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THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

THE

BREAKING OF THE STORM.

BY

FRIEDRICH SPIELHAGEN.

Translated from the German

BY

S. E. A. H. STEPHENSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL II.

LONDON: RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON. 1877.

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THE BREAKING OF THE STORM.

BOOK III.--*Continued.*

CHAPTER III.

Philip had whispered to Reinhold that he would look him up presently; Reinhold trembled for the result of a meeting between father and son, which could not have occurred at a more unfortunate moment; but it could not be helped, and he determined to employ the interval in saying a few words of comfort, after the scene that had just taken place, to the old clerk whom he had spoken to several times during the last few days, and had learnt to look upon as certainly a peculiar but an excellent and upright man. He found the old man in the little arbour at the end of the narrow walk, between the garden and the building, in the upper story of which he and Anders lived. He was sitting quite broken down on the bench, while Cilli, who was with him, wiped the drops of perspiration from his brow. She recognised Reinhold's step at once, and said, as he

entered the arbour:

"Thank God that you have come, sir! You were present. How did Herr Schmidt take my father's confession? From what my father says, I conclude very badly."

"On the contrary, Fräulein Cilli, my uncle is of opinion that between two such old friends as himself and your father, a merely theoretic difference is of no consequence."

"But if it should not stop at theory," exclaimed the old man, "if the practical consequences are carried out by everybody--"

"But not by you, my dear Herr Kreisel! Answer me one question: would you take advantage of any crisis in business to force from your employer an increase of salary?"

"Never!" exclaimed the old man, "never!"

"You see for yourself! Though you may be perfectly right in theory, between it and practice there lies, in the minds of educated people like yourself, a long and rough road, into which you will never enter, or on which, after the first few steps, you will stand still in horror."

"Ah! yes, my nerves!" murmured the old man; "my nerves are not strong enough for it. I am worn out; I believe he is right after all; an hour's sleep would do me good." He was persuaded by Reinhold and Cilli to go into the house; Reinhold went a little way with him; when he returned to the arbour, Cilli was sitting with her hands before her, and such an expression of deep sorrow and trouble on her pure, gentle face, that it went to Reinhold's heart.

"Dear little Cilli," said Reinhold, sitting down by her and taking her hands in his "do not be so anxious. I give you my word that my uncle does not dream of parting with your father; matters remain between them exactly as before."

"Not exactly," answered Cilli, shaking her head; "since Thursday my father has been quite changed. He has scarcely eaten or slept; and this morning, quite early, he came to my bedside and said that he had no longer any doubts, that he also was a Socialist, and he must tell Herr Schmidt. That was quite right, as we ought always to tell the truth, even in this case, when your uncle will not allow any Socialists on his works. And although, as you tell me, and I believed before, your uncle will make an exception in favour of my father, because he is old and feeble, my father is proud, and will not endure to be merely tolerated, all the more that he is undoubtedly in the right."

"How, my dear Cilli?" asked Reinhold, astonished. "Your father is in the right?"

"Certainly he is," answered Cilli warmly; "is it not wrong that even one man should suffer when others can prevent it? Did not Christ tell us to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to comfort the oppressed and heavy-laden? And if Christ had not commanded it, does not every good man's heart command it?"

"In that case, my dear Cilli, all good men must be Socialists, and even I myself may lay claim to the title; but between the love of our neighbours, as you describe it, and Socialism as these people desire it, there is a wide difference."

"I see none," said Cilli. Reinhold looked at the sightless eyes upraised with an expression of gentle enthusiasm.

"I can well believe that you do not see it, poor child," he said to himself.

"And on that point I am quite easy," continued the blind girl; "men must live up to their convictions, and bear the consequences patiently. And my father and I can do so the more easily, that at the worst we shall not have to bear them long."

"What do you mean, dear Cilli?"

"I know that my father will not live long; the doctor has always feared that he would sink under one of his nervous attacks; and once, when he was very bad, he told me so, that I might be prepared. I am prepared. And if my father could only believe that I should not outlive him long, he would be more easy in his mind. He thinks so much of you; perhaps he would believe you if you assured him of it."

"But how can I, dear Cilli?"

"Because it is only the truth. I am ill; dying of a nervous illness. My blindness, which came on when I was three years old, is only the result of this disease, which I doubtless inherited from my father. When I was eight years old, and had a very bad illness, my parents called in two doctors, and one said to the other as they went out--they said it in a whisper, and probably did not intend me to hear, but they did not know how sharp my hearing is--it would be a miracle if the child lived to be sixteen. I shall be sixteen next spring, and--I do not believe in miracles."

"Doctors often make mistakes; I hope they have made one in your case."

"I do not hope it--I do not wish it."

"But you love life."

"Only because I know that I must die soon, as you all say that I think the world so beautiful only because I am blind. And when my dear father is gone, whom shall I have to live for?"

"For your friends--myself, for example; for Justus, whom you love, and who loves you."

"Who loves me?" The blind girl's sweet mouth quivered. She drew two or three deep breaths, but the tears would not be kept back; they streamed from the poor blind eyes, and trickled through the slender white fingers with which she tried to hide them.

"Cilli! Cilli! what is the matter?" exclaimed Reinhold, seized with a painful foreboding.

"Nothing, nothing," murmured the blind girl. "You see yourself that I am ill--very ill. Hark! whose is that strange step in the courtyard?" Reinhold looked up and recognised Philip, who came rapidly along the walk in search of him without looking into the arbour. He could not bear the idea of being found here by Philip at this moment, he must therefore make up his mind to leave Cilli, who herself implored him to go.

"Leave me! leave me! before you I am not ashamed of my tears. You alone may see me weep." It was high time. Philip had already turned back and came towards him.

"Where the devil have you been? I have been looking for you in your room, and all over the place."

"Your interview with your father cannot have lasted long." Philip laughed bitterly.

"As if it were possible to talk to him! But I swear this shall be the last time. No man in the world would endure it if he were a hundred times his father." Philip was furious; he stormed at his father's blindness and obstinacy. From what he could gather about the course of the interview, Reinhold could not quite justify his uncle, but he could not let pass the outrageous expressions of which the angry man made use.

"Are you going to begin now?" exclaimed Philip. "It is partly your fault. All that the old man said was only what you said to me yourself yesterday. What in the world induced you to set him against a project of which neither of you understand a word? He, in spite of his knowledge of business; you, in spite of your seamanship. What does it signify to you whether the harbour is east or north? Whether it is choked up in one place or goes to the devil in the other? Do you intend to invest your money in it? If others wish to do so, let them. Every one can use his own eyes, and if he comes to grief it is his own look-out. The best of it is that none of you who set your faces against it can hinder the matter from coming to a conclusion; in fact, it is as good as concluded now. Count Golm has joined the Provisional Board; and it would be a good joke if a harbour on the east were decided upon, and Golm and the daughter of our principal opponent, General Werben, who is as obstinate as my father--good heavens! there is young Werben! I hope he did not hear!" This conversation had taken place while they walked up and down between the blocks of marble in the courtyard. Ottomar had learnt at the house from Grollman that Reinhold was in the courtyard, and now came suddenly towards him from behind one of the blocks. He had heard nothing, although Reinhold feared at first that he had from his gloomy and embarrassed air. But his handsome young face cleared the next minute; he held out his hand to him with the greatest cordiality, and then to Philip with less cordiality.

"He had been meaning to come every day, but the worries of military duty! Quite unbearable, my dear fellow! You have no conception what it is; you, especially, my dear Schmidt; you never were in the army, for reasons best known to the doctors. If I had a hand in the matter you should serve your time yet in the Guards. But what brought me here in this hand-over-head fashion was to bring you this invitation from my father and the ladies, with a thousand excuses, but the card had somehow been mislaid yesterday; for this evening--quite a small party--a good many officers, of course, a few ladies, of course also. There will be a little dancing, my sister says, who counts upon you. Of course you dance; and my father, as he told me yesterday, wants very much to talk to you on important matters of which I know nothing; some question about the harbour, I fancy. You see it is absolutely necessary that you should accept. You will accept?"

"With much pleasure."

"That is capital." Ottomar had during the last few words completely turned his back on Philip; he now turned round.

"It will not be quite so lively as it was the other day at your house, my dear Schmidt; it was quite delightful. I heard from Golm that there was no end of a row afterwards, and the ladies were quite off their heads. So sorry I could not come; but I had a fearful headache; and headache, champagne, and pretty girls I have never yet been able to stand in that order, though in the reverse order I have suffered from them only too often."

"Bertalda was in despair," said Philip, who was inwardly greatly irritated at the off-hand manner of the young guardsman.

"Dear little thing!" said Ottomar, shrugging his shoulders. "She says just what comes into her head. She is a jolly little girl. I hope Golm will behave well to her. But is not Herr Anders' studio in this courtyard? His Satyr with the young Bacchus--or is it Cupid?--has made a tremendous sensation. I have never been in a sculptor's studio; would it be too much, my dear fellow, to ask you to get me admitted?" Reinhold was quite willing. Philip remarked carelessly that if the other gentlemen had no objection he would take the opportunity of inquiring about the four marble statues which he had ordered of Anders for his staircase, and of which two must be finished by this time. He had inwardly hoped that Ottomar would be impressed by "the four marble statues." Ottomar did not even appear to have heard him. He walked on in front, with his arm in Reinhold's, to whom he spoke in so low a tone that Philip could not hear what he said, probably was not meant to hear.

"Generous to remind me of it--a *petit souper*--in honour of Count Golm, who appears to be very susceptible of such ovations--slipped in quite by chance--came away immediately. Don't say anything about it."

"Can you suppose----"

"One drops a word sometimes without thinking of it--and it arouses suspicion--the ladies and--*ces dames!*--a very different matter, thank goodness! My sister--your cousin--had the honour casually a few days ago. Should be in despair if a word--the young lady is an artist, my sister tells me. One can hardly picture to oneself an artist, and a lady artist. After you, I beg!" Reinhold, who knew by experience that in consequence of the noise of hammers and chisels in Justus's studio, a knock at the door was seldom heard, had gone before and opened the door at once, and had got some way into the room before he saw, in a corner before a cast at which Justus was working, the latter standing with Ferdinanda. Ottomar and Philip had followed him so quickly, that they had all got into the middle of the large room before the two, who were engaged in earnest conversation and bewildered by the noise around them, heard them come in, till Justus's Lesto--a shaggy little monster, of whom it was difficult to tell which was his head and which was his tail--flew with a loud bark at Philip, whose polished boots seemed to arouse his wrath. In the tumult caused by this bold attack--while Philip, fearing for his trousers, took refuge on a stool, and Justus, nearly dying of laughter, vainly called "Lesto! Lesto!" and the four or five assistants, with Antonio amongst them, moved a few obstacles out of the way, and brought chairs--Reinhold had not noticed the deep blush that overspread Ferdinanda's beautiful face when she perceived Ottomar, and the embarrassment with which the latter greeted her. By the time the confusion was somewhat allayed, and Lesto had subsided into quiet, the two had recovered their presence of mind, and the more easily that the first glance that passed between them was one of reconciliation. He had returned to her after three long anxious days, which she had passed in longing and despair. Now all was made up--all was forgiven and forgotten. After the first happy and tremulous glance, she had not again looked at him, and was now chatting with Reinhold and Philip; but to Ottomar, the fact that she remained, that she did not after the first greeting retire into her studio, the door of which stood open, was an infallible proof of her penitence perhaps, certainly of her love. And then the full, somewhat deep tone of her voice--he seemed to hear it for the first time; and he did hear it for the first time. Till to-day they had only exchanged hasty whispered words. Her laugh--he had never thought that she could laugh--it seemed to him a very miracle; her figure, whose classical form appeared more beautiful in the straight, clinging, grey working dress than it could have done in the most coquettish attire; the rich brown hair, drawn simply back from her brows and loosely knotted together low down in her neck--he had never known how beautiful she was! He stood before finished and unfinished works--they might have been the slides of a magic-lantern; he spoke to one and the other, chatted and joked; he had no idea what he said or what they answered; he was in a dream--a sweet and delicious dream--but for a few minutes only; then he awoke to a sense of the situation in which he found himself--a situation which he could hardly have wished more favourable, and the advantages of which he was determined to profit by with rapid soldier-like courage and rashness. And Ferdinanda was also dreaming the sweet, delicious dream of happy love, while she chatted and laughed with the others; only she never forgot or mistook the danger of the situation. From Reinhold, Justus, and Philip she feared nothing; a little prudence, a little clever acting, would suffice to protect her from any shadow of suspicion as far as they were concerned. But what prudence, however cunning, what acting, however clever, would protect her from Antonio's gleaming black eyes? It was true, he had returned to his work in the farthest corner of the room, and hammered and chiselled away, apparently quite unconcerned with anything that passed around him. But this very quietness, which was only apparent, alarmed her a thousand times more than if his glittering eyes had been continually upon her. What he did not see he heard. She knew the incredible sharpness of his senses; if he did not look round before, he would do so at the moment which she saw approaching. And that moment had come. Ottomar, thinking himself safe, approached her and whispered a word that she did not understand, so low was it breathed. But what matter? She read it in his eyes, on his lips: "I must speak to you alone--in your studio!" But how was it to be managed? The moments were passing; there was so much to be seen in Justus's studio, and the talk seemed endless. There were the four life-sized allegorical figures for Philip's staircase.

