cost of living *en pension* or providing for one's self.

No. Adelaide was mistaken. I wished, parenthetically, that she could make the acquaintance of von Francius, and learn how mistaken—and again my eyes fell upon the opposite windows. Friedhelm Helfen leaned from one, holding fast Courvoisier's boy. The rich Italian coloring of the lovely young face; the dusky hair; the glow upon the cheeks, the deep blue of his serge dress, made the effect of a warmly tinted southern flower; it was a flower-face too; delicate and rich at once.

Adelaide's letter dropped unheeded to the floor. Those two could not see me, and I had a joy in watching them.

To say, however, that I actually watched my opposite neighbors would not be true. I studiously avoided watching them; never sat in the window; seldom showed myself at it, though in passing I sometimes allowed myself to linger, and so had glimpses of those within. They were three and I was one. They were the happier by two. Or if I knew that they were out, that a probe was going on, or an opera or concert, there was nothing I liked better than to sit for a time and look to the opposite windows. They were nearly always open, as were also mine, for the heat of the stove was oppressive to me, and I preferred to temper it with a little of the raw outside air. I used sometimes to hear from those opposite rooms the practicing or playing of passages on the violin and violoncello—scales, shakes, long complicated flourishes and phrases. Sometimes I heard the very strains that I had to sing to: airs, scraps of airs, snatches from operas, concerts and symphonies. They were always humming and singing things. They came home haunted with "The Last Rose," from "Marta"—now some air from "Faust," "Der Freischütz," or "Tannhauser."

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But one air was particular to Eugen, who seemed to be perfectly possessed by it—that which I had heard him humming when I first met him—the March from "Lenore." He whistled it and sung it; played it on violin, 'cello and piano; hummed it first thing in the morning and last thing at night; harped upon it until in despair his companion threw books and music at him, and he, dodging them, laughed, begged pardon, was silent for five minutes, and then the March *da Capo* set in a halting kind of measure to the ballad.

By way of a slight and wholesome variety there was the whole repertory of "Volkslieder," from

"Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen;
Du, du, liegst mir im Sinn,"

up to

"Mädele, ruck, ruck, ruck
An meine gürne Seite."

Sometimes they—one or both of them with the boy—might be seen at the window leaning out, whistling or talking. When doors banged and quick steps rushed up or down the stairs two steps at a time I knew it was Courvoisier. Friedhelm Helfen's movements were slower and more sedate. I grew to know his face as well as Eugen's, and to like it better the more I saw of it. A quite young, almost boyish face, with an inexpressibly pure, true, and good expression upon the mouth and in the dark-brown eyes. Reticent, as most good faces are, but a face which made you desire to know the owner of it, made you feel that you could trust him in any trial. His face reminded me in a distant manner of two others, also faces of musicians, but greater in their craft than he, they being creators and pioneers, while he was only a disciple, of Beethoven and of the living master, Rubinstein. A gentle, though far from weak face, and such a contrast in expression and everything else to that of my musician, as to make me wonder sometimes whether they had been drawn to each other from very oppositeness of disposition and character. That they were very great friends I could not doubt; that the leadership was on Courvoisier's side was no less evident. Eugen's affection for Helfen seemed to have something fatherly in it, while I could see that both joined in an absorbing worship of the boy, who was a very Cræsus in love if in nothing else. Sigmund had, too, an adorer in a third musician, a violoncellist, one of their comrades, who apparently spent much of his spare substance in purchasing presents of toys and books and other offerings, which he laid at the shrine of St. Sigmund, with what success I could not tell. Beyond this young fellow, Karl Linders, they had not many visitors. Young men used occasionally to appear with violin-cases in their hands, coming for lessons, probably.

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All these things I saw without absolutely watching for them; they made that impression upon me which the most trifling facts connected with a person around whom cling all one's deepest pleasures and deepest pains ever do and must make. I was glad to know them, but at the same time they impressed the loneliness and aloofness of my own life more decidedly upon me.

I remember one small incident which at the time it happened struck home to me. My windows were open; it was an October afternoon, mild and sunny. The yellow light shone with a peaceful warmth upon the afternoon quietness of the street. Suddenly that quietness was broken. The sound of music, the peculiar blatant noise of trumpets smote the air. It came nearer, and with it the measured tramp of feet. I rose and went to look out. A Hussar regiment was passing; before them was borne a soldier's coffin; they carried a comrade to his grave. The music they played was the "Funeral March for the Death of a Hero," from the "Sinfonia Eroica." Muffled, slow, grand and mournful, it went wailing and throbbing by. The procession passed slowly on in the

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October sunshine, along the Schadowstrasse, turning off by the Hofgarten, and so on to the cemetery. I leaned out of the window and looked after it—forgetting all outside, till just as the last of the procession passed by my eyes fell upon Courvoisier going into his house, and who presently entered the room. He was unperceived by Friedhelm and Sigmund, who were looking after the procession. The child's face was earnest, almost solemn—he had not seen his father come up. I saw Helfen's lip caress Sigmund's loose black hair that waved just beneath them.

Then I saw a figure—only a black shadow to my eyes which were dazzled by the sun—come behind them. One hand was laid upon Helfen's shoulder, another turned the child's chin. What a change! Friedhelm's grave face smiled: Sigmund sprung aside, made a leap to his father, who stooped to him, and clasping his arms tight round his neck was raised up in his arms.

They were all satisfied—all smiling—all happy. I turned away. That was a home—that was a meeting of three affections. What more could they want? I shut the window—shut it all out, and myself with it into the cold, feeling my lips quiver. It was very fine, this life of independence and self-support, but it was dreadfully lonely.

The days went on. Adelaide was now Lady Le Marchant. She had written to me again, and warned me once more to be careful what I was about. She had said that she liked her life—at least she said so in her first two or three letters, and then there fell a sudden utter silence about herself, which seemed to me ominous.

Adelaide had always acted upon the assumption that Sir Peter was a far from strong-minded individual, with a certain hardness and cunning perhaps in relation to money matters, but nothing that a clever wife with a strong enough sense of her own privileges could not overcome.

She said nothing to me about herself. She told me about Rome; who was there; what they did and looked like; what she wore; what compliments were paid to her—that was all.

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Stella told me my letters were dull—and I dare say they were—and that there was no use in her writing, because nothing ever happened in Skernford, which was also true. And for Eugen, we were on exactly the same terms—or rather no terms—as before. Opposite neighbors, and as far removed as if we had lived at the antipodes.

My life, as time went on, grew into a kind of fossilized dream, in which I rose up and lay down, practiced so many hours a day, ate and drank and took my lesson, and it seemed as if I had been living so for years, and should continue to live on so to the end of my days—until one morning my eyes would not open again, and for me the world would have come to an end.

CHAPTER XXI.

“And nearer still shall further be,
And words shall plague and vex and
buffet thee.”

It was December, close upon Christmas. Winter at last in real earnest. A black frost. The earth bound in fetters of iron. The land gray; the sky steel; the wind a dagger. The trees, leafless and stark, rattled their shriveled boughs together in that wind.

It met you at corners and froze the words out of your mouth; it whistled a low, fiendish, malignant whistle round the houses; as vicious and little louder than the buzz of a mosquito. It swept, thin, keen and cutting, down the Königsallée, and blew fine black dust into one's face.

It cut up the skaters upon the pond in the Neue Anlage, which was in the center of the town, and comparatively sheltered; but it was in its glory whistling across the flat fields leading to the great skating-ground of Elberthal in general—the Schwanenspiegel at the Grafenbergerdahl.

The Grafenberg was a low chain of what, for want of a better name, may be called hills, lying to the north of Elberthal. The country all around this unfortunate apology for a range of hills was, if possible, flatter than ever. The Grafenbergerdahl was, properly, no “dale” at all, but a broad plain of meadows, with the railway cutting them at one point, then diverging and running on under the Grafenberg.

One vast meadow which lay, if possible, a trifle lower than the rest, was flooded regularly by the autumn rains, but not deeply. It was frozen over now, and formed a model skating place, and so, apparently, thought the townspeople, for they came out, singly or in bodies, and from nine in the morning till dusk the place was crowded, and the merry music of the iron on the ice ceased not for a second.

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I discovered this place of resort by accident one day when I was taking a constitutional, and found myself upon the borders of the great frozen mere covered with skaters. I stood looking at them, and my blood warmed at the sight. If there were one thing—one accomplishment upon which I prided myself, it was this very one—skating.

In a drawing-room I might feel awkward—confused among clever people, bashful among

accomplished ones; shy about music and painting, diffident as to my voice, and deprecatory in spirit as to the etiquette to be observed at a dinner-party. Give me my skates and put me on a sheet of ice, and I was at home.

As I paused and watched the skaters, it struck me that there was no reason at all why I should deny myself that seasonable enjoyment. I had my skates, and the mere was large enough to hold me as well as the others—indeed, I saw in the distance great tracts of virgin ice to which no skater seemed yet to have reached.

I went home, and on the following afternoon carried out my resolution; though it was after three o'clock before I could set out.

A long, bleak way. First up the merry Jägerhofstrasse, then through the Malkasten garden, up a narrow lane, then out upon the open, bleak road, with that bitter wind going ping-ping at one's ears and upon one's cheek. Through a big gate-way, and a court-yard pertaining to an orphan asylum—along a lane bordered with apple-trees, through a rustic arch, and, hurrah! the field was before me—not so thickly covered as yesterday, for it was getting late, and the Elberthalers did not seem to understand the joy of careering over the black ice by moonlight, in the night wind. It was, however, as yet far from dark, and the moon was rising in silver yonder, in a sky of a pale but clear blue.

I quickly put on my skates—stumbled to the edge, and set off. I took a few turns, circling among the people—then, seeing several turn to look at me, I fixed my eyes upon a distant clump of reeds rising from the ice, and resolved to make it my goal. I could only just see it, even with my long-sighted eyes, but struck out for it bravely. Past group after group of the skaters who turned to look at my scarlet shawl as it flashed past. I glanced at them and skimmed smoothly on, till I came to the outside circle where there was a skater all alone, his hands thrust deep into his great-coat pockets, the collar of the same turned high about his ears, and the inevitable little gray cloth *Studentenhut* crowning the luxuriance of waving dark hair. He was gliding round in complicated figures and circles, doing the outside edge for his own solitary gratification, so far as I could see; active, graceful, and muscular, with practiced ease and assured strength in every limb. It needed no second glance on my part to assure me who he was—even if the dark bright eyes had not been caught by the flash of my cloak, and gravely raised for a moment as I flew by. I dashed on, breasting the wind. To reach the bunch of reeds seemed more than ever desirable now. I would make it my sole companion until it was time to go away. At least he had seen me, and I was safe from any *contretemps*—he would avoid me as strenuously as I avoided him. But the first fresh lust after pleasure was gone. Just one moment's glance into a face had had the power to alter everything so much. I skated on, as fast, as surely as ever, but,

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“A joy has taken flight.”

The pleasant sensation of solitude, which I could so easily have felt among a thousand people had he not been counted among them, was gone. The roll of my skates upon the ice had lost its music for me; the wind felt colder—I sadder. At least I thought so. Should I go away again now that this disturbing element had appeared upon the scene? No, no, no, said something eagerly within me, and I bit my lip, and choked back a kind of sob of disgust as I realized that despite my gloomy reflections my heart was beating a high, rapid march of—joy! as I skimmed, all alone, far away from the crowd, among the dismal withered reeds, and round the little islets of stiffened grass and rushes which were frozen upright in their places.

The daylight faded, and the moon rose. The people were going away. The distant buzz of laughter had grown silent. I could dimly discern some few groups, but very few, still left, and one or two solitary figures. Even my preternatural eagerness could not discern who they were! The darkness, the long walk home, the probe at seven, which I should be too tired to attend, all had quite slipped from my mind; it was possible that among those figures which I still dimly saw, was yet remaining that of Courvoisier, and surely there was no harm in my staying here.

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I struck out in another direction, and flew on in the keen air; the frosty moon shedding a weird light upon the black ice; I saw the railway lines, polished, gleaming too in the light; the belt of dark firs to my right; the red sand soil frozen hard and silvered over with frost. Flat and tame, but still beautiful. I felt a kind of rejoicing in it; I felt it home. I was probably the first person who had been there since the freezing of the mere, thought I, and that idea was soon converted to a certainty in my mind, for in a second my rapid career was interrupted. At the furthest point from help or human presence the ice gave way with a crash, and I shrieked aloud at the shock of the bitter water. Oh, how cold it was! how piercing, frightful, numbing! It was not deep—scarcely above my knees, but the difficulty was how to get out. Put my hand where I would the ice gave way. I could only plunge in the icy water, feeling the sodden grass under my feet. What sort of things might there not be in that water? A cold shudder, worse than any ice, shot through me at the idea of newts and rats and water-serpents, absurd though it was. I screamed again in desperation, and tried to haul myself out by catching at the rushes. They were rotten with the frost and gave way in my hand. I made a frantic effort at the ice again; stumbled and fell on my knees in the water. I was wet all over now, and I gasped. My limbs ached agonizingly with the cold. I should be, if not drowned, yet benumbed, frozen to death here alone in the great mere, among the frozen reeds and under the steely sky.

I was pausing, standing still, and rapidly becoming almost too benumbed to think or hold myself up, when I heard the sound of skates and the weird measure of the “Lenore March” again. I held my breath; I desired intensely to call out, shriek aloud for help, but I could not. Not a word would

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come.

"I did hear some one," he muttered, and then in the moonlight he came skating past, saw me, and stopped.

"*Sie, Fräulein!*" he began, quickly, and then altering his tone. "The ice has broken. Let me help you."

"Don't come too near; the ice is very thin—it doesn't hold at all," I chattered, scarcely able to get the words out.

"You are cold?" he asked, and smiled. I felt the smile cruel; and realized that I probably looked rather ludicrous.

"Cold!" I repeated, with an irrepressible short sob.

He knelt down upon the ice at about a yard's distance from me.

"Here it is strong," said he, holding out his arms. "Lean this way, *mein Fräulein*, and I will lift you out."

"Oh, no! You will certainly fall in yourself."

"Do as I tell you," he said, imperatively, and I obeyed, leaning a little forward. He took me round the waist, lifted me quietly out of the water, and placed me upon the ice at a discreet distance from the hole in which I had been stuck, then rose himself, apparently undisturbed by the effort.

Miserable, degraded object that I felt! My clothes clinging round me; icy cold, shivering from head to foot; so aching with cold that I could no longer stand. As he opened his mouth to say something about its being "happily accomplished," I sunk upon my knees at his feet. My strength had deserted me; I could no longer support myself.

"Frozen!" he remarked to himself, as he stooped and half raised me. "I see what must be done. Let me take off your skates—*sonst geht's nicht.*"

I sat down upon the ice, half hysterical, partly from the sense of the degrading, ludicrous plight I was in, partly from intense yet painful delight at being thus once more with him, seeing some recognition in his eyes again, and hearing some cordiality in his voice.

He unfastened my skates deftly and quickly, slung them over his arm, and helped me up again. I essayed feebly to walk, but my limbs were numb with cold. I could not put one foot before the other, but could only cling to his arm in silence.

"So!" said he, with a little laugh. "We are all alone here! A fine time for a moonlight skating." [Pg 172]

"Ah! yes," said I, wearily, "but I can't move."

"You need not," said he. "I am going to carry you away in spite of yourself, like a popular preacher."

He put his arm round my waist and bade me hold fast to his shoulder. I obeyed, and directly found myself carried along in a swift, delightful movement, which seemed to my drowsy, deadened senses, quick as the nimble air, smooth as a swallow's flight. He was a consummate master in the art of skating—that was evident. A strong, unflinching arm held me fast. I felt no sense of danger, no fear lest he should fall or stumble; no such idea entered my head.

We had far to go—from one end of the great Schwanenspiegel to the other. Despite the rapid motion, numbness overcame me; my eyes closed, my head sunk upon my hands, which were clasped over his shoulder. A sob rose to my throat. In the midst of the torpor that was stealing over me, there shot every now and then a shiver of ecstasy so keen as to almost terrify me. But then even that died away. Everything seemed to whirl round me—the meadows and trees, the stiff rushes and the great black sheet of ice, and the white moon in the inky heavens became only a confused dream. Was it sleep or faintness, or coma? What was it that seemed to make my senses as dull as my limbs, and as heavy? I scarcely felt the movement, as he lifted me from the ice to the ground. His shout did not waken me, though he sent the full power of his voice ringing out toward the pile of buildings to our left.

With the last echo of his voice I lost consciousness entirely; all failed and faded, and then vanished before me, until I opened my eyes again feebly, and found myself in a great stony-looking room, before a big black stove, the door of which was thrown open. I was lying upon a sofa, and a woman was bending over me. At the foot of the sofa, leaning against the wall, was Courvoisier, looking down at me, his arms folded, his face pensive.

"Oh, dear!" cried I, starting up. "What is the matter? I must go home."

"You shall—when you can," said Courvoisier, smiling as he had smiled when I first knew him, before all these miserable misunderstandings had come between us. [Pg 173]

My apprehensions were stilled. It did me good, warmed me, sent the tears trembling to my eyes, when I found that his voice had not resumed the old accent of ice, nor his eyes that cool, unrecognizing stare which had frozen me so many a time in the last few weeks.

"*Trinken sie 'mal, Fräulein,*" said the woman, holding a glass to my lips; it held hot spirits and

water, which smoked.

"Bah!" replied I, gratefully, and turning away. "*Nie, nie!*" she repeated. "You must drink just a *Schnäppchen*, Fräulein."

I pushed it away with some disgust. Courvoisier took it from her hand and held it to me.

"Don't be so foolish and childish. Think of your voice after this," said he, smiling kindly; and I, with an odd sensation, choked down my tears and drank it. It was bad—despite my desire to please, I found it very bad.

"Yes, I know," said he, with a sympathetic look, as I made a horrible face after drinking it, and he took the glass. "And now this woman will lend you some dry things. Shall I go straight to Elberthal and send a drosky here for you, or will you try to walk home?"

"Oh, I will walk. I am sure it would be the best—if—do you think it would?"

"Do you feel equal to it? is the question," he answered, and I was surprised to see that though I was looking hard at him he did not look at me, but only into the glass he held.

"Yes," said I. "And they say that people who have been nearly drowned should always walk; it does them good."

"In that case then," said he, repressing a smile, "I should say it would be better for you to try. But pray make haste and get your wet things off, or you will come to serious harm."

"I will be as quick as ever I can."

"Now hurry," he replied, sitting down, and pulling one of the woman's children toward him. "Come, *mein Junge*, tell me how old you are?"

I followed the woman to an inner room, where she divested me of my dripping things, and attired me in a costume consisting of a short full brown petticoat, a blue woolen jacket, thick blue knitted stockings, and a pair of wide low shoes, which habiliments constituted the uniform of the orphan asylum of which she was matron, and belonged to her niece.

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She expatiated upon the warmth of the dress, and did not produce any outer wrap or shawl, and I, only anxious to go, said nothing, but twisted up my loose hair, and went back into the large stony room before spoken of, from which a great noise had been proceeding for some time.

I stood in the door-way and saw Eugen surrounded by other children, in addition to the one he had first called to him. There were likewise two dogs, and they—the children, the dogs, and Herr Concertmeister Courvoisier most of all—were making as much noise as they possibly could. I paused for a moment to have the small gratification of watching the scene. One child on his knee and one on his shoulder pulling his hair, which was all ruffled and on end, a laugh upon his face, a dancing light in his eyes as if he felt happy and at home among all the little flaxen heads.

Could he be the same man who had behaved so coldly to me? My heart went out to him in this kinder moment. Why was he so genial with those children and so harsh to me, who was little better than a child myself?

His eye fell upon me as he held a shouting and kicking child high in the air, and his own face laughed all over in mirth and enjoyment.

"Come here, Miss Wedderburn; this is Hans, there is Fritz, and here is Franz—a jolly trio; aren't they?"

He put the child into his mother's arms, who regarded him with an eye of approval, and told him that it was not every one who knew how to ingratiate himself with her children, who were uncommonly spirited.

"Ready?" he asked, surveying me and my costume and laughing. "Don't you feel a stranger in these garments?"

"No! Why?"

"I should have said silk and lace and velvet, or fine muslins and embroideries, were more in your style."

"You are quite mistaken. I was just thinking how admirably this costume suits me, and that I should do well to adopt it permanently."

"Perhaps there was a mirror in the inner room," he suggested.

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"A mirror! Why?"

"Then your idea would quite be accounted for. Young ladies must of course wish to wear that which becomes them."

"Very becoming!" I sneered, grandly.

"Very," he replied, emphatically. "It makes me wish to be an orphan."

"Ah, *mein Herr*," said the woman, reproachfully, for he had spoken German. "Don't jest about that. If you have parents—"

"No, I haven't," he interposed, hastily.

"Or children either?"

"I should not else have understood yours so well," he laughed. "Come, my—Miss Wedderburn, if you are ready."

After arranging with the woman that she should dry my things and return them, receiving her own in exchange, we left the house.

It was quite moonlight now; the last faint streak of twilight had disappeared. The way that we must traverse to reach the town stretched before us, long, straight, and flat.

"Where is your shawl?" he asked, suddenly.

"I left it; it was wet through."

Before I knew what he was doing, he had stripped off his heavy overcoat, and I felt its warmth and thickness about my shoulders.

"Oh, don't!" I cried, in great distress, as I strove to remove it again, and looked imploringly into his face.

"Don't do that. You will get cold; you will—"

"Get cold!" he laughed, as if much amused, as he drew the coat around me and fastened it, making no more ado of my resisting hands than if they had been bits of straw.

"So!" said he, pushing one of my arms through the sleeve. "Now," as he still held it fastened together, and looked half laughingly at me, "do you intend to keep it on or not?"

"I suppose I must."

"I call that gratitude. Take my arm—so. You are weak yet."

We walked on in silence for some time. I was happy; for the first time since the night I had heard "Lohengrin" I was happy and at rest. True, no forgiveness had been asked or extended; but he had ceased to behave as if I were not forgiven.

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"Am I not going too fast?" he inquired.

"N—no."

"Yes, I am, I see. We will moderate the pace a little."

We walked more slowly. Physically I was inexpressibly weary. The reaction after my drenching had set in; I felt a languor which amounted to pain, and an aching and weakness in every limb. I tried to regret the event, but could not; tried to wish it were not such a long walk to Elberthal, and found myself perversely regretting that it was such a short one.

At length the lights of the town came in sight. I heaved a deep sigh. Soon it would be over—"the glory and the dream."

"I think we are exactly on the way to your house, *nicht wahr?*" said he.

"Yes; and to yours since we are opposite neighbors."

"Yes."

"You are not as lonely as I am, though; you have companions."

"I—oh—Friedhelm; yes."

"And—your little boy."

"Sigmund also," was all he said.

But "*auch* Sigmund" may express much more in German than in English. It did so then.

"And you?" he added.

"I am alone," said I.

I did not mean to be foolishly sentimental. The sigh that followed my words was involuntary.

"So you are. But I suppose you like it?"

"Like it? What can make you think so?"

"Well, at least you have good friends."

"Have I? Oh, yes, of course!" said I, thinking of von Francius.

"Do you get on with your music?" he next inquired.

"I hope so. I—do you think it strange that I should live there all alone?" I asked, tormented with a desire to know what he did think of me, and crassly ready to burst into explanations on the least

provocation. I was destined to be undeceived.

"I have not thought about it at all; it is not my business."

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Snub number one. He had spoken quickly, as if to clear himself as much as possible from any semblance of interest to me.

I went on, rashly plunging into further intricacies of conversation:

"It is curious that you and I should not only live near to each other, but actually have the same profession at last."

"How?"

Snub number two. But I persevered.

"Music. Your profession is music, and mine will be."

"I do not see the resemblance. There is little point of likeness between a young lady who is in training for a prima-donna and an obscure musiker, who contributes his share of shakes and runs to the symphony."

"I in training for a prima-donna! How can you say so?"

"Do we not all know the forte of Herr von Francius? And—excuse me—are not your windows opposite to ours, and open as a rule? Can I not hear the music you practice, and shall I not believe my own ears?"

"I am sure your own ears do not tell you that a future prima-donna lives opposite to you," said I, feeling most insanely and unreasonably hurt and cut up at the idea.

"Will you tell me that you are not studying for the stage?"

"I never said I was not. I said I was not a future prima-donna. My voice is not half good enough. I am not clever enough, either."

He laughed.

"As if voice or cleverness had anything to do with it. Personal appearance and friends at court are the chief things. I have known prime-donne—seen them, I mean—and from my place below the foot-lights I have had the impertinence to judge them upon their own merits. Provided they were handsome, impudent, and unscrupulous enough, their public seemed gladly to dispense with art, cultivation, or genius in their performances and conceptions."

"And you think that I am, or shall be in time, handsome, impudent, and unscrupulous enough," said I, in a low choked tone.

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My fleeting joy was being thrust back by hands most ruthless. Unmixed satisfaction for even the brief space of an hour or so was not to be included in my lot.

"*O, bewahre!*" said he, with a little laugh, that chilled me still further. "I think no such thing. The beauty is there, *mein Fräulein*—pardon me for saying so—"

Indeed, I was well able to pardon it. Had he been informing his grandmother that there were the remains of a handsome woman to be traced in her, he could not have spoken more unenthusiastically.

"The beauty is there. The rest, as I said, when one has friends, these things are arranged for one."

"But I have no friends."

"No," with again that dry little laugh. "Perhaps they will be provided at the proper time, as Elijah was fed by the ravens. Some fine night—who knows—I may sit with my violin in the orchestra at your benefit, and one of the bouquets with which you are smothered may fall at my feet and bring me *aus der fuge*. When that happens, will you forgive me if I break a rose from the bouquet before I toss it on to the feet of its rightful owner? I promise that I will seek for no note, nor spy out any ring or bracelet. I will only keep the rose in remembrance of the night when I skated with you across the Schwanenspiegel, and prophesied unto you the future. It will be a kind of 'I told you so,' on my part."

Mock sentiment, mock respect, mock admiration; a sneer in the voice, a dry sarcasm in the words. What was I to think? Why did he veer round in this way, and from protecting kindness return to a raillery which was more cruel than his silence? My blood rose, though, at the mockingness of his tone.

"I don't know what you mean," said I, coldly. "I am studying operatic music. If I have any success in that line, I shall devote myself to it. What is there wrong in it? The person who has her living to gain must use the talents that have been given her. My talent is my voice; it is the only thing I have—except, perhaps, some capacity to love—those—who are kind to me. I can do that, thank God! Beyond that I have nothing, and I did not make myself."

"A capacity to love those who are kind to you," he said, hastily. "And do you love all who are kind to you?"

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"Yes," said I, stoutly, though I felt my face burning.

"And hate them that despitefully use you?"

"Naturally," I said, with a somewhat unsteady laugh. A rush of my ruling feeling—propriety and decent reserve—tied my tongue, and I could not say, "Not all—not always."

He, however, snapped, as it were, at my remark or admission, and chose to take it as if it were in the deepest earnest; for he said, quickly, decisively, and, as I thought, with a kind of exultation:

"Ah, then I will be disagreeable to you."

This remark, and the tone in which it was uttered, came upon me with a shock which I can not express. He would be disagreeable to me because I hated those who were disagreeable to me, *ergo*, he wished me to hate him. But why? What was the meaning of the whole extraordinary proceeding?

"Why?" I asked, mechanically, and asked nothing more.

"Because then you will hate me, unless you have the good sense to do so already."

"Why? What effect will my hatred have upon you?"

"None. Not a jot. *Gar keine*. But I wish you to hate me, nevertheless."

"So you have begun to be disagreeable to me by pulling me out of the water, lending me your coat, and giving me your arm all along this hard, lonely road," said I, composedly.

He laughed.

"That was before I knew of your peculiarity. From to-morrow morning on I shall begin. I will make you hate me. I shall be glad if you hate me."

I said nothing. My head felt bewildered; my understanding benumbed. I was conscious that I was very weary—conscious that I should like to cry, so bitter was my disappointment.

As we came within the town, I said:

"I am very sorry, Herr Courvoisier, to have given you so much trouble."

"That means that I am to put you into a cab and relieve you of my company."

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"It does not," I ejaculated, passionately, jerking my hand from his arm. "How can you say so? How dare you say so?"

"You might meet some of your friends, you know."

"And I tell you I have no friends except Herr von Francius, and I am not accountable to him for my actions."

"We shall soon be at your house now."

"Herr Courvoisier, have you forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you what?"

"My rudeness to you once."

"Ah, *mein Fräulein*," said he, shrugging his shoulders a little and smiling slightly, "you are under a delusion about that circumstance. How can I forgive that which I never resented?"

This was putting the matter in a new, and, for me, an humbling light.

"Never resented!" I murmured, confusedly.

"Never. Why should I resent it? I forgot myself, *nicht wahr!* and you showed me at one and the same time my proper place and your own excellent good sense. You did not wish to know me, and I did not resent it. I had no right to resent it."

"Excuse me," said I, my voice vibrating against my will; "you are wrong there, and either you are purposely saying what is not true, or you have not the feelings of a gentleman." His arm sprung a little aside as I went on, amazed at my own boldness. "I did not show you your 'proper place.' I did not show my own good sense. I showed my ignorance, vanity, and surprise. If you do not know that, you are not what I take you for—a gentleman."

"Perhaps not," said he, after a pause. "You certainly did not take me for one then. Why should I be a gentleman? What makes you suppose I am one?"

Questions which, however satisfactorily I might answer them to myself, I could not well reply to in words. I felt that I had rushed upon a topic which could not be explained, since he would not own himself offended. I had made a fool of myself and gained nothing by it. While I was racking my brain for some satisfactory closing remark, we turned a corner and came into the Wehrhahn. A clock struck seven.

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"*Gott im Himmel!*" he exclaimed. "Seven o'clock! The opera—*da geht's schon an!* Excuse me, Fräulein, I must go. Ah, here is your house."

He took the coat gently from my shoulders, wished me *gute besserung*, and ringing the bell, made me a profound bow, and either not noticing or not choosing to notice the hand which I stretched out toward him, strode off hastily toward the theater, leaving me cold, sick, and miserable, to digest my humble pie with what appetite I might.

CHAPTER XXII.

CUI BONO?

Christmas morning. And how cheerfully I spent it! I tried first of all to forget that it was Christmas, and only succeeded in impressing the fact more forcibly and vividly upon my mind, and with it others; the fact that I was alone especially predominating. And a German Christmas is not the kind of thing to let a lonely person forget his loneliness in; its very bustle and union serves to emphasize their solitude to solitary people.

I had seen such quantities of Christmas-trees go past the day before. One to every house in the neighborhood. One had even come here, and the widow of the piano-tuner had hung it with lights and invited some children to make merry for the feast of *Weihnachten Abend*.

Every one had a present except me. Every one had some one with whom to spend their Christmas—except me. A little tiny Christmas-tree had gone to the rooms whose windows faced mine. I had watched its arrival; for once I had broken through my rule of not deliberately watching my neighbors, and had done so. The tree arrived in the morning. It was kept a profound mystery from Sigmund, who was relegated, much to his disgust, to the society of Frau Schmidt down-stairs, who kept a vigilant watch upon him and would not let him go upstairs on any account.

The afternoon gradually darkened down. My landlady invited me to join her party down-stairs; I declined. The rapturous, untutored joy of half a dozen children had no attraction for me; the hermit-like watching of the scene over the way had. I did not light my lamp. I was secure of not being disturbed; for Frau Lutzler, when I would not come to her, had sent my supper upstairs, and said she would not be able to come to me again that evening.

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“So much the better!” I murmured, and put myself in a window corner.

The lights over the way were presently lighted. For a moment I trembled lest the blinds were going to be put down, and all my chance of spying spoiled. But no; my neighbors were careless fellows—not given to watching their neighbors themselves nor to suspecting other people of it. The blinds were left up, and I was free to observe all that passed.

Toward half past five I saw by the light of the street-lamp, which was just opposite, two people come into the house; a young man who held the hand of a little girl. The young man was Karl Linders, the violoncellist; the little girl, I supposed, must be his sister. They went upstairs, or rather Karl went upstairs; his little sister remained below.

There was a great shaking of hands and some laughing when Karl came into the room. He produced various packages which were opened, their contents criticised, and hung upon the tree. Then the three men surveyed their handiwork with much satisfaction. I could see the whole scene. They could not see my watching face pressed against the window, for they were in light and I was in darkness.

Friedhelm went out of the room, and, I suppose, exerted his lungs from the top of the stairs, for he came back, flushed and laughing, and presently the door opened, and Frau Schmidt, looking like the mother of the Gracchi, entered, holding a child by each hand. She never moved a muscle. She held a hand of each, and looked alternately at them. Breathless, I watched. It was almost as exciting as if I had been joining in the play—more so, for to me everything was *sur l'imprévu*—revealed piecemeal, while to them some degree of foreknowledge must exist, to deprive the ceremony of some of its charms.

There was awed silence for a time. It was a pretty scene. In the middle of the room a wooden table; upon it the small green fir, covered with little twinkling tapers; the orthodox waxen angels, and strings of balls and bonbons hanging about—the white *Christ-kind* at the top in the arms of Father Christmas. The three men standing in a semi-circle at one side; how well I could see them! A suppressed smile upon Eugen's face, such as it always wore when pleasing other people. Friedhelm not allowing the smile to fully appear upon his countenance, but with a grave delight upon his face, and with great satisfaction beaming from his luminous brown eyes. Karl with his hands in his pockets, and an attitude by which I knew he said, “There! what do you think of that?” Frau Schmidt and the two children on the other side.

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The tree was not a big one. The wax-lights were probably cheap ones; the gifts that hung upon the boughs or lay on the table must have been measured by the available funds of three poor musicians. But the whole affair did its mission admirably—even more effectively than an official commission to (let us say) inquire into the cause of the loss of an ironclad. It—the tree I mean, not the commission—was intended to excite joy and delight, and it did excite them to a very high extent. It was meant to produce astonishment in unsophisticated minds—it did that too, and here it has a point in common with the proceedings of the commission respectfully alluded to.

The little girl who was a head taller than Sigmund, had quantities of flaxen hair plaited in a pigtail and tied with light blue ribbon—new; and a sweet face which was a softened girl miniature of her brother's. She jumped for joy, and eyed the tree and the bonbons, and everything else with irrepressible rapture. Sigmund was not given to effusive declaration of his emotion, but after gazing long and solemnly at the show, his eyes turned to his father, and the two smiled in the odd manner they had, as if at some private understanding existing between themselves. Then the festivities were considered inaugurated.

Friedhelm Helfen took the rest of the proceedings into his own hands; and distributed the presents exactly as if he had found them all growing on the tree, and had not the least idea what they were nor whence they came. A doll which fell to the share of the little Gretchen was from Sigmund, as I found from the lively demonstrations that took place. Gretchen kissed him, at which every one laughed, and made him kiss the doll, or receive a kiss from it—a waxy salute which did not seem to cause him much enthusiasm.

I could not see what the other things were, only it was evident that every one gave every one else something, and Frau Schmidt's face relaxed into a stern smile on one or two occasions, as the young men presented her one after the other with some offering, accompanied with speeches and bows and ceremony. A conspicuous parcel done up in white paper was left to the last. Then Friedhelm took it up, and apparently made a long harangue, for the company—especially Karl Linders—became attentive. I saw a convulsive smile twitch Eugen's lips now and then, as the oration proceeded. Karl by and by grew even solemn, and it was with an almost awe-struck glance that he at last received the parcel from Friedhelm's hands, who gave it as if he were bestowing his blessing.

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Great gravity, eager attention on the part of the children, who pressed up to him as he opened it; then the last wrapper was torn off, and to my utter amazement and bewilderment Karl drew forth a white woolly animal of indefinite race, on a green stand. The look which crossed his face was indescribable; the shout of laughter which greeted the discovery penetrated even to my ears.

With my face pressed against the window I watched; it was really too interesting. But my spying was put an end to. A speech appeared to be made to Frau Schmidt, to which she answered by a frosty smile and an elaborate courtesy. She was apparently saying good-night, but, with the instinct of a housekeeper, set a few chairs straight, pulled a table-cloth, and pushed a footstool to its place, and in her tour round the room her eyes fell upon the windows. She came and put the shutters to. In one moment it had all flashed from my sight—tree and faces and lamp-light and brightness.

I raised my chin from my hands, and found that I was cold, numb, and stiff. I lighted the lamp, and passed my hands over my eyes; but could not quite find myself, and instead of getting to some occupation of my own, I sat with Richter's "Through Bass and Harmony" before me and a pen in my hand, and wondered what they were doing now.

It was with the remembrance of this evening in my mind to emphasize my loneliness that I woke on Christmas morning.

At post-time my landlady brought me a letter, scented, monogrammed, with the Roman post-mark. Adelaide wrote:

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"I won't wish you a merry Christmas. I think it is such nonsense. Who does have a merry Christmas now, except children and paupers? And, all being well—or rather ill, so far as I am concerned—we shall meet before long. We are coming to Elberthal. I will tell you why when we meet. It is too long to write—and too vexatious" (this word was half erased), "troublesome. I will let you know when we come, and our address. How are you getting on?"

"ADELAIDE."

I was much puzzled with this letter, and meditated long over it. Something lay in the background. Adelaide was not happy. It surely could not be that Sir Peter gave her any cause for discomfort. Impossible! Did he not dote upon her? Was not the being able to "turn him round her finger" one of the principal advantages of her marriage? And yet, that she should be coming to Elberthal of her own will, was an idea which my understanding declined to accept. She must have been compelled to it—and by nothing pleasant. This threw another shadow over my spirit.

Going to the window, I saw again how lonely I was. The people were passing in groups and throngs; it was Christmas-time; they were glad. They had nothing in common with me. I looked inside my room—bare, meager chamber that it was—the piano the only thing in it that was more than barely necessary, and a great wonder came over me.

"What is the use of it all? What is the use of working hard? Why am I leading this life? To earn money, and perhaps applause—some time. Well, and when I have got it—even supposing, which is extremely improbable, that I win it while I am young and can enjoy it—what good will it do me? I don't believe it will make me very happy. I don't know that I long for it very much. I don't know why I am working for it, except because Herr von Francius has a stronger will than I have, and rather compels me to it. Otherwise—"

"Well, what should I like? What do I wish for?" At the moment I seemed to feel myself free from all prejudice and all influence, and surveying with a calm, impartial eye possibilities and

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prospects, I could not discover that there was anything I particularly wished for. Had something within me changed during the last night?

I had been so eager before; I felt so apathetic now. I looked across the way. I dimly saw Courvoisier snatch up his boy, hold him in the air, and then, gathering him to him, cover him with kisses. I smiled. At the moment I felt neutral—experienced neither pleasure nor pain from the sight. I had loved the man so eagerly and intensely—with such warmth, fervor, and humility. It seemed as if now a pause had come (only for a time, I knew, but still a pause) in the warm current of delusion, and I contemplated facts with a dry, unmoved eye. After all—what was he? A man who seemed quite content with his station—not a particularly good or noble man that I could see; with some musical talent which he turned to account to earn his bread. He had a fine figure, a handsome face, a winning smile, plenty of presence of mind, and an excellent opinion of himself.

Stay! Let me be fair—he had only asserted his right to be treated as a gentleman by one whom he had treated in every respect as a lady. He did not want me—nor to know anything about me—else, why could he laugh for very glee as his boy's eyes met his? Want me? No! he was rich already. What he had was sufficient for him, and no wonder, I thought, with a jealous pang.

Who would want to have anything to do with grown-up people, with their larger selfishnesses, more developed self-seeking—robust jealousies and full-grown exactions and sophistications, when they had a beautiful little one like that? A child of one's own—not any child, but that very child to love in that ideal way. It was a relation that one scarcely sees out of a romance; it was the most beautiful thing I ever saw.

His life was sufficient to him. He did not suffer as I had been suffering. Suppose some one were to offer him a better post than that he now had. He would be glad, and would take it without a scruple. Perhaps, for a little while some casual thought of me might now and then cross his mind—but not for long; certainly in no importunate or troublesome manner. While I—why was I there, if not for his sake? What, when I accepted the proposal of von Francius, had been my chief thought? It had been, though all unspoken, scarcely acknowledged—yet a whispered force—"I shall not lose sight of him—of Eugen Courvoisier." I was rightly punished.

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I felt no great pain just now in thinking of this. I saw myself, and judged myself, and remembered how Faust had said once, in an immortal passage, half to himself, half to Mephisto:

"Entbehren sollst du; sollst entbehren."

And that read both ways, it comes to the same thing.

"Entbehren sollst du; sollst entbehren."

It flitted rhythmically through my mind on this dreamful morning, when I seemed a stranger to myself; or rather, when I seemed to stand outside myself, and contemplate, calmly and judiciously, the heart which had of late beaten and throbbed with such vivid, and such unreasoning, unconnected pangs. It is as painful and as humiliating a description of self-vivisection as there is, and one not without its peculiar merits.

The end of my reflections was the same as that which is, I believe, often arrived at by the talented class called philosophers, who spend much learning and science in going into the questions about whose skirts I skimmed; many of them, like me, after summing up, say, *Cui bono?*

So passed the morning, and the gray cloud still hung over my spirits. My landlady brought me a slice of *kuchen* at dinner-time, for Christmas, and wished me *guten appetit* to it, for which I thanked her with gravity.

In the afternoon I turned to the piano. After all it was Christmas-day. After beginning a bravura singing exercise, I suddenly stopped myself, and found myself, before I knew what I was about, singing the "Adeste Fidelis"—till I could not sing any more. Something rose in my throat—ceasing abruptly, I burst into tears, and cried plentifully over the piano keys.

"In tears, Fräulein May! *Aber*—what does that mean?"

I looked up. Von Francius stood in the door-way, looking not unkindly at me, with a bouquet in his hand of Christmas roses and ferns.

"It is only because it is Christmas," said I.

"Are you quite alone?"

"Yes."

"So am I."

"You! But you have so many friends."

"Have I? It is true, that if friends count by the number of invitations that one has, I have many. Unfortunately I could not make up my mind to accept any. As I passed through the flower-market this morning I thought of you—naturally. It struck me that perhaps you had no one to come and wish you the Merry Christmas and Happy New-year which belongs to you of right, so I came, and have the pleasure to wish it you now, with these flowers, though truly they are not

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Maiblümchen."

He raised my hand to his lips, and I was quite amazed at the sense of strength, healthiness, and new life which his presence brought.

"I am very foolish," I remarked; "I ought to know better. But I am unhappy about my sister, and also I have been foolishly thinking of old times, when she and I were at home together."

"*Ei!* That is foolish. Those things—old times and all that—are the very deuce for making one miserable. Strauss—he who writes dance music—has made a waltz, and called it 'The Good Old times.' *Lieber Himmel!* Fancy waltzing to the memory of old times. A requiem or a funeral march would have been intelligible."

"Yes."

"Well, you must not sit here and let these old times say what they like to you. Will you come out with me?"

"Go out!" I echoed, with an unwilling shrinking from it. My soul preferred rather to shut herself up in her case and turn surlily away from the light outside. But, as usual, he had his way.

"Yes—out. The two loneliest people in Elberthal will make a little zauberfest for themselves. I will show you some pictures. There are some new ones at the exhibition. Make haste."

So calm, so matter-of-fact was his manner, so indisputable did he seem to think his proposition, that I half rose; then I sat down again.

"I don't want to go out, Herr von Francius."

"That is foolish. Quick! before the daylight fades and it grows too dark for the pictures."

Scarcely knowing why I complied, I went to my room and put on my things. What a shabby sight I looked! I felt it keenly; so much, that when I came back and found him seated at the piano, and playing a wonderful in-and-out fugue of immense learning and immense difficulty, and quite without pathos or tenderness, I interrupted him incontinently.

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"Here I am, Herr von Francius. You have asked the most shabbily dressed person in Elberthal to be your companion. I have a mind to make you hold to your bargain, whether you like it or not."

Von Francius turned, surveying me from head to foot, with a smile. All the pedagogue was put off. It was holiday-time. I was half vexed at myself for beginning to feel as if it were holiday-time with me too.

We went out together. The wind was raw and cold, the day dreary, the streets not so full as they had been. We went along the street past the Tonhalle, and there we met Courvoisier alone. He looked at us, but though von Francius raised his hat, he did not notice us. There was a pallid change upon his face, a fixed look in his eyes, a strange, drawn, subdued expression upon his whole countenance. My heart leaped with an answering pang. That mood of the morning had fled. I had "found myself again," but again not "happily."

I followed von Francius up the stairs of the picture exhibition. No one was in the room. All the world had other occupations on Christmas afternoon, or preferred the stove-side and the family circle.

Von Francius showed me a picture which he said every one was talking about.

"Why?" I inquired when I had contemplated it, and failed to find it lovely.

"The drawing, the grouping, are admirable, as you must see. The art displayed is wonderful. I find the picture excellent."

"But the subject?" said I.

It was not a large picture, and represented the interior of an artist's atelier. In the foreground a dissipated-looking young man tilted his chair backward as he held his gloves in one hand, and with the other stroked his mustache, while he contemplated a picture standing on an easel before him. The face was hard, worn, *blasé*; the features, originally good, and even beautiful, had had all the latent loveliness worn out of them by a wrong, unbeautiful life. He wore a tall hat, very much to one side, as if to accent the fact that the rest of the company, upon whom he had turned his back, certainly did not merit that he should be at the trouble of baring his head to them. And the rest of the company—a girl, a model, seated on a chair upon a raised dais, dressed in a long, flounced white skirt, not of the freshest, some kind of Oriental wrap falling negligently about it—arms, models of shapeliness, folded, and she crouching herself together as if wearied, or contemptuous, or perhaps a little chilly. Upon a divan near her a man—presumably the artist to whom the establishment pertained—stretched at full length, looking up carelessly into her face, a pipe in his mouth, with indifference and—scarcely impertinence—it did not take the trouble to be a fully developed impertinence—in every gesture. This was the picture; faithful to life, significant in its very insignificance, before which von Francius sat, and declared that the drawing, coloring, and grouping were perfect.^[B]

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"The subject?" he echoed, after a pause. "It is only a scrap of artist-life."