"Trade, a bearded man of Oriental appearance and dress, calling to mind Nathan on his journey home. Industry, as you will perceive, rather vaguely represented by a female figure of the present day, with some half-dozen emblems, which may mean anything you please--all possible things--exactly as Industry herself makes everything possible out of all possible things. This

Greek youth, gentlemen, with his winged sandals and hat, may be recognised at any distance as the genius of railroads, as Hermes, if he had lived long enough, would undoubtedly have been appointed Postmaster-General in Olympus. The tall, beautiful, stately lady, in the dress of a Nuremberg lady of rank of the fifteenth century, will be recognised by the mural crown on her head and the square and level in her hand, as patroness of architecture--a neat allusion to the suburban streets which the worthy possessor has had to pull down, in order to build for himself in the middle of the town the house the vestibule of which these masterpieces are to adorn."

"You are responsible for at least half a street, Anders!" cried Philip, laughing.

"Ah!" said Justus, "that is the reason then that the lady looks so gloomy and melancholy under her mural crown! I could not imagine what was the meaning of the expression that, without my intending it--and even against my will--would come out clearer and clearer; the good lady has a pang of conscience which I ought to have had! Will any one say now that we do not bestow our best heart's blood on our creations?"

"This last figure strikes me as being particularly beautiful, if I may venture to make an observation on a matter on which I am profoundly ignorant," said Ottomar, with a glance at Ferdinanda, who strikingly resembled the lady with the mural crown, both in figure and in the haughty expression of the features. Justus, who had caught the glance, laughed. "You are not so ignorant as you pretend, Herr von Werben! You appear to know very well where we get our inspirations. But that you may see that other people can not only inspire forms, but also create very beautiful ones--may we, Fräulein Ferdinanda?" and Justus pointed to the door of her studio.

"Certainly," said Ferdinanda, while her heart beat fast. Now or never was the time. Antonio had not looked round; perhaps he had not heard. It might be possible to go in with Ottomar while the others lingered behind. And so it happened. Philip and Reinhold were disputing about one of the symbols assigned to Trade; Philip, annoyed and irritated by the contradiction that met him on all sides to-day, in a loud, excited voice. Justus, however, was following her and Ottomar closely. As she got to the door, she turned and whispered to him, "Philip is unbearable to-day; do try and make peace between them?" Justus answered, "Oh! it means nothing," but turned back. Ferdinanda entered quickly, followed by Ottomar. She walked a few steps to the left, till she was quite concealed from those in the other studio. Her arms encircled him, while she felt his arms around her. Their lips met, while he tasted the sweetness of her first kiss.

"This evening?"

"As you will."

"Eight o'clock, in the Bellevue Gardens!"

"As you will."

"Darling!"

"Darling!" They did not venture on a second kiss, fortunately, as Justus appeared, bringing with him, for greater security, the disputants. They stood before the "Reaper," while Justus explained that it had been begun in the spring and intended at first for a pendant to the kneeling "Roman Shepherd Boy" in the Exhibition--a girl, who, in the solitude of her maize field, deep in the Campagna, hears the Ave Maria ring out from the neighbouring convent, and who, laying aside her sickle and her sheaf, folds her hands for a moment in prayer; that the figure was nearly completed, attitude, gesture and expression, all quite admirable, and would have done honour to the greatest sculptors; that the greatest sculptors in Berlin had expressed their admiration; the Milanese Enrico Braga, who had been there on a visit in the summer, was quite overpowered. "And now, gentlemen, I ask you whether it is possible for any woman, even the most gifted, to carry out persistently a clearly defined aim! The statue is almost finished, only a few touches are wanted, but those touches are not given; we are not in the vein, we will wait for a more favourable day. One, two months pass, the day does not come; the clay dries up in the most unfortunate manner, breaks and splits everywhere--we have lost all inclination for the work. I had made up my mind, at the risk of the deepest displeasure, to have the 'Reaper' secretly cast at night before it quite fell to pieces; when about four weeks ago, one fine morning, I entered the studio--the sweet, dreamy face, was changed into a Medusa head, whose terrible eyes, under the hand that had in the meantime been laid on her brow, stared into the distance, apparently expecting some one. I should not like to be that some one. Would you, Captain?" Reinhold nodded to the sculptor; the statue had made exactly the same curiously mingled impression upon him, and he had almost expressed it in the same words. He said, smiling: "No, indeed!"

"Put it to the vote!" exclaimed Justus eagerly. "Would you, Herr von Werben?" Ottomar did not answer. The work was begun in the spring; in the spring he had exchanged the first tender love-tokens with Ferdinanda; then had ensued a long, weary interval, during which she had altogether avoided him; and though four weeks ago she had given way to his imploring glances and resumed again their secret understanding, it had acquired in the interval a totally different character; a gloomy, passionate character, from which even he sometimes shrank. Was this the image of her love? Was it he who was here waited for? All this passed through his brain with the speed of lightning, but his fixed glance had betrayed something of what was in his mind.

"Why say so much about it?" exclaimed Ferdinanda; "a work that must be put to the vote is not worthy to exist." She had seized the heavy mallet which lay on the table amongst her other tools and swung it towards the statue. Justus caught hold of her arm.

"Are you mad, Fräulein Ferdinanda? Cannot you understand a joke? I swear to you that it was only a joke! That I admire it even more than the former one! That you have surpassed yourself and me." Justus was quite pale with excitement; the others hastened to assure her that they were quite of the master's opinion, that they thought the statue surpassingly beautiful, that they did not wish to see one feature altered. Ottomar was foremost with his praises, and his beautiful eyes entreated for forgiveness; but Ferdinanda was not to be appeased.

"It is too late," she said, "the sentence has gone forth, and I am too proud, I confess, to accept praise which comes as an afterthought. Calm yourself, Anders; I will not destroy the statue, but I will never finish it, that I swear!"

"And I am to be calm?" exclaimed Justus; "may I break stones in the road if I do, if I--what is it, Antonio?" Antonio had entered, whispered a few words to Anders and then retired; as he went out he cast a gloomy look at the statue of the "Reaper."

"A gentleman from the committee," said Anders, "there is always somebody coming; they will drive me wild. I will be back directly." He hurried into his studio; Ottomar suggested that they had already troubled the young lady too long: he expected that Ferdinanda would press them to stay, but she did not; he bowed. "I hope, Ferdinanda," said Reinhold, "that you will not distress us, I mean all of us, by carrying out your threat and leaving the statue unfinished."

"If you knew me better," said Ferdinanda, "you would know that I always keep my word to myself and to others." These last words she had, as if accidentally, addressed to Ottomar, and accompanied it with a glance which Ottomar understood and returned. Whatever became of the "Reaper," she would come that evening. The door had closed behind the gentlemen; Ferdinanda bolted it and then turned slowly round. Her fixed glance rested first on the spot where she had kissed Ottomar for the first time, and then passed on to the "Reaper." Was it an effect of light, or was it that others' words had first made it plain to her what she had produced? A shudder passed through her.

"I keep my word when I have given it--but I wish I had not given it!"

CHAPTER IV.

Ferdinanda had long ago emancipated herself from all control on the part of her aunt. She was accustomed to go and come as she pleased; the only point on which it was necessary to be attentive was punctuality at meals. Her father was very particular about this, only Aunt Rikchen declared, in order that he might worry her out of her five senses if she ever happened to be delayed by her household duties or other matters, as could hardly be avoided by such a poor creature. Ferdinanda was aware also that her father avoided every opportunity of being alone with his sister, and that it was therefore an especial annoyance to him if she herself stayed away from meals on any pretence. Under such circumstances her father always took his meals by himself in his own room. But this had very rarely happened, even in former days, and scarcely ever happened now. Ferdinanda had almost entirely withdrawn herself from all her friends; she said often that she had no friends, only acquaintances, and that she did not care much about them. To-day she must pretend to visit some friend, and leave word at home that she should not probably be back to supper, which was always served at nine o'clock punctually. Her pride revolted at the necessity of the lie, and such an improbable one, but she had given her word; whether good or evil came of it, her fate was decided--the deed must be done. She went therefore at half-past seven, with her bonnet and cloak on, down to her aunt, who was invariably to be found at that hour in the sitting-room behind the dining-room, where, in her seat near the window, she could count her stitches by the fading light, watch the passers-by without trouble, and, as Uncle Ernst said, indulge her fancies quite undisturbed. The latter employment was the most successful to-day; the stitches were very difficult to count, in consequence of the gloomy weather, and the same cause had diminished the number of passers-by, "as if they were all on strike, like those abominable work-people;" besides the butcher had brought for the next day a miserable leg of veal, which, that silly Trine, the cook, ought never to have taken in, and for her punishment must take back again, although Heaven only knew how she was to get the supper ready all alone, for as for Trine being back in less than an hour, she knew the idle thing better than that. And now Ferdinanda was going out--was going to spend the evening out! Aunt Rikchen in despair snatched her spectacles from her nose, and let her stocking, with the stitches she had only just picked up, fall into her lap.

"Good gracious! has everything combined against poor me to-day?" she exclaimed. "Reinhold has just been in to say that he will not be at home either."

"Where is Reinhold?"

"Oh! did not he tell you? Quite a large *soirée*--that is what you call it? He supposed he must put on his uniform."

"At whose house?"

"At the Werbens'! Young Herr von Werben came here himself this morning. You saw him in your studio, by-the-bye! I know nothing about it!--of course I know nothing about it. At eight o'clock. It must be half-past seven already." Ferdinanda's countenance fell. "At the Werben's! At eight o'clock! How could that be!"

"And where are you going, if I may venture to ask?" Ferdinanda told the lie she had prepared. She had spoken to Fräulein Marfolk the artist at the Exhibition; Fräulein Marfolk had given her such a pressing invitation to go and see her again; she had some curiosities and photographs to show her, which she had brought from Rome; this evening she happened to be disengaged. Professor Seefeld from Karlsruhe would be there also, who was most anxious to make Ferdinanda's acquaintance. She had accepted, and could not draw back now.

"And poor I must eat my supper alone again!" said Aunt Rikchen; "for he had rather eat a live crocodile with its skin and bones, in company with seven Hottentots, than a comfortable mutton-cutlet with his poor old sister. Well, I must bear it. I must bear everything. If the whole business stands still, my poor intellect can stand still too, and my poor old heart with it." Her misery was too great; Aunt Rikchen burst into tears.

"What is the good of exciting yourself so unnecessarily?" asked Ferdinanda impatiently.

"Exciting myself so unnecessarily!" exclaimed Aunt Rikchen. "Of course you think everything unnecessary. But I see it coming. I noticed the people as they went away this morning, how they stood there in the street and stared up at the house, and shook their fists threateningly, and abused the police who were dragging away those two wretches, Schwarz and Brandt, and that silly boy Carl Peters; and they abused your father, too. It was shocking to hear them! It makes me shudder when I think of it, and of what may still happen, for we have not seen the end yet--of that you may be sure. But you don't excite yourself of course--not you!"

"I could not prevent it, and can do nothing against it," said Ferdinanda.

"You might have prevented it, and you could still do something before matters come to the worst, and they burn the roof over our heads!" exclaimed Aunt Rikchen; "but I cannot see my hand before my eyes; I cannot distinguish a church-tower from a knitting-needle."

"The old song!" said Ferdinanda.

"Every bird sings as he has learned," exclaimed Aunt Rikchen; "and if my ways do not please you, it is only because in these days every chicken is wiser than the hen; for if I am not your mother, I have worried myself as much as two mothers about you, and have asked myself a hundred thousand times what is to come of it? But perhaps Providence may have willed it so; it is always, one way or another, kinder to you than to other people. And I am not at all sure that your father has not always intended it so, for I always had my suspicions of that thick red pencil, when no one else was allowed to touch his plans with a finger; and any old woman can see how highly he thinks of him, and he is extremely brave and good, and it would keep the family together, if you were wise and married him before in these bad times everything flies up the chimney."

"Reinhold?"

"Did you think I meant the Emperor of Fez and Morocco? But you only pretend to be astonished, and jump up off your chair in order to make a poor old thing like me tremble in all her limbs, as if my nerves were not already sufficiently dérangés--that is what you call it, is not it?"

"I got up because it is high time for me to go," said Ferdinanda. "Good-bye, aunt." She had gone a few steps towards the door, when the portière which covered it was slowly drawn aside.

"Mi perdona, Signora! Signora Frederica, your most obedient servant!" Ferdinanda stood still in horror.

"What did Antonio come for at this moment?"

"Mi perdona!" repeated Antonio. "I fear that the ladies did not hear me knock at the door, so I ventured to walk in." And he pointed carelessly in his easy Italian fashion to some books which he held in his hand.

"This is not the day for our lesson," said Ferdinanda.

"I cannot come to-morrow, signora, so I ventured--"

"I have no time to-day. You see I am just going out." She said it in a hasty tone, for which there was apparently not the smallest occasion, and which was a wonderful contrast to the Italian's courteous, "Mi ritiro, e le domando perdona--buona sera, signora," and the low bow with which he passed again through the portière.

"Why were you so sharp with the young man?" asked Aunt Rikchen. Ferdinanda did not answer; she was listening for the soft footstep as it retired, and for the sound of the closing door. Would it be the glass door leading to the garden, or the other one which led to the entrance hall? It was the glass door; he had not gone out then. And yet. Why had she said that she was going out? Should she give it up? But there was no time to think. With a half-murmured: "Good-bye, aunt, I will make haste back," she had left the room and was standing in the street, almost without knowing how she had got there. She had intended to take a cab at the corner of the street, but the stand was empty; she must make up her mind to walk along the Springbrunnenstrasse as far as the Parkstrasse, where she hoped to find one. Perhaps it would be better; she could more easily make sure of not being followed than in a close carriage. As she walked hastily along she looked back two or three times; a few people met her; no one was behind her; she breathed more freely; he had not followed her. She feared no one but him. But he whom she feared to see behind her was at that moment far in front. Since this morning Antonio had felt certain that the relations between the handsome young officer and Ferdinanda had entered on a new stage, and probably something was going to take place, something that he must know at any price, that he would know, however secretly they might go about it. He had, therefore, made the lesson which he gave her once a week in his own language, an excuse for approaching her, in order to find fresh food for his jealous curiosity, which imagined all possible things. He had found her, who so seldom left the house in the evening, ready to go out, without having ordered the carriage as she usually did. She had sharply rebuffed him, as if she suspected his motive; and what at another time would have irritated him, now delighted him; his suspicions had taken a definite form; a rendezvous was in question! His determination to follow on her track was made even before the portière had closed behind him. He had purposely shut the garden door loudly in order that Ferdinanda might believe that he had not left the grounds. But when he got into the garden he had turned to the right and passed through an iron gate into the court-yard, and in a few steps was in the entrance hall, through which he passed into the street. The cab-stand at the corner was his first aim also; he was obliged to pass the window at which Aunt Rikchen sat; but if he stooped his head would be hidden by the elder bush in the front garden. It was a disappointment to find the cab-stand empty, but she would experience the same disappointment, but not before she got to the corner of the street. At this corner there was a small public-house which the workmen belonging to the studio were in the habit of frequenting. He sprang down the steps, and stationed himself at the window opposite the cab-stand. It was a mere chance--she might go towards the town, or might already have done so; but no! there she was! She paused a few moments exactly as he had done himself, and came then past the window behind which he was concealed; his eyes were on a level with the pavement; he could see her slender feet as she walked quickly along, with her dress slightly raised. He let her get a little in advance, then emerged again, assured himself that she was walking down the street, dashed across the street and ran up the Kanalstrasse towards a private path that ran between villas and gardens parallel with the Springbrunnenstrasse and led also to the Parkstrasse. This narrow lane was now, as almost always, quite deserted; he could run along it without exciting any attention--not that he would have cared about that; he should reach the Parkstrasse some minutes before she did. Arrived there, he flew across the street, and stationed himself between the shrubs in the Thiergarten, in such a manner that he could command the opposite side of the Parkstrasse and the opening of the three side streets. The opening of the private path immediately before him was no longer of any consequence to him, but she must come along the Springbrunnenstrasse on the left, and at the corner of the last side street to the right there was a cab-stand. She might, it was true, turn to the left, towards the town, but he would still see her, and he was convinced that she would turn to the right. And she did turn to the right. She emerged from the Springbrunnenstrasse and walked quickly along the opposite side by the houses, past the cross street to where the cabs stood. There were two cabs, she took the first; the driver of the second politely shut the door after her, and then as the first driver drove off, seized the reins and drew his horse forward. The next moment Antonio was by his side.

"Where to?" asked the driver,

"Where that cab goes."

"To the Grosse Stern, then." Antonio drew back his foot which was already on the step. The Grosse Stern, at the opposite side of the Thiergarten, where the Charlottenburg Avenue is crossed by several other paths, was not a favourable place for a pursuit in a carriage, which in the great Platz, and indeed on the way there, must excite remark and suspicion. There was a surer way. What signified to him the energetic curse which the disappointed cab-driver sent after him, as Antonio hastened past him along the road into the Thiergarten! The Grosse Stern Avenue, a broad ride, shadowed by old trees, by the side of which were foot-paths, led, as he knew, right across the Thiergarten to the Grosse Stern; Ferdinanda's cab must go round by the Corso Avenue. It was not much out of the way, and her cab went unusually quickly; but he was in the direct path, and could depend upon his muscles and sinews. He ran the several thousand yards that he had to go with wonderful rapidity, heeding as little the beating of his heart as the bloodhound heeds it when on the track of a stag; in fact, the immense exertion seemed to refresh him by overpowering for the moment his pangs of jealousy. He had reached his destination; the

Platz lay before him; an omnibus coming from Charlottenburg rattled by without stopping; a few carts were coming from the town; between them, and then in front of them, a cab came rapidly along. It must be he! Antonio had hidden himself amongst the bushes--he would be quite safe here: behind him was the entire park, where he could, at the worst, at any moment retreat into the darkness; and the bushes were so thick that the danger of being detected from the Platz was very slight, while he could see everything that passed there. The cab from the town had stopped; a gentleman sprang out. The cab immediately turned round and drove back to the town; the gentleman walked slowly along the Platz without stopping, looking around him on all sides. Antonio was startled at the first glance; the gentleman was not in uniform. Then with a scornful "Bestia!" he struck his forehead; and now that the gentleman passed his hiding-place at a short distance, he recognised his detested enemy by his slight figure and easy movements. It was too dark to see his features distinctly. But what matter? He knew quite well who was before him, and his hand grasped more firmly the handle of his stiletto, which he had drawn out, as a huntsman takes aim even when he knows that he is not within shot; and he gnashed his white teeth as at this moment the cab which he had passed came round the corner of the Corso Avenue, turned on to the Platz, and there stopped, but only for a moment, only that the man he hated might say a few words through the open door, then jump in and close the door behind him. The cab went on across the Platz, along the road to the Bellevue Schloss, and then disappeared amongst the trees. Antonio murmured through his teeth the bitterest curse that he knew. The pursuit was at an end. He could not take a short cut, because he did not know what direction they would take; he could not follow them, that was impossible along the public road. It mattered little, either, where the pursuit ended--for to-day! But he could not make up his mind to go back or quit the Platz. It was a splendid place for brooding over his revenge, while the darkness sank deeper and deeper, and the leaves around him hissed like serpents' tongues, and above him in the tops of the mighty trees there were sighings and groanings as of a victim lying mortally wounded on the ground.

CHAPTER V.

In the meantime the cab had only proceeded a short distance, to the entrance of the Bellevue Garden.

"We are quite secure here, I swear to you," Ottomar had whispered, as he helped Ferdinanda to alight. The driver contentedly pocketed his thaler and immediately drove off. Ottomar gave Ferdinanda his arm and led her, bewildered, frightened, and half stunned, into the garden. He could hear her gasping for breath. "I swear it!" he repeated.

"Swear that you love me! I only ask that!" Instead of answering he put his arm round her. She encircled him with both hers. Their lips met in a long, burning kiss. They then hastened, hand in hand, deeper into the park, till they were concealed by trees and shrubs and then sank again into one another's arms, exchanging burning kisses and words of love, intoxicated with the bliss of which they had so long been dreaming, and which was now more precious than they had ever imagined in their wildest dreams. So at least thought Ferdinanda, and so she said, while her lips again sought his, and so said Ottomar; and yet, at the very moment that he returned her burning kisses, there was a feeling in his heart that he had never known before, a dread of the flames that surrounded him, a sensation as of powerlessness in the presence of a passion which raged around and overpowered him with the irresistible might of a tempest. He had until now played at love, had looked upon his easy conquests as triumphs, had accepted the mute homage of beautiful eyes, the flattering words of gentle lips, as a tribute due to him, and not demanding any gratitude. Here, for the first time, he was the weaker. He would not acknowledge it to himself, and yet he knew it, as an experienced wrestler knows at the first touch that he has found his master, and that he must succumb, unless some accident gives him the advantage. Ottomar was already looking out for this accident, for some event to occur, some circumstance that should give him the advantage; then he blushed at his own cowardice, at his mean ingratitude towards this beautiful, gifted being, who so confidingly, so devotedly, and with such self-forgetfulness threw herself into his arms, and he redoubled the tenderness of his caresses and the sweet flattery of his loving words. And then, that uneasy feeling might be a delusion; but she who had done what he had so often, so pressingly implored of her, who had at length granted him an interview, in which he could put before her his plans for the future, she would and must expect that he would at length trace out that sketch of the future over which he had so long delayed, and which at this moment seemed to him as uncertain as ever. He did not believe what she assured him, that she wanted nothing more than to love him, to be beloved by him, that everything of which he spoke--his father, her father, circumstances which must be taken into consideration, difficulties which must be overcome--all, all was only a mist, which would disperse before the rays of the sun; trifles not worthy that they should expend upon them one moment of precious time, one breath! He did not believe her; but he only too willingly took her at her word, even now

silently absolving himself from the responsibility of the consequences which might, which must follow such a neglect of the simplest rules of prudence and wisdom. And then he, too, forgot everything but the present moment, and she had to remind him that time was flying, that he was expected at home, and must not arrive too late for the party.

"But will you take me with you?" she asked. "Will you enter the room with me on your arm, and present me to all present as your bride? You have no need to be ashamed of me; there are not likely to be many women there whom I cannot look down upon, and I have always considered that to be able to look down upon others is half way at least towards being a fine lady. To you I shall always look up. Tall as I am, I must stretch myself higher to reach your dear lips." There lay a wonderful proud charm in these jesting words, and deep love in the kiss which her smiling lips breathed upon his. He was intoxicated and bewitched by this loving gentleness, this proud love; he said to himself that she was right, and he told her so, that she could bear comparison with any queen in the world, that she deserved to be a queen; and yet--and yet--if it had been no jest, if she had demanded in earnest what one day she would demand.