"Is that artist-life?" said I, shrugging my shoulders. "I do not like it at all; it is common, low, vulgar. There is no romance about it; it only reminds one of stale tobacco and flat champagne."

"You are too particular," said von Francius, after a pause, and with a flavor of some feeling which I did not quite understand tincturing his voice.

For my part, I was looking at the picture and thinking of what Courvoisier had said: "Beauty, impudence, assurance, and an admiring public." That the girl was beautiful—at least, she had the battered remains of a decided beauty; she had impudence certainly, and assurance too, and an admiring public, I supposed, which testified its admiration by lolling on a couch and staring at her, or keeping its hat on and turning its back to her.

"Do you really admire the picture, Herr von Francius?" I inquired.

"Indeed I do. It is so admirably true. That is the kind of life into which I was born, and in which I was for a long time brought up; but I escaped from it."

I looked at him in astonishment. It seemed so extraordinary that that model of reticence should speak to me, above all, about himself. It struck me for the very first time that no one ever spoke of von Francius as if he had any one belonging to him. Calm, cold, lonely, self-sufficing—and self-sufficing, too, because he must be so, because he had none other to whom to turn—that was his character, and viewing him in that manner I had always judged him. But what might the truth be?

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"Were you not happy when you were young?" I asked, on a quick impulse.

"Happy! Who expects to be happy? If I had been simply not miserable, I should have counted my childhood a good one; but—"

He paused a moment, then went on:

"Your great novelist, Dickens, had a poor, sordid kind of childhood in outward circumstances. But mine was spiritually sordid—hideous, repulsive. There are some plants which spring from and flourish in mud and slime; they are but a flabby, pestiferous growth, as you may suppose. I was, to begin with, a human specimen of that kind; I was in an atmosphere of moral mud, an intellectual hot-bed. I don't know what there was in me that set me against the life; that I never can tell. It was a sort of hell on earth that I was living in. One day something happened—I was twelve years old then—something happened, and it seemed as if all my nature—its good and its evil, its energies and indolence, its pride and humility—all ran together, welded by the furnace of passion into one furious, white-hot rage of anger, rebellion. In an instant I had decided my course; in an hour I had acted upon it. I am an odd kind of fellow, I believe. I quitted that scene and have never visited it since. I can not describe to you the anger I then felt, and to which I yielded. Twelve years old I was then. I fought hard for many years; but, *mein Fräulein*"—(he looked at me, and paused a moment)—"that was the first occasion upon which I ever was really angry; it has been the last. I have never felt the sensation of anger since—I mean personal anger. Artistic anger I have known; the anger at bad work, at false interpretations, at charlatany in art; but I have never been angry with the anger that resents. I tell you this as a curiosity of character. With that brief flash all resentment seemed to evaporate from me—to exhaust itself in one brief, resolute, effective attempt at self-cleansing, self-government."

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He paused.

"Tell me more, Herr von Francius," I besought. "Do not leave off there. Afterward?"

"You really care to hear? Afterward I lived through hardships in plenty; but I had effectually severed the whole connection with that which dragged me down. I used all my will to rise. I am not boasting, but simply stating a peculiarity of my temperament when I tell you that what I determine upon I always accomplish. I determined upon rising, and I have risen to what I am. I set it, or something like it, before me as my goal, and I have attained it."

"Well?" I asked, with some eagerness; for I, after all my unfulfilled strivings, had asked myself *Cui bono?* "And what is the end of it? Are you satisfied?"

"How quickly and how easily you see!" said he, with a smile. "I value the position I have, in a certain way—that is, I see the advantage it gives me, and the influence. But that deep inner happiness, which lies outside of condition and circumstances—that feeling of the poet in 'Faust'—don't you remember?"

"I nothing had, and yet enough'—

all that is unknown to me. For I ask myself, *Cui bono?*"

"Like me," I could not help saying.

He added:

"Fräulein May, the nearest feeling I have had to happiness has been the knowing you. Do you know that you are a person who makes joy?"

"No, indeed I did not."

"It is true, though. I should like, if you do not mind—if you can say it truly—to hear from your lips

that you look upon me as your friend.”

“Indeed, Herr von Francius, I feel you my very best friend, and I would not lose your regard for anything,” I was able to assure him.

And then, as it was growing dark, the woman from the receipt of custom by the door came in and told us that she must close the rooms.

We got up and went out. In the street the lamps were lighted, and the people going up and down.

Von Francius left me at the door of my lodgings.

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“Good-evening, *liebes Fräulein*; and thank you for your company this afternoon.”

A light burned steadily all evening in the sitting-room of my opposite neighbors; but the shutters were closed. I only saw a thin stream coming through a chink.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“Es ist bestimmt, in Gottes
Rath,
Dass man vom Liebsten was
man hat
Muss scheiden.”

Our merry little zauberfest of Christmas-eve was over. Christmas morning came. I remember that morning well—a gray, neutral kind of day, whose monotony outside emphasized the keenness of emotion within.

On that morning the postman came—a rather rare occurrence with us; for, except with notes from pupils, notices of proben, or other official communications, he seldom troubled us.

It was Sigmund who opened the door; it was he who took the letter, and wished the postman “good-morning” in his courteous little way. I dare say that the incident gave an additional pang afterward to the father, if he marked it, and seldom did the smallest act or movement of his child escape him.

“Father, here is a letter,” he said, giving it into Eugen’s hand.

“Perhaps it is for Friedel; thou art too ready to think that everything appertains to thy father,” said Eugen, with a smile, as he took the letter and looked at it; but before he had finished speaking the smile had faded. There remained a whiteness, a blank, a haggardness.

I had caught a glimpse of the letter; it was large, square, massive, and there was a seal upon the envelope—a regular letter of fate out of a romance.

Eugen took it into his hand, and for once he made no answer to the caress of his child, who put his arms round his neck and wanted to climb upon his knee. He allowed the action, but passively.

“Let me open it!” cried Sigmund. “Let me open thy letter!”

“No, no, child!” said Eugen, in a sharp, pained tone. “Let it alone.”

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Sigmund looked surprised, and recoiled a little; a shock clouding his eyes. It was all right if his father said no, but a shade presently crossed his young face. His father did not usually speak so; did not usually have that white and pallid look about the eyes—above all, did not look at his son with a look that meant nothing.

Eugen was usually prompt enough in all he did, but he laid aside that letter, and proposed in a subdued tone that we should have breakfast. Which we had, and still the letter lay unopened. And when breakfast was over he even took up his violin and played runs and shakes and scales—and the air of a drinking song, which sounded grotesque in contrast with the surroundings. This lasted for some time, and yet the letter was not opened. It seemed as if he could not open it. I knew that it was with a desperate effort that he at last took it up, and—went into his room and shut the door.

I was reading—that is, I had a book in my hands, and was stretched out in the full luxury of an unexpected holiday upon the couch; but I could no more have read under the new influence, could no more have helped watching Sigmund, than I could help breathing and feeling.

He, Sigmund, stood still for a moment, looking at the closed door; gazing at it as if he expected it to open, and a loved hand to beckon him within. But it remained pitilessly shut, and the little boy had to accommodate himself as well as he could to a new phase in his mental history—the being excluded—left out in the cold. After making an impulsive step toward the door he turned, plunged his hands into his pockets as if to keep them from attacking the handle of that closed door, and

walking to the window, gazed out, silent and motionless. I watched; I was compelled to watch. He was listening with every faculty, every fiber, for the least noise, the faintest movement from the room from which he was shut out. I did not dare to speak to him. I was very miserable myself; and a sense of coming loss and disaster was driven firmly into my mind and fixed there—a heavy prevision of inevitable sorrow and pain overhung my mind. I turned to my book and tried to read. It was one of the most delightful of romances that I held—no other than “Die Kinder der Welt”—and the scene was that in which Edwin and Toinette make that delightful, irregular Sunday excursion to the Charlottenburg, but I understood none of it. With that pathetic little real figure taking up so much of my consciousness, and every moment more insistently so, I could think of nothing else.

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Dead silence from the room within; utter and entire silence, which lasted so long that my misery grew acute, and still that little figure, which was now growing terrible to me, neither spoke nor stirred. I do not know how long by the clock we remained in these relative positions; by my feelings it was a week; by those of Sigmund, I doubt not, a hundred years. But he turned at last, and with a face from which all trace of color had fled walked slowly toward the closed door.

“Sigmund!” I cried, in a loud whisper. “Come here, my child! Stay here, with me.”

“I must go in,” said he. He did not knock. He opened the door softly, and went in, closing it after him. I know not what passed. There was silence as deep as before, after one short, inarticulate murmur. There are some moments in this our life which are at once sacrificial, sacramental, and strong with the virtue of absolution for sins past; moments which are a crucible from which a stained soul may come out white again. Such were these—I know it now—in which father and son were alone together.

After a short silence, during which my book hung unheeded from my hand, I left the house, out of a sort of respect for my two friends. I had nothing particular to do, and so strolled aimlessly about, first into the Hofgarten, where I watched the Rhine, and looked Hollandward along its low, flat shores, to where there was a bend, and beyond the bend, Kaiserswerth. It is now long since I saw the river. Fair are his banks higher up—not at Elberthal would he have struck the stranger as being a stream for which to fight and die; but to me there is no part of his banks so lovely as the poor old Schöne Aussicht in the Elberthal Hofgarten, from whence I have watched the sun set flaming over the broad water, and felt my heart beat to the sense of precious possessions in the homely town behind. Then I strolled through the town, and coming down the Königsallée, beheld some bustle in front of a large, imposing-looking house, which had long been shut up and uninhabited. It had been a venture by a too shortly successful banker. He had built the house, lived in it three months, and finding himself bankrupt, had one morning disposed of himself by cutting his throat. Since then the house had been closed, and had had an ill name, though it was the handsomest building in the most fashionable part of the town, with a grand *porte-cochère* in front, and a pleasant, enticing kind of bowery garden behind—the house faced the Exerzierplatz, and was on the promenade of Elberthal. A fine chestnut avenue made the street into a pleasant wood, and yet Königsallée No. 3 always looked deserted and depressing. I paused to watch the workmen who were throwing open the shutters and uncovering the furniture. There were some women-servants busy with brush and duster in the hall, and a splendid barouche was being pushed through the *porte-cochère* into the back premises; a couple of trim-looking English grooms with four horses followed.

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“Is some one coming to live here?” I demanded of a workman, who made answer:

“*Ja wohl!* A rich English milord has taken the house furnished for six months—Sir Le Marchant, *oder so etwas*. I do not know the name quite correctly. He comes in a few days.”

“So!” said I, wondering what attraction Elberthal could offer to a rich English sir or milord, and feeling at the same time a mild glow of curiosity as to him and his circumstances, for I humbly confess it—I had never seen an authentic milord. Elberthal and Köln were almost the extent of my travels, and I only remembered that at the Niederrheinisches Musikfest last year some one had pointed out to me a decrepit-looking old gentleman, with a bottle-nose and a meaningless eye, as a milord—very, very rich, and exceedingly good. I had sorrowed a little at the time in thinking that he did not personally better grace his circumstances and character, but until this moment I had never thought of him again.

“That is his secretary,” pursued the workman to me, in an under-tone, as he pointed out a young man who was standing in the middle of the hall, note-book in hand. “Herr Arkwright. He is looking after us.”

“When does the *Engländer* come?”

“In a few days, with his servants and milady, and milady’s maid and dogs and bags and everything. And she—milady—is to have those rooms”—he pointed overhead, and grinned—“those where Banquier Klein was found with his throat cut. *Hè!*”

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He laughed, and began to sing lustily, “In Berlin, sagt’ er.”

After giving one more short survey to the house, and wondering why the apartments of a suicide should be assigned to a young and beautiful woman (for I instinctively judged her to be young and beautiful), I went on my way, and my thoughts soon returned to Eugen and Sigmund, and that trouble which I felt was hanging inevitably over us.

Eugen was, that evening, in a mood of utter, cool aloofness. His trouble did not appear to be one that he could confide—at present, at least. He took up his violin and discoursed most eloquent music, in the dark, to which music Sigmund and I listened. Sigmund sat upon my knee, and Eugen went on playing—improvising, or rather speaking the thoughts which were uppermost in his heart. It was wild, strange, melancholy, sometimes sweet, but ever with a ringing note of woe so piercing as to stab, recurring perpetually—such a note as comes throbbing to life now and then in the “Sonate Pathetique,” or in Raff’s Fifth Symphony.

Eugen always went to Sigmund after he had gone to bed, and talked to him or listened to him. I do not know if he taught him something like a prayer at such times, or spoke to him of supernatural things, or upon what they discoursed. I only know that it was an interchange of soul, and that usually he came away from it looking glad. But to-night, after remaining longer than usual, he returned with a face more haggard than I had seen it yet.

He sat down opposite me at the table, and there was silence, with an ever-deepening, sympathetic pain on my part. At last I raised my eyes to his face; one elbow rested upon the table, and his head leaned upon his hand. The lamp-light fell full upon his face, and there was that in it which would let me be silent no longer, any more than one could see a comrade bleeding to death, and not try to stanch the wound. I stepped up to him and laid my hand upon his shoulder. He looked up drearily, unrecognizingly, unsmilingly at me.

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“Eugen, what hast thou?”

“*La mort dans l’âme*,” he answered, quoting from a poem which we had both been reading.

“And what has caused it?”

“Must you know, friend?” he asked. “If I did not need to tell it, I should be very glad.”

“I must know it, or—or leave you to it!” said I, choking back some emotion. “I can not pass another day like this.”

“And I had no right to let you spend such a day as this,” he answered. “Forgive me once again, Friedel—you who have forgiven so much and so often.”

“Well,” said I, “let us have the worst, Eugen. It is something about—”

I glanced toward the door, on the other side of which Sigmund was sleeping.

His face became set, as if of stone. One word, and one alone, after a short pause, passed his lips—“*Ja!*”

I breathed again. It was so then.

“I told you, Friedel, that I should have to leave him?”

The words dropped out one by one from his lips, distinct, short, steady.

“Yes.”

“That was bad, very bad. The worst, I thought, that could befall; but it seems that my imagination was limited.”

“Eugen, what is it?”

“I shall not have to leave him. I shall have to send him away from me.”

As if with the utterance of the words, the very core and fiber of resolution melted away and vanished, and the broken spirit turned writhing and shuddering from the phantom that extended its arms for the sacrifice, he flung his arms upon the table; his shoulders heaved. I heard two suppressed, choked-down sobs—the sobs of a strong man—strong alike in body and mind; strongest of all in the heart and spirit and purpose to love and cherish.

“*La mort dans l’âme*,” indeed! He could have chosen no fitter expression.

“Send him away!” I echoed, beneath my breath.

“Send my child away from me—as if I—did not—want him,” said Courvoisier, slowly, and in a voice made low and halting with anguish, as he lifted his gaze, dim with the desperate pain of coming parting, and looked me in the face.

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I had begun in an aimless manner to pace the room, my heart on fire, my brain reaching wildly after some escape from the fetters of circumstance, invisible but iron strong, relentless as cramps and glaives of tempered steel. I knew no reason, of course. I knew no outward circumstances of my friend’s life or destiny. I did not wish to learn any. I did know that since he said it was so it must be so. Sigmund must be sent away! He—we—must be left alone; two poor men, with the brightness gone from our lives.

The scene does not let me rightly describe it. It was an anguish allied in its intensity to that of Gethsemane. Let me relate it as briefly as I can.

I made no spoken assurance of sympathy. I winced almost at the idea of speaking to him. I knew then that we may contemplate, or believe we contemplate, some coming catastrophe for years, believing that so the suffering, when it finally falls, will be lessened. This is a delusion. Let the

blow rather come short, sharp, and without forewarning; preparation heightens the agony.

"Friedel," said he at last, "you do not ask why must this be."

"I do not need to ask why. I know that it must be, or you would not do it."

"I would tell you if I could—if I might."

"For Heaven's sake, don't suppose that I wish to pry—" I began. He interrupted me.

"You will make me laugh in spite of myself," said he. "You wish to pry! Now, let me see how much more I can tell you. You perhaps think it wrong, in an abstract light, for a father to send his young son away from him. That is because you do not know what I do. If you did, you would say, as I do, that it must be so—I never saw it till now. That letter was a revelation. It is now all as clear as sunshine."

I assented.

"Then you consent to take my word that it must be so, without more."

"Indeed, Eugen, I wish for no more."

He looked at me. "If I were to tell you," said he, suddenly, and an impulsive light beamed in his eyes. A look of relief—it was nothing else—of hope, crossed his face. Then he sunk again into his former attitude—as if tired and wearied with some hard battle; exhausted, or what we more expressively call *niedergeschlagen*.

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"Now something more," he went on; and I saw the frown of desperation that gathered upon his brow. He went on quickly, as if otherwise he could not say what had to be said: "When he goes from me, he goes to learn to become a stranger to me. I promise not to see him, nor write to him, nor in any way communicate with him, or influence him. We part—utterly and entirely."

"Eugen! Impossible! *Herrgott!* Impossible!" cried I, coming to a stop, and looking incredulously at him. That I did not believe. "Impossible!" I repeated, beneath my breath.

"By faith men can move mountains," he retorted.

This, then, was the flavoring which made the cup so intolerable.

"You say that that is and must be wrong under all circumstances," said Eugen, eyeing me steadily.

I paused. I could almost have found it in my heart to say, "Yes, I do." But my faith in and love for this man had grown with me; as a daily prayer grows part of one's thoughts, so was my confidence in him part of my mind. He looked as if he were appealing to me to say that it must be wrong, and so give him some excuse to push it aside. But I could not. After wavering for a moment, I answered:

"No. I am sure you have sufficient reasons."

"I have. God knows I have."

In the silence that ensued my mind was busy. Eugen Courvoisier was not a religious man, as the popular meaning of religious runs. He did not say of his misfortune, "It is God's will," nor did he add, "and therefore sweet to me." He said nothing of whose will it was; but I felt that had that cause been a living thing—had it been a man, for instance, he would have gripped it and fastened to it until it lay dead and impotent, and he could set his heel upon it.

But it was no strong, living, tangible thing. It was a breathless abstraction—a something existing in the minds of men, and which they call "Right!" and being that—not an outside law which an officer of the law could enforce upon him; being that abstraction, he obeyed it.

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As for saying that because it was right he liked it, or felt any consolation from the knowledge—he never once pretended to any such thing; but, true to his character of Child of the World, hated it with a hatred as strong as his love for the creature which it deprived him of. Only—he did it. He is not alone in such circumstances. Others have obeyed and will again obey this invisible law in circumstances as anguishing as those in which he stood, will steel their hearts to hardness while every fiber cries out, "Relent!" or will, like him, writhe under the lash, shake their chained hands at Heaven, and—submit.

"One more question, Eugen. When?"

"Soon."

"A year would seem soon to any of us three."

"In a very short time. It may be in weeks; it may be in days. Now, Friedhelm, have a little pity and don't probe any further."

But I had no need to ask any more questions. The dreary evening passed somehow over, and bed-time came, and the morrow dawned.

For us three it brought the knowledge that for an indefinite time retrospective happiness must play the part of sun on our mental horizon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“My Lady’s Glory.”

“Königsallée, No. 3,” wrote Adelaide to me, “is the house which has been taken for us. We shall be there on Tuesday evening.”

I accepted this communication in my own sense, and did not go to meet Adelaide, nor visit her that evening, but wrote a card, saying I would come on the following morning. I had seen the house which had been taken for Sir Peter and Lady Le Marchant—a large, gloomy-looking house, with a tragedy attached to it, which had stood empty ever since I had come to Elberthal.

Up to the fashionable Königsallée, under the naked chestnut avenue, and past the great long Caserne and Exerzierplatz—a way on which I did not as a rule intrude my ancient and poverty-stricken garments, I went on the morning after Adelaide’s arrival. Lady Le Marchant had not yet left her room, but if I were Miss Wedderburn I was to be taken to her immediately. Then I was taken upstairs, and had time to remark upon the contrast between my sister’s surroundings and my own, before I was delivered over to a lady’s-maid—French in nationality—who opened a door and announced me as Mlle. Veddairebairne. I had a rapid, dim impression that it was quite the chamber of a *grande dame*, in the midst of which stood my lady herself, having slowly risen as I came in.

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“At last you have condescended to come,” said the old proud, curt voice.

“How are you, Adelaide?” said I, originally, feeling that any display of emotion would be unwelcome and inappropriate, and moreover, feeling any desire to indulge in the same suddenly evaporate.

She took my hand loosely, gave me a little chilly kiss on the cheek, and then held me off at arms’-length to look at me.

I did not speak. I could think of nothing agreeable to say. The only words that rose to my lips were, “How very ill you look!” and I wisely concluded not to say them. She was very beautiful, and looked prouder and more imperious than ever. But she was changed. I could not tell what it was. I could find no name for the subtle alteration; ere long I knew only too well what it was. Then, I only knew that she was different from what she had been, and different in a way that aroused tenfold all my vague forebodings.

She was wasted too—had gone, for her, quite thin; and the repressed restlessness of her eyes made a disagreeable impression upon me. Was she perhaps wasted with passion and wicked thoughts? She looked as if it would not have taken much to bring the smoldering fire into a blaze of full fury—as if fire and not blood ran in her veins.

She was in a loose silk dressing-gown, which fell in long folds about her stately figure. Her thick black hair was twisted into a knot about her head. She was surrounded on all sides with rich and costly things. All the old severe simplicity of style had vanished—it seemed as if she had gratified every passing fantastic wish or whim of her restless, reckless spirit, and the result was a curious medley of the ugly, grotesque, ludicrous and beautiful—a feverish dream of Cleopatra-like luxury, in the midst of which she stood, as beautiful and sinuous as a serpent, and looking as if she could be, upon occasion, as poisonous as the same.

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She looked me over from head to foot with piercing eyes, and then said half scornfully, half enviously:

“How well a stagnant life seems to suit some people! Now you—you are immensely improved—unspeakably improved. You have grown into a pretty woman—more than a pretty woman. I shouldn’t have thought a few months could make such an alteration in any one.”

Her words struck me as a kind of satire upon herself.

“I might say the same to you,” said I, constrainedly. “I think you are very much altered.”

Indeed I felt strangely ill at ease with the beautiful creature who, I kept trying to convince myself, was my sister Adelaide, but who seemed further apart from me than ever. But the old sense of fascination which she had been wont to exercise over me returned again in all or in more than its primitive strength.

“I want to talk to you,” said she, forcing me into a deep easy-chair. “I have millions of things to ask you. Take off your hat and mantle. You must stay all day. Heavens! how shabby you are! I never saw anything so worn out—and yet your dress suits you, and you look nice in it.” (She sighed deeply.) “Nothing suits me now. Formerly I looked well in everything. I should have looked well in rags, and people would have turned to look after me. Now, whatever I put on makes me look hideous.”

“Nonsense!”

“It does—And I am glad of it,” she added, closing her lips as if she closed in some bitter joy.

"I wish you would tell me why you have come here," I inquired, innocently. "I was so astonished. It was the last place I should have thought of your coming to."

"Naturally. But you see Sir Peter adores me so that he hastens to gratify my smallest wish. I expressed a desire one day to see you, and two days afterward we were *en route*. He said I should have my wish. Sisterly love was a beautiful thing, and he felt it his duty to encourage it."

I looked at her, and could not decide whether she were in jest or earnest. If she were in jest, it was but a sorry kind of joke—if in earnest, she chose a disagreeably flippant manner of expressing herself.

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"Sir Peter has great faith in annoying and thwarting me," she went on. "He has been looking better and more cheerful ever since we left Rome."

"But Adelaide—if you wished to leave Rome—"

"But I did not wish to leave Rome. I wished to stay—so we came away, you know."

The suppressed rage and hatred in her tone made me feel uncomfortable. I avoided speaking, but I could not altogether avoid looking at her. Our eyes met, and Adelaide burst into a peal of harsh laughter.

"Oh, your face, May! It is a study! I had a particular objection to coming to Elberthal, therefore Sir Peter instantly experienced a particular desire to come. When you are married you will understand these things. I was almost enjoying myself in Rome; I suppose Sir Peter was afraid that familiarity might bring dislike, or that if we stayed too long I might feel it dull. This is a gay, lively place, I believe—we came here, and for aught I know we are going to stay here."

She laughed again, and I sat aghast. I had been miserable about Adelaide's marriage, but I had very greatly trusted in what she had prognosticated about being able to do what she liked with him. I began now to think that there must have been some miscalculation—that she had mistaken the metal and found it not quite so ductile as she had expected. I knew enough of her to be aware that I was probably the first person to whom she had spoken in such a manner, and that not even to me would she have so spoken unless some strong feeling had prompted her to it. This made me still more uneasy. She held so fast by the fine polish of the outside of the cup and platter. Very likely the world in general supposed that she and Sir Peter were a model couple.

"I am glad you are here," she pursued. "It is a relief to have some one else than Arkwright to speak to."

"Who is Arkwright?"

"Sir Peter's secretary—a very good sort of boy. He knows all about our domestic bliss and other concerns—because he can't help. Sir Peter tells him—"

A hand on the door-handle outside. A pause ere the persons came in, for Sir Peter's voice was audible, giving directions to some one, probably the secretary of whom Adelaide had spoken. She started violently; the color fled from her face; pale dismay painted itself for a moment upon her lips, but only for a moment. In the next she was outwardly herself again. But the hand trembled which passed her handkerchief over her lips.

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The door was fully opened, and Sir Peter came in.

Yes; that was the same face, the same pent-house of ragged eyebrow over the cold and snaky eye beneath, the same wolfish mouth and permanent hungry smile. But he looked better, stouter, stronger; more cheerful. It seemed as if my lady's society had done him a world of good, and acted as a kind of elixir of life.

I observed Adelaide. As he came in her eyes dropped; her hand closed tightly over the handkerchief she held, crushing it together in her grasp; she held her breath; then, recovered, she faced him.

"Heyday! Whom have we here?" he asked, in a voice which time and a residence in hearing of the language of music had not mollified. "Whom have we here? Your dress-maker, my lady? Have you had to send for a dress-maker already? Ha! what? Your sister? Impossible! Miss May, I am delighted to see you again! Are you very well? You look a little—a—shabby, one might almost say, my dear—a little seedy, hey?"

I had no answer ready for this winning greeting.

"Rather like my lady before she was my lady," he continued, pleasantly, as his eyes roved over the room, over its furniture, over us.

There was power—a horrible kind of strength and vitality in that figure—a crushing impression of his potency to make one miserable, conveyed in the strong, rasping voice. Quite a different Sir Peter from my erstwhile wooer. He was a masculine, strong, planning creature, whose force of will was able to crush that of my sister as easily as her forefinger might crush a troublesome midge. He was not blind or driveling; he could reason, plot, argue, concoct a systematic plan for revenge, and work it out fully and in detail; he was able at once to grasp the broadest bearing and the minute details of a position, and to act upon their intimations with crushing accuracy. He was calm, decided, keen, and all in a certain small, bounded, positive way which made him all the more efficient as a ruling factor in this social sphere, where small, bounded, positive strength,

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without keen sympathies save in the one direction—self—and without idea of generosity, save with regard to its own merits, pays better than a higher kind of strength—better than the strength of Joan of Arc, or St. Stephen, or Christ.

This was the real Sir Peter, and before the revelation I stood aghast. And that look in Adelaide's eyes, that tone in her voice, that restrained spring in her movements, would have been rebellion, revolution, but in the act of breaking forth it became—fear. She had been outwitted, most thoroughly and completely. She had got a jailer and a prison. She feared the former, and every tradition of her life bade her remain in the latter.

Sir Peter, pleasantly exhilarated by my confusion and my lady's sullen silence, proceeded with an agreeable smile:

"Are you never coming down-stairs, madame? I have been deprived long enough of the delights of your society. Come down! I want you to read to me."

"I am engaged, as you may see," she answered in a low voice of opposition.

"Then the engagement must be deferred. There is a great deal of reading to do. There is the 'Times' for a week."

"I hate the 'Times,' and I don't understand it."

"So much the more reason why you should learn to do so. In half an hour," said Sir Peter, consulting his watch, "I shall be ready, or say in quarter of an hour."

"Absurd! I can not be ready in quarter of an hour. Where is Mr. Arkwright?"

"What is Mr. Arkwright to you, my dear? You may be sure that Mr. Arkwright's time is not being wasted. If his mamma knew what he was doing she would be quite satisfied—oh, quite. In quarter of an hour."

He was leaving the room, but paused at the door, with a suspicious look.

"Miss May, it is a pity for you to go away. It will do you good to see your sister, I am sure. Pray spend the day with us. Now, my lady, waste no more time."

With that he finally departed. Adelaide's face was white, but she did not address me. She rang for her maid.

"Dress my hair, Toinette, and do it as quickly as possible. Is my dress ready?" was all she said.

"Mais oui, madame."

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"Quick!" she repeated. "You have only quarter of an hour."

Despite the suppressed cries, expostulations, and announcements that it was impossible, Adelaide was dressed in quarter of an hour.

"You will stay, May?" said she; and I knew it was only the presence of Toinette which restrained her from urgently imploring me to stay.

I remained, though not all day; only until it was time to go and have my lesson from von Francius. During my stay, however, I had ample opportunity to observe how things were.

Sir Peter appeared to have lighted upon a congenial occupation somewhat late in life, or perhaps previous practice had made him an adept in it. His time was fully occupied in carrying out a series of experiments upon his wife's pride, with a view to humble and bring it to the ground. If he did not fully succeed in that, he succeeded in making her hate him as scarcely ever was man hated before.

They had now been married some two or three months, and had forsworn all semblance of a pretense at unity or concord. She thwarted him as much as she could, and defied him as far as she dared. He played round and round his victim, springing upon her at last, with some look, or word, or hint, or smile, which meant something—I know not what—that cowed her.

Oh, it was a pleasant household!—a cheerful, amiable scene of connubial love, in which this fair woman of two-and-twenty found herself, with every prospect of its continuing for an indefinite number of years; for the Le Marchants were a long-lived family, and Sir Peter ailed nothing.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Wenn Menschen aus einander
gehen,
So sagen sie, Auf Wiedersehen!
Auf
Wiedersehen!"

Eugen had said, "Very soon—it may be weeks, it may be days," and had begged me not to inquire further into the matter. Seeing his anguish, I had refrained; but when two or three days had passed, and nothing was done or said, I began to hope that the parting might not be deferred even a few weeks; for I believe the father suffered, and with him the child, enough each day to wipe out years of transgression.

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It was impossible to hide from Sigmund that some great grief threatened, or had already descended upon his father, and therefore upon him. The child's sympathy with the man's nature, with every mood and feeling—I had almost said his intuitive understanding of his father's very thoughts, was too keen and intense to be hoodwinked or turned aside. He did not behave like other children, of course—*versteht sich*, as Eugen said to me with a dreary smile. He did not hang about his father's neck, imploring to hear what was the matter; he did not weep or wail, or make complaints. After that first moment of uncontrollable pain and anxiety, when he had gone into the room whose door was closed upon him, and in which Eugen had not told him all that was coming, he displayed no violent emotion; but he did what was to Eugen and me much more heart-breaking—brooded silently; grew every day wanner and thinner, and spent long intervals in watching his father, with eyes which nothing could divert and nothing deceive. If Eugen tried to be cheerful, to put on a little gayety of demeanor which he did not feel in his heart, Sigmund made no answer to it, but continued to look with the same solemn, large and mournful gaze.

His father's grief was eating into his own young heart. He asked not what it was; but both Eugen and I knew that in time, if it went on long enough, he would die of it. The picture, "Innocence Dying of Blood-stain," which Hawthorne has suggested to us, may have its prototypes and counterparts in unsuspected places. Here was one. Nor did Sigmund, as some others, children both of larger and smaller growth, might have done, turn to me and ask me to tell him the meaning of the sad change which had crept silently and darkly into our lives. He outspartaned the Spartan in many ways. His father had not chosen to tell him; he would die rather than ask the meaning of the silence.

One night—when some three days had passed since the letter had come—as Eugen and I sat alone, it struck me that I heard a weary turning over in the little bed in the next room, and a stifled sob coming distinctly to my ears. I lifted my head. Eugen had heard too; he was looking, with an expression of pain and indecision, toward the door. With a vast effort—the greatest my regard for him had yet made—I took it upon myself, laid my hand on his arm, and coercing him again into the chair from which he had half risen, whispered:

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"I will tell him. You can not. *Nicht wahr?*"

A look was the only, but a very sufficient answer.

I went into the inner room and closed the door. A dim whiteness of moonlight struggled through the shutters, and very, very faintly showed me the outline of the child who was dear to me. Stooping down beside him, I asked if he were awake.

"*Ja, ich wache,*" he replied, in a patient, resigned kind of small voice.

"Why dost thou not sleep, Sigmund? Art thou not well?"

"No, I am not well," he answered; but with an expression of double meaning. "*Mir ist's nicht wohl.*"

"What ails thee?"

"If you know what ails him, you know what ails me."

"Do you not know yourself?" I asked.

"No," said Sigmund, with a short sob. "He says he can not tell me."

I slipped upon my knees beside the little bed, and paused a moment. I am not ashamed to say that I prayed to something which in my mind existed outside all earthly things—perhaps to the "Freude" which Schiller sung and Beethoven composed to—for help in the hardest task of my life.

"Can not tell me." No wonder he could not tell that soft-eyed, clinging warmth; that subtle mixture of fire and softness, spirit and gentleness—that spirit which in the years of trouble they had passed together had grown part of his very nature—that they must part! No wonder that the father, upon whom the child built his every idea of what was great and good, beautiful, right and true in every shape and form, could not say, "You shall not stay with me; you shall be thrust forth to strangers; and, moreover, I will not see you nor speak to you, nor shall you hear my name; and this I will do without telling you why"—that he could not say this—what had the man been who could have said it?

As I knelt in the darkness by Sigmund's little bed, and felt his pillow wet with his silent tears, and his hot cheek touching my hand, I knew it all. I believe I felt for once as a man who has begotten a child and must hurt it, repulse it, part from it, feels.

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"No, my child, he can not tell thee, because he loves thee so dearly," said I. "But I can tell thee; I have his leave to tell thee, Sigmund."

"Friedel?"

"Thou art a very little boy, but thou art not like other boys; thy father is not just like other

fathers.”

“I know it.”

“He is very sad.”

“Yes.”

“And his life which he has to live will be a sad one.”

The child began to weep again. I had to pause. How was I to open my lips to instruct this baby upon the fearful, profound abyss of a subject—the evil and the sorrow that are in the world—how, how force those little tender, bare feet, from the soft grass on to the rough up-hill path all strewn with stones, and all rugged with ups and downs? It was horribly cruel.

“Life is very sad sometimes, *mein* Sigmund.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. Some people, too, are much sadder than others. I think thy father is one of those people. Perhaps thou art to be another.”

“What my father is I will be,” said he, softly; and I thought that it was another and a holier version of Eugen’s words to me, wrung out of the inner bitterness of his heart. “The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generation, whether they deserve it or not.” The child, who knew nothing of the ancient saying, merely said with love and satisfaction swelling his voice to fullness, “What my father is, I will be.”

“Couldst thou give up something very dear for his sake?”

“What a queer question!” said Sigmund. “I want nothing when I am with him.”

“*Ei! mein kind!* Thou dost not know what I mean. What is the greatest joy of thy life? To be near thy father and see him, hear his voice, and touch him, and feel him near thee; *nicht?*”

“Yes,” said he, in a scarcely audible whisper.

There was a pause, during which I was racking my brains to think of some way of introducing the rest without shocking him too much, when suddenly he said, in a clear, low voice: [Pg 211]

“That is it. He would never let me leave him, and he would never leave me.”

Silence again for a few moments, which seemed to deepen some sneaking shadow in the boy’s mind, for he repeated through clinched teeth, and in a voice which fought hard against conviction, “Never, never, never!”

“Sigmund—never of his own will. But remember what I said, that he is sad, and there is something in his life which makes him not only unable to do what he likes, but obliged to do exactly what he does not like—what he most hates and fears—to—part from thee.”

“*Nein, nein, nein!*” said he. “Who can make him do anything he does not wish? Who can take me away from him?”

“I do not know. I only know that it must be so. There is no escaping from it, and no getting out of it. It is horrible, but it is so. Sometimes, Sigmund, there are things in the world like this.”

“The world must be a very cruel place,” he said, as if first struck with that fact.

“Now dost thou understand, Sigmund, why he did not speak? Couldst thou have told him such a thing?”

“Where is he?”

“There, in the next room, and very sad for thee.”

Sigmund, before I knew what he was thinking of, was out of bed and had opened the door. I saw that Eugen looked up, saw the child standing in the door-way, sprung up, and Sigmund bounded to meet him. A cry as of a great terror came from the child. Self-restraint, so long maintained, broke down; he cried in a loud, frightened voice:

“*Mein Vater, Friedel* says I must leave thee!” and burst into a storm of sobs and crying such as I had never before known him yield to. Eugen folded him in his arms, laid his head upon his breast, and clasping him very closely to him, paced about the room with him in silence, until the first fit of grief was over. I, from the dark room, watched them in a kind of languor, for I was weary, as though I had gone through some physical struggle.

They passed to and fro like some moving dream. Bit by bit the child learned from his father’s lips the pitiless truth, down to the last bitter drop; that the parting was to be complete, and they were not to see each other. [Pg 212]

“But never, never?” asked Sigmund, in a voice of terror and pain mingled.

“When thou art a man that will depend upon thyself,” said Eugen. “Thou wilt have to choose.”

“Choose what?”

"Whether thou wilt see me again."

"When I am a man may I choose?" he asked, raising his head with sudden animation.

"Yes; I shall see to that."

"Oh, very well. I have chosen now," said Sigmund, and the thought gave him visible joy and relief.

Eugen kissed him passionately. Blessed ignorance of the hardening influences of the coming years! Blessed tenderness of heart and singleness of affection which could see no possibility that circumstances might make the acquaintance of a now loved and adored superior being appear undesirable! And blessed sanguineness of five years old, which could bridge the gulf between then and manhood, and cry, *Auf wiedersehen!*

During the next few days more letters were exchanged. Eugen received one which he answered. Part of the answer he showed to me, and it ran thus:

"I consent to this, but only upon one condition, which is that when my son is eighteen years old, you tell him all, and give him his choice whether he see me again or not. My word is given not to interfere in the matter, and I can trust yours when you promise that it shall be as I stipulate. I want your answer upon this point, which is very simple, and the single condition I make. It is, however, one which I can not and will not waive."

"Thirteen years, Eugen," said I.

"Yes; in thirteen years I shall be forty-three."

"You will let me know what the answer to that is," I went on.

He nodded. By return of post the answer came.

"It is 'yes,'" said he, and paused. "The day after to-morrow he is to go."

"Not alone, surely?"

"No; some one will come for him."

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I heard some of the instructions he gave his boy.

"There is one man where you are going, whom I wish you to obey as you would me, Sigmund," he told him.

"Is he like thee?"

"No; much better and wiser than I am. But, remember, he never commands twice. Thou must not question and delay as thou dost with thy weak-minded old father. He is the master in the place thou art going to."

"Is it far from here?"

"Not exceedingly far."

"Hast thou been there?"

"Oh, yes," said Eugen, in a peculiar tone, "often."

"What must I call this man?" inquired Sigmund.

"He will tell thee that. Do thou obey him and endeavor to do what he wishes, and so thou mayst know thou art best pleasing me."

"And when I am a man I can choose to see thee again. But where wilt thou be?"

"When the time comes thou wilt soon find me if it is necessary—And thy music," pursued Eugen. "Remember that in all troubles that may come to thee, and whatever thou mayst pass through, there is one great, beautiful goddess who abides above the troubles of men, and is often most beautiful in the hearts that are most troubled. Remember—whom?"

"Beethoven," was the prompt reply.

"Just so. And hold fast to the service of the goddess Music, the most beautiful thing in the world."

"And thou art a musician," said Sigmund, with a little laugh, as if it "understood itself" that his father should naturally be a priest of "the most beautiful thing in the world."

I hurry over that short time before the parting came. Eugen said to me:

"They are sending for him—an old servant. I am not afraid to trust him with him."

And one morning he came—the old servant. Sigmund happened at the moment not to be in the sitting-room; Eugen and I were. There was a knock, and in answer to our *Herein!* there entered an elderly man of soldierly appearance, with a grizzled mustache, and stiff, military bearing; he was dressed in a very plain, but very handsome livery, and on entering the room and seeing Eugen, he paused just within the door, and saluted with a look of deep respect; nor did he

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attempt to advance further. Eugen had turned very pale.

It struck me that he might have something to say to this messenger of fate, and with some words to that effect I rose to leave them together. Eugen laid his hand upon my arm.

"Sit still, Friedhelm." And turning to the man, he added: "How were all when you left, Heinrich?"

"Well, Herr Gr—"

"Courvoisier."

"All were well, *mein Herr*."

"Wait a short time," said he.

A silent inclination on the part of the man. Eugen went into the inner room where Sigmund was, and closed the door. There was silence. How long did it endure? What was passing there? What throes of parting? What grief not to be spoken or described?

Meanwhile the elderly man-servant remained in his sentinel attitude, and with fixed expressionless countenance, within the door-way. Was the time long to him, or short?

At last the door opened, and Sigmund came out alone. God help us all! It is terrible to see such an expression upon a child's soft face. White and set and worn as if with years of suffering was the beautiful little face. The elderly man started, surprised from his impassiveness, as the child came into the room. An irrepressible flash of emotion crossed his face; he made a step forward. Sigmund seemed as if he did not see us. He was making a mechanical way to the door, when I interrupted him.

"Sigmund, do not forget thy old Friedhelm!" I cried, clasping him in my arms, and kissing his little pale face, thinking of the day, three years ago, when his father had brought him wrapped up in the plaid on that wet afternoon, and my heart had gone out to him.

"*Lieber Friedhelm!*" he said, returning my embrace, "Love my father when I—am gone. And—*auf—auf—wiedersehen!*"

He loosed his arms from round my neck and went up to the man, saying:

"I am ready."

The large horny hand clasped round the small delicate one. The servant-man turned, and with a stiff, respectful bow to me, led Sigmund from the room. The door closed after him—he was gone. The light of two lonely lives was put out. Was our darling right or wrong in that persistent *auf wiedersehen* of his?

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CHAPTER XXVI.

Resignation! Welch' elendes Hilfsmittel! und doch
bleibt es mir das einzig Uebrige—*Briefe*
BEETHOVEN'S.

Several small events which took place at this time had all their indirect but strong bearing on the histories of the characters in this veracious narrative. The great concert of the "Passions-musik" of Bach came off on the very evening of Sigmund's departure. It was, I confess, with some fear and trembling that I went to call Eugen to his duties, for he had not emerged from his own room since he had gone into it to send Sigmund away.

He raised his face as I came in; he was sitting looking out of the window, and told me afterward that he had sat there, he believed, ever since he had been unable to catch another glimpse of the carriage which bore his darling away from him.

"What is it, Friedel?" he asked, when I came in.

I suggested in a subdued tone that the concert began in half an hour.

"Ah, true!" said he, rising; "I must get ready. Let me see, what is it?"

"The 'Passions-musik.'"

"To be sure! Most appropriate music! I feel as if I could write a Passion Music myself just now."

We had but to cross the road from our dwelling to the concert-room. As we entered the corridor two ladies also stepped into it from a very grand carriage. They were accompanied by a young man, who stood a little to one side to let them pass; and as they came up and we came up, von Francius came up too.

One of the ladies was May Wedderburn, who was dressed in black, and looked exquisitely lovely to my eyes, and, I felt, to some others, with her warm auburn hair in shining coils upon her head.

The other was a woman in whose pale, magnificent face I traced some likeness to our fair singer, but she was different; colder, grander, more severe. It so happened that the ladies barred the way as we arrived, and we had to stand by for a few moments as von Francius shook hands with Miss Wedderburn, and asked her smilingly if she were in good voice.

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She answered in the prettiest broken German I ever heard, and then turned to the lady, saying:

“Adelaide, may I introduce Herr von Francius—Lady Le Marchant.”

A stately bow from the lady—a deep reverence, with a momentary glance of an admiration warmer than I had ever seen in his eyes, on the part of von Francius—a glance which was instantly suppressed to one of conventional inexpressiveness. I was pleased and interested with this little peep at a rank which I had never seen, and could have stood watching them for a long time; the splendid beauty and the great pride of bearing of the English lady were a revelation to me, and opened quite a large, unknown world before my mental eyes. Romances and poems, and men dying of love, or killing each other for it, no longer seemed ridiculous; for a smile or a warmer glance from that icily beautiful face must be something not to forget.

It was Eugen who pushed forward, with a frown on his brow, and less than his usual courtesy. I saw his eyes and Miss Wedderburn’s meet; I saw the sudden flush that ran over her fair face; the stern composure of his. He would own nothing; but I was strangely mistaken if he could say that it was merely because he had nothing to own.

The concert was a success, so far as Miss Wedderburn went. If von Francius had allowed repetitions, one song at least would have been encored. As it was, she was a success. And von Francius spent his time in the pauses with her and her sister; in a grave, sedate way he and the English lady seemed to “get on.”

The concert was over. The next thing that was of any importance to us occurred shortly afterward. Von Francius had long been somewhat unpopular with his men, and at silent enmity with Eugen, who was, on the contrary, a universal favorite. There came a crisis, and the men sent a deputation to Eugen to say that if he would accept the post of leader they would strike, and refuse to accept any other than he.

This was an opportunity for distinguishing himself. He declined the honor; his words were few; he said something about how kind we had all been to him, “from the time when I arrived; when Friedhelm Helfen, here, took me in, gave me every help and assistance in his power, and showed how appropriate his name was,^[C] and so began a friendship which, please Heaven, shall last till death divides us, and perhaps go on afterward.” He ended by saying some words which made a deep impression upon me. After saying that he might possibly leave Elberthal, he added: “Lastly, I can not be your leader because I never intend to be any one’s leader—more than I am now,” he added, with a faint smile. “A kind of deputy, you know. I am not fit to be a leader. I have no gift in that line—”

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“*Doch!*” from half a dozen around.

“None whatever. I intend to remain in my present condition—no lower if I can help it, but certainly no higher. I have good reasons for knowing it to be my duty to do so.”

And then he urged them so strongly to stand by Herr von Francius that we were quite astonished. He told them that von Francius would some time rank with Schumann, Raff, or Rubinstein, and that the men who rejected him now would then be pointed out as ignorant and prejudiced.

And amid the silence that ensued, he began to direct us—we had a probe to Liszt’s “Prometheus,” I remember.

He had won the day for von Francius, and von Francius, getting to hear of it, came one day to see him and frankly apologized for his prejudice in the past, and asked Eugen for his friendship in the future. Eugen’s answer puzzled me.

“I am glad, you know, that I honor your genius, and wish you well,” said he, “and your offer of friendship honors me. Suppose I say I accept it—until you see cause to withdraw it.”

“You are putting rather a remote contingency to the front,” said von Francius.

“Perhaps—perhaps not,” said Eugen, with a singular smile. “At least I am glad to have had this token of your sense of generosity. We are on different paths, and my friends are not on the same level as yours—”

“Excuse me; every true artist must be a friend of every other true artist. We recognize no division of rank or possession.”

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Eugen bowed, still smiling ambiguously, nor could von Francius prevail upon him to say anything nearer or more certain. They parted, and long afterward I learned the truth, and knew the bitterness which must have been in Eugen’s heart; the shame, the gloom; the downcast sorrow, as he refused indirectly but decidedly the thing he would have liked so well—to shake the hand of a man high in position and honorable in name—look him in the face and say, “I accept your friendship—nor need you be ashamed of wearing mine openly.”

He refused the advance; he refused that and every other opening for advancement. The man seemed to have a horror of advancement, or of coming in any way forward. He rejected even

certain offers which were made that he should perform some solos at different concerts in Elberthal and the neighborhood. I once urged him to become rich and have Sigmund back again. He said: "If I had all the wealth in Germany, it would divide us further still."

I have said nothing about the blank which Sigmund's absence made in our lives, simply because it was too great a blank to describe. Day after day we felt it, and it grew keener, and the wound smarted more sharply. One can not work all day long, and in our leisure hours we learned to know only too well that he was gone—and gone indeed. That which remained to us was the "Resignation," the "miserable assistant" which poor Beethoven indicated with such a bitter smile. We took it to us as inmate and *Hausfreund*, and made what we could of it.

CHAPTER XXVII

"So runs the world away."

Königsallée, No. 3, could scarcely be called a happy establishment. I saw much of its inner life, and what I saw made me feel mortally sad—envy, hatred, and malice; no hour of satisfaction; my sister's bitter laughs and sneers and jibes at men and things; Sir Peter's calm consciousness of his power, and his no less calm, crushing, unvarying manner of wielding it—of silently and horribly making it felt. Adelaide's very nature appeared to have changed. From a lofty indifference to most things, to sorrow and joy, to the hopes, fears, and feelings of others, she had become eager, earnest, passionate, resenting ill-usage, strenuously desiring her own way, deeply angry when she could not get it. To say that Sir Peter's influence upon her was merely productive of a negative dislike would be ridiculous. It was productive of an intense, active hatred, a hatred which would gladly, if it could, have vented itself in deeds. That being impossible, it showed itself in a haughty, unbroken indifference of demeanor which it seemed to be Sir Peter's present aim in some way to break down, for not only did she hate him—he hated her.

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She used to the utmost what liberty she had. She was not a woman to talk of regret for what she had done, or to own that she had miscalculated her game. Her life was a great failure, and that failure had been brought home to her mind in a mercilessly short space of time; but of what use to bewail it? She was not yet conquered. The bitterness of spirit which she carried about with her took the form of a scoffing pessimism. A hard laugh at the things which made other people shake their heads and uplift their hands; a ready scoff at all tenderness; a sneer at anything which could by any stretch of imagination be called good; a determined running up of what was hard, sordid, and worldly, and a persistent and utter skepticism as to the existence of the reverse of those things; such was now the yea, yea, and nay, nay, of her communication.

To a certain extent she had what she had sold herself for; outside pomp and show in plenty—carriages, horses, servants, jewels, and clothes. Sir Peter liked, to use his own expression, "to see my lady blaze away"—only she must blaze away in his fashion, not hers. He declared he did not know how long he might remain in Elberthal; spoke vaguely of "business at home," about which he was waiting to hear, and said that until he heard the news he wanted, he could not move from the place he was in. He was in excellent spirits at seeing his wife chafing under the confinement to a place she detested, and appeared to find life sweet.

Meanwhile she, using her liberty, as I said, to the utmost extent, had soon plunged into the midst of the fastest set in Elberthal.

There was a fast set there as there was a musical set, an artistic set, a religious set, a free-thinking set; for though it was not so large or so rich as many dull, wealthy towns in England, it presented from its mixed inhabitants various phases of society.

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This set into which Adelaide had thrown herself was the fast one; a coterie of officers, artists, the richer merchants and bankers, medical men, literati, and the young (and sometimes old) wives, sisters and daughters of the same; many of them priding themselves upon not being natives of Elberthal, but coming from larger and gayer towns—Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and others.

They led a gay enough life among themselves—a life of theater, concert, and opera-going, of dances, private at home, public at the Malkasten or Artists' Club, flirtations, marriages, engagements, disappointments, the usual dreary and monotonous round. They considered themselves the only society worthy the name in Elberthal, and whoever was not of their set was *niemand*.

I was partly dragged, partly I went to a certain extent of my own will, into this vortex. I felt myself to have earned a larger experience now of life and life's realities. I questioned when I should once have discreetly inclined the head and held my peace. I had a mind to examine this clique and the characters of some of its units, and see in what it was superior to some other acquaintances (in an humbler sphere) with whom my lot had been cast. As time went on I found the points of superiority to decrease—those of inferiority rapidly to increase.

I troubled myself little about them and their opinions. My joys and griefs, hopes and fears, lay so entirely outside their circle that I scarce noticed whether they noticed me or not. I felt and behaved coldly toward them! to the women because their voices never had the ring of genuine

liking in speaking to me; to the men because I found them as a rule shallow, ignorant, and pretentious; repellent to me, as I dare say I, with my inability to understand them, was to them. I saw most men and things through a distorting glass; that of contrast, conscious or unconscious, with Courvoisier.

My musician, I reasoned, wrongly or rightly, had three times their wit, three times their good looks, manners and information, and many times three times their common sense, as well as a juster appreciation of his own merits; besides which, my musician was not a person whose acquaintance and esteem were to be had for the asking—or even for a great deal more than the asking, while it seemed that these young gentleman gave their society to any one who could live in a certain style and talk a certain *argot*, and their esteem to every one who could give them often enough the savory meat that their souls loved, and the wine of a certain quality which made glad their hearts, and rendered them of a cheerful countenance.

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But my chief reason for mixing with people who were certainly as a rule utterly distasteful and repugnant to me, was because I could not bear to leave Adelaide alone. I pitied her in her lonely and alienated misery; and I knew that it was some small solace to her to have me with her.

The tale of one day will give an approximate idea of most of the days I spent with her. I was at the time staying with her. Our hours were late. Breakfast was not over till ten, that is by Adelaide and myself. Sir Peter was an exceedingly active person, both in mind and body, who saw after the management of his affairs in England in the minutest manner that absence would allow. Toward half past eleven he strolled into the room in which we were sitting, and asked what we were doing.

"Looking over costumes," said I, as Adelaide made no answer, and I raised my eyes from some colored illustrations.

"Costumes—what kind of costumes?"

"Costumes for the maskenball," I answered, taking refuge in brevity of reply.

"Oh!" He paused. Then, turning suddenly to Adelaide:

"And what is this entertainment, my lady?"

"The Carnival Ball," said she, almost inaudibly, between her closed lips, as she shut the book of illustrations, pushed it away from her, and leaned back in her chair.

"And you think you would like to go to the Carnival Ball, hey?"

"No, I do not," said she, as she stroked her lap-dog with a long, white hand on which glittered many rings, and steadily avoided looking at him. She did wish to go to the ball, but she knew that it was as likely as not that if she displayed any such desire he would prevent it. Despite her curt reply she foresaw impending the occurrence which she most of anything disliked—a conversation with Sir Peter. He placed himself in our midst, and requested to look at the pictures. In silence I handed him the book. I never could force myself to smile when he was there, nor overcome a certain restraint of demeanor which rather pleased and flattered him than otherwise. He glanced sharply round in the silence which followed his joining our company, and turning over the illustrations, said:

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"I thought I heard some noise when I came in. Don't let me interrupt the conversation."

But the conversation was more than interrupted; it was dead—the life frozen out of it by his very appearance.

"When is the carnival, and when does this piece of tomfoolery come off?" he inquired, with winning grace of diction.

"The carnival begins this year on the 26th of February. The ball is on the 27th," said I, confining myself to facts and figures.

"And how do you get there? By paying?"

"Well, you have to pay—yes. But you must get your tickets from some member of the Malkasten Club. It is the artists' ball, and they arrange it all."

"H'm! Ha! And as what do you think of going, Adelaide?" he inquired, turning with suddenness toward her.

"I tell you I had not thought of going—nor thought anything about it. Herr von Francius sent us the pictures, and we were looking over them. That is all."

Sir Peter turned over the pages and looked at the commonplace costumes therein suggested—Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Picardy Peasant, Maria Stuart, a Snow Queen, and all the rest of them.

"Well, I don't see anything here that I would wear if I were a woman," he said, as he closed the book. "February, did you say?"

"Yes," said I, as no one else spoke.

"Well, it is the middle of January now. You had better be looking out for something; but don't let it be anything in those books. Let the beggarly daubers see how English women do these things."

"Do you intend me to understand that you wish us to go to the ball?" inquired Adelaide, in an icy kind of voice.

"Yes, I do," almost shouted Sir Peter. Adelaide could, despite the whip and rein with which he held her, exasperate and irritate him—by no means more thoroughly than by pretending that she did not understand his grandiloquent allusions, and the vague grandness of the commands which he sometimes gave. "I mean you to go, and your little sister here, and Arkwright too. I don't know about myself. Now, I am going to ride. Good-morning."

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As Sir Peter went out, von Francius came in. Sir Peter greeted him with a grin and exaggerated expressions of affability at which von Francius looked silently scornful. Sir Peter added:

"Those two ladies are puzzled to know what they shall wear at the Carnival Ball. Perhaps you can give them your assistance."

Then he went away. It was as if a half-muzzled wolf had left the room.

Von Francius had come to give me my lesson, which was now generally taken at my sister's house and in her presence, and after which von Francius usually remained some half hour or so in conversation with one or both of us. He had become an *intime* of the house. I was glad of this, and that without him nothing seemed complete, no party rounded, scarcely an evening finished.

When he was not with us in the evening, we were somewhere where he was; either at a concert or a probe, or at the theater or opera, or one of the fashionable lectures which were then in season.

It could hardly be said that von Francius was a more frequent visitor than some other men at the house, but from the first his attitude with regard to Adelaide had been different. Some of those other men were, or professed to be, desperately in love with the beautiful English woman; there was always a half gallantry in their behavior, a homage which might not be very earnest, but which was homage all the same, to a beautiful woman. With von Francius it had never been thus, but there had been a gravity and depth about their intercourse which pleased me. I had never had the least apprehension with regard to those other people; she might amuse herself with them; it would only be amusement, and some contempt.

But von Francius was a man of another mettle. It had struck me almost from the first that there might be some danger, and I was unfeignedly thankful to see that as time went on and his visits grew more and more frequent and the intimacy deeper, not a look, not a sign occurred to hint that it ever was or would be more than acquaintance, liking, appreciation, friendship, in successive stages. Von Francius had never from the first treated her as an ordinary person, but with a kind of tacit understanding that something not to be spoken of lay behind all she did and said, with the consciousness that the skeleton in Adelaide's cupboard was more ghastly to look upon than most people's secret specters, and that it persisted, with an intrusiveness and want of breeding peculiar to guests of that caliber, in thrusting its society upon her at all kinds of inconvenient times.

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I enjoyed these music lessons, I must confess. Von Francius had begun to teach me music now, as well as singing. By this time I had resigned myself to the conviction that such talent as I might have lay in my voice, not my fingers, and accepted it as part of the conditions which ordain that in every human life shall be something *manqué*, something incomplete.

The most memorable moments with me have been those in which pain and pleasure, yearning and satisfaction, knowledge and seeking, have been so exquisitely and so intangibly blended, in listening to some deep sonata, some stately and pathetic old *ciacconna* or gavotte, some concerto or symphony; the thing nearest heaven is to sit apart with closed eyes while the orchestra or the individual performer interprets for one the mystic poetry, or the dramatic fire, or the subtle cobweb refinements of some instrumental poem.

I would rather have composed a certain little "Traumerei" of Schumann's or a "Barcarole" of Rubinstein's, or a sonata of Schubert's than have won all the laurels of Grisi, all the glory of Malibran and Jenny Lind.

But it was not to be. I told myself so, and yet I tried so hard in my halting, bungling way to worship the goddess of my idolatry, that my master had to restrain me.

"Stop!" said he this morning, when I had been weakly endeavoring to render a *ciacconna* from a suite of Lachner's, which had moved me to thoughts too deep for tears at the last symphonie concert. "Stop, Fräulein May! Duty first; your voice before your fingers."

"Let me try once again!" I implored.

He shut up the music and took it from the desk.

"*Entbehren sollst du; sollst entbehren!*" said he, dryly.

I took my lesson and then practiced shakes for an hour, while he talked to Adelaide; and then, she being summoned to visitors, he went away.

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Later I found Adelaide in the midst of a lot of visitors—Herr Hauptmann This, Herr Lieutenant That, Herr Maler The Other, Herr Concertmeister So-and-So—for von Francius was not the only musician who followed in her train. But there I am wrong. He did not follow in her train; he might

stand aside and watch the others who did; but following was not in his line.

There were ladies there too—gay young women, who rallied round Lady Le Marchant as around a master spirit in the art of *Zeitvertreib*.

This levée lasted till the bell rang for lunch, when we went into the dining-room, and found Sir Peter and his secretary, young Arkwright, already seated. He—Arkwright—was a good-natured, tender-hearted lad, devoted to Adelaide. I do not think he was very happy or very well satisfied with his place, but from his salary he half supported a mother and sister, and so was fain to “grin and bear it.”

Sir Peter was always exceedingly affectionate to me. I hated to be in the same room with him, and while I detested him, was also conscious of an unheroic fear of him. For Adelaide’s sake I was as attentive to him as I could make myself, in order to free her a little from his surveillance, for poor Adelaide Wedderburn, with her few pounds of annual pocket-money, and her proud, restless, ambitious spirit, had been a free, contented woman in comparison with Lady Le Marchant.

On the day in question he was particularly amiable, called me “my dear” every time he spoke to me, and complimented me upon my good looks, telling me I was growing monstrous handsome—ay, devilish handsome, by Gad! far outstripping my lady, who had gone off dreadfully in her good looks, hadn’t she, Arkwright?

Poor Arkwright, tingling with a scorching blush, and ready to sink through the floor with confusion, stammered out that he had never thought of venturing to remark upon my Lady Le Marchant’s looks.

“What a lie, Arkwright! You know you watch her as if she was the apple of your eye,” chuckled Sir Peter, smiling round upon the company with his cold, glittering eyes. “What are you blushing so for, my pretty May? Isn’t there a song something about my pretty May, my dearest May, eh?”

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“My pretty Jane, I suppose you mean,” said I, nobly taking his attention upon myself, while Adelaide sat motionless and white as marble, and Arkwright cooled down somewhat from his state of shame and anguish at being called upon to decide which of us eclipsed the other in good looks.

“Pretty Jane! Whoever heard of a pretty Jane?” said Sir Peter. “If it isn’t May, it ought to be. At any rate, there was a Charming May.”

“The month—not a person.”

“Pretty Jane, indeed! You must sing me that after lunch, and then we can see whether the song was pretty or not, my dear, eh?”

“Certainly, Sir Peter, if you like.”

“Yes, I do like. My lady here seems to have lost her voice lately. I can’t imagine the reason. I am sure she has everything to make her sing for joy; have you not, my dear?”

“Everything, and more than everything,” replies my lady, laconically.

“And she has a strong sense of duty, too; loves those whom she ought to love, and despises those whom she ought to despise. She always has done, from her infancy up to the time when she loved me and despised public opinion for my sake.”

The last remark was uttered in tones of deeper malignity, while the eyes began to glare, and the under lip to droop, and the sharp eye-teeth, which lent such a very emphatic point to all Sir Peter’s smiles, sneers, and facial movements in general, gleamed.

Adelaide’s lip quivered for a second; her color momentarily faded.

In this kind of light and agreeable badinage the meal passed over, and we were followed into the drawing-room by Sir Peter, loudly demanding “My Pretty Jane’—or May, or whatever it was.”

“We are going out,” said my lady. “You can have it another time. May can not sing the moment she has finished lunch.”

“Hold your tongue, my dear,” said Sir Peter; and inspired by an agreeable and playful humor, he patted his wife’s shoulder and pinched her ear.

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The color fled from her very lips and she stood pale and rigid with a look in her eyes which I interpreted to mean a shuddering recoil, stopped by sheer force of will.

Sir Peter turned with an engaging laugh to me:

“Miss May—bonny May—made me a promise, and she must keep it; or if she doesn’t I shall take the usual forfeit. We know what that is. Upon my word, I almost wish she would break her promise.”

“I have no wish to break my promise,” said I, hastening to the piano, and then and there singing “My Pretty Jane,” and one or two others, after which he released us, chuckling at having contrived to keep my lady so long waiting for her drive.

The afternoon's programme was, I confess, not without attraction to me; for I knew that I was pretty, and I had not one of the strong and powerful minds which remained unelated by admiration and undepressed by the absence of it.

We drove to the picture exhibitions, and at both of them had a little crowd attending us. That crowd consisted chiefly of admirers, or professed admirers, of my sister, with von Francius in addition, who dropped in at the first exhibition.

Von Francius did not attend my sister; it was by my side that he remained and it was to me that he talked. He looked on at the men who were around her, but scarcely addressed her himself.

There was a clique of young artists who chose to consider the wealth of Sir Peter Le Marchant as fabulous, and who paid court to his wife from mixed motives; the prevailing one being a hope that she would be smitten by some picture of theirs at a fancy price, and order it to be sent home—as if she ever saw with anything beyond the most superficial outward eye those pictures, and as if it lay in her power to order any one, even the smallest and meanest of them. These ingenuous artists had yet to learn that Sir Peter's picture purchases were formed from his own judgment, through the medium of himself or his secretary, armed with strict injunctions as to price, and upon the most purely practical and business-like principles—not in the least at the caprice of his wife.

We went to the larger gallery last. As we entered it I turned aside with von Francius to look at a picture in a small back room, and when we turned to follow the others, they had all gone forward into the large room; but standing at the door by which we had entered, and looking calmly after us, was Courvoisier.

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A shock thrilled me. It was some time since I had seen him; for I had scarcely been at my lodgings for a fortnight, and we had had no *haupt-proben* lately. I had heard some rumor that important things—or, as Frau Lutzler gracefully expressed it, *was wichtiges*—had taken place between von Francius and the kapelle, and that Courvoisier had taken a leading part in the affair. To-day the greeting between the two men was a cordial if a brief one.

Eugen's eyes scarcely fell upon me; he included me in his bow—that was all. All my little day-dream of growing self-complacency was shattered, scattered; the old feeling of soreness, smallness, wounded pride, and bruised self-esteem came back again. I felt a wild, angry desire to compel some other glance from those eyes than that exasperating one of quiet indifference. I felt it like a lash every time I encountered it. Its very coolness and absence of emotion stung me and made me quiver.

We and Courvoisier entered the large room at the same time. While Adelaide was languidly making its circuit, von Francius and I sat upon the ottoman in the middle of the room. I watched Eugen, even if he took no notice of me—watched him till every feeling of rest, every hard-won conviction of indifference to him and feeling of regard conquered came tumbling down in ignominious ruins. I knew he had had a fiery trial. His child, for whom I used to watch his adoration with a dull kind of envy, had left him. There was some mystery about it, and much pain. Frau Lutzler had begun to tell me a long story culled from one told her by Frau Schmidt, and I had stopped her, but knew that "Herr Courvoisier was not like the same man any more."

That trouble was visible in firmly marked lines, even now; he looked subdued, older, and his face was thin and worn. Yet never had I noticed so plainly before the bright light of intellect in his eye; the noble stamp of mind upon his brow. There was more than the grace of a kindly nature in the pleasant curve of the lips—there was thought, power, intellectual strength. I compared him with the young men who were at this moment dangling round my sister. Not one among them could approach him—not merely in stature and breadth and the natural grace and dignity of carriage, but in far better things—in the mind that dominates sense; the will that holds back passion with a hand as strong and firm as that of a master over the dog whom he chooses to obey him. This man—I write from knowledge—had the capacity to appreciate and enjoy life—to taste its pleasures—never to excess, but with no ascetic's lips. But the natural prompting—the moral "eat, drink, and be merry," was held back with a ruthless hand, with chain of iron, and biting thong to chastise pitilessly each restive movement. He dreed out his weird most thoroughly, and drank the cup presented to him to the last dregs.

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When the weird is very long and hard—when the flavor of the cup is exceeding bitter, this process leaves its effects in the form of sobered mien, gathering wrinkles, and a permanent shadow on the brow, and in the eyes. So it was with him.

He went round the room, looking at a picture here and there with the eye of a connoisseur—then pausing before the one which von Francius had brought me to look at on Christmas-day, Courvoisier, folding his arms, stood before it and surveyed it, straightly, and without moving a muscle; coolly, criticisingly and very fastidiously. The *blasé*-looking individual in the foreground received, I saw, a share of his attention—the artist, too, in the background; the model, with the white dress, oriental fan, bare arms, and half-bored, half-cynic look. He looked at them all long—attentively—then turned away; the only token of approval or disapproval which he vouchsafed being a slight smile and a slight shrug, both so very slight as to be almost imperceptible. Then he passed on—glanced at some other pictures—at my sister, on whom his eyes dwelt for a moment as if he thought that she at least made a very beautiful picture; then out of the room.

"Do you know him?" said von Francius, quite softly, to me.

I started violently. I had utterly forgotten that he was at my side, and I know not what tales my face had been telling. I turned to find the dark and impenetrable eyes of von Francius fixed on me.

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"A little," I said.

"Then you know a generous, high-minded man—a man who has made me feel ashamed of myself—and a man to whom I made an apology the other day with pleasure."

My heart warmed. This praise of Eugen by a man whom I admired so devotedly as I did Max von Francius seemed to put me right with myself and the world.

Soon afterward we left the exhibition, and while the others went away it appeared somehow by the merest casualty that von Francius was asked to drive back with us and have afternoon tea, *englischerweise*—which he did, after a moment's hesitation.

After tea he left for an orchestra probe to the next Saturday's concert; but with an *auf wiedersehen*, for the probe will not last long, and we shall meet again at the opera and later at the Malkasten Ball.

I enjoyed going to the theater. I knew my dress was pretty. I knew that I looked nice, and that people would look at me, and that I, too, should have my share of admiration and compliments as a *schöne Engländerin*.

We were twenty minutes late—naturally. All the people in the place stare at us and whisper about us, partly because we have a conspicuous place—the proscenium loge to the right of the stage, partly because we are in full toilet—an almost unprecedented circumstance in that homely theater—partly, I suppose, because Adelaide is supremely beautiful.

Mr. Arkwright was already with us. Von Francius joined us after the first act, and remained until the end. Almost the only words he exchanged with Adelaide were:

"Have you seen this opera before, Lady Le Marchant?"

"No; never."

It was Auber's merry little opera, "Des Teufels Antheil." The play was played. Von Francius was beside me. Whenever I looked down I saw Eugen, with the same calm, placid indifference upon his face; and again I felt the old sensation of soreness, shame, and humiliation. I feel wrought up to a great pitch of nervous excitement when we leave the theater and drive to the Malkasten, where there is more music—dance music, and where the ball is at its height. And in a few moments I find myself whirling down the room in the arms of von Francius, to the music of "Mein schönster Tag in Baden," and wishing very earnestly that the heart-sickness I feel would make me ill or faint, or anything that would send me home to quietness and—him. But it does not have the desired effect. I am in a fever; I am all too vividly conscious, and people tell me how well I am looking, and that rosy cheeks become me better than pale ones.

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They are merry parties, these dances at the Malkasten, in the quaintly decorated saal of the artists' club-house. There is a certain license in the dress. Velvet coats, and coats, too, in many colors, green and prune and claret, vying with black, are not tabooed. There are various uniforms of hussars, infantry, and uhlans, and some of the women, too, are dressed in a certain fantastically picturesque style to please their artist brothers or *fiancés*.

The dancing gets faster, and the festivities are kept up late. Songs are sung which perhaps would not be heard in a quiet drawing-room; a little acting is done with them. Music is played, and von Francius, in a vagrant mood, sits down and improvises a fitful, stormy kind of fantasia, which in itself and in his playing puts me much in mind of the weird performances of the Abbate Liszt.

I at least hear another note than of yore, another touch. The soul that it wanted seems gradually creeping into it. He tells a strange story upon the quivering keys—it is becoming tragic, sad, pathetic. He says hastily to me and in an under-tone: "Fräulein May, this is a thought of one of your own poets:

"How sad, and mad, and bad it was,
And yet how it was sweet."

I am almost in tears, and every face is affording illustrations for "The Expressions of the Emotions in Men and Women," when it suddenly breaks off with a loud, Ha! ha! ha! which sounds as if it came from a human voice, and jars upon me, and then he breaks into a waltz, pushing the astonished musicians aside, and telling the company to dance while he pipes.

A mad dance to a mad tune. He plays and plays on, ever faster, and ever a wilder measure, with strange eerie clanging chords in it which are not like dance notes, until Adelaide prepares to go, and then he suddenly ceases, springs up, and comes with us to our carriage. Adelaide looks white and worn.

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Again at the carriage door, "a pair of words" passes between them.

"Milady is tired?" from him, in a courteous tone, as his dark eyes dwell upon her face.

"Thanks, Herr Direktor, I am generally tired," from her, with a slight smile, as she folds her shawl across her breast with one hand, and extends the other to him.

“Milady, adieu.”

“Adieu, Herr von Francius.”

The ball is over, and I think we have all had enough of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CARNIVAL BALL.

“Aren’t you coming to the ball, Eugen?”

“I? No.”

“I would if I were you.”

“But you are yourself, you see, and I am I. What was it that Heinrich Mohr in ‘The Children of the World’ was always saying? *Ich bin ich, und setze mich selbst*. Ditto me, that’s all.”

“It is no end of a lark,” I pursued.

“My larking days are over.”

“And you can talk to any one you like.”

“I am going to talk to myself, thanks. I have long wanted a little conversation with that interesting individual, and while you are masquerading, I will be doing the reverse. By the time you come home I shall be so thoroughly self-investigated and set to rights that a mere look at me will shake all the frivolity out of you.”

“Miss Wedderburn will be there.”

“I hope she may enjoy it.”

“At least she will look so lovely that she will make others enjoy it.”

He made no answer.

“You won’t go—quite certain?”

“Quite certain, *mein lieber*. Go yourself, and may you have much pleasure.”

Finding that he was in earnest, I went out to hire one domino and purchase one mask, instead of furnishing myself, as I had hoped, with two of each of those requisites. [Pg 233]

It was Sunday, the first day of the carnival, and that devoted to the ball of the season. There were others given, but this was the Malerball, or artists’ ball. It was considered rather select, and had I not been lucky enough to have one or two pupils, members of the club, who had come forward with offerings of tickets, I might have tried in vain to gain admittance.

Everybody in Elherthal who was anybody would be at this ball. I had already been at one like it, as well as at several of the less select and rougher entertainments, and I found a pleasure which was somewhat strange even to myself in standing to one side and watching the motley throng and the formal procession which was every year organized by the artists who had the management of the proceedings.

The ball began at the timely hour of seven; about nine I enveloped myself in my domino, and took my way across the road to the scene of the festivities, which took up the whole three saals of the Tonhalle.

The night was bitter cold, but cold with that rawness which speaks of a coming thaw. The lamps were lighted, and despite the cold there was a dense crowd of watchers round the front of the building and in the gardens, with cold, inquisitive noses flattened against the long glass doors through which I have seen the people stream in the pleasant May evenings after the concert or musikfest into the illuminated gardens.

The last time I had been in the big saal had been to attend a dry probe to a dry concert—the “Erste Walpurgisnacht” of Mendelssohn. The scene was changed now; the whole room was a mob—“motley the only wear.” It was full to excess, so that there was scarcely room to move about, much less for dancing. For that purpose the middle saal of the three had been set aside, or rather a part of it railed off.

I felt a pleasant sense of ease and well-being—a security that I should not be recognized, as I had drawn the pointed hood of my domino over my head, and enveloped myself closely in its ample folds, and thus I could survey the brilliant Maskenball as I surveyed life from a quiet, unnoticed obscurity, and without taking part in its active affairs.

There was music going on as I entered. It could scarcely be heard above the Babel of tongues which was sounding. People were moving as well as they could. I made my way slowly and [Pg 234]

unobtrusively toward the upper end of the saal, intending to secure a place on the great orchestra, and thence survey the procession.

I recognized dozens of people whom I knew personally, or by sight, or name, transformed from sober Rhenish burger, or youths of the period, into persons and creatures whose appropriateness or inappropriateness to their every-day character it gave me much joy to witness. The most foolish young man I knew was attired as Cardinal Richelieu; the wisest, in certain respects, had a buffoon's costume, and plagued the statesman and churchman grievously.

By degrees I made my way through the mocking, taunting, flouting, many-colored crowd, to the orchestra, and gradually up its steps until I stood upon a fine vantage-ground. Near me were others; I looked round. One party seemed to keep very much together—a party which for richness and correctness of costume outshone all others in the room. Two ladies, one dark and one fair, were dressed as Elsa and Ortrud. A man, whose slight, tall, commanding figure I soon recognized, was attired in the blue mantle, silver helm and harness of Lohengrin the son of Percivale; and a second man, too boyish-looking for the character, was masked as Frederic of Telramund. Henry the Fowler was wanting, but the group was easily to be recognized as personating the four principal characters from Wagner's great opera.

They had apparently not been there long, for they had not yet unmasked. I had, however, no difficulty in recognizing any of them. The tall, fair girl in the dress of Elsa was Miss Wedderburn; the Ortrud was Lady Le Marchant, and right well she looked the character. Lohengrin was von Francius, and Friedrich von Telramund was Mr. Arkwright, Sir Peter's secretary. Here was a party in whom I could take some interest, and I immediately and in the most unprincipled manner devoted myself to watching them—myself unnoticed.

"Who in all that motley crowd would I wish to be?" I thought, as my eyes wandered over them.

The procession was just forming; the voluptuous music of "Die Tausend und eine Nacht" waltzes was floating from the gallery and through the room. They went sweeping past—or running, or jumping; a ballet-girl whose mustache had been too precious to be parted with and a lady of the *vielle cour* beside her, nuns and corpses; Christy Minstrels (English, these last, whose motives were constantly misunderstood), fools and astrologers, Gretchens, Clärchens, devils, Egmonts, Joans of Arc enough to have rescued France a dozen times, and peasants of every race: Turks and Finns; American Indians and Alfred the Great—it was tedious and dazzling.

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Then the procession was got into order; a long string of German legends, all the misty chronicle of Gudrun, the "Nibelungenlied" and the Rheingold—Siegfried and Kriemhild—those two everlasting figures of beauty and heroism, love and tragedy, which stand forth in hues of pure brightness that no time can dim; Brunhild and von Tronje-Hagen—this was before the days of Bayreuth and the Tetralogy—Tannhauser and Lohengrin, the Loreley, Walther von der Vogelweide, the two Elizabeths of the Wartburg, dozens of obscure legends and figures from "Volkslieder" and Folklore which I did not recognize; "Dornroschen," Rubezahl; and the music to which they marched, was the melancholy yet noble measure, "The Last Ten of the Fourth Regiment."

I surveyed the masks and masquerading for some time, keeping my eye all the while upon the party near me. They presently separated. Lady Le Marchant took the arm which von Francius offered her, and they went down the steps. Miss Wedderburn and the young secretary were left alone. I was standing near them, and two other masks, both in domino, hovered about. One wore a white domino with a scarlet rosette on the breast. The other was a black domino, closely disguised, who looked long after von Francius and Lady Le Marchant, and presently descended the orchestra steps and followed in their wake.

"Do not remain with me, Mr. Arkwright," I heard Miss Wedderburn say. "You want to dance. Go and enjoy yourself."

"I could not think of leaving you alone, Miss Wedderburn."

"Oh, yes, you could, and can. I am not going to move from here. I want to look on—not to dance. You will find me here when you return."

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Again she urged him not to remain with her, and finally he departed in search of amusement among the crowd below.

Miss Wedderburn was now alone. She turned; her eyes, through her mask, met mine through my mask, and a certain thrill shot through me. This was such an opportunity as I had never hoped for, and I told myself that I should be a great fool if I let it slip. But how to begin? I looked at her. She was very beautiful, this young English girl, with the wonderful blending of fire and softness which had made me from the first think her one of the most attractive women I had ever seen.

As I stood, awkward and undecided, she beckoned me to her. In an instant I was at her side, bowing but maintaining silence.

"You are Herr Helfen, *nicht wahr?*" said she, inquiringly.

"Yes," said I, and removed my mask. "How did you know it?"

"Something in your figure and attitude. Are you not dancing?"

"I—oh, no!"

"Nor I—I am not in the humor for it. I never felt less like dancing, nor less like a masquerade." Then—hesitatingly—"Are you alone to-night?"

"Yes. Eugen would not come."

"He will not be here at all?"

"Not at all?"

"I am surprised."

"I tried to persuade him to come," said I, apologetically. "But he would not. He said he was going to have a little conversation at home with himself."

"So!" She turned to me with a mounting color, which I saw flush to her brow above her mask, and with parted lips.

"He has never cared for anything since Sigmund left us," I continued.

"Sigmund—was that the dear little boy?"

"You say very truly."

"Tell me about him. Was not his father very fond of him?"

"Fond! I never saw a man idolize his child so much. It was only need—the hardest need that made them part." [Pg 237]

"How—need? You do not mean poverty?" said she, somewhat awe-struck.

"Oh, no! Moral necessity. I do not know the reason. I have never asked. But I know it was like a death-blow."

"Ah!" said she, and with a sudden movement removed her mask, as if she felt it stifling her, and looked me in the face with her beautiful clear eyes.

"Who could oblige him to part with his own child?" she asked.

"That I do not know, *mein Fräulein*. What I do know is that some shadow darkens my friend's life and imbitters it—that he not only can not do what he wishes, but is forced to do what he hates—and that parting was one of the things."

She looked at me with eagerness for some moments; then said, quickly:

"I can not help being interested in all this, but I fancy I ought not to listen to it, for—for—I don't think he would like it. He—he—I believe he dislikes me, and perhaps you had better say no more."

"Dislikes you!" I echoed. "Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! he does," she repeated, with a faint smile, which struggled for a moment with a look of pain, and then was extinguished. "I certainly was once very rude to him, but I should not have thought he was an ungenerous man—should you?"

"He is not ungenerous; the very reverse; he is too generous."

"It does not matter, I suppose," said she, repressing some emotion. "It can make no difference, but it pains me to be so misunderstood and so behaved to by one who was at first so kind to me—for he was very kind."

"*Mein Fräulein*," said I, eager, though puzzled, "I can not explain it; it is as great a mystery to me as to you. I know nothing of his past—nothing of what he has been or done; nothing of who he is—only of one thing I am sure—that he is not what he seems to be. He may be called Eugen Courvoisier, or he may call himself Eugen Courvoisier; he was once known by some name in a very different world to that he lives in now. I know nothing about that, but I know this—that I believe in him. I have lived more than three years with him; he is true and honorable; fantastically, chivalrously honorable" (her eyes were downcast and her cheeks burning). "He never did anything false or dishonest—"

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A slight, low, sneering laugh at my right hand caused me to look up. That figure in a white domino with a black mask, and a crimson rosette on the breast, stood leaning up against the foot of the organ, but other figures were near; the laugh might have come from one of them; it might have nothing to do with us or our remarks. I went on in a vehement and eager tone:

"He is what we Germans call a *ganzer kerl*—thorough in all—out and out good. Nothing will ever make me believe otherwise. Perhaps the mystery will never be cleared up. It doesn't matter to me. It will make no difference in my opinion of the only man I love."

A pause. Miss Wedderburn was looking at me; her eyes were full of tears; her face strangely moved. Yes—she loved him. It stood confessed in the very strength of the effort she made to be calm and composed. As she opened her lips to speak, that domino that I mentioned glided from her place and stooping down between us, whispered or murmured:

"You are a fool for your pains. Believe no one—least of all those who look most worthy of belief. He is not honest; he is not honorable. It is from shame and disgrace that he hides himself. Ask

him if he remembers the 20th of April five years ago; you will hear what he has to say about it, and how brave and honorable he looks."

Swift as fire the words were said, and rapidly as the same she had raised herself and disappeared. We were left gazing at each other. Miss Wedderburn's face was blanched—she stared at me with large dilated eyes, and at last in a low voice of anguish and apprehension said:

"Oh, what does it mean?"

Her voice recalled me to myself.

"It may mean what it likes," said I, calmly. "As I said, it makes no difference to me. I do not and will not believe that he ever did anything dishonorable."

"Do you not?" said she, tremulously. "But—but—Anna Sartorius does know something of him." [Pg 239]

"Who is Anna Sartorius?"

"Why, that domino who spoke to us just now. But I forgot. You will not know her. She wanted long ago to tell me about him, and I would not let her, so she said I might learn for myself, and should never leave off until I knew the lesson by heart. I think she has kept her word," she added, with a heartsick sigh.

"You surely would not believe her if she said the same thing fifty times over," said I, not very reasonably, certainly.

"I do not know," she replied, hesitatingly. "It is very difficult to know."

"Well, I would not. If the whole world accused him I would believe nothing except from his own lips."

"I wish I knew all about Anna Sartorius," said she, slowly, and she looked as if seeking back in her memory to remember some dream. I stood beside her; the motley crowd ebbed and flowed beneath us, but the whisper we had heard had changed everything; and yet, no—to me not changed, but only darkened things.

In the meantime it had been growing later. Our conversation, with its frequent pauses, had taken a longer time than we had supposed. The crowd was thinning. Some of the women were going.

"I wonder where my sister is!" observed Miss Wedderburn, rather wearily. Her face was pale, and her delicate head drooped as if it were overweighed and pulled down by the superabundance of her beautiful chestnut hair, which came rippling and waving over her shoulders. A white satin petticoat, stiff with gold embroidery; a long trailing blue mantle of heavy brocade, fastened on the shoulders with golden clasps; a golden circlet in the gold of her hair; such was the dress, and right royally she became it. She looked a vision of loveliness. I wondered if she would ever act Elsa in reality; she would be assuredly the loveliest representative of that fair and weak-minded heroine who ever trod the boards. Supposing it ever came to pass that she acted Elsa to some one else's Lohengrin, would she think of this night? Would she remember the great orchestra—and me, and the lights, and the people—our words—a whisper? A pause.

"But where can Adelaide be?" she said, at last. "I have not seen them since they left us." [Pg 240]

"They are there," said I, surveying from my vantage-ground the thinning ranks. "They are coming up here too. And there is the other gentleman, Graf von Telramund, following them."

They drew up to the foot of the orchestra, and then Mr. Arkwright came up to seek us.

"Miss Wedderburn, Lady Le Marchant is tired and thinks it is time to be going."

"So am I tired," she replied. I stepped back, but before she went away she turned to me, holding out her hand:

"Good-night, Herr Helfen. I, too, will not believe without proof."

We shook hands, and she went away.

The lamp still burning, the room cold, the stove extinct. Eugen seated motionless near it.

"Eugen, art thou asleep?"

"I asleep, my dear boy! Well, how was it?"

"Eugen, I wish you had been there."

"Why?" He roused himself with an effort and looked at me. His brow was clouded, his eyes too.

"Because you would have enjoyed it. I did. I saw Miss Wedderburn, and spoke to her. She looked lovely."

"In that case it would have been odd indeed if you had not enjoyed yourself."

"You are inexplicable."

"It is bed-time," he remarked, rising and speaking, as I thought, coldly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAY'S STORY.

SCHUMANN.



Following Arkwright, I joined Adelaide and von Francius at the foot of the orchestra. She had sent word that she was tired. Looking at her, I thought indeed she must be very tired, so white, so sad she looked.

"Adelaide," I expostulated, "why did you remain so long?"

"Oh, I did not know it was so late. Come!"

We made our way out of the hall through the veranda to the entrance. Lady Le Merchant's carriage, it seemed, was ready and waiting. It was a pouring night. The thaw had begun. The steady downpour promised a cheerful ending to the carnival doings of the Monday and Tuesday; all but a few homeless or persevering wretches had been driven away. We drove away too. I noticed that the "good-night" between Adelaide and von Francius was of the most laconical character. They barely spoke, did not shake hands, and he turned and went to seek his cab before we had all got into the carriage.

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Adelaide uttered not a word during our drive home, and I, leaning back, shut my eyes and lived the evening over again. Eugen's friend had laughed the insidious whisper to scorn. I could not deal so summarily with it; nor could I drive the words of it out of my head. They set themselves to the tune of the waltz, and rang in my ears:

"He is not honest; he is not honorable. It is from shame and disgrace that he is hiding. Ask him if he remembers the 20th of April five years ago."

The carriage stopped. A sleepy servant let us in. Adelaide, as we went upstairs, drew me into her dressing-room.

"A moment, May. Have you enjoyed yourself?"

"H'm—well—yes and no. And you, Adelaide?"

"I never enjoy myself now," she replied, very gently. "I am getting used to that, I think."

She clasped her jeweled hands and stood by the lamp, whose calm light lighted her calm face, showing it wasted and unutterably sad.

Something—a terror, a shrinking as from a strong menacing hand—shook me.

"Are you ill, Adelaide?" I cried.

"No. Good-night, dear May. *Schlaf wohl*, as they say here."

To my unbounded astonishment, she leaned forward and gave me a gentle kiss; then, still holding my hand, asked: "Do you still say your prayers, May?"

"Sometimes."

"What do you say?"

"Oh! the same that I always used to say; they are better than any I can invent."

"Yes. I never do say mine now. I rather think I am afraid to begin again."

"Good-night, Adelaide," I said, inaudibly; and she loosed my hand.

At the door I turned. She was still standing by the lamp; still her face wore the same strange, subdued look. With a heart oppressed by new uneasiness, I left her.

It must have been not till toward dawn that I fell into a sleep, heavy, but not quiet—filled with fantastic dreams, most of which vanished as soon as they had passed my mind. But one remained. To this day it is as vivid before me, as if I had actually lived through it.

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Meseemed again to be at the Grafenbergerdahl, again to be skating, again rescued—and by Eugen Courvoisier. But suddenly the scene changed; from a smooth sheet of ice, across which the wind blew nippingly, and above which the stars twinkled frostily, there was a huge waste of water which raged, while a tempest howled around—the clear moon was veiled, all was darkness and chaos. He saved me, not by skating with me to the shore, but by clinging with me to some floating wood until we drove upon a bank and landed. But scarcely had we set foot upon the ground, than all was changed again. I was alone, seated upon a bench in the Hofgarten, on a spring afternoon. It was May; the chestnuts and acacias were in full bloom, and the latter made the air heavy with their fragrance. The nightingales sung richly, and I sat looking, from beneath the shade of a great tree, upon the fleeting Rhine, which glided by almost past my feet. It seemed to me that I had been sad—so sad as never before. A deep weight appeared to have been just removed from my heart, and yet so heavy had it been that I could not at once recover from its pressure; and even then, in the sunshine, and feeling that I had no single cause for care or grief, I was unhappy, with a reflex mournfulness.

And as I sat thus, it seemed that some one came and sat beside me without speaking, and I did not turn to look at him; but ever as I sat there and felt that he was beside me, the sadness lifted from my heart, until it grew so full of joy that tears rose to my eyes. Then he who was beside me placed his hand upon mine, and I looked at him. It was Eugen Courvoisier. His face and his eyes were full of sadness; but I knew that he loved me, though he said but one word, "Forgive!" to which I answered, "Can you forgive?" But I knew that I alluded to something much deeper than that silly little episode of having cut him at the theater. He bowed his head; and then I thought I began to weep, covering my face with my hands; but they were tears of exquisite joy, and the peace at my heart was the most entire I had ever felt. And he loosened my hands, and drew me to him and kissed me, saying "My love!" And as I felt—yes, actually felt—the pressure of his lips upon mine, and felt the spring shining upon me, and heard the very echo of the twitter of the birds, saw the light fall upon the water, and smelled the scent of the acacias, and saw the Lotus-blume as she—

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"Duftet und weinet und zittert
Vor Liebe und Liebesweh,"

I awoke, and confronted a gray February morning, felt a raw chilliness in the air, heard a cold, pitiless rain driven against the window; knew that my head ached, my heart harmonized therewith; that I was awake, not in a dream; that there had been no spring morning, no acacias, no nightingales; above all, no love—remembered last night, and roused to the consciousness of another day, the necessity of waking up and living on.

Nor could I rest or sleep. I rose and contemplated through the window the driving rain and the soaking street, the sorrowful naked trees, the plain of the parade ground, which looked a mere waste of mud and half-melted ice; the long plain line of the Caserne itself—a cheering prospect truly!