"That was the last kiss," said Ferdinanda. "As usual, I must be the most reasonable always. And now give me your arm, and come with me to the nearest cab, and then go straight home, and be very charming and amiable this evening, and break a few more hearts in addition to those you have already broken, and which you will hereafter lay at my feet in return for my heart, which is worth more than all of them put together." It was nearly dark when they quitted the silent, deserted park; the sky had clouded over, and heavy drops were beginning to fall. Fortunately an empty cab came by, in which Ferdinanda could go as far as the Brandenburg Gate, where she would take another, and thus destroy every trace of her road. She only allowed Ottomar to kiss her hand once more, as he helped her into the cab. Then she leaned back in the corner, closed her eyes, and dreamed over again the happy hour. Ottomar looked after the carriage. It was a miserable vehicle, drawn by a wretched screw, and as it swayed backwards and forwards in the feeble light of a few lamps, and disappeared in the darkness, a strange sensation of horror and loathing came over him. "It looks like a hearse," he said to himself. "I could hardly bear to touch the wet handle. I could not have brought myself to get into it. The whole affair gets one into very uncomfortable situations. The walk home is no joke, either; it is nearly nine, and beginning to rain pretty hard." He turned into the Grosse Stern Avenue, which was his shortest way home. Under the great trees it was already so dark that he could only just distinguish the foot-path along which he hastily walked; on the other side of the broad road, along which ran a narrower foot-path, the trunks of the trees were hardly perceptible in the darkness. How many and many times had he ridden along this grand avenue--alone--with brother officers--in a brilliant company of ladies and gentlemen--how often with Carla! Elsa was right, Carla was a splendid rider, the best probably of all the ladies, certainly the most graceful. They had been so often seen and spoken of together--after all it was quite impossible to draw back now; it would make such a frightful scandal. Ottomar stood still. He had walked too fast. The perspiration was streaming from his brow; he felt stifled, and tore open his coat and waistcoat. He had never before experienced the sensation of physical fear, but now he started and his eyes peered anxiously into the darkness, as he heard behind him a slight rustle--probably a twig that had broken in its fall.

"I feel as if I had committed a murder, or as if in another moment I should be murdered," he said to himself, as almost running he continued on his way. He did not suspect that to the breaking of that twig he owed his life. Antonio had lingered, as if under the influence of a spell, at the entrance of the avenue, now sitting on the iron railing which separated the ride from the foot-path, now pacing up and down, now leaning against the trunk of a tree, always revolving the same dark thoughts, concocting plans of revenge, delighting himself with the idea of the torments he would inflict on her and on him, as soon as he had them in his power, from time to time directing his glance across the Platz towards the entrance of the other avenue, along which the carriage had disappeared with them, as if they must reappear in that direction, as if his revengeful soul had the power of compelling them. He could have spent the whole night there, as a beast of prey, furious at the loss of his victim, remains obstinately in his lair, in spite of the pangs of hunger. But what was that? There he came across the Platz directly towards him. His eyes, accustomed to the darkness, recognised him as if it had been bright day. Would the bestia be such a fool as to venture into the avenue, to give himself into his hands? Per Bacco! he would--there. After a short pause he turned into the avenue; on the other side of the road, true, but so much the better, he could the more easily follow him on this side; he had only to dash across the ride when the moment came; in the deep sand his first steps would not be heard, and then in a few bounds he would reach him and bury the stiletto in his back, or if he should turn round, drive it up to the hilt under the seventh rib! And his hand closed on the hilt as if hand and hilt were one, and with the finger of the other hand he repeatedly tried the sharp point, while he glided with long steps from tree to tree--softly, softly--the tiger's velvet paw could not have fallen and been raised more softly. They had reached the centre of the avenue. The darkness could not get more intense; it was just light enough to see the blade of the stiletto. One moment more, to assure himself that they were alone in the dark wood--that other and himself--and now, crouching low, he crossed the soft sand, behind the thick trunk which he had already selected. But, quickly as he had crossed, the other had gained some twenty paces in advance. This was too much; they must be diminished by half. And it would not be difficult. He was in the soft sand of the road, to the right of the trees, while the other was on the hard foot-path to the left, where the sound of his steps would overpower any accidental noise. But, maledetto di Dio--his foot touched a dry twig, which broke with a snap. He stepped behind a tree--he could not be seen; but the other must have heard; he was standing still--listening, perhaps awaiting his assailant--at all events no longer

unprepared. Who knew--he was a brave man and a soldier--perhaps he was turning to defy his assailant. So much the better! only one spring from behind the tree, and--he was coming! The Italian's heart throbbed as if it would choke him, as he now with his left foot advanced prepared for the spring; but his murderous thoughts had affected his usually sharp hearing. The steps were not coming towards him, but going away from him! By the time he became aware of his mistake, the distance between them was quite doubled; and trebled before, in his consternation, he could decide what was to be done. Give up the chase? There was nothing else to do. His prey was now almost running, and a late cab rolled along the drive which crossed the avenue, and on the other side of the drive were cross paths right and left--he had no certainty of being able to carry out his intention or of escaping afterwards; the moment was past--for this time, but the next time! Antonio murmured a fearful curse as he replaced his dagger in its sheath and concealed it in his coat pocket. The other man had vanished; Antonio followed slowly along the same path, out of the park, along the Thiergartenstrasse, into the Springbrunnenstrasse, and to the house in which the man he hated lived, the windows of which were brightly lighted. A carriage drove up, an officer and some ladies in evening dress, wrapped in their shawls, got out; a second carriage followed. He, above, was now laughing and feasting, and whispering at that moment to one of the pretty girls who had just arrived what ten minutes before he might have whispered to Ferdinanda. If he could only pour into her heart the poison of jealousy which burnt in his own! If he could put some impossible barrier between her and him! If the whole affair could be betrayed to the stern *signor*, her father, or to the haughty *capitano*, his father, or to both----

"Hallo!" A man coming along the pavement had run up against him, as he leaned with folded arms against the iron railing of the front garden, and had called out rudely.

"Scusi!" said the Italian, lifting his hat. "I beg your pardon!"

"Hallo!" repeated the man, "is it you, Antonio?"

"Ah! Signor Roller, the overseer!"

"Signor Roller! overseer! No more signors and overseers for me," said the man, with a loud laugh, "for the present at least--till we have served out the old man; he and his nephew and the whole lot of them! If I only had them by the throat! If I could only do them some injury! I would not mind what it cost me, so it were not money! That is all gone." The man laughed again; he was evidently half drunk.

"I have money," said Antonio quickly--"and----"

"We'll have a drink then, Signor Italiano!" exclaimed the other, clapping him on the shoulder; "una bottiglia--capisci!--ha, ha! I have not quite forgotten my Italian!--Carrara marble--capisci, capisci?"

"Eccomi tutto a voi," said the Italian, taking the man's arm. "Where to?"

"To drink, to the devil, to the public-house!" exclaimed Roller, laughing and pointing to the red lamp over the public-house at the corner of the Springbrunnenstrasse.

CHAPTER VI.

The three moderate-sized rooms in the upper floor of the small villa inhabited by the General, in the Springbrunnenstrasse, were got ready for the reception of the company; the larger room at the back was for the present closed. The supper was to be served there, and later it would be used as the dancing-room. Elsa went once more through the rooms to see that everything was in order. She did not usually do this, as she could quite depend upon the care and attention of the perfectly trained August; to-day, for the first time, he seemed to have taken his duties more easily. Or was it only her fancy? She asked herself this while she moved a few candlesticks and put them back again, and altered the arrangement of some nicknacks without being any better pleased with their appearance. "I do not know what is the matter with me to-day," said Elsa. She stepped before the looking-glass and contemplated her reflection with the greatest attention: she did not think herself looking the least pretty to-day. She was disappointed in her new blue dress; her hair was done much too loosely, the rosebuds were decidedly too dark, and were put in too far back; her eyes were not the least bright, and her nose was perceptibly red on the left side. "I really do not know what is the matter with me to-day," said Elsa. She sank into an arm-chair, laid her fan and gloves in her lap, and rested her head on her hand.

"I was looking forward so to this evening; but it is all Ottomar's fault. How can any one marry

without love?--it happens often enough though. Wallbach certainly does not love Louise, any more than she loves him; but Ottomar, who is so tender-hearted and can be so good and dear! That detestable money! how can one man spend such a sinful amount? I can't think how they manage it. Horses!--they always say they have sold them for so many guineas more than they gave for them; I don't believe it; I am sure they always lose; but even that would not come to so much. I do not know; they say Wartenberg cannot manage with twenty thousand, and, that Clemda, with fifty thousand, incurs debts to that amount every year--it is incredible! What good would my poor five thousand do him, and he would have to wait, one way and another, nearly five years for it. And if I fell in love with somebody who was not noble, and lost my portion--I should not care, of course not, but I could not give him anything if I had not got it myself--to say nothing of papa, who would certainly not allow it, though he is always talking about him; but it is all about the harbour, which is never out of his head--but I am so glad that he always talks so kindly of him--so glad--"

"Good heavens, child, what are you doing?"

"What is it?" exclaimed Elsa, starting up from her dreams, and looking with a startled expression at her aunt, who, no less startled, stood before her.

"Your new tarlatane dress! You are completely crushing it."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Elsa, drawing a deep breath.

"Oh, it is nothing to you!" exclaimed Sidonie. "You do not care about things that I care about very much, but I am getting accustomed to that by degrees!"

"Dear aunt!" Elsa had thrown her arms round her aunt and kissed her; the kind creature wanted nothing more. "Well, well," she said, "you careless child! You will quite spoil your pretty dress." She had freed herself from Elsa's embrace, and was smoothing and arranging her darling's dress. "There, step back a little; you look charming this evening, Elsa."

"I don't think so at all."

"Like my Princess! The evening that the Duke, her present illustrious husband, was to be presented to her for the first time, 'I don't think I look at all pretty to day,' said she."

"But I am not going to be presented to a Duke," said Elsa.

"How you do mix things up, child! As if you could marry a reigning prince, except by the left hand! Besides, we shall only have a member of a former reigning house here. Prince Clemda, and he is already betrothed. So I could not be thinking of him."

"And of no one else, I hope, aunt."

"I must be very much mistaken, Elsa, or your blushes--yes, you are blushing, my dear child, and you blush more and more, though it is quite unnecessary before your aunt. I can assure you, on the contrary, that I consider the match in every respect a most proper and desirable one, and the chance--if it is not a crime against Providence to speak of chance in such important matters----"

"For heaven's sake, aunt, if you love me, say no more," exclaimed Elsa. The terror that seized her at the idea of hearing her aunt speak of Count Golm, after Ottomar had already alarmed her in the morning on the same subject, was too evident in the tone of her voice to escape even Sidonie.

"Good gracious!" she said, "can I really have been mistaken! I had been thinking over the extraordinary dispute which we had this morning, and could only account for it by the explanation that you wished to conceal the inclination you have for the Count by an affectation of indifference, and even of want of consideration towards him."

"I did not intend anything of the kind," said Elsa.

"I am really sorry for it," said Sidonie, who now, under the pressure of her disappointment, seated herself--though with due regard to her brown silk gown--while Elsa walked up and down the room in some agitation; "really very sorry; I know nothing that would have given me greater pleasure, next to Ottomar's betrothal to Carla, which, in my opinion, has been too long delayed. The Count is thirty--a very good age for a man of his position to marry--he must and will marry one of these days, and he might seek long before he would find a young lady who would so entirely satisfy all the pretensions he has a right to make, and no doubt does make. His circumstances are somewhat embarrassed, but that is almost always the case nowadays with large properties; men always settle down when they are married. Besides, he will gain enormously by the new railroad, so Schieler says, who told me all these particulars. The Councillor was with me yesterday, and I almost fancied he must have come on purpose to tell me, and to hear what I said about it, as he has always had a great regard for my opinion. He is a charming man, and discretion itself; so I did not hesitate to tell him exactly what I thought; in these cases openness is always the best diplomacy, and when advances are made there is no harm in meeting them half way."

"It is too bad, aunt!" exclaimed Elsa, turning round and standing with her lace handkerchief crushed between her hands, while burning tears of shame and anger started to her eyes. Sidonie was so startled by this outburst, for which she was not in the least prepared, that she sat motionless and speechless with wide open eyes, while Elsa, instead of immediately begging her pardon, or calming herself, continued with flaming cheeks and sparkling eyes: "To talk me over like that with a stranger! and with Schieler, of all people, whom I detest as much as I do the other whom you have chosen for me, and whom I would never marry, not if he had a crown to lay at my feet, never--never!"

"What is the matter, Elsa?" asked the General, who entered the room at that moment and had heard the last words.

"A slight difference of opinion between me and my aunt," answered Elsa, hastily wiping her eyes.

"Well, well," said the General, "I thought you ladies left that sort of thing to us men. Is Ottomar not here?" He left the room again to inquire after Ottomar.

"Forgive me, aunt," said Elsa, holding out her hand; "it was very wrong of me. You do not know, but--I do not know myself, what is the matter with me this evening." It was with some hesitation that Sidonie took her hand; the General came in again.

"It is too bad," he said; "Ottomar went out again quite an hour ago and has not yet returned."

"He must be delayed by some important matter," said Sidonie.

"No doubt!" said the General, frowning, and pulling his grey moustaches.

"Councillor Schieler!" announced August, opening the folding-doors. The Councillor kissed Sidonie's hand and bowed low to Elsa, then turned to the General:

"I have heaps of news for you, my dear friend."

"Few things happen now to interest me, and still fewer that give me any pleasure," answered the General, with a courteous yet melancholy smile.

"I fear I cannot promise that my news will give you any pleasure," said the Councillor; "but at least it is interesting even to you, ladies, that the Baroness, instead of arriving on the 1st as she originally intended, will arrive on the 10th, and will therefore be here in three days."

"I had a letter this morning which said nothing about it," said the General.

"My letter arrived this afternoon, and is, therefore, doubtless the latest; it is not from herself, however, but----" The Councillor was interrupted by a slight cough.

"You may say the name out, my dear friend," said the General; "it cannot be avoided when once our meetings begin."

"You are right!" exclaimed the Councillor; "and I am happy----" The widowed Countess von Fischbach arrived at this moment with her two daughters; the ladies were engaged with their guests, and the Councillor was able to draw the General aside. "I was about to say that I am happy to find you so well prepared for what awaits you from Munich. I know how painful everything connected with the subject is to you, and yet I must ask your patience for a few minutes before you are called away by your other guests. My second piece of news is that the concession is granted."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the General.

"As good as granted."

"We had a meeting only this morning; it is true we were engaged upon other matters, but his Excellency would at least----"

"He knows your dislike to the project; I repeat, as good as granted, and that 'as good' is at the present moment better than good. I implore you, my honoured friend, to listen to me patiently; the matter is of the greatest importance, not only to me, who have only an indirect interest in it, but more especially and directly to you. The concession will of course only have been granted for a harbour on the north, against which you have no immediate objection; is not that true? Good. Now I know for certain that, behind your back, there was to the very last moment a hesitation between the North and the East Harbour, and that the pressure used has only just failed in turning the scale to the East. I need not tell you by whom pressure was put; you know better than any one the interest that Golm, who by the way will join the management, has in the existence of the railroad; and his connections in a certain region are better, very much better than I could have dreamt of. I tell you it only wanted the merest trifle. And just imagine, Signor Giraldi--I must mention his name now--has written to me to-day that the sale of part of the property appears to him advisable for the better regulation and easier administration of the rest; and that the Baroness--that is to say he--for here as everywhere he is the mouthpiece of the Baroness--will propose the sale at our meeting. Wallbach is in favour of it as he always has been; as a man of

business I cannot oppose it; in short, the property will, as far as I can see, be sold. It is almost impossible, or at least most improbable, that Giraldi should know the state of affairs here, and that an eager purchaser is ready to hand in Golm. But if Golm sees a possibility of concluding the bargain, he will move heaven and hell to carry through the East Harbour at the last minute. And now, my honoured, my excellent friend, allow an old friend, of whose devotion you are aware, one word in confidence--a bold one if you will: you are not rich; Ottomar is extravagant; it is no small matter for Ottomar to see his portion with one stroke doubled if not quadrupled in value with the rest, and Fräulein Elsa will be richer in the same proportion; and if at the death of the Baroness they inherit the remaining half, and Fräulein Elsa makes a suitable marriage--with Count Golm for instance, to name the first that occurs to me--you may close your eyes--God in His providence grant not for many a long day--with the comforting reflection that the external well-being of your family is secured for all futurity, so far as man's foresight can determine. Be wise then, my honoured friend. You need do nothing. You have only to refrain from opposition and give in to what you cannot prevent. Lastly, you must remember the good old saying: 'Well to endure what cannot well be cured;' which you will doubtless remember in your youth." The General had listened without a sign of the impatience that was usual with him when an adverse opinion was put before him; his brow had not clouded; there was even an unusually gentle, almost sad, tone in his deep voice, as he now, without raising his eyes, said, as if to himself: "I remember the saying well. It dates from the time of the wars, of liberation, and many an oppressed heart derived comfort from it in those troubled times, and many a broken courage has been supported by it. It hung framed and glazed on the wall of my father's best room; I can still see my dear mother standing before it and reading what she had read a thousand times before:

"'To triumph not in joy nor dread the storm,
Well to endure what cannot well be cured,
To do good actions and rejoice in beauty,
To love our lives and not to fear death,
Firmly to trust in God and a better future,
This is to live, yet rob death of his sting.'"

The General looked thoughtfully before him. What an inconveniently retentive memory the man has! thought the Councillor.

"And look, my dear friend," continued the General--and his eyes now rested so steadily on the Councillor that the latter, in spite of all his efforts, was forced to turn away his own--"according to the true meaning of the proverb and my own feelings it would not be doing a good action. Indeed, according to my own feelings I could no longer live, and should with justice shrink with terror from death, like a dishonoured coward, if, for the sake of outward advantage, were it a thousand times as great as it here appears to be, I neglected my positive duty and obligation, and did not resist, by every means in my power, a project the accomplishment of which I am firmly persuaded would be a manifest injury to our military strength, and an unprincipled squandering of our means, which we have the strongest reasons to be careful of. I have already nearly neglected my duty when I threw the burden of the report of this odious affair on Sattelstädt's shoulders; although I knew that his opinions were the same as my own. After what I have just heard from you, I cannot do otherwise than bring forward the subject on my own responsibility at the board, and in any case acquaint the Minister with my disapproval. And now, my dear friend, excuse me! I must help the ladies to do the honours." He turned towards the large drawing-room; the Councillor looked angrily after him.

"He is incorrigible. I almost wonder he did not turn me out of the house. That will be the next thing. Do not fatigue yourself so much, Count. It is of no use."

CHAPTER VII.

The Count had entered a few minutes before, in his deputy's uniform, with the Cross of St. John. The room was by this time nearly full, and he had had some difficulty in making his way to the ladies of the house. Elsa had not helped him in his efforts; at the moment that he appeared in the doorway she continued so eagerly the conversation already begun with Captain von Schönau, that the Count, after bowing to Sidonie, had stood for half a minute behind her without attracting her attention, till Schönau at last felt bound with "I think" and a movement of the hand to draw her notice to the newly-arrived guest.

"I am happy--" said the Count.

"Ah! Count Golm!" exclaimed Elsa, with well-acted astonishment. "I beg your pardon for not having seen you sooner, I was so absorbed. May I introduce you? Captain von Schönau, on the staff--a great friend of ours--Count von Golm. Have you seen papa, Count Golm? I think he is in the other room. You were saying, Captain von Schönau----" The Count stepped back with a bow.

"That was rather strong, Fräulein Elsa," said Schönau.

"What?" Schönau laughed.

"Do you know that if I were not the most modest of men I might imagine all possible and impossible follies?"

"How so?"

"Why, did not you see that the Count held out his hand, and drew back with a face as red as my collar? A young lady with such sharp eyes as Fräulein Elsa von Werben could only overlook such a thing if she did not wish to see it; which can hardly be the case here, or if she--I am afraid to go on.--Who is that?"

"Who?"

"That officer--to the left, near Baroness Kniebreche--you are looking to the right! He is speaking to your father now--a fine-looking man--he has got the cross, too. Where did you meet with him?" Elsa was forced to make up her mind to see Reinhold, though her heart beat fast, to her great annoyance. She was vexed already at having laid herself open to Schönau's sharp-sighted eyes, and almost betrayed herself to him by her behaviour to the Count. It should not happen again.

"A Herr Schmidt," she said, arranging the rosebuds in her hair--"a merchant-captain. We made his acquaintance when we were travelling. Papa likes him very much."

"A very fine-looking man," repeated Schönau; "just the sort of handsome, manly face that I admire; and a very good manner, too, though one recognises the officer of the reserve at the first glance."

"In what way?" asked Elsa, whose heart began to beat again.

"You ought to know that as well or better than I do, as you see more of the Guards. Compare him with Ottomar, who is late as usual, and is trying to repair his faults by making himself doubly agreeable! Look at the finished courtesy with which he kisses old Countess Kniebreche's bony hand, and now turns and makes a bow to Countess Fischbach, for which the great Vestris might have envied him--*Allons, mon fils, montrez votre talent*; and how he speaks now to Sattelstädt, not a shade too much or too little. It is really unfair to compare one of the reserve with the model of all knightly graces! Do not you agree with me?" Elsa only looked straight before her. Schönau was right; there was a difference. She had liked him better as he walked up and down the deck in his rough pilot jacket. She had envied him the firmness and freedom of his movements. And when later he sat in the boat and steered it as calmly as a rider governs his fiery steed, then he had appeared to her as the model of a brave man conscious of his strength. If only he had not come now, just now! At that moment Reinhold, who had all this time been talking to her father, and was now dismissed with a friendly nod, turned, and seeing Elsa, came straight towards her. Elsa trembled so violently that she was obliged to support herself by laying her hand on the back of a chair; she wished to act a little comedy before the quick-witted Schönau, and to appear perfectly cool and unconcerned; but as he now stepped towards her, his bright, honest eyes still beaming at the recollection of her father's kind reception of him, in the open, manly features a certain embarrassment, which seemed to ask, 'Shall I be welcome to you also?' her heart leaped up warmly and generously; and though one hand still rested on the chair, she held out the other towards him. Her dark eyes glowed, her red lips smiled, and she said: "Welcome to our house, my dear Herr Schmidt!" as cheerfully and frankly as if there were no finer name in the world. He seized her hand and said a few words which she only half heard. She turned towards Schönau, the Captain had vanished; the colour mounted into her cheeks.

"It does not matter," she murmured.

"What does not matter?"

"I will tell you by-and-by if-- We are going to dance a little after supper. I do not know----"

"Whether I dance! I am very fond of it."

"Even the Rheinländer?"

"Even the Rheinländer. And notwithstanding your incredulous smile, not so badly that Fräulein von Werben need be afraid to give me the honour."

"The Rheinländer then! I have already promised all the others. Now I must go and entertain the company." She nodded kindly to him and turned away, but came back immediately. "Do you like my brother?"

"Very much."

"I wish so much that you should be friends. Do try to see more of him. Will you?"