When I went down-stairs I found Sir Peter, in heavy traveling overcoat, standing in the hall; a carriage stood at the door; his servant was putting in his master's luggage and rugs. I paused in astonishment. Sir Peter looked at me and smiled with the dubious benevolence which he was in the habit of extending to me.

"I am very sorry to be obliged to quit your charming society, Miss Wedderburn, but business calls me imperatively to England; and, at least, I am sure that my wife can not be unhappy with such a companion as her sister."

"You are going to England?"

"I am going to England. I have been called so hastily that I can make no arrangements for Adelaide to accompany me, and indeed it would not be at all pleasant for her, as I am only going on business; but I hope to return for her and bring her home in a few weeks. I am leaving Arkwright with you. He will see that you have all you want."

Sir Peter was smiling, ever smiling, with the smile which was my horror.

"A brilliant ball, last night, was it not?" he added, extending his hand to me, in farewell, and looking at me intently with eyes that fascinated and repelled me at once.

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"Very, but—but—you were not there?"

"Was I not? I have a strong impression that I was. Ask my lady if she thinks I was there. And now good-bye, and *au revoir!*"

He loosened my hand, descended the steps, entered the carriage, and was driven away. His departure ought to have raised a great weight from my mind, but it did not; it impressed me with

a sense of coming disaster.

Adelaide breakfasted in her room. When I had finished I went to her. Her behavior puzzled me. She seemed elated, excited, at the absence of Sir Peter, and yet, suddenly turning to me, she exclaimed, eagerly:

"Oh, May! I wish I had been going to England, too! I wish I could leave this place, and never see it again."

"Was Sir Peter at the ball, Adelaide?" I asked.

She turned suddenly pale; her lip trembled; her eye wavered, as she said in a low, uneasy voice:

"I believe he was—yes; in domino."

"What a sneaking thing to do!" I remarked, candidly. "He had told us particularly that he was not coming."

"That very statement should have put us on our guard," she remarked.

"On our guard? Against what?" I asked, unsuspectingly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing! I wonder when he will return! I would give a world to be in England!" she said, with a heartsick sigh; and I, feeling very much bewildered, left her.

In the afternoon, despite wind and weather, I sallied forth, and took my way to my old lodgings in the Wehrhahn. Crossing a square leading to the street I was going to, I met Anna Sartorius. She bowed, looking at me mockingly. I returned her salutation, and remembered last night again with painful distinctness. The air seemed full of mysteries and uncertainties; they clung about my mind like cobwebs, and I could not get rid of their soft, stifling influence.

Having arrived at my lodgings, I mounted the stairs. Frau Lutzler met me.

"*Na, na*, Fräulein! You do not patronize me much now. My rooms are becoming too small for you, I reckon." [Pg 246]

"Indeed, Frau Lutzler, I wish I had never been in any larger ones," I answered her, earnestly.

"So! Well, 'tis true you look thin and worn—not as well as you used to. And were you—but I heard you were, so where's the use of telling lies about it—at the Maskenball last night? And how did you like it?"

"Oh, it was all very new to me. I never was at one before."

"*Nicht?* Then you must have been astonished. They say there was a Mephisto so good he would have deceived the devil himself. And you, Fräulein—I heard that you looked very beautiful."

"So! It must have been a mistake."

"*Doch nicht!* I have always maintained that at certain times you were far from bad-looking, and dressed and got up for the stage, would be absolutely handsome. Nearly any one can be that—if you are not too near the foot-lights, that is, and don't go behind the scenes."

With which neat slaying of a particular compliment by a general one, she released me, and let me go on my way upstairs.

Here I had some books and some music. But the room was cold; the books failed to interest me, and the music did not go—the piano was like me—out of tune. And yet I felt the need of some musical expression of the mood that was upon me. I bethought myself of the Tonhalle, next door, almost, and that in the rittersaal it would be quiet and undisturbed, as the ball that night was not to be held there, but in one of the large rooms of the Caserne.

Without pausing to think a second time of the plan, I left the house and went to the Tonhalle, only a few steps away. In consequence of the rain and bad weather almost every trace of the carnival had disappeared. I found the Tonhalle deserted save by a bar-maid at the restauration. I asked her if the rittersaal were open, and she said yes. I passed on. As I drew near the door I heard music; the piano was already being played. Could it be von Francius who was there? I did not think so. The touch was not his—neither so practiced, so brilliant, nor so sure.

Satisfied, after listening a moment, that it was not he, I resolved to go in and pass through the room. If it were any one whom I could send away I would do so, if not, I could go away again myself. [Pg 247]

I entered. The room was somewhat dark, but I went in and had almost come to the piano before I recognized the player—Courvoisier. Overcome with vexation and confusion at the *contretemps*, I paused a moment, undecided whether to turn back and go out again. In any case I resolved not to remain in the room. He was seated with his back to me, and still continued to play. Some music was on the desk of the piano before him.

I might turn back without being observed. I would do so. Hardly, though—a mirror hung directly before the piano, and I now saw that while he continued to play, he was quietly looking at me, and that his keen eyes—that hawk's glance which I knew so well—must have recognized me. That decided me. I would not turn back. It would be a silly, senseless proceeding, and would look

much more invidious than my remaining. I walked up to the piano, and he turned, still playing.

"Guten Tag, mein Fräulein."

I merely bowed, and began to search through a pile of songs and music upon the piano. I would at any rate take some away with me to give some color to my proceedings. Meanwhile he played on.

I selected a song, not in the least knowing what it was, and rolling it up, was turning away.

"Are you busy, Miss Wedderburn?"

"N—no."

"Would it be asking too much of you to play the pianoforte accompaniment?"

"I will try," said I, speaking briefly, and slowly drawing off my gloves.

"If it is disagreeable to you, don't do it," said he, pausing.

"Not in the very least," said I, avoiding looking at him.

He opened the music. It was one of Jensen's "Wanderbilder" for piano and violin—the "Kreuz am Wege."

"I have only tried it once before," I remarked, "and I am a dreadful bungler."

"Bitte sehr!" said he, smiling, arranging his own music on one of the stands and adding, "Now I am ready."

I found my hands trembling so much that I could scarcely follow the music. Truly this man, with his changes from silence to talkativeness, from ironical hardness to cordiality, was a puzzle and a trial to me. [Pg 248]

"Das Kreuz am Wege" turned out rather lame. I said so when it was over.

"Suppose we try it again," he suggested, and we did so. I found my fingers lingering and forgetting their part as I listened to the piercing beauty of his notes.

"That is dismal," said he.

"It is a dismal subject, is it not?"

"Suggestive, at least. 'The Cross by the Wayside.' Well, I have a mind for something more cheerful. Did you leave the ball early last night?"

"No; not very early."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"It was all new to me—very interesting—but I don't think I quite enjoyed it."

"Ah, you should see the balls at Florence, or Venice, or Vienna!"

He smiled as he leaned back, as if thinking over past scenes.

"Yes," said I, dubiously, "I don't think I care much for such things, though it is interesting to watch the little drama going on around."

"And to act in it," I also thought, remembering Anna Sartorius and her whisper, and I looked at him. "Not honest, not honorable. Hiding from shame and disgrace."

I looked at him and did not believe it. For the moment the torturing idea left me. I was free from it and at peace.

"Were you going to practice?" he asked. "I fear I disturb you."

"Oh, no! It does not matter in the least. I shall not practice now."

"I want to try some other things," said he, "and Friedhelm's and my piano was not loud enough for me, nor was there sufficient space between our walls for the sounds of a symphony. Do you not know the mood?"

"Yes."

"But I am afraid to ask you to accompany me."

"Why?"

"You seem unwilling."

"I am not: but I should have supposed that my unwillingness—if I had been unwilling—would have been an inducement to you to ask me." [Pg 249]

"Herrgott! Why?"

"Since you took a vow to be disagreeable to me, and to make me hate you."

A slight flush passed rapidly over his face, as he paused for a moment and bit his lips.

"*Mein Fräulein*—that night I was in bitterness of spirit—I hardly knew what I was saying—"

"I will accompany you," I interrupted him, my heart beating. "Only how can I begin unless you play, or tell me what you want to play?"

"True," said he, laughing, and yet not moving from his place beside the piano, upon which he had leaned his elbow, and across which he now looked at me with the self-same kindly, genial glance as that he had cast upon me across the little table at the Köln restaurant. And yet not the self-same glance, but another, which I would not have exchanged for that first one.

If he would but begin to play I felt that I should not mind so much; but when he sat there and looked at me and half smiled, without beginning anything practical, I felt the situation at least trying.

He raised his eyes as the door opened at the other end of the saal.

"Ah, there is Friedhelm," said he, "now he will take seconds."

"Then I will not disturb you any longer."

"On the contrary," said he, laying his hand upon my wrist. (My dream of the morning flashed into my mind.) "It would be better if you remained, then we could have a trio. Friedel, come here! You are just in time. Fräulein Wedderburn will be good enough to accompany us, and we can try the Fourth Symphony."

"What you call 'Spring'?" inquired Helfen, coming up smilingly. "With all my heart. Where is the score?"

"What you call Spring?" Was it possible that in winter—on a cold and unfriendly day—we were going to have spring, leafy bloom, the desert filled with leaping springs, and blossoming like a rose? Full of wonder, surprise, and a certain excitement at the idea, I sat still and thought of my dream, and the rain beat against the windows, and a draughty wind fluttered the tinselly decorations of last night. The floor was strewn with fragments of garments torn in the crush—paper and silken flowers, here a rosette, there a buckle, a satin bow, a tinsel spangle. Benches and tables were piled about the room, which was half dark; only to westward, through one window, was visible a paler gleam, which might by comparison be called light.

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The two young men turned over the music, laughing at something, and chaffing each other. I never in my life saw two such entire friends as these; they seemed to harmonize most perfectly in the midst of their unlikeness to each other.

"Excuse that we kept you waiting, *mein Fräulein*," said Courvoisier, placing some music before me. "This fellow is so slow, and will put everything into order as he uses it."

"Well for you that I am, *mein lieber*," said Helfen, composedly. "If any one had the enterprise to offer a prize to the most extravagant, untidy fellow in Europe, the palm would be yours—by a long way too."

"Friedel binds his music and numbers it," observed Courvoisier. "It is one of the most beautiful and affecting of sights to behold him with scissors, paste-pot, brush and binding. It occurs periodically about four times a year, I think, and moves me almost to tears when I see it."

"*Der edle Ritter* leaves his music unbound, and borrows mine on every possible occasion when his own property is scattered to the four winds of heaven."

"*Aber! aber!*" cried Eugen. "That is too much! I call Frau Schmidt to witness that all my music is put in one place."

"I never said it wasn't. But you never can find it when you want it, and the confusion is delightfully increased by your constantly rushing off to buy a new *partitur* when you can't find the old one; so you have three or four of each."

"This is all to show off what he considers his own good qualities; a certain slow, methodical plodding and a good memory, which are natural gifts, but which he boasts of as if they were acquired virtues. He binds his music because he is a pedant and a prig, and can't help it; a bad fellow to get on with. Now, *mein bester*, for the 'Fruhling.'"

"But the Fräulein ought to have it explained," expostulated Helfen, laughing. "Every one has not the misfortune to be so well acquainted with you as I am. He has rather insane fancies sometimes," he added, turning to me, "without rhyme or reason that I am aware, and he chooses to assert that Beethoven's Fourth Symphony, or the chief motive of it, occurred to him on a spring day, when the master was, for a time, quite charmed from his bitter humor, and had, perhaps, some one by his side who put his heart in tune with the spring songs of the birds, the green of the grass, the scent of the flowers. So he calls it the 'Fruhling Symphonie,' and will persist in playing it as such. I call the idea rather far-fetched, but then that is nothing unusual with him."

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"Having said your remarkably stupid say, which Miss Wedderburn has far too much sense to heed in the least, suppose you allow us to begin," said Courvoisier, giving the other a push toward his violin.

But we were destined to have yet another coadjutor in the shape of Karl Linders, who at that moment strolled in, and was hailed by his friends with jubilation.

"Come and help! Your 'cello will give just the mellowness that is wanted," said Eugen.

"I must go and get it then," said Karl, looking at me.

Eugen, with an indescribable expression as he intercepted the glance, introduced us to one another. Karl and Friedhelm Helfen went off to another part of the Tonhalle to fetch Karl's violoncello, and we were left alone again.

"Perhaps I ought not to have introduced him. I forgot 'Lohengrin,'" said Eugen.

"You know that you did not," said I, in a low voice.

"No," he answered, almost in the same tone. "It was thinking of that which led me to introduce poor old Karl to you. I thought, perhaps, that you would accept it as a sign—will you?"

"A sign of what?"

"That I feel myself to have been in the wrong throughout—and forgive."

As I sat, amazed and a little awed at this almost literal fulfillment of my dream, the others returned.

Karl contributed the tones of his mellowest of instruments, which he played with a certain pleasant breadth and brightness of coloring, and my dream came ever truer and truer. The symphony was as spring-like as possible. We tried it nearly all through; the hymn-like and yet fairy-like first movement; the second, that song of universal love, joy, and thanksgiving, with Beethoven's masculine hand evident throughout. To the notes there seemed to fall a sunshine into the room, and we could see the fields casting their covering of snow, and withered trees bursting into bloom; brooks swollen with warm rain, birds busy at nest-making; clumps of primroses on velvet leaves, and the subtle scent of violets; youths and maidens with love in their eyes; and even a hint of later warmth, when hedges should be white with hawthorn, and the woodland slopes look, with their sheets of hyacinths, as if some of heaven's blue had been spilled upon earth's grass.

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As the last strong, melodious modulations ceased, Courvoisier pointed to one of the windows.

"Friedhelm, you wretched unbeliever, behold the refutation of your theories. The symphony has brought the sun out."

"For the first time," said Friedhelm, as he turned his earnest young face with its fringe of loose brown hair toward the sneaking sun-ray, which was certainly looking shyly in. "As a rule the very heavens weep at the performance. Don't you remember the last time we tried it, it began to rain instantly?"

"Miss Wedderburn's co-operation must have secured its success then on this occasion," said Eugen, gravely, glancing at me for a moment.

"Hear! hear!" murmured Karl, screwing up his violoncello and smiling furtively.

"Oh, I am afraid I hindered rather than helped," said I, "but it is very beautiful."

"But not like spring, is it?" asked Friedhelm.

"Well, I think it is."

"There! I knew she would declare for me," said Courvoisier, calmly, at which Karl Linders looked up in some astonishment.

"Shall we try this 'Traumerei,' Miss Wedderburn, if you are not too tired?"

I turned willingly to the piano, and we played Schumann's little "Dreams."

"Ah," said Eugen, with a deep sigh (and his face had grown sad), "isn't that the essence of sweetness and poetry? Here's another which is lovely. 'Noch ein Paar,' *nicht wahr?*"

"And it will be 'noch ein Paar' until our fingers drop off," scolded Friedhelm, who seemed, however, very willing to await that consummation. We went through many of the Kinderscenen and some of the Kreissleriana, and just as we finished a sweet little "Bittendes Kind," the twilight grew almost into darkness, and Courvoisier laid his violin down.

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"Miss Wedderburn, thank you a thousand times!"

"Oh, *bitte sehr!*" was all I could say. I wanted to say so much more; to say that I had been made happy; my sadness dispelled, a dream half fulfilled, but the words stuck, and had they come ever so flowingly I could not have uttered them with Friedhelm Helfen, who knew so much, looking at us, and Karl Linders on his best behavior in what he considered superior company.

I do not know how it was that Karl and Friedhelm, as we all came from the Tonhalle, walked off to the house, and Eugen and I were left to walk alone through the soaking streets, emptied of all their revelers, and along the dripping Königsallée, with its leafless chestnuts, to Sir Peter's house. It was cold, it was wet—cheerless, dark, and dismal, and I was very happy—very insanely

so. I gave a glance once or twice at my companion. The brightness had left his face; it was stern and worn again, and his lips set as if with the repression of some pain.

"Herr Courvoisier, have you heard from your little boy?"

"No."

"No?"

"I do not expect to hear from him, *mein Fräulein*. When he left me we parted altogether."

"Oh, how dreadful!"

No answer. And we spoke no more until he said "Good-evening" to me at the door of No. 3. As I went in I reflected that I might never meet him thus face to face again. Was it an opportunity missed, or was it a brief glimpse of unexpected joy?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRUTH.

As days went on and grew into weeks, and weeks paired off until a month passed, and I still saw the same stricken look upon my sister's face, my heart grew full of foreboding.

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One morning the astonishing news came that Sir Peter had gone to America.

"America!" I ejaculated (it was always I who acted the part of chorus and did the exclamations and questioning), and I looked at Harry Arkwright, who had communicated the news, and who held an open letter in his hand.

"Yes, to America, to see about a railway which looks very bad. He has no end of their bonds," said Harry, folding up the letter.

"When will he return?"

"He doesn't know. Meanwhile we are to stay where we are."

Adelaide, when we spoke of this circumstance, said, bitterly:

"Everything is against me!"

"Against you, Adelaide?" said I, looking apprehensively at her.

"Yes, everything!" she repeated.

She had never been effusive in her behavior to others; she was now, if possible, still less so, but the uniform quietness and gentleness with which she now treated all who came in contact with her, puzzled and troubled me. What was it that preyed upon her mind? In looking round for a cause my thoughts lighted first on one person, then on another; I dismissed the idea of all, except von Francius, with a smile. Shortly I abandoned that idea too. True, he was a man of very different caliber from the others; a man, too, for whom Adelaide had conceived a decided friendship, though in these latter days even that seemed to be dying out. He did not come so often; when he did come they had little to say to each other. Perhaps, after all, the cause of her sadness lay no deeper than her every-day life, which must necessarily grow more mournful day by day. She could feel intensely, as I had lately become aware, and had, too, a warm, quick imagination. It might be that a simple weariness of life and the anticipation of long years to come of such a life lay so heavily upon her soul as to have wrought that gradual change.

Sometimes I was satisfied with this theory; at others it dwindled into a miserably inadequate measure. When Adelaide once or twice kissed me, smiled at me, and called me "dear," it was on my lips to ask the meaning of the whole thing, but it never passed them. I dared not speak when it came to the point.

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One day, about this time, I met Anna Sartorius in one of the picture exhibitions. I would have bowed and passed her, but she stopped and spoke to me.

"I have not seen you often lately," said she; "but I assure you, you will hear more of me some time—and before long."

Without replying, I passed on. Anna had ceased even to pretend to look friendly upon me, and I did not feel much alarm as to her power for or against my happiness or peace of mind.

Regularly, once a month, I wrote to Miss Hallam and occasionally had a few lines from Stella, who had become a protégée of Miss Hallam's too. They appeared to get on very well together, at which I did not wonder; for Stella, with all her youthfulness, was of a cynical turn of mind, which must suit Miss Hallam well.

My greatest friend in Elberthal was good little Dr. Mittendorf, who had brought his wife to call upon me, and to whose house I had been invited several times since Miss Hallam's departure.

During this time I worked more steadily than ever, and with a deeper love of my art for itself. Von Francius was still my master and my friend. I used to look back upon the days, now nearly a year ago, when I first saw him, and seeing him, distrusted and only half liked him, and wondered at myself; for I had now as entire a confidence in him as can by any means be placed in a man. He had thoroughly won my esteem, respect, admiration—in a measure, too, my affection. I liked the power of him; the strong hand with which he carried things in his own way; the idiomatic language, and quick, curt sentences in which he enunciated his opinions. I felt him like a strong, kind, and thoughtful elder brother, and have had abundant evidence in his deeds and in some brief unemotional words of his that he felt a great regard of the fraternal kind for me. It has often comforted me, that friendship—pure, disinterested and manly on his side, grateful and unwavering on mine.

I still retained my old lodgings in the Wehrhahn, and was determined to do so. I would not be tied to remain in Sir Peter Le Marchant's house unless I choose. Adelaide wished me to come and remain with her altogether. She said Sir Peter wished it too; he had written and said she might ask me. I asked what was Sir Peter's motive in wishing it? Was it not a desire to humiliate both of us, and to show us that we—the girl who had scorned him, and the woman who had sold herself to him—were in the end dependent upon him, and must follow his will and submit to his pleasure?

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She reddened, sighed, and owned that it was true; nor did she press me any further.

A month, then, elapsed between the carnival in February and the next great concert in the latter end of March. It was rather a special concert, for von Francius had succeeded, in spite of many obstacles, in bringing out the Choral Symphony.

He conducted well that night; and he, Courvoisier, Friedhelm Helfen, Karl Linders, and one or two others, formed in their white heat of enthusiasm a leaven which leavened the whole lump. Orchestra and chorus alike did a little more than their possible, without which no great enthusiasm can be carried out. As I watched von Francius, it seemed to me that a new soul had entered into the man. I did not believe that a year ago he could have conducted the Choral Symphony as he did that night. Can any one enter into the broad, eternal clang of the great "world-story" unless he has a private story of his own which may serve him in some measure as a key to its mystery? I think not. It was a night of triumph for Max von Francius. Not only was the glorious music cheered and applauded, he was called to receive a meed of thanks for having once more given to the world a never-dying joy and beauty.

I was in the chorus. Down below I saw Adelaide and her devoted attendant, Harry Arkwright. She looked whiter and more subdued than ever. All the splendor of the praise of "joy" could not bring joy to her heart—

"Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt"

brought no warmth to her cheek, nor lessened the load on her breast.

The concert over, we returned home. Adelaide and I retired to her dressing-room, and her maid brought us tea. She seated herself in silence. For my part, I was excited and hot, and felt my cheeks glowing. I was so stirred that I could not sit still, but moved to and fro, wishing that all the world could hear that music, and repeating lines from the "Ode to Joy," the grand march-like measure, feeling my heart uplifted with the exaltation of its opening strain:

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"Freude, schöner Gotterfunken!
Tochter aus Elysium!"

As I paced about thus excitedly, Adelaide's maid came in with a note. Mr. Arkwright had received it from Herr von Francius, who had desired him to give it to Lady Le Marchant.

Adelaide opened it and I went on with my chant. I know now how dreadful it must have sounded to her.

"Freude trinken alle Wesen
An den Brüsten der Natur—"

"May!" said Adelaide, faintly.

I turned in my walk and looked at her. White as death, she held the paper toward me with a steady hand, and I, the song of joy slain upon my lips, took it. It was a brief note from von Francius.

"I let you know, my lady, first of all that I have accepted the post of Musik-Direktor in ——. It will be made known to-morrow."

I held the paper and looked at her. Now I knew the reason of her pallid looks. I had indeed been blind. I might have guessed better.

"Have you read it?" she asked, and she stretched her arms above her head, as if panting for breath.

"Adelaide!" I whispered, going up to her; "Adelaide—oh!"

She fell upon my neck. She did not speak, and I, speechless, held her to my breast.

"You love him, Adelaide?" I said, at last.

"With my whole soul!" she answered, in a low, very low, but vehement voice. "With my whole soul."

"And you have owned it to him?"

"Yes."

"Tell me," said I, "how it was."

"I think I have loved him since almost the first time I saw him—he made quite a different impression upon me than other men do—quite. I hardly knew myself. He mastered me. No other man ever did—except—" she shuddered a little, "and that only because I tied myself hand and foot. But I liked the mastery. It was delicious; it was rest and peace. It went on for long. We knew—each knew quite well that we loved, but he never spoke of it. He saw how it was with me and he helped me—oh, why is he so good? He never tried to trap me into any acknowledgment. He never made any use of the power he knew he had except to keep me right. But at the Maskenball—I do not know how it was—we were alone in all the crowd—there was something said—a look. It was all over. But he was true to the last. He did not say, 'Throw everything up and come to me.' He said, 'Give me the only joy that we may have. Tell me you love me.' And I told him. I said, 'I love you with my life and my soul, and everything I have, for ever and ever.' And that is true. He said, 'Thank you, milady. I accept the condition of my knighthood,' and kissed my hand. There was some-one following us. It was Sir Peter. He heard all, and he has punished me for it since. He will punish me again."

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A pause.

"That is all that has been said. He does not know that Sir Peter knows, for he has never alluded to it since. He has spared me. I say he is a noble man."

She raised herself, and looked at me.

Dear sister! With your love and your pride, your sins and your folly, inexpressibly dear to me! I pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Von Francius is good, Adelaide; he is good."

"Von Francius would have told me this himself, but he has been afraid for me; some time ago he said to me that he had the offer of a post at a distance. That was asking my advice. I found out what it was, and said, 'Take it.' He has done so."

"Then you have decided?" I stammered.

"To part. He has strength. So have I. It was my own fault. May—I could bear it if it were for myself alone. I have had my eyes opened now. I see that when people do wrong they drag others into it—they punish those they love—it is part of their own punishment."

A pause. Facts, I felt, were pitiless; but the glow of friendship for von Francius was like a strong fire. In the midst of the keenest pain one finds a true man, and the discovery is like a sudden soothing of sharp anguish, or like the finding a strong comrade in a battle.

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Adelaide had been very self-restrained and quiet all this time, but now suddenly broke out into low, quick, half sobbed-out words:

"Oh, I love him, I love him! It is dreadful! How shall I go through with it?"

Ay, there was the rub! Not one short, sharp pang, and over—all fire quenched in cool mists of death and unconsciousness, but long years to come of daily, hourly, paying the price; incessant compunction, active punishment. A prospect for a martyr to shirk from, and for a woman who has made a mistake to—live through.

We needed not further words. The secret was told, and the worst known. We parted. Von Francius was from this moment a sacred being to me.

But from this time he scarcely came near the house—not even to give me my lessons. I went to my lodging and had them there. Adelaide said nothing, asked not a question concerning him, nor mentioned his name, and the silence on his side was almost as profound as that on hers. It seemed as if they feared that should they meet, speak, look each other in the eyes, all resolution would be swept away, and the end hurry resistless on.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"And behold, though the way was light and the sun did shine, yet my heart was ill at ease, for a sinister blot did now and again fleck the sun, and a

muttered sound perturbed the air. And he repeated oft 'One hath told me—thus—or thus.'"

Karl Linders, our old acquaintance, was now our fast friend. Many changes had taken place in the *personnel* of our fellow-workmen in the kapelle, but Eugen, Karl, and I remained stationary in the same places and holding the same rank as on the day we had first met. He, Karl, had been from the first more congenial to me than any other of my fellows (Eugen excepted, of course). Why, I could never exactly tell. There was about him a contagious cheerfulness, good-humor, and honesty. He was a sinner, but no rascal; a wild fellow—*Taugenichts—wilder Gesell*, as our phraseology had it, but the furthest thing possible from a knave.

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Since his visits to us and his earnest efforts to curry favor with Sigmund by means of nondescript wool beasts, domestic or of prey, he had grown much nearer to us. He was the only intimate we had—the only person who came in and out of our quarters at any time; the only man who sat and smoked with us in an evening. At the time when Karl put in his first appearance in these pages he was a young man not only not particular, but utterly reckless as to the society he frequented. Any one, he was wont to say, was good enough to talk with, or to listen while talked to. Karl's conversation could not be called either affected or pedantic; his taste was catholic, and comprised within wide bounds; he considered all subjects that were amusing appropriate matter of discussion, and to him most subjects were—or were susceptible of being made—amusing.

Latterly, however, it would seem that a process of growth had been going on in him. Three years had worked a difference. In some respects he was, thank Heaven! still the old Karl—the old careless, reckless, aimless fellow; but in others he was metamorphosed.

Karl Linders, a handsome fellow himself and a slave to beauty, as he was careful to inform us—susceptible in the highest degree to real loveliness—so he often told us—and in love on an average, desperately and forever, once a week, had at last fallen really and actually in love.

For a long time we did not guess it—or rather, accepting his being in love as a chronic state of his being—one of the "inseparable accidents," which may almost be called qualities, we wondered what lay at the bottom of his sudden intense sobriety of demeanor and propriety of conduct, and looked for some cause deeper than love, which did not usually have that effect upon him; we thought it might be debt. We studied the behavior itself; we remarked that for upward of ten days he had never lauded the charms of any young woman connected with the choral or terpsichorean staff of the opera, and wondered.

We saw that he had had his hair very much cut, and we told him frankly that we did not think it improved him. To our great surprise he told us that we knew nothing about it, and requested us to mind our own business, adding testily, after a pause, that he did not see why on earth a set of men like us should make ourselves conspicuous by the fashion of our hair, as if we were Absaloms or Samsons.

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"Samson had a Delilah, *mein lieber*," said I, eying him. "She shore his locks for him. Tell us frankly who has acted the part by you."

"Bah! Can a fellow have no sense in his own head to find such things out? Go and do likewise, and I can tell you you'll be improved."

But we agreed when he was gone that the loose locks, drooping over the laughing glance, suited him better than that neatly cropped propriety.

Days passed, and Karl was still not his old self. It became matter of public remark that his easy, short jacket, a mongrel kind of garment to which he was deeply attached, was discarded, not merely for grand occasions, but even upon the ordinary Saturday night concert, yea, even for walking out at midday, and a superior frock-coat substituted for it—a frock-coat in which, we told him, he looked quite *edel*. At which he pished and pshawed, but surreptitiously adjusted his collar before the looking-glass which the propriety and satisfactoriness of our behavior had induced Frau Schmidt to add to our responsibilities, pulled his cuffs down, and remarked *en passant* that "the 'cello was a horribly ungraceful instrument."

"Not as you use it," said we both, politely, and allowed him to lead the way to the concert-room.

A few evenings later he strolled into our room, lighted a cigar, and sighed deeply.

"What ails thee, then, Karl?" I asked.

"I've something on my mind," he replied, uneasily.

"That we know," put in Eugen; "and a pretty big lump it must be, too. Out with it, man! Has she accepted the bottle-nosed oboist after all?"

"No."

"Have you got into debt? How much? I dare say we can manage it between us."

"No—oh, no! I am five thalers to the good."

Our countenances grow more serious. Not debt? Then what was it, what could it be?

"I hope nothing has happened to Gretchen," suggested Eugen, for Gretchen, his sister, was the

one permanently strong love of Karl's heart.

"Oh, no! *Das Mädel* is very well, and getting on in her classes."

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"Then what is it?"

"I'm—engaged—to be married."

I grieve to say that Eugen and I, after staring at him for some few minutes, until we had taken in the announcement, both burst into the most immoderate laughter—till the tears ran down our cheeks, and our sides ached.

Karl sat quite still, unresponsive, puffing away at his cigar; and when we had finished, or rather were becoming a little more moderate in the expression of our amusement, he knocked the ash away from his weed, and remarked:

"That's blind jealousy. You both know that there isn't a *Mädchen* in the place who would look at you, so you try to laugh at people who are better off than yourselves."

This was so stinging (from the tone more than the words) as coming from the most sweet-tempered fellow I ever knew, that we stopped. Eugen apologized, and we asked who the lady was.

"I shouldn't suppose you cared to know," said he, rather sulkily. "And it's all very fine to laugh, but let me see the man who even smiles at her—he shall learn who I am."

We assured him, with the strongest expressions that we could call to our aid, that it was the very idea of his being engaged that made us laugh—not any disrespect, and begged his pardon again. By degrees he relented. We still urgently demanded the name of the lady.

"*Als verlobte empfehlen sich* Karl Linders and—who else?" asked Eugen.

"*Als verlobte empfehlen sich*^[D] Karl Linders and Clara Steinmann," said Karl, with much dignity.

"Clara Steinmann," we repeated, in tones of respectful gravity, "I never heard of her."

"No, she keeps herself rather reserved and select," said Karl, impressively. "She lives with her aunt in the Alléestrasse, at number 39."

"Number 39!" we both ejaculated.

"Exactly so! What have you to say against it?" demanded Herr Linders, glaring round upon us with an awful majesty.

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"Nothing—oh, less than nothing. But I know now where you mean. It is a boarding-house, *nicht wahr?*"

He nodded sedately.

"I have seen the young lady," said I, carefully observing all due respect. "Eugen, you must have seen her too. Miss Wedderburn used to come with her to the Instrumental Concerts before she began to sing."

"Right!" said Karl, graciously. "She did. Clara liked Miss Wedderburn very much."

"Indeed!" said we, respectfully, and fully recognizing that this was quite a different affair from any of the previous flirtations with chorus-singers and ballet-girls which had taken up so much of his attention.

"I don't know her," said I, "I have not that pleasure, but I am sure you are to be congratulated, old fellow—so I do congratulate you very heartily."

"Thank you," said he.

"I can't congratulate you, Karl, as I don't know the lady," said Eugen, "but I do congratulate her," laying his hand upon Karl's shoulder; "I hope she knows the kind of man she has won, and is worthy of him."

A smile of the Miss Squeers description—"Tilda, I pity your ignorance and despises you"—crossed Karl's lips as he said:

"Thank you. No one else knows. It only took place—decidedly, you know, to-night. I said I should tell two friends of mine—she said she had no objection. I should not have liked to keep it from you two. I wish," said Karl, whose eyes had been roving in a seeking manner round the room, and who now brought his words out with a run; "I wish Sigmund had been here too. I wish she could have seen him. She loves children; she has been very good to Gretchen."

Eugen's hand dropped from our friend's shoulder. He walked to the window without speaking, and looked out into the darkness—as he was then in more senses than one often wont to do—nor did he break the silence nor look at us again until some time after Karl and I had resumed the conversation.

So did the quaint fellow announce his engagement to us. It was quite a romantic little history, for it turned out that he had loved the girl for full two years, but for a long time had not been able

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even to make her acquaintance, and when that was accomplished, had hardly dared to speak of his love for her; for though she was sprung from much the same class as himself, she was in much better circumstances, and accustomed to a life of ease and plenty, even if she were little better in reality than a kind of working housekeeper. A second suitor for her hand had, however, roused Karl into boldness and activity; he declared himself, and was accepted. Despite the opposition of Frau Steinmann, who thought the match in every way beneath her niece (why, I never could tell), the lovers managed to carry their purpose so far as the betrothal or *verlobung* went; marriage was a question strictly of the future. It was during the last weeks of suspense and uncertainty that Karl had been unable to carry things off in quite his usual light-hearted manner; it was after finally conquering that he came to make us partners in his satisfaction.

In time we had the honor of an introduction to Fräulein Steinmann, and our amazement and amusement were equally great. Karl was a tall, handsome, well-knit fellow, with an exceptionally graceful figure and what I call a typical German face (typical, I mean, in one line of development)—open, frank, handsome, with the broad traits, smiling lips, clear and direct guileless eyes, waving hair and aptitude for geniality which are the chief characteristics of that type—not the highest, perhaps, but a good one, nevertheless—honest, loyal, brave—a kind which makes good fathers and good soldiers—how many a hundred are mourned since 1870-71!

He had fallen in love with a little stout dumpy *Mädchen*, honest and open as himself, but stupid in all outside domestic matters. She was evidently desperately in love with him, and could understand a good waltz or a sentimental song, so that his musical talents were not altogether thrown away. I liked her better after a time. There was something touching in the way in which she said to me once:

“He might have done so much better. I am such an ugly, stupid thing, but when he said did I love him or could I love him, or something like that, *um Gotteswillen*, Herr Helfen, what could I say?”

“I am sure you did the best possible thing both for him and for you,” I was able to say, with emphasis and conviction. [Pg 265]

Karl had now become a completely reformed and domesticated member of society; now he wore the frock-coat several times a week, and confided to me that he thought he must have a new one soon. Now too did other strange results appear of his engagement to Fräulein Clara (he got sentimental and called her Clärchen sometimes). He had now the *entrée* of Frau Steinmann’s house and there met feminine society several degrees above that to which he had been accustomed. He was obliged to wear a permanently polite and polished manner (which, let me hasten to say, was not the least trouble to him). No chaffing of these young ladies—no offering to take them to places of amusement of any but the very sternest and severest respectability.

He took Fräulein Clara out for walks. They jogged along arm in arm, Karl radiant, Clara no less so, and sometimes they were accompanied by another inmate of Frau Steinmann’s house—a contrast to them both. She lived *en famille* with her hostess, not having an income large enough to admit of indulging in quite separate quarters, and her name was Anna Sartorius.

It was very shortly after his engagement that Karl began to talk to me about Anna Sartorius. She was a clever young woman, it seemed—or as he called her, a *gescheidtes Mädchen*. She could talk most wonderfully. She had traveled—she had been in England and France, and seen the world, said Karl. They all passed very delightful evenings together sometimes, diversified with music and song and the racy jest—at which times Frau Steinmann became quite another person, and he, Karl, felt himself in heaven.

The substance of all this was told me by him one day at a probe, where Eugen had been conspicuous by his absence. Perhaps the circumstance reminded Karl of some previous conversation, for he said:

“She must have seen Courvoisier before somewhere. She asks a good many questions about him, and when I said I knew him she laughed.”

“Look here, Karl, don’t go talking to outsiders about Eugen—or any of us. His affairs are no business of Fräulein Sartorius, or any other busybody.”

“I talk about him! What do you mean? Upon my word I don’t know how the conversation took that turn; but I am sure she knows something about him. She said ‘Eugen Courvoisier indeed!’ and laughed in a very peculiar way.” [Pg 266]

“She is a fool. So are you if you let her talk to you about him.”

“She is no fool, and I want to talk to no one but my own *Mädchen*,” said he, easily; “but when a woman is talking one can’t stop one’s ears.”

Time passed. The concert with the Choral Symphony followed. Karl had had the happiness of presenting tickets to Fräulein Clara and her aunt, and of seeing them, in company with Miss Sartorius, enjoying looking at the dresses, and saying how loud the music was. His visits to Frau Steinmann continued.

“Friedel,” he remarked abruptly one day to me, as we paced down the Casernenstrasse, “I wonder who Courvoisier is!”

“You have managed to exist very comfortably for three or four years without knowing.”

"There is something behind all his secrecy about himself."

"Fräulein Sartorius says so, I suppose," I remarked, dryly.

"N—no; she never said so; but I think she knows it is so."

"And what if it be so?"

"Oh, nothing! But I wonder what can have driven him here."

"Driven him here? His own choice, of course."

Karl laughed.

"*Nee, nee*, Friedel, not quite."

"I should advise you to let him and his affairs alone, unless you want a row with him. I would no more think of asking him than of cutting off my right hand."

"Asking him—*lieber Himmel!* no; but one may wonder—It was a very queer thing his sending poor Sigmund off in that style. I wonder where he is."

"I don't know."

"Did he never tell you?"

"No."

"Queer!" said Karl, reflectively. "I think there is something odd behind it all."

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"Now listen, Karl. Do you want to have a row with Eugen? Are you anxious for him never to speak to you again?"

"*Herrgott*, no!"

"Then take my advice, and just keep your mouth shut. Don't listen to tales, and don't repeat them."

"But, my dear fellow, when there is a mystery about a man—"

"Mystery! Nonsense! What mystery is there in a man's choosing to have private affairs? We didn't behave in this idiotic manner when you were going on like a lunatic about Fräulein Clara. We simply assumed that as you didn't speak you had affairs which you chose to keep to yourself. Just apply the rule, or it may be worse for you."

"For all that, there is something queer," he said, as we turned into the restoration for dinner.

Yet again, some days later, just before the last concert came off, Karl, talking to me, said, in a tone and with a look as if the idea troubled and haunted him:

"I say, Friedel, do you think Courvoisier's being here is all square?"

"All square?" I repeated, scornfully.

He nodded.

"Yes. Of course all has been right since he came here; but don't you think there may be something shady in the background?"

"What do you mean by 'shady'?" I asked, more annoyed than I cared to confess at his repeated returning to the subject.

"Well, you know, there must be a reason for his being here—"

I burst into a fit of laughter, which was not so mirthful as it might seem.

"I should rather think there must. Isn't there a reason for every one being somewhere? Why am I here? Why are you here?"

"Yes; but this is quite a different thing. We are all agreed that whatever he may be now, he has not always been one of us, and I like things to be clear about people."

"It is a most extraordinary thing that you should only have felt the anxiety lately," said I, witheringly, and then, after a moment's reflection, I said:

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"Look here, Karl; no one could be more unwilling than I to pick a quarrel with you, but quarrel we must if this talking of Eugen behind his back goes on. It is nothing to either of us what his past has been. I want no references. If you want to gossip about him or any one else, go to the old women who are the natural exchangers of that commodity. Only if you mention it again to me it comes to a quarrel—*verstehst du?*"

"I meant no harm, and I can see no harm in it," said he.

"Very well; but I do. I hate it. So shake hands, and let there be an end of it. I wish now that I had spoken out at first. There's a dirtiness, to my mind, in the idea of speculating about a person with whom you are intimate, in a way that you wouldn't like him to hear."

"Well, if you will have it so," said he; but there was not the usual look of open satisfaction upon his face. He did not mention the subject to me again, but I caught him looking now and then earnestly at Eugen, as if he wished to ask him something. Then I knew that in my anxiety to avoid gossiping about the friend whose secrets were sacred to me, I had made a mistake. I ought to have made Karl tell me whether he had heard anything specific about him or against him, and so judge the extent of the mischief done.

It needed but little thought on my part to refer Karl's suspicions and vague rumors to the agency of Anna Sartorius. Lately I had begun to observe this young lady more closely. She was a tall, dark, plain girl, with large, defiant-looking eyes, and a bitter mouth; when she smiled there was nothing genial in the smile. When she spoke, her voice had a certain harsh flavor; her laugh was hard and mocking—as if she laughed at, not with, people. There was something rather striking in her appearance, but little pleasing. She looked at odds with the world, or with her lot in it, or with her present circumstances, or something. I was satisfied that she knew something of Eugen, though, when I once pointed her out to him and asked if he knew her, he looked at her, and after a moment's look, as if he remembered, shook his head, saying:

"There is something a little familiar to me in her face, but I am sure that I have never seen her—
most assuredly never spoken to her." [Pg 269]

Yet I had often seen her look at him long and earnestly, usually with a certain peculiar smile, and with her head a little to one side as if she examined some curiosity or *lusus naturæ*. I was too little curious myself to know Eugen's past to speculate much about it; but I was quite sure that there was some link between him and that dark, bitter, sarcastic-looking girl, Anna Sartorius.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"Didst thou, or didst thou not? Just tell
me, friend!
Not that *my* conscience may be satisfied,
I never for a moment doubted thee—
But that I may have wherewithal in hand
To turn against them when they point at
thee:
A whip to flog them with—a rock to
crush—
Thy word—thy simple downright 'No, I
did not.'
* * * * *
Why! How!
What's this? He does not, will not speak.
Oh, God!
Nay, raise thy head and look me in the
eyes!
Canst not? What is this thing?"

It was the last concert of the season, and the end of April, when evenings were growing pleasantly long and the air balmy. Those last concerts, and the last nights of the opera, which closed at the end of April, until September, were always crowded. That night I remember we had Liszt's "Prometheus," and a great violinist had been announced as coming to enrapture the audience with the performance of a Concerto of Beethoven's.

The concert was for the benefit of von Francius, and was probably the last one at which he would conduct us. He was leaving to assume the post of Königlich Musik-Direktor at ——. Now that the time came there was not a man among us who was not heartily sorry to think of the parting.

Miss Wedderburn was one of the soloists that evening and her sister and Mr. Arkwright were both there.

Karl Linders came on late. I saw that just before he appeared by the orchestra entrance, his beloved, her aunt, and Fräulein Sartorius had taken their places in the parquet. Karl looked sullen and discontented, and utterly unlike himself. Anna Sartorius was half smiling. Lady Le Marchant, I noticed, passing by, looked the shadow of her former self. [Pg 270]

Then von Francius came on; he too looked disturbed, for him very much so, and glanced round the orchestra and the room; and then coming up to Eugen, drew him a little aside, and seemed to put a question to him. The discussion, though carried on in low tones, was animated, and lasted some time. Von Francius appeared greatly to urge Courvoisier to something—the latter to resist. At last some understanding appeared to be come to. Von Francius returned to his estrade, Eugen to his seat, and the concert began.

The third piece on the list was the Violin Concerto, and when its turn came all eyes turned in all directions in search of —, the celebrated, who was to perform it. Von Francius advanced and

made a short enough announcement.

"*Meine Herrschaften*, I am sorry to say that I have received a telegram from Herr —, saying that sudden illness prevents his playing to-night. I am sorry that you should be disappointed of hearing him, but I can not regret that you should have an opportunity of listening to one who will be a very effectual substitute—Herr Concertmeister Courvoisier, your first violin."

He stepped back. Courvoisier rose. There was a dead silence in the hall. Eugen stood in the well-known position of the prophet without honor, only that he had not yet begun to speak. The rest of the orchestra and von Francius were waiting to begin Beethoven's Concerto; but Eugen, lifting his voice, addressed them in his turn:

"I am sorry to say that I dare not venture upon the great Concerto; it is so long since I attempted it. I shall have pleasure in trying to play a *Chaconne*—one of the compositions of Herr von Francius."

Von Francius started up as if to forbid it. But Eugen had touched the right key. There was a round of applause, and then an expectant settling down to listen on the part of the audience, who were, perhaps, better pleased to hear von Francius the living and much discussed than Beethoven the dead and undisputed.

It was a minor measure, and one unknown to the public, for it had not yet been published. Von Francius had lent Eugen the score a few days ago, and he had once or twice said to me that it was full not merely of talent; it was replete with the fire of genius.

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And so, indeed, he proved to us that night. Never, before or since, from professional or private *virtuoso*, have I heard such playing as that. The work was in itself a fine one; original, strong, terse and racy, like him who had composed it. It was sad, very sad, but there was a magnificent elevation running all through it which raised it far above a mere complaint, gave a depth to its tragedy while it pointed at hope. And this, interpreted by Eugen, whose mood and whose inner life it seemed exactly to suit, was a thing not to be forgotten in a life-time. To me the scene and the sounds come freshly as if heard yesterday. I see the great hall full of people, attentive—more than attentive—every moment more enthralled. I see the pleased smile which had broken upon every face of his fellow-musicians at this chance of distinction gradually subside into admiration and profound appreciation; I feel again the warm glow of joy which filled my own heart; I meet again May's eyes and see the light in them, and see von Francius shade his face with his hand to conceal the intensity of the artist's delight he felt at hearing his own creation so grandly, so passionately interpreted.