"With all my heart." She was now obliged to go; and Reinhold also mixed with the rest of the company, without any of the embarrassment that he had felt on first entering a circle so brilliant and so strange to him. His hosts had received him as a dear friend of the house. Even the eyes of the dignified aunt had glanced at him not without a certain good-natured curiosity, stately as her curtsey had been; but the General had shaken him warmly by the hand, and after the first words of greeting, drawing him confidentially aside, had said: "I must introduce you to Colonel von Sattelstädt and Captain von Schönau, both on the staff. They are anxious to hear your opinion on the Harbour question. Pray speak your mind quite freely. You will be doing me a favour. I shall also have a special favour to ask of you with regard to this affair, which I will tell you later. Au revoir, then." That was flattering to the lieutenant of the reserve, said Reinhold to himself as he turned towards Elsa; and now she, too, had been so kind and friendly. He felt like one of Homer's heroes, who in silence hopes that the goddess to whom he prays will be gracious to him, and to whom the divinity appears in the tumult of battle and looks at him with her immortal eyes, and in words which only he can hear, promises him her assistance. What mattered to him now that old Baroness Kniebreche's gold eye-glass was so long fixed upon him with such a disagreeable stare, and then let fall with a movement that plainly said: It was hardly worth the trouble! What mattered to him that Count Golm avoided seeing him as long as he could possibly do so, and, when it was no longer possible, walked past him with a snappish "Ah, Captain! delighted to see you!" That young Prince Clemda's bow when they were introduced might have been somewhat less careless. What did it all signify? And those were the only marks of coldness which had been shown him during the hour that he had already passed in the somewhat numerous assembly. He had met with scarcely anything but good-natured, open friendliness on the part of the ladies, and almost all the men, who were mostly officers, cordially received him as one of themselves. Even Prince Clemda seemed inclined to make up for his previous carelessness by suddenly coming up to him and murmuring a few sentences, amongst which Reinhold only distinguished clearly the words: Werben--Orleans--Vierzon--confounded ride--sorry. But what pleased him most was his acquaintance with Herr von Sattelstädt and Herr von Schönau. They came up to him almost at the same moment, and begged him, if it was not troubling him too much, to give them his views on the practicability and utility of a harbour to the north of Wissow Head. "We are both well acquainted with the locality," said the Colonel, "and are both--the Captain even more than myself--opposed to the project; we have of course discussed the matter often at the Admiralty, but none the less, or rather all the more, it would be of the greatest interest and importance to us to hear the opinion of an intelligent sailor, who, while thoroughly well acquainted with the circumstances of the case, is at the same time quite unprejudiced, more especially when he possesses at the same time the soldierly eye of a campaigner. Let us sit down in the study here--there is another chair, Schönau! And now I think it would be best if you would allow us to ask you a few questions. It is the easiest and surest way of arriving at our object. We will not trouble you long."

"I am quite at your orders," said Reinhold. The gentlemen intended only to take a discreet advantage of the permission; but as Reinhold, against his will, was obliged frequently to enter into details, in order to answer the questions put to him, the conversation prolonged itself further than either of them had intended, though no one seemed aware of it but himself. Flattering though the respectful attention might be with which the two officers listened to his explanations, and sincerely as he admired the sagacity and knowledge displayed by every question, by every word they said--he could not refrain from casting from time to time a longing glance through the door of the study into the larger drawing-room, where the company were still circulating as before, and through the drawing-room into the second small room on the other side of the drawing-room, in which apparently a group of young people had assembled, amongst whom he perceived Ottomar and the lady who had been pointed out to him at the Exhibition as Fräulein von Wallbach, Count Golm, and finally Elsa. A lively dispute was going on, as could be heard right across the intervening drawing-room, though naturally the actual words could not be distinguished. Even Schönau's attention was at length caught by it. "I would bet anything," he said, "that they are quarrelling over Wagner; where Fräulein von Wallbach presides, Wagner is sure to be the subject of discussion. I would give anything to hear what she says about him this evening."

"That is to say, my dear Schönau, if I am not mistaken, I would give anything if Sattelstädt would hold his tongue," said the Colonel, smiling. "Well, we have already taken an unconscionable advantage of Captain Schmidt's patience." He rose and held out his hand to Reinhold. Schönau protested that he meant nothing of the kind; the Colonel shook his finger threateningly at him. "For shame, Schönau, to deny your liege lady! She, you must know, Captain Schmidt, is Divine Harmony. For her he would go through fire and water, and let the harbour matters take care of themselves. Be off, Schönau!" Schönau laughed, but went, taking with him Reinhold, who followed not unwillingly, as he was thus enabled to return to Elsa and to Ottomar, to whom he had only spoken in passing.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ottomar had been fully occupied in making up for lost time. He went from one to the other, here whispering a compliment, there accompanying a shake of the hand with a jest, this evening more than ever overflowing with life and spirits and good-humour, the accomplished favourite of the Graces, and king of society. So said Baroness Kniebreche to Carla, who had just appeared in the drawing-room, with her brother and sister-in-law, and was immediately taken possession of by the old lady, one of whose "*mignons*" she was. "Look, my dear Carla! he is just speaking to Helene Leisewitz--how happy the poor thing is! It is not often that she is so singled out. Mon Dieu! he is positively paying attentions to her. Do look!" Carla was in despair. She could see nothing without her eye-glass, but did not like to make use of it while with the Baroness whose pince-nez, with glasses as big as thalers, were fixed to her almost sightless eyes. Besides the old lady screamed so loud that she might be heard half across the room, and she expected to be answered equally loudly, being quite deaf of the right ear and almost deaf of the left.

"Ah! at last he has fluttered off to Emilie Fischbach--*à la bonne heure!* She has been making eyes at him for ever so long, charming little creature! She really grows more charming every day. And how she chatters and wriggles. A little too much simplicity, but she will improve. You will have another rival next season, my dear Carla. What, going already! No, no, my dear, not so fast; I have not spoken to you for ages. You owe me a world of confidences. Do you think that an old woman like me is to go about in society as ignorant as a new-born baby, while the whole world is *au courant*? Out with it! When is the betrothal to be? Not speak so loud? Why I am hardly speaking above a whisper--this ear, please! It is not yet settled! Don't be angry with me, my dear Carla; but what in the world are you thinking about? Do you imagine an Ottomar von Werben is always to be had?"

"Do you want me, Baroness?" said Ottomar, who had heard his name.

"I want you to sit down by me here, on my left side, you faithless butterfly!"

"Is there such a thing as a faithful butterfly, Baroness?"

"Now none of your jokes; I am a serious, practical old woman, and want you both--why what has become of Carla?" Carla had seized the opportunity, and, rising with an expression of delighted astonishment on her animated countenance, had hastened towards Count Golm, whom, by a hasty glance through her eye-glass, she had perceived at the other side of the room engaged in conversation with Countess Fischbach, and who now turned towards her. She was determined to punish Ottomar for the neglect with which he had in the most open manner treated her. Ottomar looked after her with gloomy eyes, and his glance did not clear while the old Baroness took him to task, as she expressed it. "Yes, yes, my dear Ottomar, it is only the truth; and from whom should you hear it if not from an old woman, who knows the world thoroughly and has known you ever since you were born? I have seen other affairs come to nothing that looked quite as promising as yours. Everything has its limits, even the patience of society. If this patience is tried too long, society says nothing will come of it; and when society has said so for a certain length of time nothing does come of it, simply because it has said so. People do everything as society decides; are betrothed, marry, separate, fall in love, fall out of it again, fall in love a second and a third time, fight duels, shoot their friends, shoot themselves--society is always right."

"And supposing society should be right in our case?" The old lady let her pince-nez fall in horror: "*Mais vous êtes fou, monsieur, positivement fou!*" She seized her large black fan, and fanned herself violently and noisily; replaced her pince-nez, cast a sharp glance at Ottomar, who stared moodily before him, and said, while she motioned to him to put his ear near her mouth--

"Now listen patiently, like a good child, for you are children, both of you; you who sit here looking like an ensign who has had twenty marks too few at his examination for lieutenant; and Carla who is flirting over there with Count Golm, on purpose to provoke you. Don't play with fire. You might burn your fingers badly. If the affair comes to nothing it will be the greatest scandal of the season. And now go and make your peace with Carla, and tell her from me that I have known the Counts Golm for three generations, and that the present one--well, I had rather tell her myself." She rapped Ottomar on the knuckles with her fan. Ottomar rose quickly and moved a few paces towards Carla, in the full conviction that his approach was all that was necessary to appease her, as she had watched the whole progress of his conversation with the old lady, and now turned her eye-glass on him. But Carla let him come a few steps nearer and then turned completely round towards the Count, with the defiant movement of an actress who wishes to give the audience an opportunity of admiring the back of her dress. Ottomar started back and turned on his heel, murmuring between his teeth: "A formal provocation! Thank heaven!" But when he now again mixed with the company, laughing and jesting even more gaily than before, in his heart was dark night. What the Baroness had murmured in his ear he had said to himself over and over again as he hastened home through the Thiergarten, and the mighty trees over his head could as little overpower with their sighings and groanings the warning voice within him, as the

hum and rustle of the company could now overpower the harsh voice of the toothless old lady. Was she only the mouth-piece of society? So, exactly so, would and must society speak, perhaps did speak already, though he could not hear. Let it! What did society know of the tall, slender figure which he had but now held in his arms, of the throbbing heart that had rested on his breast, of the wealth of kisses that still burned on his lips? If the four charming girls with whom he was talking could combine all their charms into one, they would still not make a Ferdinanda. And as for Carla, he had never admired her as much as the rest of the world did, and now he thought her positively ugly, with her coquettish airs, her eternal laugh and her everlasting eye-glass. Let her marry the Count; let them say and do what they would! And what could they do? A duel with Wallbach? Well, it would be the fourth within four years, and if he were killed, so much the better! There would be an end to the whole affair; he need no longer trouble his head with his debts, or his heart about the women! Debts, women--he would have done with them all!

"Oh, Herr von Werben! how intensely amusing you are this evening!"

"I feel intensely amusing, I assure you."

"I don't wonder, under the circumstances."

"Of course not!"

"Then do us a favour."

"A thousand."

"Do bring us your brother officer from the reserve; what is his name?"

"Schmidt!"

"Really?"

"Really!"

"How funny!"

"Why?"

"How cross you look! It is not our fault. Emilie Fischbach says he is quite delightful! We want to know the delightful Herr Schmidt. Do please bring Herr Schmidt here!"

"Oh, do!" exclaimed the other young ladies, "bring Herr Schmidt here!"

"I fly." The titter of the girls, which was not ill-meant, sounded after him like an intentional scoff. His cheeks burnt with anger and shame; that name--it was hers also.

"One word, Werben." Clemda touched him on the shoulder.

"What do you want?"

"I have had a letter from Brussels, from the Duke, and also one from Antonia. The Duke is now free. Our wedding is to be in four weeks. Antonia is very anxious that your betrothed should be one of her bridesmaids. You must of course take me under your wing; I dare not write and tell her that you are not yet betrothed. You are not angry with me for the hint?"

"Why should I be?"

"Because you look so serious over it. Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"The ladies want me to take Lieutenant Schmidt to them."

"Ah! not a bad fellow--in his way!" Clemda had let the last words slip out carelessly after the others--as one might open a chink of a door one had just shut, in order to let the dog in, thought Ottomar.

"And what I wanted to say besides, Ottomar--of course, as host, one has certain duties, but then certain duties are owed to the host also; and entre nous, I consider Golm's flirtation as rather a want of consideration towards you, as he must know your situation with regard to Fräulein Wallbach as well as anybody."

"He is quite a stranger in our circle."

"Then you should explain matters to him; and Golm----"

"My dear Werben! can you spare me a moment?"

"At your orders, Colonel!"

"Ah!" said Clemda, retiring with a bow before his commanding officer.

"Only a moment," repeated Colonel von Bohl, drawing Ottomar a little on one side; "I have just been speaking to Wallbach; he was very pressing, but, with the best will in the world, I cannot give you leave before the spring. Clemda will want a long leave; Rossow must be away at least three months, as his wound threatens to break out again. I cannot spare all my best officers at once. His Excellency must understand that."

"But there is no hurry, Colonel."

"You want to marry, and I am not devoted to newly-married young officers; I grant you willingly, therefore, a year's leave for diplomatic service in St. Petersburg. And then, my dear Werben----" The Colonel cast a glance behind him and said in a lower voice:

"I should not be sorry if you could find some excuse for a short absence,"--the Colonel made a significant gesture; "those matters might be better and easier arranged from St. Petersburg than here--believe me, my dear Werben!"

"But everything is arranged, Colonel; since this morning."

"Everything?" The Colonel looked Ottomar full in the face.

"All but a trifling matter----"

"I should like even that trifling matter to be got over. His Majesty is very particularly sensitive on those matters just now, and with reason. Now, my dear Werben, we have all been young once, and you know my feelings towards you. I speak for your own sake, and may tell you in confidence that Wallbach, if not exactly prepared for any sacrifice--that would be saying too much--is ready to help you as far as he can in making any arrangement. You understand!" The Colonel held out his hand, and turned quickly away to put an end to the interview. He had in the kindest and friendliest manner said his last word, his ultimatum. Ottomar had quite understood. The blood ran hot and cold through his veins; his temples throbbed violently. He stopped a servant who was passing with a tray, tossed down several glasses of wine and then laughed, as one of his brother officers called out to him: "Leave a little for me!"

"Do you find it so hot too?"

"Tolerably! But I believe we are going to dance,"

"After supper; I don't know why it is so late. I will ask my sister."

"She is in that room." Ottomar plunged into the room, into the midst of a circle which had grouped itself round Carla. An extraordinary feeling of perversity came over him. In this little room almost all his most decisive meetings with Carla had taken place; here it was the custom, when the company was smaller, to withdraw in order to talk more at ease; and here were now gathered together all his most intimate friends: a few of his favourite brother officers--Wartenberg, Tettritz--only Schönau was absent--few of Elsa's particular friends, Elsa herself, even old Baroness Kniebreche had made her appearance, as she always did wherever she expected an interesting conversation, and, preventing Carla from rising off the small, blue silk sofa, had sunk into an armchair, in which, leaning forward, with her hand to her left ear, she listened eagerly to Carla's words. The only one of the party who was a stranger, as Ottomar himself had said a few minutes before to Clemda, was Count Golm; and this stranger stood, with one hand on the back of the small sofa, close to Carla, where he himself ought to have been standing, instead of remaining in the doorway, without the possibility of advancing a step farther into the crowded room, and not daring either to withdraw, after Baroness Kniebreche, turning her pince-nez angrily on him, had exclaimed: "There you are at last, when our dear Carla has been enchanting us with her clever talk--yes, yes, my dear Carla, positively enchanting us. Let your brother stand, Elsa; he has richly deserved it. For heaven's sake go on, my dear Carla!" Carla had hastily glanced towards the door through her eye-glass. "I cannot say any more without repeating what I have said already."

"Then repeat it!" exclaimed the Baroness. "One cannot hear often enough that Wagner is the master of all masters who have ever lived or ever will live."

"I did not say that, Baroness," said Carla, laying her hand on the old lady's; "only of those who have lived! It is not for nothing that the master calls his music that of the future; and the future is so called because it is yet to come. But who can venture to predict what will come?"

"Is it not magnificent?" exclaimed the old lady--"positively magnificent?"

"For," continued Carla, "deep as is my admiration for the master, I cannot conceal from myself, though with some trembling--only too natural in face of such incomparable greatness--that the mystical connection between word and sound--the Eleusinian mystery--proclaimed by the master, though only to the initiated, produces a deeper, more heart-felt satisfaction, in which the last remains of that barbarous separation which has hitherto existed between poetry and music entirely and for ever disappear."

"Positively stupendous!" exclaimed the Baroness.

"Magnificent!" growled Lieutenant von Tettritz.

"But Wagner himself allows that," said Von Wartenberg.

"And that speaks in my favour," answered Carla. "When we see how this splendid genius goes further and deeper with every work, how he advances with giant strides from 'Rienzi' and the 'Fliegende Holländer' to 'Tannhäuser' and 'Lohengrin;' from these to the 'Meistersinger;' from the 'Meistersinger' to 'Tristan and Isolde,' which I have only glanced at as yet, and now to what the 'Ring des Nibelungen' is to bring us--can we, dare we say, in opposition to the most modest of men, who looks upon every height that he has reached as only the stepping stone to a greater one, that with the 'Ring' the ring is closed? Impossible! 'Art,' says Goethe, who, if he understood nothing of music, always deserves to be listened to on the universal principles of æsthetics--'Art has never been possessed by one man alone;' and, god-like though he is, we must still look upon the master as a man."

"I must kiss you--I positively must kiss you!" exclaimed the Baroness. "What do you say to it, Count Golm--what do you say to it?"

"I bow my head in admiration and--silence," answered the Count, laying his hand on his heart.

"And you, Ottomar?" exclaimed the Baroness, turning in her chair with almost girlish activity, and fixing her pince-nez like a double-barrelled pistol on him.

"I consider Wagnerism, from beginning to end, to be an abominable humbug!" answered Ottomar defiantly. The company were horror-struck. "Good heavens!" "Unheard of!" "Abominable!" "Positive blasphemy!" was heard on all sides.

"What did he say?" asked the old lady, her hand to her ear, bending towards Carla. Carla shrugged her shoulders. "You really cannot expect me to repeat Herr von Werben's words. Baroness?"

"Which Ottomar did not mean seriously," said Elsa, with an imploring look at her brother, which Ottomar answered by a shrug of the shoulders.

"I thought myself bound," he said, "as the Baroness did me the honour to appeal directly to me, to give my opinion, though it can be of no importance in this 'noble circle.'" He emphasised scornfully the last words.

"Humbug!" exclaimed the old lady, who, while the others were all talking at once, had made Herr von Tettritz repeat the fearful word in her ear. "It is too bad! You must withdraw it!--you must positively withdraw it! Do you hear, Ottomar?"

"Perfectly, Baroness," answered Ottomar; "but I am unfortunately unable to comply with your command."

"It is an insult--a positive insult!" exclaimed the Baroness, waving her enormous fan violently up and down--"to us all, to Carla in particular--on my honour, my dear Carla!" Carla appeared not to hear; she was leaning back on the sofa, and laughing with Count Golm, who, leaning on his elbow, bent low over her. Elsa was greatly disturbed. She knew that her brother did not in the least care about music, and that under any other circumstances he would have put an end to the disagreeable scene with one of the light jests that came so easily to him; and that if he did not do so now--if, as was evident from his gloomy countenance, he was determined to continue it, he could only have one reason for doing so--the wish to bring about a crisis, to break with Carla irrevocably and for ever, in the presence of their friends! She did not wish for the marriage; she had spoken eagerly against it that very day; had opened her anxious heart to her brother. But Carla had not deserved this; she was only behaving today as she always did, and her laughter at this moment was doubtless forced. What could she say or do?

"Will you at least honour me with an answer?" exclaimed the angry old lady, half rising from her chair.

"Let me answer for him, Baroness?" said a voice. Elsa almost exclaimed in joyful astonishment. It was Schönau, who, laying his hand on Ottomar's shoulder, stepped into the doorway. Behind them she saw another bearded countenance, whose large, honest eyes rapidly surveyed the group, and finally rested on her. He could do no good here; but his very presence was a comfort, while Schönau's wits would bring help. Half a dozen voices at once made him acquainted with the crime Ottomar had committed.

"Now, Werben, Werben!" said Schönau, shaking his head at him. "How could you let your rash daring lead you into such danger, even if you were as much at home in logic as you are on horseback? But to confuse cause with effect--to call Bark giddiness because it produces giddiness, singing in the ears, and headache, is really unheard of!"

"You hear him!" exclaimed the old lady triumphantly, having only caught the last words. "Unheard of--positively unheard of! Get up, Tettritz; let Schönau sit down here. Go on, Schönau. Wagner is the greatest musician--eh?"

"And the greatest dramatist also," said Schönau, taking the place willingly left free for him by the Baroness.

"Go on, go on!" exclaimed the Barones, tapping Schönau on the hand with her fan.

"Undoubtedly," continued Schönau, with a smile, "it is the mission of every poet to hold a looking-glass to nature; but with a difference. '*J'ai vu les mœurs de mon temps, et j'ai publié ces lettres*,' wrote Rousseau in the preface to his 'Nouvelle Héloise;' that may suffice for the novelist, the poet's half-brother, as Schiller calls him. We must be content if he presents to us good photographs of reality--instantaneous pictures; and more than content if these photographs come out stereoscopically, and appear almost like life--almost. For only the dramatist fulfils, and can fulfil, his mission in earnest, his aim having been from the first, and being still, to leave the impress of his style on the age and on the material world. The first thing necessary for this, however, is Shakespeare's golden rule--'Be not too tame.' And it is just because Wagner is not too tame--because he has the courage, which his enemies call audacity, to allow the salient points in the character of his age to appear, to allow the excrescences to grow out of the material world--it is this which raises him so far above his rivals in the estimation of all who have ears to hear and eyes to see."

"I should like to kiss you!" exclaimed the Baroness. "Go on, my dear Schönau--go on!" Schönau bowed.

"What are, however, the salient points of our age? Ask our philosophers--Schopenhauer, Hartmann----"

"This will please you, Carla!" exclaimed the Baroness.

"They will answer, the deep conviction of the insufficiency, wretchedness, misery--let me say the word--worthlessness of this our earthly life; and combined with this, the conscious-unconscious longing after the Nirvana, the sweet Nothing--the beginning and foundation of things, which appears to our troubled nature as the only deliverance and last haven of refuge from the desolation and error of this life, and to which we should undoubtedly fly were it not for our will--our gigantic, invincible, indestructible will--that cares for nothing more than to live, to enjoy, to drink down the foaming cup of life, of love, to its last bitter drops. Renunciation there, enjoyment here, both to overflowing; because each is aware of the other, each hates the other, like the hostile brothers. And in this constantly renewed contest between irreconcilable contradictions; in this sensation of being torn backwards and forwards in the wildest confusion, the maddest tumult, the most entangled whirl; in this witches' Sabbath, this will-o'-the-wisp dance, and this halo of falling stars of modern humanity, hurrying from hell to heaven, from heaven to hell, raging and vanishing into mist; in this everything, and something more, turned into endless sing-song and eternal clang--the most horrible Past painted into a rosy-red caricature of the Present, while the eyes of a spectral Future stare from the empty sockets--the flute-notes of soft enjoyment, the violin-tones of fading bliss, drowned by the crashing cymbals and the shrill sound of the trumpets--here you have the 'Venusberg' and the 'Penitent,' the 'Wedding-night' and 'Monsalvat,' the chronic sorrows of love and the magic drink from a prescription; here you have, taking it all in all, him whose like has never been seen, and never will be seen--here you have Richard Wagner! And now, Baroness and ladies, allow me to withdraw before the enchanted silence into which I have lulled you breaks into words, which might hurt my modesty, though not that of nature." Schönau kissed Baroness Kniebreche's hand and disappeared, taking Ottomar with him. A few laughed, others cried "Treachery." The Baroness exclaimed:

"I don't know what you mean; he is quite right!" Lieutenant von Tettritz, who, as an enthusiastic Wagnerite, felt himself seriously offended, and was considering whether he ought not to call out Schönau for this insult, tried to explain to her that the Captain had mystified and laughed at her in the most outrageous manner.

"Without my finding it out!" exclaimed the old lady. "You must not say that, my dear child; old Kniebreche knows better than that when she is laughed at, I can assure you."

CHAPTER IX.

Fortunately at this moment supper was announced; it was served from a buffet which had been prepared in the hitherto closed room, on two small tables which had in the meantime been laid.

"Are you not yet engaged?" asked Elsa of Reinhold as she passed him; "make haste, then; Fräulein Emilie von Fischbach is waiting for you; she is indeed, though you look so astonished! It is all settled; she is standing near the looking-glass with Fräulein von Rossow whom Schönau has engaged. I do not intend to engage myself--I shall follow you in--we are going to sit at the small round table in the window! Now make haste, for fear anybody should get there before us." Reinhold hastened to fulfil so agreeable a command; Elsa stopped Ottomar, who was passing her. "Do, dear Ottomar, take Carla in to supper; I am sure she is waiting for you. You really have got a fault to make up for."

"Which I shall not do by committing another."

"I do not understand you; but you owe something to her and to us all."