Then I see how it was all over, and Eugen, pale with the depth of emotion with which he had played the passionate music, retired, and there came a burst of enthusiastic applause—applause renewed again and again—it was a veritable *succès fou*.

But he would make no response to the plaudits. He remained obstinately seated, and there was no elation, but rather gloom upon his face. In vain von Francius besought him to come forward. He declined, and the calls at last ceased. It was the last piece on the first part of the programme. The people at last let him alone. But there could be no doubt that he had both roused a great interest in himself and stimulated the popularity of von Francius in no common degree. And at last he had to go down the orchestra steps to receive a great many congratulations, and go through several introductions, while I sat still and mentally rubbed my hands.

Meanwhile Karl Linders, with nearly all the other instrumentalists, had disappeared from the orchestra. I saw him appear again in the body of the hall, among all the people, who were standing up, laughing and discussing and roving about to talk to their friends. He had a long discussion with Fräulein Clara and Anna Sartorius.

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And then I turned my attention to Eugen again, who, looking grave and unelated, released himself as soon as possible from his group of new acquaintance and joined me.

Then von Francius brought Miss Wedderburn up the steps, and left her sitting near us. She turned to Eugen and said, "*Ich gratuliere*," to which he only bowed rather sadly. Her chair was quite close to ours, and von Francius stood talking to her. Others were quickly coming. One or two were around and behind us.

Eugen was tuning his violin, when a touch on the shoulder roused me. I looked up. Karl stood there, leaning across me toward Eugen. Something in his face told me that it—that which had been hanging so long over us—was coming. His expression, too, attracted the attention of several other people—of all who were immediately around.

Those who heard Karl were myself, von Francius, Miss Wedderburn, and some two or three others, who had looked up as he came, and had paused to watch what was coming.

"Eugen," said he, "a foul lie has been told about you."

"So!"

"Of course I don't believe a word of it. I'm not such a fool. But I have been challenged to confront you with it. It only needs a syllable on your side to crush it instantly; for I will take your word against all the rest of the world put together."

"Well?" said Eugen, whose face was white, and whose voice was low.

"A lady has said to me that you had a brother who had acted the part of father to you, and that you rewarded his kindness by forging his name for a sum of money which you could have had for the asking, for he denied you nothing. It is almost too ridiculous to repeat, and I beg your pardon for doing it; but I was obliged. Will you give me a word of denial?"

Silence!

I looked at Eugen. We were all looking at him. Three things I looked for as equally likely for him to do; but he did none. He did not start up in an indignant denial; he did not utter icily an icy word of contempt; he did not smile and ask Karl if he were out of his senses. He dropped his eyes, and maintained a deadly silence.

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Karl was looking at him, and his candid face changed. Doubt, fear, dismay succeeded one another upon it. Then, in a lower and changed voice, as if first admitting the idea that caution might be necessary:

"*Um Gotteswillen*, Eugen! Speak!"

He looked up—so may look a dog that is being tortured—and my very heart sickened; but he did not speak.

A few moments—not half a minute—did we remain thus. It seemed a hundred years of slow agony. But during that time I tried to comprehend that my friend of the bright, clear eyes, and open, fearless glance; the very soul and flower of honor; my ideal of almost Quixotic chivalrousness, stood with eyes that could not meet ours that hung upon him; face white, expression downcast, accused of a crime which came, if ever crime did, under the category "dirty," and not denying it!

Karl, the wretched beginner of the wretched scene, came nearer, took the other's hand, and, in a hoarse whisper, said:

"For God's sake, Eugen, speak! Deny it! You can deny it—you must deny it!"

He looked up at last, with a tortured gaze; looked at Karl, at me, at the faces around. His lips quivered faintly. Silence yet. And yet it seemed to me that it was loathing that was most strongly depicted upon his face; the loathing of a man who is obliged to intimately examine some unclean thing; the loathing of one who has to drag a corpse about with him.

"Say it is a lie, Eugen!" Karl conjured him.

At last came speech; at last an answer; slow, low, tremulous, impossible to mistake or explain away.

"No; I can not say so."

His head—that proud, high head—dropped again, as if he would fain avoid our eyes.

Karl raised himself. His face too was white. As if stricken with some mortal blow, he walked away. Some people who had surrounded us turned aside and began to whisper to each other behind their music. Von Francius looked impenetrable; May Wedderburn white. The noise and bustle was still going on all around, louder than before. The drama had not taken three minutes to play out.

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Eugen rested his brow for a moment on his hand, and his face was hidden. He looked up, rising as he did so, and his eyes met those of Miss Wedderburn. So sad, so deep a gaze I never saw. It was a sign to me, a significant one, that he could meet her eyes.

Then he turned to von Francius.

"Herr Direktor, Helfen will take my place, *nicht wahr?*"

Von Francius bowed. Eugen left his seat, made his way, without a word, from the orchestra, and von Francius rapped sharply, the preliminary tumult subsided; the concert began.

I glanced once or twice toward Karl; I received no answering look. I could not even see his face; he had made himself as small as possible behind his music.

The concert over—it seemed to me interminable—I was hastening away, anxious only to find Eugen, when Karl Linders stopped me in a retired corner, and holding me fast, said:

"Friedel, I am a damned fool."

"I am sorry not to be able to contradict you."

"Listen," said he. "You must listen, or I shall follow you and make you. I made up my mind not to hear another word against him, but when I went to *die Clara* after the solo, I found her and that confounded girl whispering together. She—Anna Sartorius—said it was very fine for such scamps to cover their sins with music. I asked her pretty stiffly what she meant, for she is always slanging Eugen, and I thought she might have let him alone for once. She said she meant that he was a blackguard—that's the word she used—*ein lauter Spitzbube*—a forger, and worse. I told her I believed it was a lie. I did not believe it.

"Ask him," said she. I said I would be—something—first. But Clara would have nothing to say to

me, and they both badgered me until for mere quietness I agreed to do as they wished."

He went on in distress for some time.

"Oh, drop it!" said I, impatiently. "You have done the mischief. I don't want to listen to your whining over it. Go to the Fräulein Steinmann and Sartorius. They will confer the reward of merit upon you."

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"Gott behüte!"

I shook myself loose from him and took my way home. It was with a feeling not far removed from tremulousness that I entered the room. That poor room formed a temple which I had no intention of desecrating.

He was sitting at the table when I entered, and looked at me absently. Then, with a smile in which sweetness and bitterness were strangely mingled, said:

"So! you have returned? I will not trouble you much longer. Give me house-room for to-night. In the morning I shall be gone."

I went up to him, pushed the writing materials which lay before him away, and took his hands, but could not speak for ever so long.

"Well, Friedhelm," he asked, after a pause, during which the drawn and tense look upon his face relaxed somewhat, "what have you to say to the man who has let you think him honest for three years?"

"Whom I know, and ever have known, to be an honest man."

He laughed.

"There are degrees and grades even in honesty. One kind of honesty is lower than others. I am honest now because my sin has found me out, I can't keep up appearances any longer."

"Pooh! do you suppose that deceives me?" said I, contemptuously. "Me, who have known you for three years. That would be a joke, but one that no one will enjoy at my expense."

A momentary expression of pleasure unutterable flashed across his face and into his eyes; then was repressed, as he said:

"You must listen to reason. Have I not told you all along that my life had been spoiled by my own fault?—that I had disqualified myself to take any leading part among men?—that others might advance, but I should remain where I was? And have you not the answer to all here? You are a generous soul, I know, like few others. My keenest regret now is that I did not tell you long ago how things stood, but it would have cost me your friendship, and I have not too many things to make life sweet to me."

"Eugen, why did you not tell me before? I know the reason; for the very same reason which prevents you from looking me in the eyes now, and saying, 'I am guilty. I did that of which I am accused,' because it is not true. I challenge you; meet my eyes, and say, 'I am guilty!'"

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He looked at me; his eyes were dim with anguish. He said:

"Friedel, I—can not tell you that I am innocent."

"I did not ask you to do so. I asked you to say you were guilty, and on your soul be it if you lie to me. That I could never forgive."

Again he looked at me, strove to speak, but no word came. I never removed my eyes from his; the pause grew long, till I dropped his hands and turned away with a smile.

"Let a hundred busybodies raise their clamoring tongues, they can never divide you and me. If it were not insulting I should ask you to believe that every feeling of mine for you is unchanged, and will remain so as long as I live."

"It is incredible. Such loyalty, such—Friedel, you are a fool!"

His voice broke.

"I wish you could have heard Miss Wedderburn sing her English song after you were gone. It was called, 'What would You do, Love?' and she made us all cry."

"Ah, Miss Wedderburn! How delightful she is."

"If it is any comfort to you to know, I can assure you that she thinks as I do. I am certain of it."

"Comfort—not much. It is only that if I ever allowed myself to fall in love again, which I shall not do, it would be with Miss Wedderburn."

The tone sufficiently told me that he was much in love with her already.

"She is bewitching," he added.

"If you do not mean to allow yourself to fall in love with her," I remarked, sententiously, "because it seems that 'allowing' is a matter for her to decide, not the men who happen to know her."

"I shall not see much more of her. I shall not remain here."

As this was what I had fully expected to hear, I said nothing, but I thought of Miss Wedderburn, and grieved for her. [Pg 277]

"Yes, I must go forth from hence," he pursued. "I suppose I ought to be satisfied that I have had three years here. I wonder if there is any way in which a man could kill all trace of his old self; a man who has every desire to lead henceforth a new life, and be at peace and charity with all men. I suppose not—no. I suppose the brand has to be carried about till the last; and how long it may be before that 'last' comes!"

I was silent. I had put a good face upon the matter and spoken bravely about it. I had told him that I did not believe him guilty—that my regard and respect were as high as ever, and I spoke the truth. Both before and since then he had told me that I had a bump of veneration and one of belief ludicrously out of proportion to the exigencies of the age in which I lived.

Be it so. Despite my cheerful words, and despite the belief I did feel in him, I could not help seeing that he carried himself now as a marked man. The free, open look was gone; a blight had fallen upon him, and he withered under it. There was what the English call a "down" look upon his face, which had not been there formerly, even in those worst days when the parting from Sigmund was immediately before and behind us.

In the days which immediately followed the scene at the concert I noticed how he would set about things with a kind of hurried zeal, then suddenly stop and throw them aside, as if sick of them, and fall to brooding with head sunk upon his breast, and lowering brow; a state and a spectacle which caused me pain and misery not to be described. He would begin sudden conversations with me, starting with some question, as:

"Friedel, do you believe in a future state?"

"I do, and I don't. I mean to say that I don't know anything about it."

"Do you know what my idea of heaven would be?"

"Indeed, I don't," said I, feebly endeavoring a feeble joke. "A place where all the fiddles are by Stradivarius and Guanari, and all the music comes up to Beethoven."

"No; but a place where there are no mistakes."

"No mistakes?"

"*Ja wohl!* Where it would not be possible for a man with fair chances to spoil his whole career by a single mistake. Or, if there were mistakes, I would arrange that the punishment should be in some proportion to them—not a large punishment for a little sin, and *vice versa*." [Pg 278]

"Well, I should think that if there is any heaven there would be some arrangement of that kind."

"As for hell," he went on, in a low, calm tone which I had learned to understand meant with him intense earnestness, "there are people who wonder that any one could invent a hell. My only wonder is why they should have resorted to fire and brimstone to enhance its terrors when they had the earth full of misery to choose from."

"You think this world a hell, Eugen?"

"Sometimes I think it the very nethermost hell of hells, and I think if you had my feelings you would think so too. A poet, an English poet (you do not know the English poets as you ought, Friedhelm), has said that the fiercest of all hells is the failure in a great purpose. I used to think that a fine sentiment; now I sometimes wonder whether to a man who was once inclined to think well of himself it may not be a much fiercer trial to look back and find that he has failed to be commonly honest and upright. It is a nice little distinction—a moral wire-drawing which I would recommend to the romancers if I knew any."

Once and only once was Sigmund mentioned between us, and Eugen said:

"Nine years, were you speaking of? No—not in nineteen, nor in ninety-nine shall I ever see him again."

"Why?"

"The other night, and what occurred then, decided me. Till then I had some consolation in thinking that the blot might perhaps be wiped out—the shame lived down. Now I see that that is a fallacy. With God's help I will never see him nor speak to him again. It is better that he should forget me."

His voice did not tremble as he said this, though I knew that the idea of being forgotten by Sigmund must be to him anguish of a refinement not to be measured by me.

I bided my time, saying nothing. I at least was too much engrossed with my own affairs to foresee the cloud then first dawning on the horizon, which they who looked toward France and Spain might perhaps perceive.

It had not come yet—the first crack of that thunder which rattled so long over our land, and when we saw the dingy old Jäger Hof at one end of the Hofgarten, and heard by chance the words of [Pg 279]

Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, no premonition touched us. My mind was made up, that let Eugen go when and where he would, I would go with him.

I had no ties of duty, none of love or of ambition to separate me from him; his God should be my God, and his people my people; if the God were a jealous God, dealing out wrath and terror, and the people should dwindle to outcasts and pariahs, it mattered not to me. I loved him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Nein, länger kann ich diesen Kampf
nicht kämpfen,
Den Riesenkampf der Pflicht.
Kannst du des Herzens Flammentrieb
nicht dämpfen,
So fordre, Tugend, dieses Opfer
nicht.

Geschworen hab' ich 's, ja, ich hab's
geschworen,
Mich selbst zu bändigen.
Hier ist dein Kranz, er sei auf ewig mir
verloren;
Nimm ihn zurück und lass mich
sündigen.

SCHILLER.

If I had never had a trouble before I had one now—large, stalwart, robust. For what seemed to me a long time there was present to my mind's eye little but the vision of a large, lighted room—a great undefined crowd surging around and below, a small knot of persons and faces in sharp distinctness immediately around me; low-spoken words with a question; no answer—vehement imploring for an answer—still no reply; yet another sentence conjuring denial, and then the answer itself—the silence that succeeded it; the face which had become part of my thoughts all changed and downcast—the man whom I had looked up to, feared, honored, as chivalrous far beyond his station and circumstances slowly walking away from the company of his fellows, disgraced, fallen, having himself owned to the disgrace being merited, pointed at as a cheat—bowing to the accusation.

It drove me almost mad to think of it. I suffered the more keenly because I could speak to no one of what had happened. What sympathy should I get from any living soul by explaining my sick looks and absent demeanor with the words, "I love that man who is disgraced?" I smiled dryly in the midst of my anguish, and locked it the deeper in my own breast.

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I had believed in him so devotedly, so intensely, had loved him so entirely, and with such a humility, such a consciousness of my own shortcomings and of his superiority. The recoil at first was such as one might experience who embraces a veiled figure, presses his lips to where its lips should be, and finds that he kisses a corpse.

Such, I say, was the recoil at first. But a recoil, from its very nature, is short and vehement. There are some natures, I believe, which after a shock turn and flee from the shocking agent. Not so I. After figuratively springing back and pressing my hands over my eyes, I removed them again, and still saw his face—and it tortured me to have to own it, but I had to do so—still loved that face beyond all earthly things.

It grew by degrees familiar to me again. I caught myself thinking of the past and smiling at the remembrance of the jokes between Eugen and Helfen on Carnival Monday, then pulled myself up with a feeling of horror, and the conviction that I had no business to be thinking of him at all. But I did think of him day by day and hour by hour, and tortured myself with thinking of him, and wished, yet dreaded, to see him, and wondered how I possibly could see him, and could only live on in a hope which was not fulfilled. For I had no right to seek him out. His condition might be much—very much to me. My sympathy or pity or thought—as I felt all too keenly—could be nothing to him.

Meanwhile, as is usual in such cases, circumstance composedly took my affairs into her hands and settled them for me without my being able to move a finger in the matter.

The time was approaching for the departure of von Francius. Adelaide and I did not exchange a syllable upon the subject. Of what use? I knew to a certain extent what was passing within her. I knew that this child of the world—were we not all children of the world, and not of light?—had braced her moral forces to meet the worst, and was awaiting it calmly.

Adelaide, like me, based her actions not upon religion. Religion was for both of us an utter abstraction; it touched us not. That which gave Adelaide force to withstand temptation, and to

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remain stoically in the drear sphere in which she already found herself, was not religion; it was pride on the one hand, and on the other love for Max von Francius.

Pride forbade her to forfeit her reputation, which was dear to her, though her position had lost the charms with which distance had once gilded it for her. Love for von Francius made her struggle with all the force of her nature to remain where she was, renounce him blamelessly rather than yield at the price which women must pay who do such things as leave their husbands.

It was wonderful to me to see how love had developed in her every higher emotion. I remembered how cynical she had always been as to the merits of her own sex. Women, according to her, were an inferior race, who gained their poor ends by poor means. She had never been hard upon female trickery and subterfuge. Bah! she said, how else are they to get what they want? But now with the exalted opinion of a man, had come exalted ideas as to the woman fit for his wife.

Since to go to him she must be stained and marked forever, she would remain away from him. Never should any circumstance connected with him be made small or contemptible by any act of hers. I read the motive, and, reading it, read her.

Von Francius was, equally with herself, distinctly and emphatically a child of the world—as she honored him he honored her. He proved his strength and the innate nobility of his nature by his stoic abstinence from evasion of or rebellion against the decree which had gone out against their love. He was a better man, a greater artist, a more sympathetic nature now than before. His passage through the furnace had cleansed him. He was a standing example to me that despite what our preachers and our poets, our philosophers and our novelists are incessantly dinnning into our ears, there are yet men who can renounce—men to whom honor and purity are still the highest goddesses.

I saw him, naturally, and often during these days—so dark for all of us. He spoke to me of his prospects in his new post. He asked me if I would write to him occasionally, even if it should be only three or four times in the year.

“Indeed I will, if you care to hear from me,” said I, much moved.

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This was at our last music lesson, in my dark little room at the Wehrhahn. Von Francius had made it indeed a lesson, more than a lesson, a remembrance to carry with me forever, for he had been playing Beethoven and Schubert to me.

“Fräulein May, everything concerning you and yours will ever be of the very deepest interest to me,” he said, looking earnestly at me. “Take a few words of advice and information from one who has never felt anything for you since he first met you but the truest friendship. You have in you the materials of a great artist; whether you have the Spartan courage and perseverance requisite to attain the position, I can hardly tell. If you choose to become an artist, *eine vollkommene Künstlerin*, you must give everything else up—love and marriage and all that interferes with your art, for, *liebes Fräulein*, you can not pursue two things at once.”

“Then I have every chance of becoming as great an artist as possible,” said I; “for none of those things will ever interfere with my pursuit of art.”

“Wait till the time of probation comes; you are but eighteen yet,” said he, kindly, but skeptically.

“Herr von Francius”—the words started to my lips as the truth into my mind, and fell from them in the strong desire to speak to some one of the matter that then filled my whole soul—“I can tell you the truth—you will understand—the time of probation has been—it is over—past. I am free for the future.”

“So!” said he, in a very low voice, and his eyes were filled, less with pity than with a fellow-feeling which made them “wondrous kind.” “You too have suffered, and given up. There are then four people—you and I, and one whose name I will not speak, and—may I guess once, Fräulein May?”

I bowed.

“My first violinist, *nicht wahr?*”

Again I assented silently. He went on:

“Fate is perverse about these things. And now, my fair pupil, you understand somewhat more that no true artist is possible without sorrow and suffering and renunciation. And you will think sometimes of your old, fault-finding, grumbling master—*ja?*”

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“Oh, Herr von Francius!” cried I, laying my hand upon the key-board of the piano, and sobbing aloud. “The kindest, best, most patient, gentle—”

I could say no more.

“That is mere nonsense, my dear May,” he said, passing his hand over my prostrate head; and I felt that it—the strong hand—trembled. “I want a promise from you. Will you sing for me next season?”

“If I am alive, and you send for me, I will.”

"Thanks. And—one other word. Some one very dear to us both is very sad; she will become sadder. You, my child, have the power of allaying sadness, and soothing grief and bitterness in a remarkable degree. Will you expend some of that power upon her when her burden grows very hard, and think that with each word of kindness to her you bind my heart more fast to yourself?"

"I will—indeed I will!"

"We will not say good-bye, but only *auf wiedersehen!*" said he. "You and I shall meet again. I am sure of that. *Meine liebe, gute Schülerin*, adieu!"

Choked with tears, I passively let him raise my hand to his lips. I hid my face in my handkerchief to repress my fast-flowing tears. I would not, because I dared not, look at him. The sight of his kind and trusted face would give me too much pain.

He loosed my hand. I heard steps; a door opened and closed. He was gone! My last lesson was over. My trusty friend had departed. He was to leave Elberthal on the following day.

The next night there was an entertainment—half concert, half theatricals, wholly *dilettante*—at the Malkasten, the Artists' Club. We, as is the duty of a decorous English family, buried all our private griefs, and appeared at the entertainment, to which, indeed, Adelaide had received a special invitation. I was going to remain with Adelaide until Sir Peter's return, which, we understood, was to be in the course of a few weeks, and then I was going to —, by the advice of von Francius, there to finish my studies.

Dearly though I loved music, divine as she ever has been, and will be, to me, yet the idea of leaving von Francius for other masters had at first almost shaken my resolution to persevere. But, as I said, all this was taken out of my hands by an irresistible concourse of circumstances, over which I had simply no control whatever.

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Adelaide, Harry, and I went to the Malkasten. The gardens were gayly illuminated; there was a torch-light procession round the little artificial lake, and chorus singing—merry choruses, such as "Wenn Zwei sich gut sind, sie finden den Weg"—which were cheered and laughed at. The fantastically dressed artists and their friends were flitting, torch in hand, about the dark alleys under the twisted acacias and elms, the former of which made the air voluptuous with their scent. Then we adjourned to the saal for the concert, and heard on all sides regrets about the absence of von Francius.

We sat out the first part of the festivities, which were to conclude with theatricals. During the pause we went into the garden. The May evening was balmy and beautiful; no moonlight, but many stars and the twinkling lights in the garden.

Adelaide and I had seated ourselves on a circular bench surrounding a big tree, which had the mighty word GOETHE cut deeply into its rugged bark. When the others began to return to the Malkasten, Adelaide, turning to Arkwright, said:

"Harry, will you go in and leave my sister and me here, that's a good boy? You can call for us when the play is over."

"All right, my lady," assented he, amiably, and left us.

Presently Adelaide and I moved to another seat, near to a small table under a thick shade of trees. The pleasant, cool evening air fanned our faces; all was still and peaceful. Not a soul but ourselves had remained out-of-doors. The still drama of the marching stars was less attractive than the amateur murdering of "Die Piccolomin" within. The tree-tops rustled softly over our heads. The lighted pond gleamed through the low-hanging boughs at the other end of the garden. A peal of laughter and a round of applause came wafted now and then from within. Ere long Adelaide's hand stole into mine, which closed over it, and we sat silent.

Then there came a voice. Some one—a complaisant *dilettantin*—was singing Thekla's song. We heard the refrain—distance lent enchantment; it sounded what it really was, deep as eternity:

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"Ich habe gelebt und geliebet."

Adelaide moved uneasily; her hand started nervously, and a sigh broke from her lips.

"Schiller wrote from his heart," said she, in a low voice.

"Indeed, yes, Adelaide."

"Did you say good-bye to von Francius, May, yesterday?"

"Yes—at least, we said *au revoir*. He wants me to sing for him next winter."

"Was he very down?"

"Yes—very. He—"

A footstep close at hand. A figure passed in the uncertain light, dimly discerned us, paused, and glanced at us.

"Max!" exclaimed Adelaide, in a low voice, full of surprise and emotion, and she half started up.

"It is you! That is too wonderful!" said he, pausing.

"You are not yet gone?"

"I have been detained to-day. I leave early to-morrow. I thought I would take at least one turn in the Malkasten garden, which I may perhaps never see or enter again. I did not know you were here."

"We—May and I—thought it so pleasant that we would not go in again to listen to the play."

Von Francius had come under the trees and was now leaning against a massive trunk; his slight, tall figure almost lost against it; his arms folded, and an imposing calm upon his pale face, which was just caught by the gleam of a lamp outside the trees.

"Since this accidental meeting has taken place, I may have the privilege of saying adieu to your ladyship."

"Yes—" said Adelaide, in a strange, low, much-moved tone.

I felt uneasy, I was sorry this meeting had taken place. The shock and revulsion of feeling for Adelaide, after she had been securely calculating that von Francius was a hundred miles on his way to —, was too severe. I could tell from the very *timbre* of her voice and its faint vibration how agitated she was, and as she seated herself again beside me, I felt that she trembled like a reed.

"It is more happiness than I expected," went on von Francius, and his voice too was agitated. Oh, if he would only say "Farewell," and go! [Pg 286]

"Happiness!" echoed Adelaide, in a tone whose wretchedness was too deep for tears.

"Ah! You correct me. Still it is a happiness; there are some kinds of joy which one can not distinguish from griefs, my lady, until one comes to think that one might have been without them, and then one knows their real nature."

She clasped her hands. I saw her bosom rise and fall with long, stormy breaths.

I trembled for both; for Adelaide, whose emotion and anguish were, I saw, mastering her; for von Francius, because if Adelaide failed he must find it almost impossible to repulse her.

"Herr von Francius," said I, in a quick, low voice, making one step toward him, and laying my hand upon his arm, "leave us! If you do love us," I added, in a whisper, "leave us! Adelaide, say good-bye to him—let him go!"

"You are right," said von Francius to me, before Adelaide had time to speak; "you are quite right."

A pause. He stepped up to Adelaide. I dared not interfere. Their eyes met, and his will not to yield produced the same in her, in the shape of a passive, voiceless acquiescence in his proceedings. He took her hands, saying:

"My lady, adieu! Heaven send you peace, or death, which brings it, or—whatever is best."

Loosing her hands he turned to me, saying distinctly:

"As you are a woman, and her sister, do not forsake her now."

Then he was gone. She raised her arms and half fell against the trunk of the giant acacia beneath which we had been sitting, face forward, as if drunk with misery.

Von Francius, strong and generous, whose very submission seemed to brace one to meet trouble with a calmer, firmer front, was gone. I raised my eyes, and did not even feel startled, only darkly certain that Adelaide's evil star was high in the heaven of her fate, when I saw, calmly regarding us, Sir Peter Le Marchant.

In another moment he stood beside his wife, smiling, and touched her shoulder; with a low cry she raised her face, shrinking away from him. She did not seem surprised either, and I do not think people often are surprised at the presence, however sudden and unexpected, of their evil genius. It is good luck which surprises the average human being. [Pg 287]

"You give me a cold welcome, my lady," he remarked. "You are so overjoyed to see me, I suppose. Your carriage is waiting outside. I came in it, and Arkwright told me I should find you here. Suppose you come home. We shall be less disturbed there than in these public gardens."

Tone and words all convinced me that he had heard most of what had passed, and would oppress her with it hereafter.

The late scene had apparently stunned her. After the first recoil she said, scarcely audibly, "I am ready," and moved. He offered her his arm; she took it, turning to me and saying, "Come, May!"

"Excuse me," observed Sir Peter, "you are better alone. I am sorry I can not second your invitation to my charming sister-in-law. I do not think you fit for any society—even hers."

"I can not leave my sister, Sir Peter; she is not fit to be left," I found voice to say.

"She is not 'left,' as you say, my dear. She has her husband. She has me," said he.

Some few further words passed. I do not chronicle them. Sir Peter was as firm as a rock—that I was helpless before him is a matter of course. I saw my sister handed into her carriage; I saw Sir Peter follow her—the carriage drive away. I was left alone, half mad with terror at the idea of her state, to go home to my lodgings.

Sir Peter had heard the words of von Francius to me; “do not forsake her now,” and had given himself the satisfaction of setting them aside as if they had been so much waste paper. Von Francius was, as I well knew, trying to derive comfort in this very moment from the fact that I at least was with her; I who loved them both, and would have laid down my life for them. Well, let him have the comfort! In the midst of my sorrow I rejoiced that he did not know the worst, and would not be likely to imagine for himself a terror grimmer than any feeling I had yet known.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

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“Some say, ‘A queen discrowned,’ and some call it ‘Woman’s shame.’ Others name it ‘A false step,’ or ‘Social suicide,’ just as it happens to strike their minds, or such understanding as they may be blessed with. In these days one rarely hears seriously mentioned such unruly words as ‘Love,’ or ‘Wretchedness,’ or ‘Despair,’ which may nevertheless be important factors in bringing about that result which stands out to the light of day for public inspection.”

The three days which I passed alone and in suspense were very terrible ones to me. I felt myself physically as well as mentally ill, and it was in vain that I tried to learn anything of or from Adelaide, and I waited in a kind of breathless eagerness for the end of it all, for I knew as well as if some one had shouted it aloud from the house-tops that that farewell in the Malkasten garden was not the end.

Early one morning, when the birds were singing and the sunshine streaming into the room, Frau Lutzler came into the room and put a letter into my hand, which she said a messenger had left. I took it, and paused a moment before I opened it. I was unwilling to face what I knew was coming—and yet, how otherwise could the whole story have ended?

“DEAR MAY,—You, like me, have been suffering during these three days. I have been trying—yes, I have tried to believe I could bear this life, but it is too horrible. Isn’t it possible that sometimes it may be right to do wrong? It is of no use telling you what has passed, but it is enough. I believe I am only putting the crowning point to my husband’s revenge when I leave him. He will be glad—he does not mind the disgrace for himself; and he can get another wife, as good as I, when he wants one. When you read this, or not long afterward, I shall be with Max von Francius. I wrote to him—I asked him to save me, and he said, ‘Come!’ It is not because I want to go, but I must go somewhere. I have made a great mess of my life. I believe everybody does make a mess of it who tries to arrange things for himself. Remember that, May.

“I wonder if we shall ever meet again. Not likely, when you are married to some respectable, conventional man, who will shield you from contamination with such as I. I must not write more or I shall write nonsense. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye! What will be the end of me? Think of me sometimes, and try not to think too hardly. Listen to your heart—not to what people say. Good-bye again!

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“ADELAIDE.”

I received this stroke without groan or cry, tear or shiver. It struck home to me. The heavens were riven asunder—a flash came from them, descended upon my head, and left me desolate. I stood, I know not how long, stock-still in the place where I had read that letter. In novels I had read of such things; they had had little meaning for me. In real life I had only heard them mentioned dimly and distantly, and here I was face to face with the awful thing, and so far from being able to deal out hearty, untempered condemnation, I found that the words of Adelaide’s letter came to me like throes of a real heart. Bald, dry, disjointed sentences on the outside; without feeling they might seem, but to me they were the breathless exclamations of a soul in supreme torture and peril. My sister! with what a passion of love my heart went out to her. Think of you, Adelaide, and think of you not too hardly? Oh, why did not you trust me more?

I saw her as she wrote these words: “I have made a great mess of it.” To make a mess of one’s life—one mistake after another, till what might have been at least honest, pure, and of good report, becomes a stained, limp, unsightly thing, at which men feel that they may gaze openly, and from which women turn away in scorn unutterable; and that Adelaide, my proudest of proud sisters, had come to this!

I was not thinking of what people would say. I was not wondering how it had come about; I was feeling Adelaide's words ever more and more acutely, till they seemed to stand out from the paper and turn into cries of anguish in my very ears. I put my hands to my ears; I could not bear those notes of despair.

"What will be the end of me?" she said, and I shook from head to foot as I repeated the question. If her will and that of von Francius ever came in contact. She had put herself at his mercy utterly; her whole future now depended upon the good pleasure of a man—and men were selfish.

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With a faint cry of terror and foreboding, I felt everything whirl unsteadily around me; the letter fell from my hand; the icy band that had held me fast gave way. All things faded before me, and I scarcely knew that I was sinking upon the floor. I thought I was dying; then thought faded with the consciousness that brings it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Allein, allein! und so soll ich
genesen?
Allein, allein! und das des
Schicksals Segen!
Allein, allein! O Gott, ein einzig
Wesen,
Um dieses Haupt an seine Brust
zu legen!"

I had a sharp, if not a long attack of illness, which left me weak, shaken, passive, so that I felt neither ability nor wish to resist those who took me into their hands. I remember being surprised at the goodness of every one toward me; astonished at Frau Lutzler's gentle kindness, amazed at the unfailing goodness of Dr. Mittendorf and his wife, at that of the medical man who attended me in my illness. Yes, the world seemed full of kindness, full of kind people who were anxious to keep me in it, and who managed, in spite of my effort to leave it, to retain me.

Dr. Mittendorf, the oculist, had been my guardian angel. It was he who wrote to my friends and told them of my illness; it was he who went to meet Stella and Miss Hallam's Merrick, who came over to nurse me—and take me home. The fiat had gone forth. I was to go home. I made no resistance, but my very heart shrunk away in fear and terror from the parting, till one day something happened which reconciled me to going home, or rather made me evenly and equally indifferent whether I went home, or stayed abroad, or lived, or died, or, in short, what became of me.

I sat one afternoon for the first time in an arm-chair opposite the window. It was June, and the sun streamed warmly and richly in. The room was scented with a bunch of wall-flowers and another of mignonette, which Stella had brought in that morning from the market. Stella was very kind to me, but in a superior, patronizing way. I had always felt deferentially backward before the superior abilities of both my sisters, but Stella quite over-awed me by her decided opinions and calm way of setting me right upon all possible matters.

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This afternoon she had gone out with Merrick to enjoy a little fresh air. I was left quite alone, with my hands in my lap, feeling very weak, and looking wistfully toward the well-remembered windows on the other side of the street.

They were wide open; I could see inside the room. No one was there—Friedhelm and Eugen had gone out, no doubt.

The door of my room opened, and Frau Lutzler came in. She looked cautiously around, and then, having ascertained that I was not asleep, asked in a nerve-disturbing whisper if I had everything that I wanted.

"Everything, thank you, Frau Lutzler," said I. "But come in! I want to speak to you. I am afraid I have given you no end of trouble."

"*Ach, ich bitte sie, Fräulein!* Don't mention the trouble. We have managed to keep you alive."

How they all did rejoice in having won a victory over that gray-winged angel, Death! I thought to myself, with a curious sensation of wonder.

"You are very kind," I said, "and I want you to tell me something, Frau Lutzler: how long have I been ill?"

"Fourteen days, Fräulein; little as you may think it."

"Indeed! I have heard nothing about any one in that time. Who has been made musik-direktor in place of Herr von Francius?"

Frau Lutzler folded her arms and composed herself to tell me a history.

"*Ja, Fräulein*, the post would have been offered to Herr Courvoisier, only, you see, he has turned out a good-for-nothing. But perhaps you heard about that?"

"Oh, yes! I know all about it," said I, hastily, as I passed my handkerchief over my mouth to hide the spasm of pain which contracted it.

"Of course, considering all that, the Direktion could not offer it to him, so they proposed it to Herr Helfen—you know Herr Helfen, Fräulein, *nicht?*"

I nodded.

"A good young man! a worthy young man, and so popular with his companions! *Aber denken sie nur!* The authorities might have been offering him an insult instead of a good post. He refused it then and there; would not stop to consider about it—in fact, he was quite angry about it. The gentleman who was chosen at last was a stranger, from Hanover."

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"Herr Helfen refused it—why, do you know?"

"They say, because he was so fond of Herr Courvoisier, and would not be set above him. It may be so. I know for a certainty that, so far from taking part against Herr Courvoisier, he would not even believe the story against him, though he could not deny it, and did not try to deny it. *Aber, Fräulein*—what hearts men must have! To have lived three years, and let the world think him an honest man, when all the time he had that on his conscience! *Schrecklich!*"

Adelaide and Courvoisier, it seemed, might almost be pelted with the same stones.

"His wife, they say, died of grief at the disgrace—"

"Yes," said I, wincing. I could not bear this any longer, nor to discuss Courvoisier with Frau Lutzler, and the words "his wife," uttered in that speculatively gossiping tone, repelled me. She turned the subject to Helfen again.

"Herr Helfen must indeed have loved his friend, for when Herr Courvoisier went away he went with him."

"Herr Courvoisier is gone?" I inquired, in a voice so like my usual one that I was surprised.

"Yes, certainly he is gone. I don't know where, I am sure."

"Perhaps they will return?"

Frau Lutzler shook her head, and smiled slightly.

"*Nee, Fräulein!* Their places were filled immediately. They are gone—*ganz und gar.*"

I tried to listen to her, tried to answer her as she went on giving her opinions upon men and things, but the effort collapsed suddenly. I had at last to turn my head away and close my eyes, and in that weary, weary moment I prayed to God that He would let me die, and wondered again, and was almost angry with those who had nursed me, for having done their work so well. "We have managed to save you," Frau Lutzler had said. Save me from what, and for what?

I knew the truth, as I sat there; it was quite too strong and too clear to be laid aside, or looked upon with doubtful eyes. I was fronted by a fact, humiliating or not—a fact which I could not deny.

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It was bad enough to have fallen in love with a man who had never showed me by word or sign that he cared for me, but exactly and pointedly the reverse; but now it seemed the man himself was bad too. Surely a well-regulated mind would have turned away from him—uninfluenced.

If so, then mine was an ill-regulated mind. I had loved him from the bottom of my heart; the world without him felt cold, empty and bare—desolate to live in, and shorn of its sweetest pleasures. He had influenced me, he influenced me yet—I still felt the words true:

"The *greater* soul that draweth thee
Hath left his shadow plain to see
On thy fair face, Persephone!"

He had bewitched me; I did feel capable of "making a fool of myself" for his sake. I did feel that life by the side of any other man would be miserable, though never so richly set; and that life by his side would be full and complete though never so poor and sparing in its circumstances. I make no excuses, no apologies for this state of things. It simply was so.

Gone! And Friedhelm with him! I should probably never see either of them again. "I have made a mess of my life," Adelaide had said, and I felt that I might chant the same dirge. A fine ending to my boasted artistic career! I thought of how I had sat and chattered so aimlessly to Courvoisier in the cathedral at Köln, and had little known how large and how deep a shadow his influence was to cast over my life.

I still retained a habit of occasionally kneeling by my bedside and saying my prayers, and this night I felt the impulse to do so. I tried to thank God for my recovery. I said the Lord's Prayer; it is a universal petition and thanksgiving; it did not too nearly touch my woes; it allowed itself to be said, but when I came to something nearer, tried to say a thanksgiving for blessings and friends who yet remained, my heart refused, my tongue cleaved to my mouth. Alas! I was not

regenerate. I could not thank God for what had happened. I found myself thinking of "the pity on't," and crying most bitterly till tears streamed through my folded fingers, and whispering, "Oh, if I could only have died while I was so ill! no one would have missed me, and it would have been so much better for me!"

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In the beginning of July, Stella, Merrick, and I returned to England, to Skernford, home. I parted in silent tears from my trusted friends, the Mittendorfs, who begged me to come and stay with them at some future day. The anguish of leaving Elberthal did not make itself fully felt at first—that remained to torment me at a future day. And soon after our return came printed in large type in all the newspapers, "Declaration of War between France and Germany." Mine was among the hearts which panted and beat with sickening terror in England while the dogs of war were fastened in deadly grip abroad.

My time at home was spent more with Miss Hallam than in my own home. I found her looking much older, much feebler, and much more subdued than when she had been in Germany. She seemed to find some comfort from my society, and I was glad to devote myself to her. But for her I should never have known all those pains and pleasures which, bitter though their remembrance might be, were, and ever would be to me, the dearest thing of my life.

Miss Hallam seemed to know this; she once asked me: "Would I return to Germany if I could?"

"Yes," said I, "I would."

To say that I found life dull, even in Skernford, at that time would be untrue. Miss Hallam was a furious partisan of the French, and I dared not mention the war to her, but I took in the "Daily News" from my private funds, and read it in my bedroom every night with dimmed eyes, fast-coming breath, and beating heart. I knew—knew well, that Eugen must be fighting—unless he were dead. And I knew, too, by some intuition founded, I suppose, on many small negative evidences unheeded at the time, that he would fight, not like the other men who were battling for the sake of hearth and home, and sheer love and pride for the Fatherland, but as one who has no home and no Fatherland, as one who seeks a grave, not as one who combats a wrong.

Stella saw the pile of newspapers in my room, and asked me how I could read those dreary accounts of battles and bombardments. Beyond these poor newspapers I had, during the sixteen months that I was at home, but scant tidings from without. I had implored Clara Steinmann to write me now and then, and tell me the news of Elberthal, but her penmanship was of the most modest and retiring description, and she was, too, so desperately excited about Karl as to be able to think scarce of anything else. Karl belonged to a Landwehr regiment which had not yet been called out, but to which that frightful contingency might happen any day; and what should she, Clara, do in that case? She told me no news; she lamented over the possibility of Karl's being summoned upon active service. It was, she said, *grausam, schrecklich!* It made her almost faint to write about it, and yet she did compose four whole pages in that condition. The barrack, she informed me, was turned into a hospital, and she and "Tante" both worked hard. There was much work—dreadful work to do—such poor groaning fellows to nurse! "*Herrgott!*" cried poor little Clara, "I did not know that the world was such a dreadful place!" Everything was so dear, so frightfully dear, and Karl—that was the burden of her song—might have to go into battle any day.

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Also through the public papers I learned that Adelaide and Sir Peter Le Marchant were divided forever. As to what happened afterward I was for some time in uncertainty, longing most intensely to know, not daring to speak of it. Adelaide's name was the signal for a cold stare from Stella, and angry, indignant expostulation from Miss Hallam. To me it was a sorrowful spell which I carried in my heart of hearts.

One day I saw in a German musical periodical which I took in, this announcement: "Herr Musikdirektor Max von Francius in — has lately published a new symphony in B minor. The productions of this gifted composer are slowly but most surely making the mark which they deserve to leave in the musical history of our nation; he has, we believe, left — for — for a few weeks to join his lady (*seine Gemahlin*), who is one of the most active and valuable hospitable nurses of that town, now, alas! little else than a hospital."

This paragraph set my heart beating wildly. Adelaide was then the wife of von Francius. My heart yearned from my solitude toward them both. Why did not they write? They knew how I loved them. Adelaide could not suppose that I looked upon her deed with the eyes of the world at large—with the eyes of Stella or Miss Hallam. Had I not grieved with her? Had I not seen the dreadful struggle? Had I not proved the nobility of von Francius? On an impulse I seized pen and paper, and wrote to Adelaide, addressing my letter under cover to her husband at the town in which he was musik-direktor; to him I also wrote—only a few words—"Is your pupil forgotten by her master? he has never been forgotten by her."

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At last the answer came. On the part of Adelaide it was short:

"DEAR MAY,—I have had no time till now to answer your letter. I can not reply to all your questions. You ask whether I repent what I have done. I repent my whole life. If I am happy—how can I be happy? I am busy now, and have many calls upon my time. My husband is very good: he never interposes between me and my work. Shall I ever come to England again?—never."

"Yours,

No request to write again! No inquiry after friends or relations! This letter showed me that whatever I might feel to her—however my heart might beat and long, how warm soever the love I bore her, yet that Adelaide was now apart from me—divided in every thought. It was a cruel letter, but in my pain I could not see that it had not been cruelly intended. Her nature had changed. But behind this pain lay comfort. On the back of the same sheet as that on which Adelaide's curt epistle was written, were some lines in the hand I knew well.

"LIEBE MAI"—they said—"Forgive your master, who can never forget you, nor ever cease to love you. You suffer. I know it; I read it in those short, constrained lines, so unlike your spontaneous words and frank smile. My dear child, remember the storms that are beating on every side—over our country, in on our hearts. Once I asked you to sing for me some time: you promised. When the war is over I shall remind you of your promise. At present, believe me, silence is best.

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"Your old music-master,
"M. v. F."

Gall and honey, roses and thistles, a dagger at the heart and a caress upon the lips; such seemed to me the characters of the two letters on the same sheet which I held in my hand. Adelaide made my heart ache; von Francius made tears stream from my eyes. I reproached myself for having doubted him, but oh, I treasured the proof that he was true! It was the one tangible link between me, reality, and hard facts, and the misty yet beloved life I had quitted. My heart was full to overflowing; I must tell some one—I must speak to some one.

Once again I tried to talk to Stella about Adelaide, but she gazed at me in that straight, strange way, and said coldly that she preferred not to speak of "that." I could not speak to Miss Hallam about it. Alone in the broad meadows, beside the noiseless river, I sometimes whispered to myself that I was not forgotten, and tried to console myself with the feeling that what von Francius promised he did—I should touch his hand, hear his voice again—and Adelaide's. For the rest, I had to lock the whole affair—my grief and my love, my longing and my anxiety, fast within my own breast, and did so.

It was a long lesson—a hard one; it was conned with bitter tears, wept long and alone in the darkness; it was a sorrow which lay down and rose up with me. It taught (or rather practiced me until I became expert in them) certain things in which I had been deficient; reticence, self-reliance, a quicker ability to decide in emergencies. It certainly made me feel old and sad, and Miss Hallam often said that Stella and I were "as quiet as nuns."

Stella had the power which I so ardently coveted: she was a first-rate instrumentalist. The only topic she and I had in common was the music I had heard and taken part in. To anything concerning that she would listen for hours.

Meanwhile the war rolled on, and Paris capitulated, and peace was declared. The spring passed and Germany laughed in glee, and bleeding France roused herself to look with a haggard eye around her; what she saw, we all know—desolation, and mourning, and woe. And summer glided by, and autumn came, and I did not write either to Adelaide or von Francius. I had a firm faith in him—and absolute trust. I felt I was not forgotten.

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In less than a year after my return to England, Miss Hallam died. The day before her death she called me to her, and said words which moved me very much.

"May, I am an eccentric old woman, and lest you should be in any doubt upon the subject of my feelings toward you, I wish to tell you that my life has been more satisfactory to me ever since I knew you."

"That is much more praise than I deserve, Miss Hallam."

"No, it isn't. I like both you and Stella. Three months ago I made a codicil to my will by which I endeavored to express that liking. It is nothing very brilliant, but I fancy it will suit the views of both of you."

Utterly astounded, I stammered out some incoherent words.

"There, don't thank me," said she. "If I were not sure that I shall die to-morrow—or thereabouts, I should put my plan into execution at once, but I shall not be alive at the end of the week."

Her words proved true. Grim, sardonic, and cynical to the last, she died quietly, gladly closing her eyes which had so long been sightless. She was sixty-five years old, and had lived alone since she was five-and-twenty.

The codicil to her will, which she had spoken of with so much composure, left three hundred pounds to Stella and me. She wished a portion of it to be devoted to our instruction in music, vocal and instrumental, at any German conservatorium we might select. She preferred that of L—. Until we were of age, our parents or guardians saw to the dispensing of the money, after that it was our own—half belonging to each of us; we might either unite our funds or use them separately as we choose.

It need scarcely be said that we both chose that course which she indicated. Stella's joy was deep and intense—mine had an unavoidable sorrow mingled with it. At the end of September, 18—, we

departed for Germany, and before going to L— it was agreed that we should pay a visit at Elberthal, to my friend Dr. Mittendorf.

It was a gusty September night, with wind dashing angrily about and showers of rain flying before the gale, on which I once again set foot in Elberthal—the place I had thought never more to see.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

“Freude trinken alle
Wesen
An den Brüsten der
Natur;
Alle Guten, alle
Bösen
Folgen ihrer
Rosenspur.”

I felt a deep rapture in being once more in that land where my love, if he did not live, slept. But I forbear to dwell on that rapture, much as it influenced me. It waxes tedious when put into words—loses color and flavor, like a pressed flower.

I was at first bitterly disappointed to find that Stella and I were only to have a few days at Elberthal. Dr. Mittendorf no longer lived there; but only had his official residence in the town, going every week-end to his country house, or “Schloss,” as he ambitiously called it, at Lahnburg, a four-hours’ railway journey from Elberthal.

Frau Mittendorf, who had been at Elberthal on a visit, was to take Stella and me with her to Lahnburg on the Tuesday morning after our arrival, which was on Friday evening.

The good doctor’s schloss, an erection built like the contrivances of the White Knight in “Through the Looking-glass,” on “a plan of his own invention,” had been his pet hobby for years, and now that it was finished, he invited every inevitable person to come and stay at it.

It was not likely that he would excuse a person for whom he had so much regard as he professed for me from the honor, and I was fain to conceal the fact that I would much rather have remained in Elberthal, and make up my mind to endure as well as I could the prospect of being buried in the country with Frau Mittendorf and her children.

It was Sunday afternoon. An equinoctial gale was raging, or rather had been raging all day. It had rained incessantly, and the wind had howled. The skies were cloud-laden, the wind was furious. The Rhine was so swollen that the streets in the lower part of the town sloping to the river were under water, and the people going about in boats.

But I was tired of the house; the heated rooms stifled me. I was weary of Frau Mittendorf’s society, and thoroughly dissatisfied with my own.

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About five in the afternoon I went to the window and looked out. I perceived a strip of pale, watery blue through a rift in the storm-laden clouds, and I chose to see that, and that only, ignoring the wind-lashed trees of the allee; the leaves, wet, and sodden and sere, hurrying panic-stricken before the gale, ignoring, too, the low wail promising a coming hurricane, which sighed and soughed beneath the wind’s shrill scream.

There was a temporary calm, and I bethought myself that I would go to church—not to the Protestant church attended by the English clique—heaven forbid! but to my favorite haunt, the Jesuiten Kirche.

It was just the hour at which the service would be going on. I asked Stella in a low voice if she would not like to come; she declined with a look of pity at me, so, notifying my intention to Frau Mittendorf, and mildly but firmly leaving the room before she could utter any remonstrance, I rushed upstairs, clothed myself in my winter mantle, threw a shawl over my arm, and set out.

The air was raw, but fresh, life-giving and invigorating. The smell of the stove, which clung to me still, was quickly dissipated by it. I wrapped my shawl around me, turned down a side street, and was soon in the heart of the old part of the town, where all Roman Catholic churches were, the quarter lying near the river and wharves and bridge of boats.

I liked to go to the Jesuiten Kirche, and placing myself in the background, kneel as others knelt, and, without taking part in the service, think my own thoughts and pray my own prayers.

Here none of the sheep looked wolfish at you unless you kept to a particular pen, for the privilege of sitting in which you paid so many marks *per quartal* to a respectable functionary who came to collect them. Here the men came and knelt down, cap in hand, and the women seemed really to

be praying, and aware of what they were praying for, not looking over their prayer-books at each other's clothes.

I entered the church. Within the building it was already almost dark. A reddish light burned in a great glittering censer, which swung gently to and fro in the chancel.

There were many people in the church, kneeling in groups and rows, and all occupied with their prayers. I, too, knelt down, and presently as the rest sat up I sat up too. A sad-looking monk had ascended the pulpit, and was beginning to preach. His face was thin, hollow, and ascetic-looking; his eyes blazed bright from deep, sunken sockets. His cowl came almost up to his ears. I could dimly see the white cord round his waist as he began to preach, at first in a low and feeble voice, which gradually waxed into power.

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He was in earnest—whether right or wrong, he was in earnest. I listened with the others to what he said. He preached the beauties of renunciation, and during his discourse quoted the very words which had so often haunted me—*Entbehren sollst du! sollst entbehren!*

His earnestness moved me deeply. His voice was musical, sweet. His accent made the German burr soft; he was half Italian. I had been at the instrumental concert the previous night, for old association's sake, and they had played the two movements of Schubert's unfinished symphony—the B minor. The refrain in the last movement haunted me—a refrain of seven cadences, which rises softly and falls, dies away, is carried softly from one instrument to another, wanders afar, returns again, sinks lower and lower, deeper and deeper, till at last the 'celli (if I mistake not) takes it up for the last time, and the melody dies a beautiful death, leaving you undecided whether to weep or smile, but penetrated through and through with its dreamy loveliness.

This exquisite refrain lingered in my memory and echoed in my mind, like a voice from some heavenly height, telling me to rest and be at peace, in time to the swinging of the censer, in harmony with the musical southern voice of that unknown Brother Somebody.

By degrees I began to think that the censer did not sway so regularly, so like a measured pendulum as it had done, but was moving somewhat erratically, and borne upon the gale came a low, ominous murmur, which first mingled itself with the voice of the preacher, and then threatened to dominate it. Still the refrain of the symphony rang in my ears, and I was soothed to rest by the inimitable nepenthe of music.

But the murmur of which I had so long been, as it were, half-conscious, swelled and drove other sounds and the thoughts of them from my mind. It grew to a deep, hollow roar—a very hurricane of a roar. The preacher's voice ceased, drowned.

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I think none of us were at first certain about what was happening; we only felt that something tremendous was going on. Then, with one mighty bang and blow of the tempest, the door by which I had entered the church was blown bodily in, and fell crashing upon the floor; and after the hurricane came rushing through the church with the howl of a triumphant demon, and hurried round the building, extinguishing every light, and turning a temple of God into Hades.

Sounds there were as of things flapping from the walls, as of wood falling; but all was in the pitchiest darkness—a very "darkness which might be felt." Amid the roar of the wind came disjointed, broken exclamations of terrified women and angry, impatient men. "*Ach Gott!*" "*Du meine Zeit!*" "*Herr du meine Güte!*" "*Oh je!*" etc., rang all round, and hurrying people rushed past me, making confusion worse confounded as they scrambled past to try to get out.

I stood still, not from any bravery or presence of mind, but from utter annihilation of both qualities in the shock and surprise of it all. At last I began trying to grope my way toward the door. I found it. Some people—I heard and felt rather than saw—were standing about the battered-in door, and there was the sound of water hurrying past the door-way. The Rhine was rushing down the street.

"We must go to the other door—the west door," said some one among the people; and as the group moved I moved too, beginning to wish myself well out of it.

We reached the west door; it led into a small lane or *gasse*, regarding the geography of which I was quite at sea, for I had only been in it once before. I stepped from the street into the lane, which was in the very blackness of darkness, and seemed to be filled with wind and a hurricane which one could almost distinguish and grasp.

The roar of the wind and the surging of water were all around, and were deafening. I followed, as I thought, some voices which I heard, but scarcely knew where I was going, as the wind seemed to be blowing all ways at once, and there came to me an echo here and an echo there, misleading rather than guiding. In a few moments I felt my foot upon wood, and there was a loud creaking and rattling, as of chains, a groaning, splitting, and great uproar going on, as well as a motion as if I were on board a ship.

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After making a few steps I paused. It was utterly impossible that I could have got upon a boat—wildly impossible. I stood still, then went on a few steps. Still the same extraordinary sounds—still such a creaking and groaning—still the rush, rush, and swish, swish of water; but not a human voice any more, not a light to be seen, not a sign!

With my hat long since stripped from my head and launched into darkness and space, my hair lashed about me in all directions, my petticoats twisted round me like ropes, I was utterly and

completely bewildered by the thunder and roar of all around. I no longer knew which way I had come nor where to turn. I could not imagine where I was, and my only chance seemed to be to hold fast and firm to the railing against which the wind had unceremoniously banged me.

The creaking grew louder—grew into a crash; there was a splitting of wood, a snapping of chains, a kind of whirl, and then I felt the wind blow upon me, first upon this side, then from that, and became conscious that the structure upon which I stood was moving—floating smoothly and rapidly upon water. In an instant (when it was too late) it all flashed upon my mind. I had wandered upon the Schiffbrücke, or bridge of boats which crossed the Rhine from the foot of the market-place, and this same bridge had been broken by the strength of the water and wind, and upon a portion of it I was now floating down the river.

With my usual wisdom, and “the shrewd application of a wide experience so peculiar to yourself,” as some one has since insulted me by saying, I instantly gave myself up as lost. The bridge would run into some other bridge, or dash into a steamer, or do something horrible, and I should be killed, and none would know of my fate; or it would all break into little pieces, and I should have to cling to one of them, and should inevitably be drowned.

In any case, my destruction was only a matter of time. How I loved my life then! How sweet, and warm, and full, and fresh it seemed! How cold the river, and how undesirable a speedy release from the pomps and vanities of this wicked world!

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The wind was still howling horribly—chanting my funeral dirge. Like grim death, I held on to my railing, and longed, with a desperate longing, for one glimpse of light.

I had believed myself alone upon my impromptu raft—or rather, it had not occurred to me that there might be another than myself upon it; but at this instant, in a momentary lull of the wind, almost by my side I heard a sound that I knew well, and had cause to remember—the tune of the wild march from “Lenore,” set to the same words, sung by the same voice as of yore.

My heart stood still for a moment, then leaped on again. Then a faint, sickly kind of dread overcame me. I thought I was going out of my mind—was wandering in some delusion, which took the form of the dearest voice, and sounded with its sound in my ears.

But no. The melody did not cease. As the beating of my heart settled somewhat down, I still heard it—not loud, but distinct. Then the tune ceased. The voice—ah! there was no mistaking that, and I trembled with the joy that thrilled me as I heard it—conned over the words as if struck with their weird appropriateness to the scene, which was certainly marked:

“Und das Gesindel, husch, husch, husch
Kam hinten nachgeprasselt—
Wie Wirbelwind am Haselbusch
Durch dürre Blätter rasselt.”

And *wirbelwind*—the whirlwind—played a wild accompaniment to the words.

It seemed to me that a long time passed, during which I could not speak, but could only stand with my hands clasped over my heart, trying to steady its tumultuous beating. I had not been wrong, thank the good God above! I had not been wrong when my heart sung for joy at being once more in this land. He was here—he was living—he was safe!

Here were all my worst fears soothed—my intensest longings answered without my having spoken. It was now first that I really knew how much I loved him—so much that I felt almost afraid of the strength of the passion. I knew not till now how it had grown—how fast and all-denominating it had become.

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A sob broke from my lips, and his voice was silenced.

“Herr Courvoisier!” I stammered.

“Who spoke?” he asked in a clear voice.

“It is you!” I murmured.

“May!” he uttered, and paused abruptly.

A hand touched mine—warm, firm, strong—his very hand. In its lightest touch there seemed safety, shelter, comfort.

“Oh, how glad I am! how glad I am!” I sobbed.

He murmured “Sonderbar!” as if arguing with himself, and I held his hand fast.

“Don’t leave me! Stay here!” I implored.

“I suppose there is not much choice about that for either of us,” said he, and he laughed.

I did not remember to wonder how he came there; I only knew that he was there. That tempest, which will not soon be forgotten in Elberthal, subsided almost as rapidly as it had arisen. The winds lulled as if a wizard had bidden them be still. The gale hurried on to devastate fresh fields and pastures new. There was a sudden reaction of stillness, and I began to see in the darkness the outlines of a figure beside me. I looked up. There was no longer that hideous, driving black

mist, like chaos embodied, between me and heaven. The sky, though dark, was clear; some stars were gleaming coldly down upon the havoc which had taken place since they last viewed the scene.

Seeing the heavens so calm and serene, a sudden feeling of shyness and terror overtook me. I tried to withdraw my hand from that of my companion, and to remove myself a little from him. He held my hand fast.

"You are exhausted with standing?" said he. "Sit down upon this ledge."

"If you will too."

"Oh, of course. I think our voyage will be a long one, and—"

"Speak German," said I. "Let me hear you speaking it again."

"And I have no mind to stand all the time," he concluded in his own tongue.

"Is there no one else here but ourselves?"

"No one."

I had seated myself and he placed himself beside me. I was in no laughing mood or I might have found something ludicrous in our situation. [Pg 306]

"I wonder where we are now," I half whispered, as the bridge was still hurried ceaselessly down the dark and rushing river. I dared not allude to anything else. I felt my heart was too full—I felt too, too utterly uncertain of him. There was sadness in his voice. I, who knew its every cadence, could hear that.

"I think we are about passing Kaiserswerth," said he. "I wonder where we shall land at last."

"Do you think we shall go very far?"

"Perhaps we may. It is on record that the Elberthal boat bridge—part of it, I mean—once turned up at Rotterdam. It may happen again, *warum nicht?*"

"How long does that take?"

"Twelve or fourteen hours, I dare say."

I was silent.

"I am sorry for you," he said in the gentlest of voices, as he happed my shawl more closely around me. "And you are cold too—shivering. My coat must do duty again."

"No, no!" cried I. "Keep it! I won't have it."

"Yes you will, because you can't help it if I make you," he answered as he wrapped it round me.

"Well, please take part of it. At least wrap half of it round you," I implored, "or I shall be miserable."

"Pray don't. No, keep it! It is not like charity—it has not room for many sins at once."

"Do you mean you or me?" I could not help asking.

"Are we not all sinners?"

I knew it would be futile to resist, but I was not happy in the new arrangement, and I touched his coat-sleeve timidly.

"You have quite a thin coat," I remonstrated, "and I have a winter dress, a thick jacket, and a shawl."

"And my coat, *und doch bist du*—oh, pardon! and you are shivering in spite of it," said he, conclusively.

"It is an awful storm, is it not?" I suggested next.

"Was an awful storm, *nicht wahr?* Yes. And how very strange that you and I, of all people, should have met here, of all places. How did you get here?"

"I had been to church."

"So! I had not."

"How did you come here?" I ventured to ask.

"Yes—you may well ask; but first—you have been in England, have you not?"

"Yes, and am going back again."

"Well—I came here yesterday from Berlin. When the war was over—"

"Ah, you were in the war?" I gasped.

"*Natürlich, mein Fräulein.* Where else should I have been?"

"And you fought?"

"Also *natürlich*."

"Where did you fight? At Sedan?"

"At Sedan—yes."

"Oh, my God!" I whispered to myself. "And were you wounded?" I added aloud.

"A mere trifle. Friedhelm and I had luck to march side by side. I learned to know in spirit and in letter the meaning of *Ich hatt' einen guten Kameraden*."

"You were wounded!" I repeated, unheeding all that discursiveness. "Where? How? Were you in the hospital?"

"Yes. Oh, it is nothing. Since then I have been learning my true place in the world, for you see, unluckily, I was not killed."

"Thank God! Thank God! How I have wondered! How I have thought—well, how did you come here?"

"I coveted a place in one of those graves, and couldn't have it," he said, bitterly. "It was a little thing to be denied, but fallen men must do without much. I saw boys falling around me, whose mothers and sisters are mourning for them yet."

"Oh, don't."

"Well—Friedel and I are working in Berlin. We shall not stay there long; we are wanderers now! There is no room for us. I have a short holiday, and I came to spend it at Elberthal. This evening I set out, intending to hear the opera—'Der Fliegende Holländer'—very appropriate, wasn't it?"

"Very."

"But the storm burst over the theater just as the performance was about to begin, and removed part of the roof, upon which one of the company came before the curtain and dismissed us with his blessing and the announcement that no play would be played to-night. Thus I was deprived of the ungodly pleasure of watching my old companions wrestle with Wagner's stormy music while I looked on like a gentleman."

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"But when you came out of the theater?"

"When I came out of the theater the storm was so magnificent, and was telling me so much that I resolved to come down to its center-point and see Vater Rhein in one of his grandest furies. I strayed upon the bridge of boats; forgot where I was, listened only to the storm: ere I knew what was happening I was adrift and the tempest howling round me—and you, fresh from your devotions to lull it."

"Are you going to stay long in Elberthal?"

"It seems I may not. I am driven away by storms and tempests."

"And me with you," thought I. "Perhaps there is some meaning in this. Perhaps fate means us to breast other storms together. If so, I am ready—anything—so it be with you."

"There's the moon," said he; "how brilliant, is she not?"

I looked up into the sky wherein she had indeed appeared "like a dying lady, lean and pale," shining cold and drear, but very clearly upon the swollen waters, showing us dim outlines of half-submerged trees, cottages and hedges—showing us that we were in midstream, and that other pieces of wreck were floating down the river with us, hurrying rapidly with the current—showing me, too, in a ghostly whiteness, the face of my companion turned toward me, and his elbow rested on his knee and his chin in his hand, and his loose dark hair was blown back from his broad forehead, his strange, deep eyes were resting upon my face, calmly, openly.

Under that gaze my heart fell. In former days there had been in his face something not unakin to this stormy free night; but now it was changed—how changed!

A year had wrought a terrible alteration. I knew not his past; but I did know that he had long been struggling, and a dread fear seized me that the struggle was growing too hard for him—his spirit was breaking. It was not only that the shadows were broader, deeper, more permanently sealed—there was a down look—a hardness and bitterness which inspired me both with pity and fear.

"Your fate is a perverse one," he remarked, as I did not speak.

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"So! Why?"

"It throws you so provokingly into society which must be so unpleasant to you."

"Whose society?"

"Mine, naturally."

"You are much mistaken," said I, composedly.

"It is kind of you to say so. For your sake, I wish it had been any one but myself who had been thus thrown together with you. I promise you faithfully that as soon as ever we can land I will only wait to see you safely into a train and then I will leave you and—"

He was suddenly silenced. I had composed my face to an expression of indifference as stony as I knew how to assume, and with my hands folded in my lap, had steeled myself to look into his face and listen to him.

I could find nothing but a kind of careless mockery in his face—a hard half smile upon his lips as he went on saying the hard things which cut home and left me quivering, and which he yet uttered as if they had been the most harmless pleasantries or the merest whipped-cream compliments.

It was at this moment that the wind, rising again in a brief spasm, blew a tress of my loosened hair across his face. How it changed! flushed crimson. His lips parted—a strange, sudden light came into his eyes.

"I beg your pardon!" said I, hastily, started from my assumed composure, as I raised my hand to push my hair back. But he had gathered the tress together—his hand lingered for one moment—a scarcely perceptible moment—upon it, then he laid it gently down upon my shoulder.

"Then I will leave you," he went on, resuming the old manner, but with evident effort, "and not interfere with you any more."

What was I to think? What to believe? I thought to myself that had he been my lover and I had intercepted such a glance of his to another woman my peace of mind had been gone for evermore. But, on the other hand, every cool word he said gave the lie to his looks—or did his looks give the lie to his words? Oh, that I could solve the problem once for all, and have done with it forever!

"And you, Miss Wedderburn—have you deserted Germany?"

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"I have been obliged to live in England, if that is what you mean—I am living in Germany at present."

"And art—*die Kunst*—that is cruel!"

"You are amusing yourself at my expense, as you have always delighted in doing," said I, sharply, cut to the quick.

"*Aber, Fräulein May!* What do you mean?"

"From the very first," I repeated, the pain I felt giving a keenness to my reproaches. "Did you not deceive me and draw me out for your amusement that day we met at Köln? You found out then, I suppose, what a stupid, silly creature I was, and you have repeated the process now and then, since—much to your own edification and that of Herr Helfen, I do not doubt. Whether it was just, or honorable, or kind, is a secondary consideration. Stupid people are only invented for the amusement of those who are not stupid."

"How dare you, how dare you talk in that manner?" said he, emphatically, laying his hand upon my shoulder, and somehow compelling my gaze to meet his. "But I know why—I read the answer in those eyes which dare everything, and yet—"

"Not quite everything," thought I, uncomfortably, as the said eyes sunk beneath his look.

"Fräulein May, will you have the patience to listen while I tell you a little story?"

"Oh, yes!" I responded, readily, as I hailed the prospect of learning something more about him.

"It is now nearly five years since I first came to Elberthal. I had never been in the town before. I came with my boy—may God bless him and keep him!—who was then two years old, and whose mother was dead—for my wife died early."

A pause, during which I did not speak. It was something so wonderful to me that he should speak to me of his wife.

"She was young—and very beautiful," said he. "You will forgive my introducing the subject?"

"Oh, Herr Courvoisier!"

"And I had wronged her. I came to Friedhelm Helfen, or rather was sent to him, and, as it happened, found such a friend as is not granted to one man in a thousand. When I came here, I was smarting under various griefs; about the worst was that I had recklessly destroyed my own prospects. I had a good career—a fair future open to me. I had cut short that career, annihilated that future, or any future worth speaking of, by—well, something had happened which divided me utterly and uncompromisingly and forever from the friends, and the sphere, and the respect and affection of those who had been parents and brother and sister to me. Then I knew that their good opinion, their love, was my law and my highest desire. And it was not their fault—it was mine—my very own."

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"The more I look back upon it all, the more I see that I have myself to thank for it. But that reflection, as you may suppose, does not add to the delights of a man's position when he is humbled to the dust as I was then. Biting the dust—you have that phrase in English. Well, I have

been biting the dust—yes, eating it, living upon it, and deservedly so, for five years; but nothing ever can, nothing ever will, make it taste anything but dry, bitter, nauseating to the last degree.”

“Go on!” said I, breathlessly.

“How kind you are to listen to the dull tale! Well, I had my boy Sigmund, and there were times when the mere fact that he was mine made me forget everything else, and thank my fate for the simple fact that I lived and was his father. His father—he was a part of myself, he could divine my every thought. But at other times, generally indeed, I was sick of life—that life. Don’t suppose that I am one of those high-flown idiots who would make it out that no life is worth living: I knew and felt to my soul that the life from which I had locked myself out and then dropped the key as it were here in midstream, was a glorious life, worth living ten times over.

“There was the sting of it. For three years I lived thus, and learned a great deal, learned what men in that position are—learned to respect, admire, and love some of them—learned to understand that man—*der Mensch*—is the same, and equally to be honored everywhere. I also tried to grow accustomed to the thought, which grew every day more certain to me, that I must live on so for the future—to plan my life, and shape out a certain kind of repentance for sins past. I decided that the only form my atonement could take was that of self-effacement—”

“That is why you never would take the lead in anything.”

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“Exactly. I am naturally fond of leading. I love beyond everything to lead those who I know like me, and like following me. When I was *haupt*—I mean, I knew that all that by-gone mischief had arisen from doing what I liked, so I dropped doing what I liked, and began to do what I disliked. By the time I had begun to get a little into training three years had passed—these things are not accomplished in a day, and the effects of twenty-seven years of selfishness are not killed soon. I was killing them, and becoming a machine in the process.

“One year the Lower Rhenish Musikfest was to be held at Köln. Long before it came off the Cologne Orchestra had sent to us for contingents, and we had begun to attend some of the *proben* regularly once or twice a week.

“One day Friedhelm and I had been at a probe. The ‘Tower of Babel’ and the ‘Lenore’ Symphony were among the things we had practiced. Both of them, the ‘Lenore’ particularly, had got into my head. I broke lose for one day from routine, from drudgery and harness. It was a mistake. Friedhelm went off, shrugging his dear old shoulders, and I at last turned up, mooning at the Kölner Bahnhof. Well—you know the rest. Nay, do not turn so angrily away. Try to forgive a fallen man one little indiscretion. When I saw you I can not tell what feeling stole warm and invigorating into my heart; it was something quite new—something I had never felt before: it was so sweet that I could not part with it. *Fräulein May*, I have lived that afternoon over again many and many a time. Have you ever given a thought to it?”

“Yes, I have,” said I, dryly.

“My conduct after that rose half from pride—wounded pride, I mean, for when you cut me, it did cut me—I own it. Partly it arose from a worthier feeling—the feeling that I could not see very much of you or learn to know you at all well without falling very deeply in love with you. You hide your face—you are angry at that—”

“Stop. Did you never throughout all this give a thought to the possibility that I might fall in love with you?”

I did not look at him, but he said, after a pause:

“I had the feeling that if I tried I could win your love. I never was such a presumptuous fool as to suppose that you would love me unasked—or even with much asking on my part—*bewahre!*”

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I was silent, still concealing my face. He went on:

“Besides, I knew that you were an English lady. I asked myself what was the right thing to do, and I decided that though you would consider me an ill-mannered, churlish clown, I would refuse those gracious, charming advances which you in your charity made. Our paths in life were destined to be utterly apart and divided, and what could it matter to you—the behavior of an insignificant fiddler? You would forget him just when he deserved to be forgotten, that is—*instantly*.

“Time went on. You lived near us. Changes took place. Those who had a right to arbitrate for me, since I had by my own deed deprived myself of that right, wrote and demanded my son. I had shown myself incapable of managing my own affairs—was it likely that I could arrange his? And then he was better away from such a black sheep. It is true. The black sheep gave up the white lambling into the care of a legitimate shepherd, who carried it off to a correct and appropriate fold. Then life was empty indeed, for, strange though it may seem, even black sheep have feelings—ridiculously out of place they are too.”

“Oh, don’t speak so harshly!” said I, tremulously, laying my hand for an instant upon his.

His face was turned toward me; his mien was severe, but serene; he spoke as of some far-past, distant dream.

“Then it was in looking round my darkened horizon for Sigmund, I found that it was not empty.

You rose trembling upon it like a star of light, and how beautiful a star! But there! do not turn away. I will not shock you by expatiating upon it. Enough that I found what I had more than once suspected—that I loved you. Once or twice I nearly made a fool of myself; that Carnival Monday—do you remember? Luckily Friedel and Karl came in, but in my saner moments I worshiped you as a noble, distant good—part of the beautiful life which I had gambled with—and lost. Be easy! I never for one instant aspired to you—never thought of possessing you: I was not quite mad. I am only telling you this to explain, and—”

“And you renounced me?” said I in a low voice.

“I renounced you.”

I removed my hand from my eyes, and looked at him. His eyes, dry and calm, rested upon my face. His countenance was pale; his mouth set with a grave, steady sweetness. [Pg 314]

Light rushed in upon my mind in a radiant flood—light and knowledge. I knew what was right; an unerring finger pointed it to me. I looked deep, deep into his sad eyes, read his innermost soul, and found it pure.

“They say you have committed a crime,” said I.

“And I have not denied, can not deny it,” he answered, as if waiting for something further.

“You need not,” said I. “It is all one to me. I want to hear no more about that. I want to know if your heart is mine.”

The wind wuthered wearily; the water rushed. Strange, inarticulate sounds of the night came fitfully across ear and sense, as he answered me:

“Yours and my honor’s. What then?”

“This,” I answered, stooping, sweeping the loose hair from that broad, sad forehead, and pressing my lips upon it. “This: accept the gift or reject it. As your heart is mine, so mine is yours—for ever and ever.”

A momentary silence as I raised myself, trembling, and stood aside; and the water rushed, and the storm-birds on untiring wing beat the sky and croaked of the gale.

Then he drew me to him, folded me to his breast without speaking, and gave me a long, tender, yearning kiss, with unspeakable love, little passion in it, fit seal of a love that was deeper and sadder than it was triumphant.

“Let me have a few moments of this,” said he, “just a few moments, May. Let me believe that I may hold you to your noble, pitying words. Then I shall be my own master again.”

Ignoring this hint, I laid my hands upon his arm, and eying him steadily, went on:

“But understand, the man I love must not be my servant. If you want to keep me you must be the master; I brook no feeble curb; no weak hand can hold me. You must rule, or I shall rebel; you must show the way, for I don’t know it. I don’t know whether you understand what you have undertaken.”

“My dear, you are excited. Your generosity carries you away, and your divine, womanly pity and kindness. You speak without thinking. You will repent to-morrow.” [Pg 315]

“That is not kind nor worthy of you,” said I. “I have thought about it for sixteen months, and the end of my thought has always been the same: I love Eugen Courvoisier, and if he had loved me I should have been a happy woman, and if—though I thought it too good to be true, you know—if he ever should tell me so, nothing in this world shall make me spoil our two lives by cowardice; I will hold to him against the whole world.”

“It is impossible, May,” he said, quietly, after a pause. “I wish you had never seen me.”

“It is only impossible if you make it so.”

“My sin found me out even here, in this quiet place, where I knew no one. It will find me out again. You—if ever you were married to me—would be pointed out as the wife of a man who had disgraced his honor in the blackest, foulest way. I must and will live it out alone.”

“You shall not live it out alone,” I said.

The idea that I could not stand by him—the fact that he was not prosperous, not stainless before the world—that mine would be no ordinary flourishing, meaningless marriage, in which “for better, for worse” signifies nothing but better, no worse—all this poured strength on strength into my heart, and seemed to warm it and do it good.

“I will tell you your duty,” said he. “Your duty is to go home and forget me. In due time some one else will find the loveliest and dearest being in the world—”

“Eugen! Eugen!” I cried, stabbed to the quick. “How can you? You can not love me, or you could not coldly turn me over to some other man, some abstraction—”

“Perhaps if he were not an abstraction I might not be able to do it,” he said, suddenly clasping me to him with a jealous movement. “No; I am sure I should not be able to do it. Nevertheless,

while he yet is an abstraction, and because of that, I say, leave me!"

"Eugen, I do not love lightly!" I began, with forced calm. "I do not love twice. My love for you is not a mere fancy—I fought against it with all my strength; it mastered me in spite of myself—now I can not tear it away. If you send me away it will be barbarous; away to be alone, to England again, when I love you with my whole soul. No one but a man—no one but you could have said such a thing. If you do," I added, terror at the prospect overcoming me, "if you do I shall die—I shall die."

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I could command myself no longer, but sobbed aloud.

"You will have to answer for it," I repeated; "but you will not send me away."

"What, in Heaven's name, makes you love me so?" he asked, as if lost in wonder.

"I don't know. I can not imagine," said I, with happy politeness. "It is no fault of mine." I took his hand in mine. "Eugen, look at me." His eyes met mine. They brightened as he looked at me. "That crime of which you were accused—you did not do it."

Silence!

"Look at me and say that you did," I continued.

Silence still.

"Friedhelm Helfen always said you had not done it. He was more loyal than I," said I, contritely; "but," I added, jealously, "he did not love you better than I, for I loved you all the same even though I almost believed you had done it. Well, that is an easy secret to keep, because it is to your credit."

"That is just what makes it hard. If it were true, one would be anxious rather than not to conceal it; but as it is not true, don't you see? Whenever you see me suspected, it will be the impulse of your loyal, impetuous heart to silence the offender, and tell him he lies."

In my haste I had not seen this aspect of the question. It was quite a new idea to me. Yes, I began to see in truer proportions the kind of suffering he had suffered, the kind of trials he had gone through, and my breath failed at the idea. When they pointed at him I must not say, "It is a lie; he is as honest as you." It was a solemn prospect. It overpowered me.

"You quail before that?" said he, gently, after a pause.

"No; I realize it. I do not quail before it," said I, firmly. "But," I added, looking at him with a new element in my glance—that of awe—"do you mean that for five years you have effaced yourself thus, knowing all the while that you were not guilty?"

"It was a matter of the clearest duty—and honor," he replied, flushing and looking somewhat embarrassed.

"Of duty!" I cried, strangely moved. "If you did not do it, who did? Why are you silent?"

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Our eyes met. I shall never forget that glance. It had the concentrated patience, love, and pride, and loyalty, of all the years of suffering past and—to come.

"May, that is the test for you! That is what I shrink from exposing you to, what I know it is wrong to expose you to. I can not tell you. No one knows but I, and I shall never tell any one, not even you, if you become my other self and soul and thought. Now you know all."

He was silent.

"So that is the truth?" said I. "Thank you for telling it to me. I always thought you were a hero; now I am sure of it. Oh, Eugen! how I do love you for this! And you need not be afraid. I have been learning to keep secrets lately. I shall help, not hinder you. Eugen, we will live it down together."

At last we understood each other. At last our hands clasped and our lips met upon the perfect union of feeling and purpose for all our future lives. All was clear between us, bright, calm; and I, at least, was supremely happy. How little my past looked now; how petty and insignificant all my former hopes and fears!

Dawn was breaking over the river. Wild and storm-beaten was the scene on which we looked. A huge waste of swollen waters around us, devastated villages, great piles of wreck on all sides; a watery sun casting pallid beams upon the swollen river. We were sailing Hollandward upon a fragment of the bridge, and in the distance were the spires and towers of a town gleaming in the sickly sun-rays. I stood up and gazed toward that town, and he stood by my side, his arm round my waist. My chief wish was that our sail could go on forever.

"Do you know what is ringing in my ears and will not leave my mind?" I asked.

"Indeed, no! You are a riddle and a mystery to me."

I hummed the splendid air from the Choral Symphony, the *motif* of the music to the choruses to "Joy" which follow.

"Ah!" said he, taking up its deep, solemn gladness, "you are right, May—quite right. There is a joy, if it be 'beyond the starry belt.'"

"I wonder what that town is?" I said, after a pause.

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"I am not sure, but I fancy it is Emmerich. I am sure I hope so."

Whatever the town, we were floating straight toward it. I suddenly thought of my dream long ago, and told it to him, adding:

"I think this must have been the floating wreck to which you and I seemed clinging; though I thought that all of the dream that was going to be fulfilled had already come to pass on that Carnival Monday afternoon."

The boat had got into one of the twisting currents, and was being propelled directly toward the town.

Eugen looked at me and laughed. I asked why.

"What for a lark! as they say in your country."

"You are quite mistaken. I never heard such an expression. But what is such a lark?"

"We have no hats; we want something to eat; we must have tickets to get back to Elberthal, and I have just two thalers in my pocket—oh! and a two-pfennige piece. I left my little all behind me."

"Hurrah! At last you will be compelled to take back that three thalers ten."

We both laughed at this *jeu d'esprit* as if it had been something exquisitely witty; and I forgot my disheveled condition in watching the sun rise over the broad river, in feeling our noiseless progression over it, and, above all, in the divine sense of oneness and harmony with him at my side—a feeling which I can hardly describe, utterly without the passionate fitfulness of the orthodox lover's rapture, but as if for a long time I had been waiting for some quality to make me complete, and had quietly waked to find it there, and the world understandable—life's riddle read.

Eugen's caresses were few, his words of endearment quiet; but I knew what they stood for; a love rooted in feelings deeper than those of sense, holier than mere earthly love—feelings which had taken root in adversity, had grown in darkness and "made a sunshine in a shady place"—feelings which in him had their full and noble growth and beauty of development, but which it seems to be the aim of the fashionable education of this period as much as possible to do away with—the feeling of chivalry, delicacy, reticence, manliness, modesty.

As we drew nearer the town, he said to me:

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"In a few hours we shall have to part, May, for a time. While we are here alone, and you are uninfluenced, let me ask you something. This love of yours for me—what will it carry you through?"

"Anything, now that I am sure of yours for me."

"In short, you are firmly decided to be my wife some time?"

"When you tell me you are ready for me," said I, putting my hand in his.

"And if I find it best to leave my Fatherland, and begin life quite anew?"

"Thy God is my God, and thy people are my people, Eugen."

"One other thing. How do you know that you can marry? Your friends—"

"I am twenty years old. In a year I can do as I like," said I, composedly. "Surely we can stand firm and faithful for a year?"

He smiled, and it was a new smile—sweet, hopeful, if not merry.

With this silent expression of determination and trust we settled the matter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"What's failure or success to me?
I have subdued my life to the one
purpose."

Eugen sent a telegram from Emmerich to Frau Mittendorf to reassure her as to my safety. At four in the afternoon we left that town, refreshed and rehatted, to reach Elberthal at six.

I told Eugen that we were going away the next day to stay a short time at a place called Lahnburg.

He started and looked at me.

"Lahnburg!—I—when you are there—*nein, das ist*—You are going to Lahnburg?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"You will know why I ask if you go to Schloss Rothenfels."

"Why?"

"I say no more, dear May. I will leave you to form your own conclusions. I have seen that this fair head could think wisely and well under trying circumstances enough. I am rather glad that you are going to Lahnburg." [Pg 320]

"The question is—will you still be at Elberthal when I return?"

"I can not say. We had better exchange addresses. I am at Frau Schmidt's again—my old quarters. I do not know when or how we shall meet again. I must see Friedhelm, and you—when you tell your friends, you will probably be separated at once and completely from me."

"Well, a year is not much out of our lives. How old are you, Eugen?"

"Thirty-two. And you?"

"Twenty and two months; then you are twelve years older than I. You were a school-boy when I was born. What were you like?"

"A regular little brute, I should suppose, as they all are."

"When we are married," said I, "perhaps I may go on with my singing, and earn some more money by it. My voice will be worth something to me then."

"I thought you had given up art."

"Perhaps I shall see Adelaide," I added; "or, rather, I will see her." I looked at him rather inquiringly. To my relief he said:

"Have you not seen her since her marriage?"

"No; have you?"

"She was my angel nurse when I was lying in hospital at ——. Did you not know that she has the Iron Cross? And no one ever won it more nobly."

"Adelaide—your nurse—the Iron Cross?" I ejaculated. "Then you have seen her?"

"Seen her shadow to bless it."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"With her husband at ——. She told me that you were in England, and she gave me this."

He handed me a yellow, much-worn folded paper, which, on opening, I discovered to be my own letter to Adelaide, written during the war, and which had received so curt an answer.

"I begged very hard for it," said he, "and only got it with difficulty, but I represented that she might get more of them, whereas I—"

He stopped, for two reasons. I was weeping as I returned it to him, and the train rolled into the Elberthal station. [Pg 321]

On my way to Dr. Mittendorf's, I made up my mind what to do. I should not speak to Stella, nor to any one else of what had happened, but I should write very soon to my parents and tell them the truth. I hoped they would not refuse their consent, but I feared they would. I should certainly not attempt to disobey them while their authority legally bound me, but as soon as I was my own mistress, I should act upon my own judgment. I felt no fear of anything; the one fear of my life—the loss of Eugen—had been removed, and all others dwindled to nothing. My happiness, I am and was well aware, was quite set upon things below; if I lost Eugen I lost everything, for I, like him, and like all those who have been and are dearest to both of us, was a Child of the World.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"Oftmals hab' ich geirrt, und habe mich
wiedergefunden,
Aber glücklicher nie."

It was beginning to be dusk when we alighted the next day at Lahnburg, a small way-side station, where the doctor's brand-new carriage met us, and after we had been bidden welcome, whirled us off to the doctor's brand-new schloss, full of brand-new furniture. I skip it all, the renewed

greetings, the hospitality, the noise. They were very kind. It was all right to me, and I enjoyed it immensely. I was in a state of mind in which I verily believe I should have enjoyed eating a plate of porridge for supper, or a dish of sauerkraut for dinner.

The subject for complacency and contemplation in Frau Mittendorf's life was her intimacy with the von Rothenfels family, whose great, dark old schloss, or rather, a portion of it, looking grimly over its woods, she pointed out to me from the windows of her salon. I looked somewhat curiously at it, chiefly because Eugen had mentioned it, and also because it was such a stern, imposing old pile. It was built of red stone, and stood upon red-stone foundations. Red were the rocks of this country, and hence its name, "Rothen-fels," the red rocks. Woods, also dark, but now ablaze with the last fiery autumn tints, billowed beneath it; on the other side, said Frau Mittendorf, was a great plateau covered with large trees, intersected by long, straight avenues. She would take us to look at it; the Gräfin von Rothenfels was a great friend of hers.

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She was entertaining us with stories to prove the great regard and respect of the countess for her (Frau Mittendorf) on the morning after our arrival, while I was longing to go out and stroll along some of those pleasant breezy upland roads, or explore the sleepy, quaint old town below.

Upon her narrative came an interruption. A servant threw open the door very wide, announcing the Gräfin von Rothenfels. Frau Mittendorf rose in a tremulous hurry and flutter to greet her noble guest, and then introduced us to her.

A tall, melancholy, meager-looking woman,—far past youth—on the very confines of middle age, with iron-gray hair banded across a stern, much-lined brow. Colorless features of a strong, large, not unhandsome type from which all liveliness and vivacity had long since fled. A stern mouth—steady, lusterless, severe eyes, a dignity—yes, even a majesty of mien which she did not attempt to soften into graciousness; black, trailing draperies; a haughty pride of movement.

Such was the first impression made upon me by Hildegarde, Countess of Rothenfels—a forbidding, if grand figure—aristocrat in every line; utterly alien and apart, I thought, from me and every feeling of mine.

But on looking again the human element was found in the deeply planted sadness which no reserve pride could conceal. Sad the eyes, sad the mouth; she was all sad together—and not without reason, as I afterward learned.

She was a rigid Roman Catholic, and at sixteen had been married for *les convenances* to her cousin, Count Bruno von Rothenfels, a man a good deal older than herself, though not preposterously so, and whose ample possessions and old name gave social position of the highest kind. But he was a Protestant by education, a thinker by nature, a rationalist by conviction.

That was one bitter grief. Another was her childlessness. She had been married twenty-four years; no child had sprung from the union. This was a continual grief which imbittered her whole existence.

Since then I have seen a portrait of her at twenty—a splendid brunette, with high spirit and resolute will and noble beauty in every line. Ah, me! What wretches we become! Sadness and bitterness, proud aloofness and a yearning wistfulness were subtly mingled in the demeanor of Gräfin von Rothenfels.

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She bowed to us, as Frau Mittendorf introduced us. She did not bestow a second glance upon Stella; but bent a long look, a second, a third scrutinizing gaze upon me. I—I am not ashamed to own it—quivered somewhat under her searching glance. She impressed and fascinated me.

She seated herself, and slightly apologizing to us for intruding domestic affairs, began to speak with Frau Mittendorf of some case of village distress in which they were both interested. Then she turned again to us, speaking in excellent English, and asked us whether we were staying there, after which she invited us to dine at her house the following day with Frau Mittendorf. After the invitation had been accepted with sufficient reverence by that lady, the countess rose as if to go, and turning again to me with still that pensive, half-wistful, half-mistrustful gaze, she said:

"I have my carriage here. Would you like to come with me to see our woods and house? They are sometimes interesting to strangers."

"Oh, very much!" I said, eagerly.

"Then come," said she. "I will see that you are escorted back when you are tired. It is arranged that you remain until you feel *gené, nicht wahr?*"

"Oh, thank you!" said I, again, hastening to make myself ready, and parenthetically hoping, as I ran upstairs, that Frau Mittendorf's eyes might not start quite out of her head with pride at the honor conferred upon her house and visitors.

Very soon I was seated beside the Gräfin in the dark-green clarence, with the grand coachman and the lady's own jäger beside him, and we were driving along a white road with a wild kind of country spreading round—moorland stretches, and rich deep woods. Up and down, for the way was uneven, till we entered a kind of park, and to the right, high above, I saw the great red pile with its little pointed towers crowned with things like extinguishers ending in a lightning-rod, and which seemed to spring from all parts of the heavy mass of the main building.

That, then, was Schloss Rothenfels. It looked the very image of an aristocratic, ancient feste burg, grim and grand; it brooded over us like a frown, and dominated the landscape for miles around. I was deeply impressed; such a place had always been like a dream to me.

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There was something so imposingly conservative about it; it looked as if it had weathered so many storms; defying such paltry forces as wind and weather, and would through so many more, quite untouched by the roar of life and progress outside—a fit and firm keeping-place for old shields, for weapons honorably hacked and dented, for tattered loyal flags—for art treasures and for proud beauties.

As we gained the height, I perceived the huge scale on which the schloss was constructed. It was a little town in itself. I saw, too, that plateau on the other side, of which I had heard; later I explored it. It was a natural plain—a kind of table-land, and was laid out in what have always, since I was a child, impressed me more than any other kind of surroundings to a house—mile-long avenues of great trees, stretching perfectly straight, like lines of marching troops in every direction.

Long, melancholy alleys and avenues, with huge, moss-grown stone figures and groups guarding the terraces or keeping fantastic watch over the stone tanks, on whose surfaces floated the lazy water-lilies. Great moss-grown gods and goddesses, and strange hybrid beasts, and fauns and satyrs, and all so silent and forlorn, with the lush grass and heavy fern growing rank and thick under the stately trees. To right they stretched and to left; and straightaway westward was one long, wide, vast, deserted avenue, at the end of which was an opening, and in the opening a huge stone myth or figure of a runner, who in the act of racing receives an arrow in his heart, and, with arms madly tossed in the air, staggers.

Behind this terrible figure the sun used to set, flaming, or mild, or sullen, and the vast arms of it were outlined against the gorgeous sky, or in the half-dark it glimmered like a ghost and seemed to move. It had been there so long that none could remember the legend of it. It was a grim shape.

Scattered here and there were quaint wildernesses and pleasaunces—clipped yews and oddly trained shrubs and flowers trying to make a diversion, but ever dominated by the huge woods, the straight avenues, the mathematical melancholy on an immense scale.

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The Frau Gräfin glanced at me once or twice as my head turned this way and that, and my eyes could not take in the strange scene quickly enough; but she said nothing, nor did her severe face relax into any smile.

We stopped under a huge *porte-cochère* in which more servants were standing about.

“Come with me,” said the lady to me. “First I will take you to my rooms, and then when you have rested a little you can do what you like.”

Pleased at the prospect, I followed her; through a hall which without any joking was baronial; through a corridor into a room, through which she passed, observing to me:

“This is the rittersaal, one of the oldest rooms in the house.”

The rittersaal—a real, hereditary Hall of Knights where a sangerkrieg might have taken place—where Tannhauser and the others might have contended before Elizabeth. A polished parquet—a huge hearth on which burned a large bright wood fire, whose flames sparkled upon suits of mail in dozens—crossed swords and lances, over which hung tattered banners and bannerets. Shields and lances, portraits with each a pair of spurs beneath it—the men were all knights, of that line! dark and grave chiefly were these lords of the line of Sturm. In the center of the hall a great trophy of arms and armor, all of which had been used, and used to purpose; the only drapery, the banners over these lances and portraits. The room delighted me while it made me feel small—very small. The countess turned at a door at the other end and looked back upon me where I stood gasping in the door-way by which we had entered. She was one of the house; this had nothing overpowering for her, if it did give some of the pride to her mien.

I hurried after her, apologizing for my tardiness; she waved the words back, and led me to a smaller room, which appeared to be her private sitting-room. Here she asked me to lay aside my things, adding that she hoped I should spend the day at the schloss.

“If you find it not too intolerably stupid,” she added. “It is a dull place.”

I said that it seemed to me like something out of a fairy tale, and that I longed to see more of it if I might.

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“Assuredly you shall. There may be some few things which you may like to see. I forget that every one is not like myself—tired. Are you musical?”

“Very!” said I, emphatically.

“Then you will be interested in the music-rooms here. How old are you?”

I told her. She bowed gravely. “You are young, and, I suppose, happy?” she remarked.

“Yes, I am—very happy—perfectly,” said I, smiling, because I could not help it.

“When I saw you I was so struck with that look,” said she. “I thought I had never seen any one

look so radiantly, transcendently happy. I so seldom see it—and never feel it, and I wished to see more of you. I am very glad you are so happy—very glad. Now I will not keep you talking to me. I will send for Herr Nahrath, who shall be your guide.”

She rang the bell. I was silent, although I longed to say that I could talk to her for a day without thinking of weariness, which indeed was true. She impressed and fascinated me.

“Send Herr Nahrath here,” she said, and presently there came into the room a young man in the garb of what is called in Germany a Kandidat—that is to say an embryo pastor, or parish priest. He bowed very deeply to the countess and did not speak or advance much beyond the door.

Having introduced us, she desired him to act as cicerone to me until I was tired. He bowed, and I did not dispute the mandate, although I would rather have remained with her, and got to know something of the nature that lay behind those gray passionless features, than turn to the society of that smug-looking young gentleman who waited so respectfully, like a machine whose mainspring was awe.

I accompanied him, nevertheless, and he showed me part of the schloss, and endeavored in the intervals of his tolerably arduous task of cicerone to make himself agreeable to me. It was a wonderful place indeed—this schloss. The deeper we penetrated into it, the more absorbed and interested did I become. Such piled-up, profusely scattered treasures of art it had never before fallen to my lot to behold. The abundance was prodigal; the judgment, cultivation, high perception of truth, rarity and beauty, seemed almost faultless. Gems of pictures—treasures of sculpture, bronze, china, carvings, glass, coins, curiosities which it would have taken a life-time properly to learn. Here I saw for the first time a private library on a large scale, collected by generation after generation of highly cultured men and women—a perfect thing of its kind, and one which impressed me mightily; but it was not there that I was destined to find the treasure which lay hidden for me in this enchanted palace. We strayed over an acre or so of passage and corridor till he paused before an arched door across which was hung a curtain, and over which was inscribed *Musik-kammern* (the music-rooms).

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“If you wish to see the music, *mein Fräulein*, I must leave you in the hands of Herr Brunken, who will tolerate no cicerone but himself.”

“Oh, I wish to see it certainly,” said I, on fire with curiosity.

He knocked and was bidden *herein!* but not going in, told some one inside that he recommended to his charge a young lady staying with the countess, and who was desirous of seeing the collection.

“Pray, *mein Fräulein*, come in!” said a voice. Herr Nahrath left me, and I, lifting the curtain and pushing open the half-closed door, found myself in an octagonal room, confronted by the quaintest figure I had ever seen. An old man whose long gray hair, long white beard, and long black robe made him look like a wizard or astrologer of some mediæval romance, was smiling at me and bidding me welcome to his domain. He was the librarian and general custodian of the musical treasures of Schloss Rothenfels, and his name was Brunken. He loved his place and his treasures with a jealous love, and would talk of favorite instruments as if they had been dear children, and of great composers as if they were gods.

All around the room were large shelves filled with music—and over each division stood a name—such mighty names as Scarlatti, Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Schumann, Mozart, Haydn—all the giants, and apparently all the pygmies too, were there. It was a complete library of music, and though I have seen many since, I have never beheld any which in the least approached this in richness or completeness. Rare old manuscript scores; priceless editions of half-forgotten music; the literature of the productions of half-forgotten composers; Eastern music, Western music, and music of all ages; it was an idealized collection—a musician’s paradise, only less so than that to which he now led me, from amid the piled-up scores and the gleaming busts of those mighty men, who here at least were honored with never-failing reverence.

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He took me into a second room, or rather hall, of great size, height, and dimensions, a museum of musical instruments. It would take far too long to do it justice in description; indeed, on that first brief investigation I could only form a dim general idea of the richness of its treasures. What histories—what centuries of story were there piled up! Musical instruments of every imaginable form and shape, and in every stage of development. Odd-looking pre-historic bone embryo instruments from different parts of France. Strange old things from Nineveh, and India, and Peru, instruments from tombs and pyramids, and ancient ruined temples in tropic groves—things whose very nature and handling is a mystery and a dispute—tuned to strange scales which produce strange melodies, and carry us back into other worlds. On them, perhaps, has the swarthy Ninevan, or slight Hindoo, or some

“Dusky youth with painted plumage gay”

performed as he apostrophized his mistress’s eyebrow. On that queer-looking thing which may be a fiddle or not—which may have had a bow or not—a slightly clad slave made music while his master the rayah played chess with his favorite wife. They are all dead and gone now, and their jewels are worn by others, and the memory of them has vanished from off the earth; and these, their musical instruments, repose in a quiet corner amid the rough hills and oak woods and under the cloudy skies of the land of music—Deutschland.

Down through the changing scale, through the whole range of cymbal and spinet, "flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music," stand literally before me, and a strange revelation it is. Is it the same faculty which produces that grand piano of Bechstein's, and that clarion organ of Silbermann's, and that African drum dressed out with skulls, that war-trumpet hung with tiger's teeth? After this nothing is wonderful! Strange, unearthly looking Chinese frames of sonorous stones or modulated bells; huge drums, painted and carved, and set up on stands six feet from the ground; quaint instruments from the palaces of Aztec Incas, down to pianos by Broadwood, Collard & Collard, and Bechstein.

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There were trophies of Streichinstrumente and Blaseinstrumente. I was allowed to gaze upon two real Stradivarius fiddles. I might see the development by evolution, and the survival of the fittest in violin, 'cello, contrabass, alto, beside countless others whose very names have perished with the time that produced them, and the fingers which played them—ingenious guesses, clever misses—the tragedy of harmony as well as its "Io Pæan!"

There were wind instruments, quaint old double flutes from Italy; pipes, single, double, treble, from ages much further back; harps—Assyrian, Greek, and Roman; instruments of percussion, guitars, and zithers in every form and kind; a dulcimer—I took it up and thought of Coleridge's "damsel with a dulcimer;" and a grand organ, as well as many incipient organs, and the quaint little things of that nature from China, Japan, and Siam.

I stood and gazed in wonder and amazement.

"Surely the present Graf has not collected all these instruments!" said I.

"Oh, no, *mein Fräulein*; they have been accumulating for centuries. They tell strange tales of what the Sturms will do for music."

With which he proceeded to tell me certain narratives of certain instruments in the collection, in which he evidently firmly believed, including one relating to a quaint old violin for which he said a certain Graf von Rothenfels called "Max der Tolle," or the Mad Count Max, had sold his soul.

As he finished this last he was called away, and excusing himself, left me. I was alone in this voiceless temple of so many wonderful sounds. I looked round, and a feeling of awe and weirdness crept over me. My eyes would not leave that shabby old fiddle, concerning whose demoniac origin I had just heard such a cheerful little anecdote. Every one of those countless instruments was capable of harmony and discord—had some time been used; pressed, touched, scraped, beaten or blown into by hands or mouths long since crumbled to dust. What tales had been told! what songs sung, and in what languages; what laughs laughed, tears shed, vows spoken, kisses exchanged, over some of those silent pieces of wood, brass, ivory, and catgut! The feelings of all the histories that surrounded me had something eerie in it.

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I stayed until I began to feel nervous, and was thinking of going away when sounds from a third room drew my attention. Some one in there began to play the violin, and to play it with no ordinary delicacy of manipulation. There was something exquisitely finished, refined, and delicate about the performance; it lacked the bold splendor and originality of Eugen's playing, but it was so lovely as to bring tears to my eyes, and, moreover, the air was my favorite "Traumerei." Something in those sounds, too, was familiar to me. With a sudden beating of the heart, a sudden eagerness, I stepped hastily forward, pushed back the dividing curtain, and entered the room whence proceeded those sounds.

In the middle of the room, which was bare and empty, but which had large windows looking across the melancholy plateau, and to the terrible figure of the runner at the end of the avenue—stood a boy—a child with a violin. He was dressed richly, in velvet and silk; he was grown—the slender delicacy of his form was set off by the fine clothing that rich men's children wear; his beautiful waving black hair was somewhat more closely cut, but the melancholy yet richly colored young face that turned toward me—the deep and yearning eyes, the large, solemn gaze, the premature gravity, were all his—it was Sigmund, Courvoisier's boy.

For a moment we both stood motionless—hardly breathing; then he flung his violin down, sprung forward with a low sound of intense joy, exclaiming:

"*Das Fräulein, das Fräulein*, from home!" and stood before me trembling from head to foot.

I snatched the child to my heart (he looked so much older and sadder), and covered him with kisses.

He submitted—nay, more, he put his arms about my neck and laid his face upon my shoulder, and presently, as if he had choked down some silent emotion, looked up at me with large, imploring, sad eyes, and asked:

"Have you seen my father?"

"Sigmund, I saw him the day before yesterday."

"You saw him—you spoke to him, perhaps?"

"Yes. I spoke long with him."

"What did he look like?"

"As he always does—brave, and true, and noble."

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"Nicht wahr?" said the boy, with flashing eyes. "I know how he looks, just. I am waiting till I am grown up, that I may go to him again."

"Do you like me, Sigmund?"

"Yes; very much."

"Do you think you could love me? Would you trust me to love those you love?"

"Do you mean him?" he asked point-blank, and looked at me somewhat startled.

"Yes."

"I—don't—know."

"I mean, to take care of him, and try to make him happy till you come to him again, and then we will all be together."

He looked doubtful still.

"What I mean, Sigmund, is that your father and I are going to be married; but we shall never be quite happy until you are with us."

He stood still, taking it in, and I waited in much anxiety. I was certain that if I had time and opportunity I could win him; but I feared the result of this sudden announcement and separation. He might only see that his father—his supreme idol—could turn for comfort to another, while he would not know how I loved him and longed to make his grave young life happy for him. I put my arm round his shoulder, and kneeling down beside him, said:

"You must say you are glad, Sigmund, or you will make me very unhappy. I want you to love me as well as him. Look at me and tell me you will trust me till we are all together, for I am sure we shall be together some day."

He still hesitated some little time, but at last said, with the sedateness peculiar to him, as of one who overcame a struggle and made a sacrifice:

"If he has decided it so it must be right, you know; but—but—you won't let him forget me, will you?"

The child's nature overcame that which had been, as it were, supplanted and grafted upon it. The lip quivered, the dark eyes filled with tears. Poor little lonely child! desolate and sad in the midst of all the grandeur! My heart yearned to him.

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"Forget you, Sigmund? Your father never forgets, he can not!"

"I wish I was grown up," was all he said.

Then it occurred to me to wonder how he got there, and in what relation he stood to these people.

"Do you live here, Sigmund?"

"Yes."

"What relation are you to the Herr Graf?"

"Graf von Rothenfels is my uncle."

"And are they kind to you?" I asked, in a hasty whisper, for his intense gravity and sadness oppressed me. I trembled to think of having to tell his father in what state I had found him.

"Oh, yes!" said he. "Yes, very."

"What do you do all day?"

"I learn lessons from Herr Nahrath, and I ride with Uncle Bruno, and—and—oh! I do whatever I like. Uncle Bruno says that some time I shall go to Bonn, or Heidelberg, or Jena, or England, whichever I like."

"And have you no friends?"

"I like being with Brunken the best. He talks to me about my father sometimes. He knew him when he was only as old as I am."

"Did he? Oh, I did not know that."

"But they won't tell me why my father never comes here, and why they never speak of him," he added, wearily, looking with melancholy eyes across the lines of wood, through the wide window.

"Be sure it is for nothing wrong. He does nothing wrong. He does nothing but what is good and right," said I.

"Oh, of course! But I can't tell the reason. I think and think about it." He put his hand wearily to his head. "They never speak of him. Once I said something about him. It was at a great dinner they had. Aunt Hildegard turned quite pale, and Uncle Bruno called me to him and said—no one heard it but me, you know—'Never let me hear that name again!' and his eyes looked so fierce.

"I'm tired of this place," he added, mournfully. "I want to be at Elberthal again—at the Wehrhahn, with my father and Friedhelm and Karl Linders. I think of them every hour. I liked Karl and Friedhelm, and Gretchen, and Frau Schmidt."

"They do not live there now, dear, Friedhelm and your father," said I, gently.

"Not? Then where are they?"

"I do not know," I was forced to say. "They were fighting in the war. I think they live at Berlin now, but I am not at all sure."

This uncertainty seemed to cause him much distress, and he would have added more, but our conversation was brought to an end by the entrance of Brunken, who looked rather surprised to see us in such close and earnest consultation.

"Will you show me the way back to the countess's room?" said I to Sigmund.

He put his hand in mine, and led me through many of those interminable halls and passages until we came to the rittersaal again.

"Sigmund," said I, "are you not proud to belong to these?" and I pointed to the dim portraits hanging around.

"Yes," said he, doubtfully. "Uncle Bruno is always telling me that I must do nothing to disgrace their name, because I shall one day rule their lands; but," he added, with more animation, "do you not see all these likenesses? These are all counts of Rothenfels, who have been heads of the family. You see the last one is here—Graf Bruno—my uncle. But in another room there are a great many more portraits, ladies and children and young men, and a man is painting a likeness of me, which is going to be hung up there; but my father is not there. What does it mean?"

I was silent. I knew his portrait must have been removed because he was considered to be living in dishonor—a stain to the house, who was perhaps the most chivalrous of the whole race; but this I could not tell Sigmund. It was beginning already, the trial, the "test" of which he had spoken to me, and it was harder in reality than in anticipation.

"I don't want to be stuck up there where he has no place," Sigmund went on, sullenly. "And I should like to cut the hateful picture to pieces when it comes."

With this he ushered me into Gräfin Hildegarde's boudoir again. She was still there, and a tall, stately, stern-looking man of some fifty years was with her. [Pg 334]

His appearance gave me a strange shock. He was Eugen, older and without any of his artist brightness; Eugen's grace turned into pride and stony hauteur. He looked as if he could be savage upon occasion; a nature born to power and nurtured in it. Ruggedly upright, but narrow. I learned him by heart afterward, and found that every act of his was the direct, unsoftened outcome of his nature.

This was Graf Bruno; this was the proud, intensely feeling man who had never forgiven the stain which he supposed his brother had brought upon their house; this was he who had proposed such hard, bald, pitiless terms concerning the parting of father and son—who forbade the child to speak of the loved one.

"Ha!" said he, "you have found Sigmund, *mein Fräulein*? Where did you meet, then?"

His keen eyes swept me from head to foot. In that, at least, Eugen resembled him; my lover's glance was as hawk-like as this, and as impenetrable.

"In the music-room," said Sigmund; and the uncle's glance left me and fell upon the boy.

I soon read that story. The child was at once the light of his eyes and the bitterness of his life. As for Countess Hildegarde, she gazed at her nephew with all a mother's soul in her pathetic eyes, and was silent.

"Come here," said the Graf, seating himself and drawing the boy to him. "What hast thou been doing?"

There was no fear in the child's demeanor—he was too thoroughly a child of their own race to know fear—but there was no love, no lighting up of the features, no glad meeting of the eyes.

"I was with Nahrath till Aunt Hildegarde sent for him, and then I went to practice."

"Practice what? Thy riding or fencing?"

"No; my violin."

"Bah! What an extraordinary thing it is that this lad has no taste for anything but fiddling," observed the uncle, half aside.

Gräfin Hildegarde looked sharply and apprehensively up.

Sigmund shrunk a little away from his uncle, not timidly, but with some distaste. Words were upon his lips; his eyes flashed, his lips parted; then he checked himself, and was silent. [Pg 335]

"*Nun denn!*" said the count. "What hast thou? Out with it!"

"Nothing that it would please you to hear, uncle; therefore I will not say it," was the composed retort.

The grim-looking man laughed a grim little laugh, as if satisfied with the audacity of the boy, and his grizzled mustache swept the soft cheek.

"I ride no further this morning; but this afternoon I shall go to Mulhausen. Wilt thou come with me?"

"Yes, uncle."

Neither willing nor unwilling was the tone, and the answer appeared to dissatisfy the other, who said:

"Yes, uncle'—what does that mean? Dost thou not wish to go?"

"Oh, yes! I would as soon go as stay at home."

"But the distance, Bruno," here interposed the countess, in a low tone. "I am sure it is too far. He is not too strong."

"Distance? Pooh! Hildegarde, I wonder at you; considering what stock you come of, you should be superior to such nonsense! Wert thou thinking of the distance, Sigmund?"

"Distance—no," said he, indifferently.

"Come with me," said the elder. "I want to show thee something."

They went out of the room together. Yes, it was self-evident; the man idolized the child. Strange mixture of sternness and softness! The supposed sin of the father was never to be pardoned; but natural affection was to have its way, and be lavished upon the son; and the son could not return it, because the influence of the banished scapegrace was too strong—he had won it all for himself, as scapegraces have the habit of doing.

Again I was left alone with the countess, sitting upright over her embroidery. A dull life this great lady led. She cared nothing for the world's gayeties, and she had neither chick nor child to be ambitious for. Her husband was polite enough to her; but she knew perfectly well, and accepted it as a matter of course, that the death of her who had lived with him and been his companion for twenty-five years would have weighed less by half with him than any catastrophe to that mournful, unenthusiastic child, who had not been two years under their roof, and who displayed no delight in the wealth of love lavished upon him.

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She knew that she also adored the child, but that his affection was hard to get. She dared not show her love openly, or in the presence of her husband, who seemed to look upon the boy as his exclusive property, and was as jealous as a tiger of the few faint testimonies of affection manifested by his darling. A dull journey to Berlin once a year, an occasional visitor, the society of her director and that of her husband—who showed how much at home with her he felt by going to sleep whenever he was more than a quarter of an hour in her presence—a little interest of a lofty, distant kind in her townspeople of the poorer sort, an occasional call upon or from some distant neighbor of a rank approaching her own; for the rest, embroidery in the newest patterns and most elegant style, some few books, chiefly religious and polemical works—and what can be drearier than Roman Catholic polemics, unless, indeed, Protestant ones eclipse them?—a large house, vast estates, servants who never raised their voices beyond a certain tone; the envy of all the middle-class women, the fear and reverential courtesies of the poorer ones—a cheerful existence, and one which accounted for some of the wrinkles which so plentifully decked her brow.

"That is our nephew," said she; "my husband's heir."

"I have often seen him before," said I; "but I should have thought that his father would be your husband's next heir."

Never shall I forget the look she darted upon me—the awful glance which swept over me scathingly, ere she said, in icy tones:

"What do you mean? Have you seen—or do you know—Graf Eugen?"

There was a pause, as if the name had not passed her lips for so long that now she had difficulty in uttering it.

"I knew him as Eugen Courvoisier," said I; but the other name was a revelation to me, and told me that he was also "to the manner born." "I saw him two days ago, and I conversed with him," I added.

She was silent for a moment, and surveyed me with a haggard look. I met her glance fully, openly.

"Do you wish to know anything about him?" I asked.

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"Certainly not," said she, striving to speak frigidly; but there was a piteous tremble in her low tones. "The man has dis—What am I saying? It is sufficient to say that he is not on terms with his family."

"So he told me," said I, struggling on my own part to keep back the burning words within me.

The countess looked at me—looked again. I saw now that this was one of the great sorrows of her sorrowful life. She felt that to be consistent she ought to wave aside the subject with calm contempt; but it made her heart bleed. I pitied her; I felt an odd kind of affection for her already. The promise I had given to Eugen lay hard and heavy upon me.

"What did he tell you?" she asked, at last; and I paused ere I answered, trying to think what I could make of this opportunity. "Do you know the facts of the case?" she added.

"No; he said he would write."

"Would write!" she echoed, suspending her work, and fixing me with her eyes. "Would write—to whom?"

"To me."

"You correspond with him?" There was a tremulous eagerness in her manner.

"I have never corresponded with him yet," said I, "but I have known him long, and loved him almost from the first. The other day I promised—to—marry him."

"You?" said she; "you are going to marry Eugen! Are you"—her eyes said—"are you good enough for him?" but she came to an abrupt conclusion. "Tell me," said she; "where did you meet him, and how?"

I told her in what capacity I had become acquainted with him, and she listened breathlessly. Every moment I felt the prohibition to speak heavier, for I saw that the Countess von Rothenfels would have been only too delighted to hail any idea, any suggestion, which should allow her to indulge the love that, though so strong, she rigidly repressed. I dare say I told my story in a halting kind of way; it was difficult for me on the spur of the moment to know clearly what to say and what to leave unsaid. As I told the countess about Eugen's and my voyage down the river, a sort of smile tried to struggle out upon her lips; it was evidently as good as a romance to her. I finished, saying:

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"That is the truth, *gnädige Frau*. All I fear is that I am not good enough for him—shall not satisfy him."

"My child," said she, and paused. "My dear child," she took both my hands, and her lips quivered, "you do not know how I feel for you. I can feel for you because I fear that with you it will be as it was with me. Do you know any of the circumstances under which Eugen von Rothenfels left his friends?"

"I do not know them circumstantially. I know he was accused of something, and—and—did not—I mean—"

"Could not deny it," she said. "I dare not take the responsibility of leaving you in ignorance. I must tell you all, and may Our Lady give me eloquence!"

"I should like to hear the story, madame, but I do not think any eloquence will change my mind."

"He always had a manner calculated to deceive and charm," said she; "always. Well, my husband is his half-brother. I was their cousin. They are the sons of different mothers, and my husband is many years older than Eugen—eighteen years older. He, my husband, was thirty years old when he succeeded to the name and estates of his father—Eugen, you see, was just twelve years old, a school-boy. We were just married. It is a very long time ago—*ach ja!* a very long time ago! We played the part of parents to that boy. We were childless, and as time went on, we lavished upon him all the love which we should have bestowed upon our own children had we been happy enough to have any. I do not think any one was ever better loved than he. It so happened that his own inheritance was not a large one; that made no difference. My husband, with my fullest consent and approbation, had every intention of providing for him: we had enough and to spare: money and land and house room for half a dozen families, and our two selves alone to enjoy it all. He always seemed fond of us. I suppose it was his facile manner, which could take the appearance of an interest and affection which he did not feel—"

"No, Frau Gräfin! no, indeed!"

"Wait till you have heard all, my poor child. Everyone loved him. How proud I was of him. Sometimes I think it is a chastisement, but had you been in my place you would have been proud too; so gallant, so handsome, such grace, and such a charm. He was the joy of my life," she said in a passionate under-tone. "He went by the name of a worthy descendant of all essential things: honor and loyalty and bravery, and so on. They used to call him *Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter*, after the old song. He was wild and impatient of control, but who is not? I hate your young men whose veins run milk, not blood. He was one of a fiery passionate line. At the universities he was extravagant; we heard all sorts of follies."

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"Did you ever hear of anything base—anything underhand or dishonorable?"

"Never—oh, never. High play. He was very intimate with a set of young Englishmen, and the play was dreadful, it is true; he betted too. That is a curse. Play and horses, and general recklessness and extravagance, but no wine and no women. I never heard that he had the least affinity for either of these dissipations. There were debts—I suppose all young men in his position make

debts," said the countess, placidly. "My husband made debts at college, and I am sure my brothers did. Then he left college and lived at home awhile, and that was the happiest time of my life. But it is over.

"Then he entered the army—of course. His family interest procured him promotion. He was captain in a fine Uhlan regiment. He was with his regiment at Berlin and Munich, and ——. And always we heard the same tales—play, and wild, fast living. Music always had a hold upon him.

"In the midst of his extravagance he was sometimes so simple. I remember we were dreadfully frightened at a rumor that he had got entangled with Fräulein —, a singer of great beauty at the Hofoper at —. I got my husband to let me write about it. I soon had an answer from Eugen. How he laughed at me! He had paid a lot of debts for the girl, which had been pressing heavily upon her since her career began; now he said he trusted she would get along swimmingly; he was going to her benefit that night.

"But when he was at —, and when he was about six-and-twenty, he really did get engaged to be married. He wrote and told us about it. That was the first bitter blow: she was an Italian girl of respectable but by no means noble family—he was always a dreadful radical in such matters. She was a governess in the house of one of his friends in —.

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"We did everything we could think of to divert him from it. It was useless. He married her, but he did not become less extravagant. She did not help him to become steady, I must say. She liked gayety and admiration, and he liked her to be worshiped. He indulged her frightfully. He played—he would play so dreadfully.

"We had his wife over to see us, and he came with her. We were agreeably surprised. She quite won our hearts. She was very beautiful and very charming—had rather a pretty voice, though nothing much. We forgave all his misconduct, and my husband talked to him and implored him to amend. He said he would. Mere promises! It was so easy to him to make promises.

"That poor young wife! Instead of pitying him for having made a *mésalliance*, we know now that it was she who was to be pitied for having fallen into the hands of such a black-hearted, false man."

The lady paused. The recital evidently cost her some pain and some emotion. She went on:

"She was expecting her confinement. They returned to —, where we also had a house, and we went with them. Vittoria shortly afterward gave birth to a son. That was in our house. My husband would have it so. That son was to reconcile all and make everything straight. At that time Eugen must have been in some anxiety: he had been betting heavily on the English Derby. We did not know that, nor why he had gone to England. At last it came out that he was simply ruined. My husband was dreadfully cut up. I was very unhappy—so unhappy that I was ill and confined to my room.

"My husband left town for a few days to come over to Rothenfels on business. Eugen was scarcely ever in the house. I thought it was our reproachful faces that he did not wish to see. Then my husband came back. He was more cheerful. He had been thinking things over, he said. He kissed me, and told me to cheer up: he had a plan for Eugen, which, he believed, would set all right again.

"In that very moment some one had asked to see him. It was a clerk from the bank with a check which they had cashed the day before. Had my husband signed it? I saw him look at it for a moment. Then he sent the man away, saying that he was then busy and would communicate with him. Then he showed me the check. It was payable to the bearer, and across the back was written 'Vittoria von Rothenfels.'

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"You must bear in mind that Eugen was living in his own house, in another quarter of the town. My husband sent the check to him, with a brief inquiry as to whether he knew anything about it. Then he went out: he had an appointment, and when he returned he found a letter from Eugen. It was not long: it was burned into my heart, and I have never forgotten a syllable of it. It was:

"I return the check. I am guilty. I relieve you of all further responsibility about me. It is evident that I am not fit for my position. I leave this place forever, taking the boy with me. Vittoria does not seem to care about having him. Will you look after her? Do not let her starve in punishment for my sin. For me—I leave you forever.

'EUGEN.'

"That was the letter. *Ei! mein Gott!* Oh, it is hideous, child, to find that those in whom you believed so intensely are bad—rotten to the core. I had loved Eugen, he had made a sunshine in my not very cheerful life. His coming was a joy to me, his going away a sorrow. It made everything so much blacker when the truth came out. Of course the matter was hushed up.

"My husband took immediate steps about it. Soon afterward we came here; Vittoria with us. Poor girl! Poor girl! She did nothing but weep and wring her hands, moan and lament and wonder why she had ever been born, and at last she died of decline—that is to say, they called it decline, but it was really a broken heart. That is the story—a black chronicle, is it not? You know about Sigmund's coming here. My husband remembered that he was heir to our name, and we were in a measure responsible for him. Eugen had taken the name of a distant family connection on his mother's side—she had French blood in her veins—Courvoisier. Now you know all, my child—he

is not good. Do not trust him.”

I was silent. My heart burned; my tongue longed to utter ardent words, but I remembered his sad smile as he said, “You shrink from that,” and I braced myself to silence. The thing seemed to me altogether so pitiable—and yet—and yet, I had sworn. But how had he lived out these five terrible years?

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By and by the luncheon bell rang. We all met once more. I felt every hour more like one in a dream or in some impossible old romance. That piece of outward death-like reserve, the countess, with the fire within which she was forever spending her energy in attempts to quench; that conglomeration of ice, pride, roughness and chivalry, the Herr Graf himself; the thin, wooden-looking priest, the director of the Gräfin; that lovely picture of grace and bloom, with the dash of melancholy, Sigmund; certainly it was the strangest company in which I had ever been present. The countess sent me home in the afternoon, reminding me that I was engaged to dine there with the others to-morrow. I managed to get a word aside with Sigmund—to kiss him and tell him I should come to see him again. Then I left them; interested, enthralled, fascinated with them and their life, and—more in love with Eugen than ever.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“WHERE IS MY FATHER?”

We had been bidden to dine at the schloss—Frau Mittendorf, Stella, and I. In due time the doctor’s new carriage was called out, and seated in it we were driven to the great castle. With a renewed joy and awe I looked at it by twilight, with the dusk of sunset veiling its woods and turning the whole mass to the color of a deep earth-stain. Eugen’s home: there he had been born; as the child of such a race and in its traditions he had been nurtured by that sad lady whom we were going to see. I at least knew that he had acted, and was now acting, up to the very standard of his high calling. The place has lost much of its awfulness for me; it had become even friendly and lovely.

The dinner was necessarily a solemn one. I was looking out for Sigmund, who, however, did not put in an appearance.

After dinner, when we were all assembled in a vast salon which the numberless wax-lights did but partially and in the center illuminate, I determined to make an effort at release from this seclusion, and asked the countess (who had motioned me to a seat beside her) where Sigmund was.

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“He seemed a little languid and not inclined to come down-stairs,” said she. “I expect he is in the music-room—he generally finds his way there.”

“Oh, I wish you would allow me to go and see him.”

“Certainly, my child,” said she, ringing; and presently a servant guided me to the door of the music-rooms, and in answer to my knock I was bidden *herein!*

I entered. The room was in shadow; but a deep glowing fire burned in a great cavernous, stone fire-place, and shone upon huge brass andirons on either side of the hearth. In an easy-chair sat Brunken, the old librarian, and his white hair and beard were also warmed into rosiness by the fire-glow. At his feet lay Sigmund, who had apparently been listening to some story of his old friend. His hands were clasped about the old man’s knee, his face upturned, his hair pushed back.

Both turned as I came in, and Sigmund sprung up, but ere he had advanced two paces, paused and stood still, as if overcome with languor or weariness.

“Sigmund, I have come to see you,” said I, coming to the fire and greeting the old man, who welcomed me hospitably.

I took Sigmund’s hand; it was hot and dry. I kissed him; lips and cheeks were burning and glowing crimson. I swept the hair from his brow, that too was burning, and his temples throbbed. His eyes met mine with a strange, misty look. Saying nothing, I seated myself in a low chair near the fire, and drew him to me. He nestled up to me, and I felt that if Eugen could see us he would be almost satisfied. Sigmund did not say anything. He merely settled his head upon my breast, gave a deep sigh as if of relief, and closing his eyes, said:

“Now, Brunken, go on!”

“As I was saying, *mein Liebling*, I hope to prove all former theorists and writers upon the subject to have been wrong—”

“He’s talking about a Magrepha,” said Sigmund, still not opening his eyes.

“A Magrepha—what may that be?” I inquired.

“Yes. Some people say it was a real full-blown organ,” explained Sigmund, in a thick, hesitating

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voice, "and some say it was nothing better than a bag-pipe—oh, dear! how my head does ache—and there are people who say it was a kettle-drum—nothing more nor less; and Brunken is going to show that not one of them knew anything about it."

"I hope so, at least," said Brunken, with a modest placidity.

"Oh, indeed!" said I, glancing a little timidly into the far recesses of the deep, ghostly room, where the fire-light kept catching the sheen of metal, the yellow whiteness of ivory keys or pipes, or the polished case of some stringed instrument.

Strange, grotesque shapes loomed out in the uncertain, flickering light; but was it not a strange and haunted chamber? Ever it seemed to me as if breaths of air blew through it, which came from all imaginable kinds of graves, and were the breaths of those departed ones who had handled the strange collection, and who wished to finger, or blow into, or beat the dumb, unvibrating things once more.

Did I say unvibrating? I was wrong then. The strings sometimes quivered to sounds that set them trembling; something like a whispered tone I have heard from the deep, upturned throats of great brazen trumpets—something like a distant moan floating around the gilded organ-pipes. In after-days, when Friedhelm Helfen knew this room, he made a wonderful fantasia about it, in which all the dumb instruments woke up, or tried to wake up to life again, for the whole place impressed him, he told me, as nothing that he had ever known before.

Brunken went on in a droning tone, giving theories of his own as to the nature of the Magrepha, and I, with my arms around Sigmund, half listened to the sleepy monotone of the good old visionary. But what spoke to me with a more potent voice was the souging and wuthering of the sorrowful wind without, which verily moaned around the old walls, and sought out the old corners, and wailed, and plained, and sobbed in a way that was enough to break one's heart.

By degrees a silence settled upon us. Brunken, having satisfactorily annihilated his enemies, ceased to speak; the fire burned lower; Sigmund's eyes were closed; his cheeks were not less flushed than before, nor his brow less hot, and a frown contracted it. I know not how long a time had passed, but I had no wish to rise. [Pg 345]

The door was opened, and some one came into the room. I looked up. It was the Gräfin. Brunken rose and stood to one side, bowing.

I could not get up, but some movement of mine, perhaps, disturbed the heavy and feverish slumber of the child. He started wide awake, with a look of wild terror, and gazed down into the darkness, crying out:

"*Mein Vater*, where art thou?"

A strange, startled, frightened look crossed the face of the countess when she heard the words. She did not speak, and I said some soothing words to Sigmund.

But there could be no doubt that he was very ill. It was quite unlike his usual silent courage and reticence to wring his small hands and with ever-increasing terror turn a deaf ear to my soothings, sobbing out in tones of pain and insistence:

"Father! father! where art thou? I want thee!"

Then he began to cry pitifully, and the only word that was heard was "Father!" It was like some recurrent wail in a piece of music, which warns one all through of a coming tragedy.

"Oh, dear! What is to be done? Sigmund! *Was ist denn mit dir, mein Engel?*" said the poor countess, greatly distressed.

"He is ill," said I. "I think he has taken an illness. Does thy head ache, Sigmund?"

"Yes," said he, "it does. Where is my own father? My head never ached when I was with my father."

"*Mein Gott! mein Gott!*" said the countess in a low tone. "I thought he had forgotten his father."

"Forgotten!" echoed I. "Frau Gräfin, he is one of yourselves. You do not seem to forget."

"*Herrgott!*" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "What can be the matter with him? What must I say to Bruno? Sigmund darling, what hast thou then! What ails thee?"

"I want my father!" he repeated. Nor would he utter any other word. The one idea, long dormant, had now taken full possession of him; in fever, half delirious, out of the fullness of his heart his mouth spake.

"Sigmund, *Liebchen*," said the countess, "control thyself. Thy uncle must not hear thee say that word." [Pg 346]

"I don't want my uncle. I want my father!" said Sigmund, looking restlessly round. "Oh, where is he? I have not seen him—it is so long, and I want him. I love him; I do love my father, and I want him."

It was pitiful, pathetic, somewhat tragic too. The poor countess had not the faintest idea what to do with the boy, whose illness frightened her. I suggested that he should be put to bed and the

doctor sent for, as he had probably taken some complaint which would declare itself in a few days, and might be merely some childish disorder.

The countess seized my suggestion eagerly. Sigmund was taken away. I saw him no more that night. Presently we left the schloss and drove home.

I found a letter waiting for me from Eugen. He was still at Elberthal, and appeared to have been reproaching himself for having accepted my "sacrifice," as he called it. He spoke of Sigmund. There was more, too, in the letter, which made me both glad and sad. I felt life spreading before me, endowed with a gravity, a largeness of aim, and a dignity of purpose such as I had never dreamed of before.

It seemed that for me, too, there was work to do. I also had a love for whose sake to endure. This made me feel grave. Eugen's low spirits, and the increased bitterness with which he spoke of things, made me sad; but something else made me glad. Throughout his whole letter there breathed a passion, a warmth—restrained, but glowing through its bond of reticent words—an eagerness which he told me that at last

"As I loved, loved am I."

Even after that sail down the river I had felt a half mistrust, now all doubts were removed. He loved me. He had learned it in all its truth and breadth since we last parted. He talked of renunciation, but it was with an anguish so keen as to make me wince for him who felt it. If he tried to renounce me now, it would not be the cold laying aside of a thing for which he did not care, it would be the wrenching himself away from his heart's desire. I triumphed in the knowledge, and this was what made me glad.

Almost before we had finished breakfast in the morning, there came a thundering of wheels up to the door, and a shriek of excitement from Frau Mittendorf, who, *morgenhaube* on her head, a shapeless old morning-gown clinging hideously about her ample figure, rushed to the window, looked out, and announced the carriage of the Frau Gräfin. "*Aber!* What can she want at this early hour?" she speculated, coming into the room again and staring at us both with wide open eyes round with agitation and importance. "But I dare say she wishes to consult me upon some matter. I wish I were dressed more becomingly. I have heard—that is, I know, for I am so intimate with her—that she never wears *négligé*. I wonder if I should have time to—"

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She stopped to hold out her hand for the note which a servant was bringing in; but her face fell when the missive was presented to me.

"LIEBE MAI"—it began—"Will you come and help me in my trouble? Sigmund is very ill. Sometimes he is delirious. He calls for you often. It breaks my heart to find that after all not a word is uttered of us, but only of Eugen (burn this when you have read it), of you, and of 'Karl,' and 'Friedhelm,' and one or two other names which I do not know. I fear this petition will sound troublesome to you, who were certainly not made for trouble, but you are kind. I saw it in your face. I grieve too much. Truly the flesh is fearfully weak. I would live as if earth had no joys for me—as indeed it has none—and yet that does not prevent my suffering. May God help me! Trusting to you, Your,

"HILDEGARDE V. ROTHENFELS."

I lost no time in complying with this summons. In a few moments I was in the carriage; ere long I was at the schloss, was met by Countess Hildegarde, looking like a ghost that had been keeping a strict Lent, and was at last by Sigmund's bedside.

He was tossing feverishly from side to side, murmuring and muttering. But when he saw me he was still, a sweet, frank smile flitted over his face—a smile wonderfully like that which his father had lately bent upon me. He gave a little laugh, saying:

"Fräulein May! *Willkommen!* Have you brought my father? And I should like to see Friedhelm, too. You and *der Vater* and Friedel used to sit near together at the concert, don't you remember? I went once, and you sung. That tall black man beat time, and my father never stopped looking at you and listening—Friedel too. I will ask them if they remember."

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He laughed again at the reminiscence, and took my hand, and asked me if I remembered, so that it was with difficulty that I steadied my voice and kept my eyes from running over as I answered him. Gräfin Hildegarde behind wrung her hands and turned to the window. He did not advance any reminiscence of what had happened since he came to the schloss.

There was no doubt that our Sigmund was very ill. A visitation of scarlet fever, of the worst kind, was raging in Lahnburg and in the hamlet of Rothenfels, which lay about the gates of the schloss.

Sigmund, some ten days before, had ridden with his uncle, and waited on his pony for some time outside a row of cottages, while the count visited one of his old servants, a man who had become an octogenarian in the service of his family, and upon whom Graf Bruno periodically shed the light of his countenance.

It was scarcely to be doubted that the boy had taken the infection then and there, and the doctor did not conceal that he had the complaint in its worst form, and that his recovery admitted of the gravest doubts.

A short time convinced me that I must not again leave the child till the illness was decided in one way or another. He was mine now, and I felt myself in the place of Eugen, as I stood beside his bed and told him the hard truth—that his father was not here, nor Friedhelm, nor Karl, for whom he also asked, but only I.

The day passed on. A certain conviction was growing every hour stronger with me. An incident at last decided it. I had scarcely left Sigmund's side for eight or nine hours, but I had seen nothing of the count, nor heard his voice, nor had any mention been made of him, and remembering how he adored the boy, I was surprised.

At last Gräfin Hildegarde, after a brief absence, came into the room, and with a white face and parted lips, said to me in a half-whisper.

"*Liebe* Miss Wedderburn, will you do something for me? Will you speak to my husband?"

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"To your husband!" I ejaculated.

She bowed.

"He longs to see Sigmund, but dare not come. For me, I have hardly dared to go near him since the little one began to be ill. He believes that Sigmund will die, and that he will be his murderer, having taken him out that day. I have often spoken to him about making *der Arme* ride too far, and now the sight of me reminds him of it; he can not endure to look at me. Heaven help me! Why was I ever born?"

She turned away without tears—tears were not in her line—and I went, much against my will, to find the Graf.

He was in his study. Was that the same man, I wondered, whom I had seen the very day before, so strong, and full of pride and life? He raised a haggard, white, and ghastly face to me, which had aged and fallen in unspeakably. He made an effort, and rose with politeness as I came in.

"*Mein Fräulein*, you are loading us with obligations. It is quite unheard of."

But no thanks were implied in the tone—only bitterness. He was angry that I should be in the place he dared not come to.

If I had not been raised by one supreme fear above all smaller ones, I should have been afraid of this haggard, eager-looking old man—for he did look very old in his anguish. I could see the rage of jealousy with which he regarded me, and I am not naturally fond of encountering an old wolf who has starved.

But I used my utmost effort to prevail upon him to visit his nephew, and at last succeeded. I piloted him to Sigmund's room; led him to the boy's bedside. The sick child's eyes were closed, but he presently opened them. The uncle was stooping over him, his rugged face all working with emotion, and his voice broken as he murmured:

"*Ach, mein Liebling!* art thou then so ill?"

With a kind of shuddering cry, the boy pushed him away with both hands, crying:

"Go away! I want my father—my father, my father, I say! Where is he? Why do you not fetch him? You are a bad man, and you hate him."

Then I was frightened. The count recoiled; his face turned deathly white—livid; his fist clinched. He glared down upon the now unrecognizing young face and stuttered forth something, paused, then said in a low, distinct voice, which shook me from head to foot:

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"So! Better he should die. The brood is worthy the nest it sprung from. Where is our blood, that he whines after that hound—that hound?"

With which, and with a fell look around, he departed, leaving Sigmund oblivious of all that had passed, utterly indifferent and unconscious, and me shivering with fear at the outburst I had seen.

But it seemed to me that my charge was worse. I left him for a few moments, and seeking out the countess, spoke my mind.

"Frau Gräfin, Eugen must be sent for. I fear that Sigmund is going to die, and I dare not let him die without sending for his father."

"I dare not!" said the countess.

She had met her husband, and was flung, unnerved, upon a couch, her hand over her heart.

"But I dare, and I must do it!" said I, secretly wondering at myself. "I shall telegraph for him."

"If my husband knew!" she breathed.

"I can not help it," said I. "Is the poor child to die among people who profess to love him, with the one wish ungratified which he has been repeating ever since he began to be ill? I do not understand such love; I call it horrible inhumanity."

"For Eugen to enter this house again!" she said in a whisper.

"I would to God that there were any other head as noble under its roof!" was my magniloquent and thoroughly earnest inspiration. "Well, *gnädige Frau*, will you arrange this matter, or shall I?"

"I dare not," she moaned, half distracted; "I dare not—but I will do nothing to prevent you. Use the whole household; they are at your command."

I lost not an instant in writing out a telegram and dispatching it by a man on horseback to Lahnburg. I summoned Eugen briefly:

"Sigmund is ill. I am here. Come to us."

I saw the man depart, and then I went and told the countess what I had done. She turned, if possible, a shade paler, then said: [Pg 351]

"I am not responsible for it."

Then I left the poor pale lady to still her beating heart and kill her deadly apprehensions in the embroidery of the lily of the field and the modest violet.

No change in the child's condition. A lethargy had fallen upon him. That awful stupor, with the dark, flushed cheek and heavy breath, was to me more ominous than the restlessness of fever.

I sat down and calculated. My telegram might be in Eugen's hand in the course of an hour.

When could he be here? Was it possible that he might arrive this night? I obtained the German equivalent for Bradshaw, and studied it till I thought I had made out that, supposing Eugen to receive the telegram in the shortest possible time, he might be here by half past eleven that night. It was now five in the afternoon. Six hours and a half—and at the end of that time his non-arrival might tell me he could not be here before the morrow.

I sat still, and now that the deed was done, gave myself up, with my usual enlightenment and discretion, to fears and apprehensions. The terrible look and tone of Graf von Rothenfels returned to my mind in full force. Clearly it was just the most dangerous thing in the world for Eugen to do—to put in an appearance at the present time. But another glance at Sigmund somewhat reassured me. In wondering whether girl had ever before been placed in such a bizarre situation as mine, darkness overtook me.

Sigmund moved restlessly and moaned, stretching out little hot hands, and saying "Father!" I caught those hands to my lips, and knew that I had done right.

CHAPTER XL.

VINDICATED.

It was a wild night. Driving clouds kept hiding and revealing the stormy-looking moon. I was out-of-doors. I could not remain in the house; it had felt too small for me, but now nature felt too large. I dimly saw the huge pile of the schloss defined against the gray light; sometimes when the moon unveiled herself it started out clear, and black, and grim. I saw a light in a corner window—that was Sigmund's room; and another in a room below—that was the Graf's study, and there the terrible man sat. I heard the wind moan among the trees, heard the great dogs baying from the kennels; from an open window came rich, low, mellow sounds. Old Brunken was in the music-room, playing to himself upon the violoncello. That was a movement from the "Grand Septuor"—the second movement, which is, if one may use such an expression, painfully beautiful. I bethought myself of the woods which lay hidden from me, the vast avenues, the lonely tanks, the grotesques statues, and that terrible figure with its arms cast upward, at the end of the long walk, and I shivered faintly. [Pg 352]

I was some short distance down the principal avenue, and dared not go any further. A sudden dread of the loneliness and the night-voices came upon me; my heart beating thickly, I turned to go back to the house. I would try to comfort poor Countess Hildegarde in her watching and her fears.

But there is a step near me. Some one comes up the avenue, with foot that knows its windings, its turns and twists, its ups and downs.

"Eugen!" I said, tremulously.

A sudden pause—a stop; then he said with a kind of laugh:

"Witchcraft—Zauberei!" and was going on.

But now I knew his whereabouts, and coming up to him, touched his arm.

"This, however, is reality!" he exclaimed, infolding me and kissing me as he hurried on. "May, how is he?"

"Just the same," said I, clinging to him. "Oh, thank Heaven that you are come!"

"I drove to the gates, and sent the fellow away. But what art thou doing alone at the Ghost's

Corner on a stormy night?"

We were still walking fast toward the schloss. My heart was beating fast, half with fear of what was impending, half with intensity of joy at hearing his voice again, and knowing what that last letter had told me.

As we emerged upon the great terrace before the house Eugen made one (the only one) momentary pause, pressed my arm, and bit his lips. I knew the meaning of it all. Then we passed quickly on. We met no one in the great stone hall—no one on the stairway or along the passages—straight he held his way, and I with him.

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We entered the room. Eugen's eyes leaped swiftly to his child's face. I saw him pass his hand over his mouth. I withdrew my hand from his arm and stood aside, feeling a tremulous thankfulness that he was here, and that that restless plaining would at last be hushed in satisfaction.

A delusion! The face over which my lover bent did not brighten; nor the eyes recognize him. The child did not know the father for whom he had yearned out his little heart—he did not hear the half-frantic words spoken by that father as he flung himself upon him, kissing him, beseeching him, conjuring him with every foolish word of fondness that he could think of, to speak, answer, look up once again.

Then fear, terror overcame the man—for the first time I saw him look pale with apprehension.

"Not this cup—not this!" muttered he. "*Gott im Himmel!* anything short of this—I will give him up—leave him—anything—only let him live!"

He had flung himself, unnerved, trembling, upon a chair by the bedside—his face buried in his hands. I saw the sweat stand upon his brow—I could do nothing to help—nothing but wish despairingly that some blessed miracle would reverse the condition of the child and me—lay me low in death upon that bed—place him safe and sound in his father's arms.

Is it not hard, you father of many children, to lose one of them? Do you not grudge Death his prize? But this man had but the one; the love between them was such a love as one meets perhaps once in a life-time. The child's life had been a mourning to him, the father's a burden, ever since they had parted.

I felt it strange that I should be trying to comfort him, and yet it was so; it was his brow that leaned on my shoulder; it was he who was faint with anguish, so that he could scarce see or speak—his hand that was cold and nerveless. It was I who said:

"Do not despair, I hope still."

"If he is dying," said Eugen, "he shall die in my arms."

With which, as if the idea were a dreary kind of comfort, he started up, folded Sigmund in a shawl, and lifted him out of bed, infolding him in his arms, and pillowing his head upon his breast.

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It was a terrible moment, yet, as I clung to his arm, and with him looked into our darling's face, I felt that von Francius' words, spoken long ago to my sister, contained a deep truth. This joy, so like a sorrow—would I have parted with it? A thousand times, no!

Whether the motion and movement roused him, or whether that were the crisis of some change, I knew not. Sigmund's eyes opened. He bent them upon the face above him, and after a pause of reflection, said, in a voice whose utter satisfaction passed anything I had ever heard: "My own father!" released a pair of little wasted arms from his covering, and clasped them round Eugen's neck, putting his face close to his, and kissing him as if no number of kisses could ever satisfy him.

Upon this scene, as Eugen stood in the middle of the room, his head bent down, a smile upon his face which no ultimate griefs could for the moment quench, there entered the countess.

Her greeting after six years of absence, separation, belief in his dishonesty, was a strange one. She came quickly forward, laid her hand on his arm, and said:

"Eugen, it is dreadfully infectious! Don't kiss the child in that way, or you will take the fever and be laid up too."

He looked up, and at his look a shock passed across her face; with pallid cheeks and parted lips she gazed at him speechless.

His mind, too, seemed to bridge the gulf—it was in a strange tone that he answered:

"Ah, Hildegarde! What does it matter what becomes of me? Leave me this!"

"No, not that, Eugen," said I, going up to him, and I suppose something in my eyes moved him, for he gave the child into my arms in silence.

The countess had stood looking at him. She strove for silence; sought tremulously after coldness, but in vain.

"Eugen—" She came nearer, and looked more closely at him. "*Herrgott!* how you are altered!

What a meeting! I—can it be six years ago—and now—oh!” Her voice broke into a very wail. “We loved you—why did you deceive us?” [Pg 355]

My heart stood still. Would he stand this test? It was the hardest he had had. Gräfin Hildegard had been—was dear to him. That he was dear to her, intensely dear, that love for him was intertwined about her very heart-strings, stood confessed now. “Why did you deceive us?” It sounded more like, “Tell us we may trust you; make us happy again!” One word from him, and the poor sad lady would have banished from her heart the long-staying, unwelcome guest—belief in his falseness, and closed it away from her forever.

He was spared the dreadful necessity of answering her. A timid summons from her maid at the door told her the count wanted to speak to her, and she left us quickly.

Sigmund did not die; he recovered, and lives now. But with that I am not at present concerned.

It was the afternoon following that never-to-be-forgotten night. I had left Eugen watching beside Sigmund, who was sleeping, his hand jealously holding two of his father’s fingers.

I intended to call at Frau Mittendorf’s door to say that I could not yet return there, and when I came back, said Eugen, he would have something to tell me; he was going to speak with his brother—to tell him that we should be married, “and to speak about Sigmund,” he added, decisively. “I will not risk such a thing as this again. If you had not been here he might have died without my knowing it. I feel myself absolved from all obligation to let him remain. My child’s happiness shall not be further sacrificed.”

With this understanding I left him. I went toward the countess’s room, to speak to her, and tell her of Sigmund before I went out. I heard voices ere I entered the room, and when I entered it I stood still, and a sickly apprehension clutched my very heart. There stood my evil genius—the *böser Geist* of my lover’s fate—Anna Sartorius. And the count and countess were present, apparently waiting for her to begin to speak.

“You are here,” said the Gräfin to me. “I was just about to send for you. This lady says she knows you.”

“She does,” said I, hesitatingly.

Anna looked at me. There was gravity in her face, and the usual cynical smile in her eyes. [Pg 356]

“You are surprised to see me,” said she. “You will be still more surprised to hear that I have journeyed all the way from Elberthal to Lahnburg on your account, and for your benefit.”

I did not believe her, and composing myself as well as I could, sat down. After all, what could she do to harm me? She could not rob me of Eugen’s heart, and she had already done her worst against him and his fair name.

Anna had a strong will, she exerted it. Graf Bruno was looking in some surprise at the unexpected guest; the countess sat rigidly upright, with a puzzled look, as if at the sight of Anna she recalled some far-past scene. Anna compelled their attention; she turned to me, saying:

“Please remain here, Miss Wedderburn. What I have to say concerns you as much as any one here. You wonder who I am, and what business I have to intrude myself upon you,” she added to the others.

“I confess—” began the countess, and Anna went on:

“You, *gnädige Frau*, have spoken to me before, and I to you. I see you remember, or feel you ought to remember me. I will recall the occasion of our meeting to your mind. You once called at my father’s house—he was a music teacher—to ask about lessons for some friend or protégée of yours. My father was engaged at the moment, and I invited you into my sitting-room and endeavored to begin a conversation with you. You were very distant and very proud, scarcely deigning to answer me. When my father came into the room, I left it. But I could not help laughing at your treatment of me. You little knew from your shut-up, *coquette* existence among the lofty ones of the earth, what influence even such insignificant persons as I might have upon your lot. At the time I was the intimate friend of, and in close correspondence with, a person who afterward became one of your family. Her name was Vittoria Leopardi, and she married your brother-in-law, Graf Eugen.”

The plain-spoken, plain-looking woman had her way. She had the same power as that which shone in the “glittering eye” of the Ancient Mariner. Whether we liked or not we gave her our attention. All were listening now, and we listened to the end.

“Vittoria Leopardi was the Italian governess at General von —’s. At one time she had several music lessons from my father. That was how I became acquainted with her. She was very beautiful—almost as beautiful as you, Miss Wedderburn, and I, dull and plain myself, have a keen appreciation of beauty and of the gentleness which does not always accompany it. When I first knew her she was lonely and strange, and I tried to befriend her. I soon began to learn what a singular mixture of sordid worldliness and vacant weak-mindedness dwelt behind her fair face. She wrote to me often, for she was one of the persons who must have some one to whom to relate their ‘triumphs’ and conquests, and I suppose I was the only person she could get to listen to her. [Pg 357]

"At that time—the time you called at our house, *gnädige Frau*—her epistles were decidedly tedious. What sense she had—there was never too much of it—was completely eclipsed. At last came the announcement that her noble and gallant Uhlan had proposed, and been accepted—naturally. She told me what he was, and his possessions and prospects; his chief merit in her eyes appeared to be that he would let her do anything she liked, and release her from the drudgery of teaching, for which she never had the least affinity. She hated children. She never on any occasion hinted that she loved him very much.

"In due time the marriage, as you all know, came off. She almost dropped me then, but never completely so; I suppose she had that instinct which stupid people often have as to the sort of people who may be of use to them some time. I received no invitations to her house. She used awkwardly to apologize for the negligence sometimes, and say she was so busy, and it would be no compliment to me to ask me to meet all those stupid people of whom the house was always full.

"That did not trouble me much, though I loved her none the better for it. She had become more a study to me now than anything I really cared for. Occasionally I used to go and see her, in the morning, before she had left her room; and once, and once only, I met her husband in the corridor. He was hastening away to his duty, and scarcely saw me as he hurried past. Of course I knew him by sight as well as possible. Who did not? Occasionally she came to me to recount her triumphs and make me jealous. She did not wish to reign supreme in her husband's heart; she wished idle men to pay her compliments. Everybody in — knew of the extravagance of that household, and the reckless, neck-or-nothing habits of its master. People were indignant with him that he did not reform. I say it would have been easier for him to find his way alone up the Matterhorn in the dark than to reform—after his marriage.

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"There had been hope for him before—there was none afterward. A pretty inducement to reform, she offered him! I knew that woman through and through, and I tell you that there never lived a more selfish, feeble, vain, and miserable thing. All was self—self—self. When she was mated to a man who never did think of self—whose one joy was to be giving, whose generosity was no less a by-word than his recklessness, who was delighted if she expressed a wish, and would move heaven and earth to gratify it; the more eagerly the more unreasonable it was—*mes amis*, I think it is easy to guess the end—the end was ruin. I watched it coming on, and I thought of you, Frau Gräfin. Vittoria was expecting her confinement in the course of a few months. I never heard her express a hope as to the coming child, never a word of joy, never a thought as to the wider cares which a short time would bring to her. She did say often, with a sigh, that women with young children were so tied; they could not do this, and they could not do that. She was in great excitement when she was invited to come here; in great triumph when she returned.

"Eugen, she said, was a fool not to conciliate his brother and that doting old saint (her words, *gnädige Frau*, not mine) more than he did. It was evident that they would do anything for him if he only flattered them, but he was so insanely downright—she called it stupid, she said. The idea of missing such advantages when a few words of common politeness would have secured them. I may add that what she called 'common politeness' was just the same thing that I called smooth hypocrisy.

"Very shortly after this her child was born. I did not see her then. Her husband lost all his money on a race, and came to smash, as you English say. She wrote to me. She was in absolute need of money, she said; Eugen had not been able to give her any. He had said they must retrench. Retrench! was that what she married him for! There was a set of turquoises that she must have, or another woman would get them, and then she would die. And her milliner, a most unreasonable woman, had sent word that she must be paid.

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"So she was grumbling in a letter which I received one afternoon, and the next I was frightfully startled to see herself. She came in and said smilingly that she was going to ask a favor of me. Would I take her cab on to the bank and get a check cashed for her? She did not want to go there herself. And then she explained how her brother-in-law had given her a check for a thousand thalers—was it not kind of him? It really did not enter my head at the moment to think there was anything wrong about the check. She had indorsed it, and I took it, received the money for it, and brought it to her. She trembled so as she took it, and was so remarkably quiet about it, that it suddenly flashed upon my mind that there must be something not as it ought to be about it.

"I asked her a question or two, and she said, deliberately contradicting herself, that the Herr Graf had not given it to her, but to her husband, and then she went away, and I was sure I should hear more about it. I did. She wrote to me in the course of a few days, saying she wished she were dead, since Eugen, by his wickedness, had destroyed every chance of happiness; she might as well be a widow. She sent me a package of letters—my letters—and asked me to keep them, together with some other things, an old desk among the rest. She had no means of destroying them all, and she did not choose to carry them to Rothenfels, whither she was going to be buried alive with those awful people.

"I accepted the charge. For five—no, six years, the desk, the papers, everything lay with some other possessions of mine which I could not carry about with me on the wandering life I led after my father's death—stored in an old trunk in the lumber-room of a cousin's house. I visited that house last week.

"Certain circumstances which have occurred of late years induced me to look over those papers. I burned the old bundle of letters from myself to her, and then I looked through the desk. In a

pigeon-hole I found these."

She handed some pieces of paper to Graf Bruno, who looked at them. I, too, have seen them since. They bore the imitations of different signatures; her husband's, Graf Bruno's, that of Anna Sartorius, and others which I did not know.

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The same conviction as that which had struck Anna flashed into the eyes of Graf von Rothenfels.

"I found those," repeated Anna, "and I knew in a second who was the culprit. He, your brother, is no criminal. She forged the signature of the Herr Graf—"

"Who forged the signature of the Herr Graf?" asked a voice which caused me to start up, which brought all our eyes from Anna's face, upon which they had been fastened, and showed us Eugen standing in the door-way, with compressed lips and eyes that looked from one to the other of us anxiously.

"Your wife," said Anna, calmly. And before any one could speak she went on: "I have helped to circulate the lie about you, Herr Graf"—she spoke to Eugen—"for I disliked you; I disliked your family, and I disliked, or rather wished to punish, Miss Wedderburn for her behavior to me. But I firmly believed the story I circulated. The moment I knew the truth I determined to set you right. Perhaps I was pleased to be able to circumvent your plans. I considered that if I told the truth to Friedhelm Helfen he would be as silent as yourself, because you chose to be silent. The same with May Wedderburn, therefore I decided to come to head-quarters at once. It is useless for you to try to appear guilty any longer," she added, mockingly. "You can tell them all the rest, and I will wish you good-afternoon."

She was gone. From that day to this I have never seen her nor heard of her again. Probably with her power over us her interest in us ceased.

Meanwhile I had released myself from the spell which held me, and gone to the countess. Something very like fear held me from approaching Eugen.

Count Bruno had gone to his brother, and touched his shoulder. Eugen looked up. Their eyes met. It just flashed into my mind that after six years of separation the first words were—must be—words of reconciliation, of forgiveness asked on the one side, eagerly extended on the other.

"Eugen!" in a trembling voice, and then, with a positive sob, "canst thou forgive?"

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"My brother—I have not resented. I could not. Honor in thee, as honor in me—"

"But that thou wert doubted, hated, mistak—"

But another had asserted herself. The countess had come to herself again, and going up to him, looked him full in the face and kissed him.

"Now I can die happy! What folly, Eugen! and folly like none but thine. I might have known—"

A faint smile crossed his lips. For all the triumphant vindication, he looked very pallid.

"I have often wondered, Hildegarde, how so proud a woman as you could so soon accept the worthlessness of a pupil on whom she had spent such pains as you upon me. I learned my best notions of honor and chivalry from you. You might have credited me rather with trying to carry the lesson out than with plucking it away and casting it from me at the first opportunity."

"You have much to forgive," said she.

"Eugen, you came to see me on business," said his brother.

Eugen turned to me. I turned hot and then cold. This was a terrible ordeal indeed. He seemed metamorphosed into an exceedingly grand personage as he came to me, took my hand, and said, very proudly and very gravely:

"The first part of my business related to Sigmund. It will not need to be discussed now. The rest was to tell you that this young lady—in spite of having heard all that could be said against me—was still not afraid to assert her intention to honor me by becoming my wife and sharing my fate. Now that she has learned the truth—May, do you still care for me enough to marry me?"

"If so," interrupted his brother before I could speak, "let me add my petition and that of my wife—do you allow me, Hildegarde?"

"Indeed, yes, yes!"

"That she will honor us and make us happy by entering our family, which can only gain by the acquisition of such beauty and excellence."

The idea of being entreated by Graf Bruno to marry his brother almost overpowered me. I looked at Eugen and stammered out something inaudible, confused, too, by the look he gave me.

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He was changed; he was more formidable now than before, and he led me silently up to his brother without a word, upon which Count Bruno crowned my confusion by uttering some more very Grandisonian words and gravely saluting my cheek. That was certainly a terrible moment, but from that day to this I have loved better and better my haughty brother-in-law.

Half in consideration for me, I believe, the countess began:

"But I want to know, Eugen, about this. I don't quite understand yet how you managed to shift the blame upon yourself."

"Perhaps he does not want to tell," said I, hastily.

"Yes; since the truth is known, I may tell the rest," said he. "It was a very simple matter. After all was lost, my only ray of comfort was that I could pay my debts by selling everything, and throwing up my commission. But when I thought of my wife I felt a devil. I suppose that is the feeling which the devils do experience in place of love—at least Heine says so:

"Die Teufel nennen es Höllenqual,
Die Menschen nennen es Liebe."

"I kept it from her as long as I could. It was a week after Sigmund was born that at last one day I had to tell her. I actually looked to her for advice, help. It was tolerably presumptuous in me, I must say, after what I had brought her to. She brought me to reason. May Heaven preserve men from needing such lessons! She reproached me—ay, she did reproach me. I thank my good genius, or whatever it is that looks after us, that I could set my teeth and not answer her a syllable."

"The minx!" said the countess aside to me. "I would have shaken her!"

"What was she to do without a groschen?" she concluded, and I could only say that I had had thoughts of dropping my military career and taking to music in good earnest. I had never been able to neglect it, even in any worst time, for it was a passion with me. She said:

"A composer—a beggar! That was hard.

"I asked her, 'Will you not help me?'

"Never, to degrade yourself in that manner," she assured me.

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"Considering that I had deserved my punishment, I left her. I sat up all night, I remember, thinking over what I had brought her to, and wondering what I could do for her. I wondered if you, Bruno, would help her and let me go away and work out my punishment, for, believe me, I never thought of shirking it. I had been most effectually brought to reason, and your example, and yours, Hildegarde, had taught me a different kind of moral fiber to that.

"I brought your note about the check to Vittoria, and asked her if she knew anything about it. She looked at me, and in that instant I knew the truth. She did not once attempt to deny it. I do not know what, in my horrible despair and shame, I may have said or done.

"I was brought to my senses by seeing her cowering before me, with her hands before her face, and begging me not to kill her. I felt what a brute I must have been, but that kind of brutality has been knocked out of me long ago. I raised her, and asked her to forgive me, and bade her keep silence and see no one, and I would see that she did not suffer for it.

"Everything seemed to stand clearly before me. If I had kept straight, the poor ignorant thing would never have been tempted to such a thing. I settled my whole course in half an hour, and have never departed from it since.

"I wrote that letter to you, and went and read it to my wife. I told her that I could never forgive myself for having caused her such unhappiness, and that I was going to release her from me. I only dropped a vague hint about the boy at first; I was stooping over his crib to say good-bye to him. She said, 'What am I to do with him?' I caught at the idea, and she easily let me take him. I asked Hugo von Meilingen to settle affairs for me, and left that night. Thanks to you, Bruno, the story never got abroad. The rest you know."

"What did you tell Hugo von Meilingen?"

"Only that I had made a mess of everything and broken my wife's heart, which he did not seem to believe. He was stanch. He settled up everything. Some day I will thank him for it. For two years I traveled about a good deal. Sigmund has been more a citizen of the world than he knows. I had so much facility of execution—"

"So much genius, you mean," I interposed.

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"That I never had any difficulty in getting an engagement. I saw a wonderful amount of life of a certain kind, and learned most thoroughly to despise my own past, and to entertain a thorough contempt for those who are still leading such lives. I have learned German history in my banishment. I have lived with our trues heroes—the lower middle-classes."

"Well, well! You were always a radical, Eugen," said the count, indulgently.

"At last, at Köln I obtained the situation of first violinist in the Elberthal Kapelle, and I went over there one wet October afternoon and saw the director, von Francius. He was busy, and referred me to the man who was next below me, Friedhelm Helfen."

Eugen paused, and choked down some little emotion ere he added:

"You must know him. I trust to have his friendship till death separates us. He is a nobleman of nature's most careful making—a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*. When Sigmund came here it

was he who saved me from doing something desperate or driveling—there is not much of a step between the two. Fräulein Sartorius, who seems to have a peculiar disposition, took it into her head to confront me with a charge of my guilt at a public place. Friedhelm never wavered, despite my shame and my inability to deny the charge.”

“Oh, dear, how beautiful!” said the countess, in tears.

“We must have him over here and see a great deal of him.”

“We must certainly know him, and that soon,” said Count Bruno.

At this juncture I, from mingled motives, stole from the room, and found my way to Sigmund’s bedside, where also joy awaited me. The stupor and the restlessness had alike vanished; he was in a deep sleep. I knelt down by the bedside and remained there long.

Nothing, then, was to be as I had planned it. There would be no poverty, no shame to contend against—no struggle to make, except the struggle up to the standard—so fearfully severe and unapproachable, set up by my own husband. Set up and acted upon by him. How could I ever attain it or anything near it? Should I not be constantly shocking him by coarse, gross notions as to the needlessness of this or that fine point of conduct? by my ill-defined ideas as to a code of honor—my slovenly ways of looking at questions?

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It was such a fearful height, this to which he had carried his notions and behavior in the matter of chivalry and loyalty. How was I ever to help him to carry it out, and moreover, to bring up this child before me, and perhaps children of my own in the same rules?

It was no doubt a much more brilliant destiny which actually awaited me than any which I had anticipated—the wife of a nobleman, with the traditions of a long line of noblemen and noblewomen to support, and a husband with the most impossible ideas upon the subject.

I felt afraid. I thought of that poor, vain, selfish first wife, and I wondered if ever the time might come when I might fall in his eyes as she had fallen, for scrupulous though he was to cast no reproach upon her, I felt keenly that he despised her, that had she lived, after that dreadful discovery he would never have loved her again. It was awful to think of. True, I should never commit forgery; but I might, without knowing it, fail in some other way, and then—woe to me!

Thus dismally cogitating I was roused by a touch on my shoulder and a kiss on the top of my head. Eugen was leaning over me, laughing.

“You have been saying your prayers so long that I was sure you must be asking too much.”

I confided some of my doubts and fears to him, for with his actual presence that dreadful height of morality seemed to dwindle down. He was human too—quick, impulsive, a very mortal. And he said:

“I would ask thee one thing, May. Thou dost not seem to see what makes all the difference. I loved Vittoria: I longed to make some sacrifice for her, would she but have let me. But she could not; poor girl! She did not love me.”

“Well?”

“Well! *Mein Engel*—you do,” said he, laughing.

“Oh, I see!” said I, feeling myself blushing violently. Yes, it was true. Our union should be different from that former one. After all it was pleasant to find that the high tragedy which we had so wisely planned for ourselves had made a *faux pas* and come ignominiously to ground.

CHAPTER XLI.

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“And surely, when all this is
past
They shall not want their
rest at last.”

On the 23d of December—I will not say how few or how many years after those doings and that violent agitation which my friend Gräfin May has striven to make coherent in the last chapter—I, with my great-coat on my arm, stood waiting for the train which was to bear me ten miles away from the sleepy old musical ducal Hauptstadt, in which I am Herzoglicher Kapellmeister, to Rothenfels, where I was bidden to spend Christmas. I had not long to wait. Having ascertained that my bag was safe, in which reposed divers humble proofs of my affection for the friends of the past, I looked leisurely out as the train came in for a second-class carriage, and very soon found what I wanted. I shook hands with an acquaintance, and leaned out of the window, talking to him till the train started. Then for the first time I began to look at my fellow-traveler; a lady, and most distinctly not one of my own countrywomen, who, whatever else they may excel in, emphatically do not know how to clothe themselves for traveling. Her veil was down, but her face was turned

toward me, and I thought I knew something of the grand sweep of the splendid shoulders and majestic bearing of the stately form. She soon raised her veil, and looking at me, said, with a grave bow:

"Herr Helfen, how do you do?"

"Ah, pardon me, *gnädige Frau*; for the moment I did not recognize you. I hope you are well."

"Quite well, thank you," said she, with grave courtesy; but I saw that her beautiful face was thin and worn, her pallor greater than ever.

She had never been a person much given to mirthfulness; but now she looked as if all smiles had passed forever from her lips—a certain secret sat upon them, and closed them in an outline, sweet, but utterly impenetrable.

"You are going to Rothenfels, I presume?" she said.

"Yes. And you also?"

"I also—somewhat against my will; but I did not want to hurt my sister's feelings. It is the first time I have left home since my husband's death."

I bowed. Her face did not alter. Calm, sad, and staid—whatever storms had once shaken that proud heart, they were lulled forever now. [Pg 367]

Two years ago Adelaide von Francius had buried keen grief and sharp anguish, together with vivid hope or great joy, with her noble husband, whom we had mourned bitterly then, whom we yet mourn in our hearts, and whom we shall continue to mourn as long as we live.

May's passionate conviction that he and she should meet again had been fulfilled. They had met, and each had found the other unchanged; and Adelaide had begun to yield to the conviction that her sister's love was love, pure and simple, and not pity. Since his death she had continued to live in the town in which their married life had been passed—a life which for her was just beginning to be happy—that is to say, she was just learning to allow herself to be happy, in the firm assurance of his unalterable love and devotion, when the summons came; a sharp attack, a short illness, all over—eyes closed, lips, too—silent before her for evermore.

It has often been my fate to hear criticisms both on von Francius and his wife, and upon their conduct. This I know, that she never forgave herself the step she had taken in her despair. Her pride never recovered from the burden laid upon it—that she had taken the initiative, had followed the man who had said farewell to her. Bad her lot was to be, sad, and joyless, whether in its gilded cage, or linked with the man whom she loved, but to be with whom she had had to pay so terrible a price. I have never heard her complain of life and the world; yet she can find neither very sweet, for she is an extremely proud woman, who has made two terrible failures in her affairs.

Von Francius, before he died, had made a mark not to be erased in the hearts of his musical compatriots. Had he lived—but that is vain! Still, one feels—one can now but feel—that, as his widow said to me, with matter-of-fact composure:

"He was much more hardly to be spared than such a person as I, Herr Helfen. If I might have died and left him to enrich and gladden the world, I should have felt that I had not made such a mess of everything after all."

Yet she never referred to him as "my poor husband," or by any of those softening terms by which some people approach the name of a dead dear one; all the same we knew quite well that with him life had died for her. [Pg 368]

Since his death, she and I had been in frequent communication; she was editing a new edition of his works, for which, after his death, there had been an instant call. It had lately been completed; and the music of our former friend shall, if I mistake not, become, in the best and highest sense of the word, popular music—the people's music. I had been her eager and, she was pleased to say, able assistant in the work.

We journeyed on together through the winter country, and I glanced at her now and then—at the still, pale face which rose above her English-fashioned sealskin, and wondered how it was that some faces, though never so young and beautiful, have written upon them in unmistakable characters, "The End," as one saw upon her face. Still, we talked about all kinds of matters—musical, private, and public. I asked if she went out at all.

"Only to concerts with the von —s, who have been friends of mine ever since I went to —," she replied; and then the train rolled into the station of Lahnburg.

There was a group of faces I knew waiting to meet us.

"Ah! there is my sister Stella," said Adelaide, in a low voice. "How she is altered! And that is May's husband, I suppose. I remember his face now that I see it."

We had been caught sight of. Four people came crowding round us. Eugen—my eyes fell upon him first—we grasped hands silently. His wife, looking lovelier than ever in her winter furs and feathers. A tall boy in a sealskin cap—my Sigmund—who had been hanging on his father's arm, and whose eyes welcomed me more volubly than his tongue, which was never given to excessive

wagging.

May and Frau von Francius went home in a carriage which Sigmund, under the direction of an awful-looking Kutscher, drove.

Stella, Eugen, and I walked to Rothenfels, and they quarreled, as they always did, while I listened and gave an encouraging word to each in turn. Stella Wedderburn was very beautiful; and after spending Christmas at Rothenfels, she was going home to be married. Eugen, May, and Sigmund were going too, for the first time since May's marriage.

Graf Bruno that year had temporarily abdicated his throne, and Eugen had been constituted host for the season. The guests were his and his wife's; the arrangements were his, and the entertainment fell to his share. [Pg 369]

Gräfin Hildegarde looked a little amazed at such of her guests, for instance, as Karl Linders. She had got over the first shock of seeing me a regular visitor in the house, and was pleased to draw me aside on this occasion, and inform me that really that young man, Herr Linders, was presentable—quite presentable—and never forgot himself; he had handed her into her carriage yesterday really quite creditably. No doubt it was long friendship with Eugen which had given him that extra polish.

"Indeed, Frau Gräfin, he was always like that. It is natural."

"He is very presentable, really—very. But as a friend of Eugen's," and she smiled condescendingly upon me, "he would naturally be so."

In truth, Karl was Karl. "Time had not thinned his flowing locks;" he was as handsome, as impulsive, and as true as ever; had added two babies to his responsibilities, who, with his beloved Frau Gemahlin, had likewise been bidden to this festivity, but had declined to quit the stove and private Christmas-tree of home life. He wore no more short jackets now; his sister Gretchen was engaged to a young doctor, and Karl's head was growing higher—as it deserved—for it had no mean or shady deeds to bow it.

The company then consisted *in toto* of Graf and Gräfin von Rothenfels, who, I must record it, both looked full ten years younger and better since their prodigal was returned to them, of Stella Wedderburn, Frau von Francius, Karl Linders, and Friedhelm Helfen. May, as I said, looked lovelier than ever. It was easy to see that she was the darling of the elder brother and his wife. She was a radiant, bright creature, yet her deepest affections were given to sad people—to her husband, to her sister Adelaide, to Countess Hildegarde.

She and Eugen are well mated. It is true he is not a very cheerful man—his face is melancholy. In his eyes is a shadow which never wholly disappears—lines upon his broad and tranquil brow which are indelible. He has honor and titles, and a name clean and high before men, but it was not always so. That terrible bringing to reason—that six years' grinding lesson of suffering, self-suppression—ay, self-effacement—have left their marks, a "shadow plain to see," and will never leave him. He is a different man from the outcast who stepped forth into the night with a weird upon him, nor ever looked back till it was dreed out in darkness to its utmost term. [Pg 370]

He has tasted of the sorrows—the self-brought sorrows which make merry men into sober ones, the sorrows which test a man and prove his character to be of gold or of dross, and therefore he is grave. Grave too is the son who is more worshiped by both him and his wife than any of their other children. Sigmund von Rothenfels is what outsiders call "a strange, incomprehensible child;" seldom smiles, and has no child friends. His friends are his father and "Mother May"—Mütterchen he calls her; and it is quaint sometimes to see how on an equality the three meet and associate. His notions of what is fit for a man to be and do he takes from his father; his ideal woman—I am sure he has one—would, I believe, turn out to be a subtle and impossible compound of May and his aunt Hildegarde.

We sometimes speculate as to what he will turn out. Perhaps the musical genius which his father will not bring before the world in himself may one day astonish that world in Sigmund. It is certain that his very life seems bound up in the art, and in that house and that circle it must be a very Caliban, or something yet lower, which could resist the influence.

One day May, Eugen, Karl, and I, repaired to the music-room and played together the Fourth Symphonie and some of Schumann's "Kinderscenen," but May began to cry before it was over, and the rest of us had thoughts that did lie too deep for tears—thoughts of that far-back afternoon of Carnival Monday, and how we "made a sunshine in a shady place"—of all that came before—and after.

Between me and Eugen there has never come a cloud, nor the faintest shadow of one. Built upon days passed together in storm and sunshine, weal and woe, good report and evil report, our union stands upon a firm foundation of that nether rock of friendship, perfect trust, perfect faith, love stronger than death, which makes a peace in our hearts, a mighty influence in our lives which very truly "passeth understanding."

THE END.

In the spring of '48, I was called to Jackson to attend court, having been engaged to defend a young man who had been accused of robbing the mail. I had a long conference with my client, and he acknowledged to me that on the night when the mail was robbed he had been with a party of dissipated companions over to Topham, and that on returning, they met the mail-carrier on horseback coming from Jackson. Some of his companions were very drunk, and they proposed to stop the carrier and overhaul his bag. The roads were very muddy at the time, and the coach could not run. My client assured me that he not only had no hand in robbing the mail, but that he tried to dissuade his companions from doing so. But they would not listen to him. One of them slipped up behind the carrier, and knocked him from his horse. Then they bound and blindfolded him, and having tied him to a tree, they took his mail-bag, and made off into a neighboring field, where they overhauled it, finding some five hundred dollars in money in the various letters. He went with them, but in no way did he have any hand in the crime. Those who did do it had fled, and, as the carrier had recognized him as in the party, he had been arrested.

The mail-bag had been found, as well as the letters. Those letters from which money had been taken, were kept, by order of the officers, and duplicates sent to the various persons, to whom they were directed, announcing the particulars. These letters had been given me for examination, and I had then returned them to the prosecuting attorney.

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I got through with my private preliminaries about noon, and as the case would not come up before the next day, I went into the court in the afternoon, to see what was going on. The first case which came up was one of theft, and the prisoner was a young girl, not more than seventeen years of age, named Elizabeth Madworth. She was very pretty, and bore that mild, innocent look, which we seldom find in a culprit.

The complaint against her set forth that she had stolen one hundred dollars from a Mrs. Naseby; and as the case went on, I found that this Mrs. Naseby was her mistress, she (Mrs. N.) being a wealthy widow, living in the town. The poor girl declared her innocence in the wildest terms, and called on God to witness that she would rather die than steal. But circumstances were hard against her. A hundred dollars, in bank notes had been stolen from her mistress's room, and she was the only one who had access there.

At this juncture, while the mistress was upon the witness stand, a young man came and caught me by the arm.

"They tell me you are a good lawyer?" he whispered.

"I am a lawyer," I answered.

"Then—oh!—save her! You can certainly do it, for she is innocent."

"Has she no counsel?" I asked.

"None that's good for anything—nobody that'll do anything for her. Oh, save her, and I'll pay you all I've got. I can't pay you much, but I can raise something."

I reflected for a moment. I cast my eyes toward the prisoner, and she was at that moment looking at me. She caught my eye, and the volume of humble, prayerful entreaty I read in those large, tearful orbs, resolved me in a moment. I arose and went to the girl, and asked her if she wished me to defend her. She said yes. Then I informed the court that I was ready to enter into the case, and I was admitted at once.

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I asked for a moment's cessation, that I might speak with my client. I went and sat down by her side, and asked her to state candidly the whole case. She told me she had lived with Mrs. Naseby nearly two years, and that during all that time she had never had any trouble before. About two weeks ago, she said, her mistress lost a hundred dollars.

"She missed it from her drawer," the girl told me, "and she asked me about it, but I knew nothing of it. The next thing I knew, Nancy Luther told Mrs. Naseby that she saw me take the money from her drawer—that she watched me through the keyhole. Then they went to my trunk, and they found twenty-five dollars of the missing money there. But, oh, sir, I never took it—and somebody else put that money there!"

I then asked her if she suspected any one.

"I don't know," she said, "who could have done it but Nancy. She has never liked me, because she thought I was treated better than she was. She is the cook, and I was the chamber-maid."

She pointed Nancy Luther out to me. She was a stout, bold-faced girl, somewhere about five-and-twenty years old, with a low forehead, small gray eyes, a pug nose and thick lips.

"Oh, sir, can you help me?" my client asked, in a fearful whisper.

"Nancy Luther, did you say that girl's name was?" I asked, for a new light had broken in upon me.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any other girl of that name about here?"

"No, sir."

"Then rest easy. I'll try hard to save you."

I left the courtroom, and went to the prosecuting attorney and asked him for the letters I had handed him—the ones that had been stolen from the mail-bag. He gave them to me, and, having selected one, I returned the rest, and told him I would see that he had the one I kept before night. I then returned to the courtroom, and the case went on.

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Mrs. Naseby resumed her testimony. She said she entrusted her room to the prisoner's care, and that no one else had access there save herself. Then she described about missing the money, and closed by telling how she found twenty-five dollars of it in the prisoner's trunk. She could swear it was the identical money she had lost, it being in two tens and one five-dollar bill.

"Mrs. Naseby," said I, "when you first missed your money, had you any reason to believe that the prisoner had it?"

"No, sir," she answered.

"Had you ever before detected her in any dishonesty?"

"No, sir."

"Should you have thought of searching her trunk, had not Nancy Luther advised you and informed you?"

"No, sir."

Mrs. Naseby then left the stand, and Nancy Luther took her place. She came up with a bold look, and upon me she cast a defiant glance, as much as to say "Trap me, if you can." She gave her evidence as follows:

She said that on the night when the money was stolen she saw the prisoner going upstairs, and from the sly manner in which she went up, she suspected all was not right. So she followed her up. "Elizabeth went into Mrs. Naseby's room, and shut the door after her. I stooped down and looked through the keyhole, and saw her at the mistress's drawer. I saw her take out the money and put it in her pocket. Then she stooped down and picked up the lamp, and as I saw that she was coming out, I hurried away." Then she went on and told how she had informed her mistress of this, and how she proposed to search the girl's trunk.

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I called Mrs. Naseby back to the stand.

"You say that no one save yourself and the prisoner had access to your room," I said. "Now, could Nancy Luther have entered that room, if she wished?"

"Certainly, sir. I meant no one else had any right there."

I saw that Mrs. N., though naturally a hard woman, was somewhat moved by poor Elizabeth's misery.

"Could your cook have known, by any means in your knowledge, where your money was?"

"Yes, sir; for she has often come up to my room when I was there, and I have given her money with which to buy provisions of marketmen who happened along with their wagons."

"One more question: Have you known of the prisoner's having used any money since this was stolen?"

"No, sir."

I now called Nancy Luther back, and she began to tremble a little, though her look was as bold and defiant.

"Miss Luther," I said, "why did you not inform your mistress at once of what you had seen without waiting for her to ask you about the lost money?"

"Because I could not make up my mind at once to expose the poor young girl," she answered, promptly.

"You say you looked through the keyhole and saw her take the money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did she place the lamp, while she did so?"

"On the bureau."

"In your testimony, you said she stooped down when she picked it up. What did you mean by that?"

The girl hesitated, and finally said she didn't mean anything, only that she picked up the lamp.

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"Very well," said I. "How long have you been with Mrs. Naseby?"

"Not quite a year, sir."

"How much does she pay you a week?"

"A dollar and three-quarters."

"Have you taken up any of your pay since you have been there?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why don't you know?"

"How should I? I've taken it at different times, just as I wanted it, and have kept no account."

"Now, if you had had any wish to harm the prisoner, couldn't you have raised twenty-five dollars to put in her trunk?"

"No, sir," she replied, with virtuous indignation.

"Then you have not laid up any money since you have been there?"

"No, sir—only what Mrs. Naseby may owe me."

"Then you didn't have twenty-five dollars when you came there?"

"No, sir; and what's more, the money found in the girl's trunk was the very money that Mrs. Naseby lost. You might have known that, if you'd only remember what you hear."

"Will you tell me if you belong to this State?" I asked next.

"I do, sir."

"In what town?"

She hesitated, and for an instant the bold look forsook her. But she finally answered:

"I belong in Somers, Montgomery County."

I next turned to Mrs. Naseby.

"Do you ever take a receipt from your girls when you pay them?" I asked.

"Always," she answered.

"Can you send and get one of them for me?"

She said she would willingly go, if the court said so. The court did say so, and she went. Her dwelling was not far off, and she soon returned, and handed me four receipts, which I took and examined. They were all signed in a strange, straggling hand, by the witness.

"Now, Nancy Luther," said I, turning to the witness, "please tell the court, and the jury, and tell me, too, where you got the seventy-five dollars you sent in a letter to your sister in Somers?"

The witness started as though a volcano had burst at her feet. She turned pale as death, and every limb shook violently. I waited until the people could have an opportunity to see her emotion, and then I repeated the question.

"I—never—sent—any," she fairly gasped.

"You did!" I thundered, for I was excited now.

"I—I—didn't," she faintly uttered, grasping the rail by her side for support.

"May it please your honor, and gentlemen of the jury," I said, as soon as I had looked the witness out of countenance, "I came here to defend a youth who had been arrested for helping to rob the mail, and in the course of my preliminary examinations, I had access to the letters which had been torn open and rifled of money. When I entered upon this case, and I heard the name of this witness pronounced, I went out and got the letter which I now hold, for I remembered to have seen one bearing the signature of Nancy Luther. This letter was taken from the mail-bag, and it contained seventy-five dollars, and by looking at the post-mark, you will observe that it was mailed on the very next day after the hundred dollars were taken from Mrs. Naseby's drawer. I will read it to you, if you please."

The court nodded assent, and I read the following, which was without date, save that made by the post-master upon the outside. I give it here verbatim:

"SISTER DORCAS: I cend yu heer sevente fiv dolers, which i want yu to kepe for me till i cum hum. I can't kepe it heer coz ime afrade it will git stole. don't speke wun word tu a livin sole bout this coz I don't want nobodi tu kno i hav got enny mony. yu wont now wil yu. i am first rate heer, only that gude fur nuthin snipe of liz madwurth is heer yit—but i hop tu git red ov her now. yu no i rote yu bout her. give my luv to awl inquiren friends. this is from your sister til deth. NANCY LUTHER."

"Now, your honor," I said, as I handed him the letter, and also the receipts, "you will see that the

letter is directed to 'Dorcas Luther, Somers, Montgomery County.' And you will also observe that one hand wrote that letter and signed those receipts. The jury will also observe. And now I will only add: It is plain to see how the hundred dollars were disposed of. Seventy-five were put into that letter and sent off for safe-keeping, while the remaining twenty-five were placed in the prisoner's trunk for the purpose of covering the real criminal."

The case was given to the jury immediately following their examination of the letter. Without leaving their seats, they returned a verdict of—"Not Guilty."

The youth, who had first asked me to defend the prisoner, caught me by the hand, but he could not speak plainly. He simply looked at me through his tears for a moment, and then rushed to the fair prisoner. He seemed to forget where he was, for he flung his arms about her, and as she laid her head upon his bosom, she wept aloud.

I will not attempt to describe the scene that followed; but if Nancy Luther had not been immediately arrested for theft, she would have been obliged to seek the protection of the officers, or the excited people would surely have maimed her, if they had done no more. On the next morning, I received a note, very handsomely written, in which I was told that "the within" was but a slight token of the gratitude due me for my effort in behalf of a poor, defenseless, but much loved, maiden. It was signed "Several Citizens," and contained one hundred dollars. Shortly afterward, the youth came to pay me all the money he could raise. I simply showed him the note I had received, and asked him if he would keep his hard earnings for his wife, when he got one. He owned that he intended to make Lizzie Madworth his wife very soon.

[Pg A-11]

I will only add that on the following day I succeeded in clearing my next client from conviction of robbing the mail; and I will not deny that I made a considerable handle of the fortunate discovery of the letter which had saved an innocent girl, on the day before, in my appeal to the jury; and if I made them feel that the finger of Omnipotence was in the work, I did it because I sincerely believe my client was innocent of all crime; and I am sure they thought so too.

FOOTNOTES:

- [A] *Caput*—a German slang expression with the general significance of the English "gone to smash," but also a hundred other and wider meanings, impossible to render in brief.
- [B] The original is by Charles Herman, of Brussels.
- [C] *Helfen*—to help.
- [D] The German custom on an engagement taking place is to announce it with the above words, signifying "M. and N. announce (recommend) themselves as betrothed." This appears in the newspaper—as a marriage with us.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES:

1. Minor changes have been made to correct obvious typesetters' errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author's words and intent.
2. The original book did not have a Table of Contents; one has been added for the reader's convenience.
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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FIRST VIOLIN: A NOVEL ***

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