"I shall never be able to pay all my debts. Well, to please you--there!" and he glanced at Carla, who just then passed on Golm's arm to the nearest table; "you see how she has waited for me!"

"Paula!" exclaimed Elsa to a young lady, "my brother is anxious to take you in to supper, but does not dare ask you because you refused him the other day. At that table!--Prince Clemda, at that table, please, near Count Golm and Ottomar--there are just four places empty--every seat must be occupied."

"At your orders," said Clemda; "*allons*, Werben!" Ottomar, with the lady on his arm, still stood undecided.

"Will a Werben allow a Golm to say that he left the field clear for him?" whispered Elsa in his ear. She regretted the words as soon as they were spoken: how could any cause prosper that was fed from the spring of injured vanity? But Ottomar had already led away her friend, and it was high time for her also to take her place. She was too late already. She had hoped that Reinhold would sit by her; but room must be made for another couple who had been wandering from table to table, and the whole arrangement was thus disturbed. Still he was opposite to her, and she had the satisfaction of seeing him--of noticing his eyes so often, it could hardly be unintentionally, turned towards her--if only for a moment; of hearing his hearty laugh, which had so enchanted Meta, and which she herself, as she secretly acknowledged, found so enchanting; the calm clearness of his words when he joined in the conversation, the modest silence with which he readily allowed the witty Schönau to take the lead in the conversation. The latter, now that he thought it worth his while, spoke his real opinion of Wagner and Wagnerism, and explained how he saw in Wagner, not the prophet of the future, but, on the contrary, the last exponent of a great past; how the mixing and mingling of arts, which Wagner held up as their highest development, had everywhere and at all times prepared and accompanied their downfall; how the blind fanaticism of his supporters, and the tyrannical intolerance with which they cried down every opposite opinion, was for him not a proof of their strength, but, on the contrary, of their weakness, the overpowering consciousness of which they sought to drown in this manner; and how, to his eyes, the only comfort to be derived from the whole affair was that the despotism usurped by the Wagnerites hung on one life only, namely, that of the master himself, and that his empire must fall into ruins as soon as he abandoned the scene, because his so-called theory did not rest on true principles of art, did not result necessarily from the essence of art, but was nothing more than the abstraction of his own highly-gifted, energetic but capricious and exceptional nature, of which it might truly be said that its like would hardly be seen again.

"Believe me, my friends, to his helpless disciples Mephistopheles' saying will be carried out; they will have the parts in their hands, but the spiritual bond that united them will be gone for ever." Schönau had addressed his words chiefly to Elsa, but Elsa's thoughts were wandering, and yet she generally listened to him with so much pleasure; and he was talking to-day even better than usual, with a certain passion which was very striking in the usually quiet, reserved man. Her friends had often teased her about Captain Schönau, and she had never denied that she liked him; and now, while he was speaking, and her eyes wandered from him to Reinhold and back again, and she compared, almost against her will, these two men who were so unlike one another, she asked herself how it could be that one should like one man so much and yet like another a great deal better, even though the former had undoubtedly far more brilliant ideas beneath his broad, sharply-chiselled brow, than the other who listened to him with such respectful attention; besides, how curious it was, that while the one had for years frequented their house as an intimate friend, she had never troubled herself to think whether he enjoyed himself there, while her head was now constantly troubling itself with the question whether the other, who was their guest for the first time to-day, had come willingly and would wish to come again, and she rejoiced to see how contentedly he was chatting with pretty Emilie Fischbach, and how he now, in his open-hearted way, lifted his glass to her and drained it, while his eyes looked so kindly and so steadily into hers. Yes, she was happy, and would have been entirely so if the talk at the long table near them had been somewhat less loud and excited, and if Ottomar's voice had not several times rung out so loudly that she started in terror, and was relieved when the sounds of laughter and the clinking of glasses drowned his clear tones. She knew that it was always particularly noisy and jolly at the table at which Ottomar sat. To-day more than ever. "A Werben will not leave the field clear for a Golm!" The words sounded in Ottomar's ear as he sat at table by his partner, opposite to Golm and Carla, and they re-echoed in his passion-filled heart; and, if no one else remarked it, to Carla there was a tone in his voice as he now plunged into the conversation already started, in which he took and maintained the lead, as if it were a race, thought Carla, in which he was determined to be the victor in spite of all the efforts of his rivals.

And Count Golm strove in every imaginable way--but in vain. Ottomar was inexhaustible in his amusing fancies, absurd jokes, and witty answers; Carla had never seen him so brilliant. Carla was enchanted; she knew what prize was being ridden for in this race, and why the foremost rider took the highest hedges and the widest ditches with such temerity, and that it was from her hands the winner would receive the prize. Poor Golm, he did all he could, and more than all; it was not his fault if he remained farther and farther behind, and at length seemed inclined to turn out of the course. But that could not be allowed; he must be cheered and encouraged, he must be allowed to receive at least the second prize, and be persuaded that it was only an unlucky accident that vanquished him this time, and that it was not impossible that another time he might win the first. But this must be done very carefully, by an encouraging smile, by a kind, rapid glance; before the company Ottomar must be crowned; to Ottomar she addressed herself as they rose from table, and holding out her hand, said, loud enough to be heard by the bystanders:

"You really surpassed yourself, Herr von Werben."

"You are too kind," answered Ottomar, with so low a bow that it was almost mocking. The mockery was not heartfelt. He was intoxicated by his success, and not by his success only. He had desired to forget his cares and troubles by drowning them in wine, and he had succeeded. The dark wood, and the beautiful girl whom a few hours back he had folded in his arms in that dark wood, it was all a dream--a wild, confused dream which he had dreamt, heaven only knew when; here were pleasure and mirth, and light and brightness, whichever way he looked; and whichever way he looked bright eyes sparkled, rosy lips laughed, white shoulders glistened, and all sparkled, laughed, and glistened for him! Here was his empire; here he was king; he had only to hold out his hand and the hand of the lady most courted here would be laid in his! Was there a to-morrow? Let it come; the present belonged to him; pleasure and mirth for ever! Bright eyes, and rosy lips, and white shoulders for ever! And as if all the spirits of pleasure and mirth were surrounding him, Ottomar flew through the rooms to apologise to the elder guests, if in the interests of the young people who wanted to dance a little they were somewhat crowded till the supper-room could be cleared, begging his brother officers not to waste precious time, but to engage their partners if they had not been wise enough to do so already, giving the young ladies the delightful information that the evening would wind up with a cotillon, with orders to be given by the ladies, and that there was room on his breast for more than one. And now the doors were re-opened, from the empty room resounded the notes of a merry polka, and----

"You will dance this with me, Carla?" exclaimed Ottomar, and without awaiting her answer--putting his arm round her--he flew with her into the dancing-room, followed by the other couples who had anxiously awaited this moment.

"Are you not dancing?" asked a deep voice behind Reinhold. Reinhold turned. "No, General."

"Do you not dance?"

"Oh yes; but you did me the honour to say you wished to speak to me. I was just about to----"

"That is very good of you. I was coming to fetch you."

"I am at your orders, General."

"Come, then." The General, however, did not move. The aspect of the room, which was almost filled with dancers, appeared to interest and absorb him. Reinhold, who had unconsciously turned in the direction in which the General was looking, saw that the eyes of the latter were fastened on Ottomar, who with Carla was engaged in the centre of the room in performing the skilful evolutions demanded by the polka. A smile passed over his grave, stern face; then, as if rousing himself from a dream, he passed his hand over his forehead, and said again, "Come, then." He put his arm through Reinhold's, and crossed with him the large drawing-room in front of a group that had assembled round Baroness Kniebreche. The Baroness suddenly stopped speaking; the round glasses of her pince-nez seemed to flash forth angry flames at the sight of the confidential manner of the General towards the young officer of the reserve.

"Look away!" thought Reinhold, while his heart beat proudly, "and heaven grant that I may prove worthy of the honour!" They entered the small room in which a little while before Wagner had been so warmly discussed. The room was empty.

"Sit down," said the General, taking possession of an arm-chair and motioning to Reinhold to sit by him; "I will not keep you long."

"I am really in no hurry. General; I am only engaged once for a later dance with your daughter."

"That is right," said the General. "Elsa is in your debt, and here am I going to take advantage of your good-nature again. In one word, you have spoken to Colonel Sattelstädt and to Schönau, and have given them your decided opinion upon the matter you know of. They both say that your explanations have put the matter in quite a new light, which they consider most important, and which ought to decide the question in the eyes of all who can see in our favour; that is to say, in mine and these two gentlemen's, who unfortunately stand pretty nearly alone in our views, and have every reason to look about us for allies. I ask you now, in our joint names, if you will be that ally, and if you will draw up for us a written statement of the circumstances of which we can

make unrestricted use? Schönau will willingly provide you with maps and any other assistance you may want, if you will put yourself in communication with him. The first question now is, will you do us this kindness?"

"Most certainly, General, and will do it to the best of my ability."

"I felt sure you would; but I must draw your attention to one important point. President von Sanden has told me that he has you in his mind, and Elsa confided to me that you were not disinclined to agree to the President's wish, and accept the situation in question. The post is not in the gift of the Minister of War, but your report will cause ill feeling in more than one department, and we might find ourselves compelled to give up the name of our informant. Have you thought of that?"

"No, General; but I have never been ashamed of my name, and, thank God, have never had reason to be. From the moment that it is named in such company and in this affair, I shall be proud of it." The General nodded.

"One thing more: the matter is pressing, very pressing. When do you think you can have the report ready?"

"If I can communicate with Herr von Schönau to-morrow morning, it shall be ready the morning after."

"But you would have to work all night."

"I am a good sleeper, General, and I can keep awake too when necessary." The General smiled.

"Thank you, my dear Schmidt." It was the first time that he had spoken to Reinhold in the unceremonious manner usual from superior officers to their younger comrades. He had risen, and his usually stern glance rested with almost fatherly kindness on the young man who stood before him, colouring with pleasure and pride.

"And now go and amuse yourself for a little while with the young people; you are still young enough yourself, thank God. There comes my son, probably to fetch you."

"Just so," said Ottomar, who appeared hurriedly and excitedly in the doorway. "I apologise; but Elsa----"

"Off with you!" said the General. Ottomar drew Reinhold away. The General looked thoughtfully after the two young men.

"It is a pity," he said, "but one cannot have everything at once, and if Ottomar--what do you want!"

"This letter has just been left."

"A letter, now? How can that be?"

"The hall door is open, sir. The man who brought it said it was lucky, as otherwise he would have had to ring. It was very important."

"Very odd!" said the General, contemplating the letter which he had taken from the servant. It was a large, business-like looking letter, and the direction was in a clerk's hand.

"Very odd!" said the General again. He had opened the letter mechanically and began to read it. What was this? He passed his hand over his eyes and looked again; but there it stood quite plain, in clear, bold words. His face became purple.

"Have you any orders, sir?" asked August, who was anxiously waiting.

"No, no! nothing, nothing! You can go," murmured the General, as he put the letter down and pretended to fold it. But the servant had hardly left the room before he took it up again to read to the end. And then the strong man trembled from head to foot, while with a cautious glance around he quickly folded the letter, and tearing open his uniform, put it in his pocket.

"Unhappy boy!" he murmured.

CHAPTER X.

The last carriage had driven away; the servants were arranging the rooms under Sidonie's directions. Elsa, who generally spared her aunt all household cares, had withdrawn under pretext of feeling a little tired, that, in her quiet room, she might let the soft echoes of this happy evening die out of her heart, undisturbed by the clatter of chairs and tables. It had not needed that he should dance the Rheinländer so admirably; she would still have brought him in the cotillon the large blazing order which she had placed at the bottom of the basket, and which, when her turn came, she boldly and successfully drew out, and then with trembling hands fastened it beside the iron cross on his breast. Yes; her hands had trembled and her heart had fluttered as she had done the great deed, and then looked up in his sparkling eyes; but it was from happiness, from pure happiness and joy. And it was happiness and joy which now kept her awake, after she had laid her greatest treasures--the album with his portrait and the little compass--on the table by her bedside, and had extinguished the candle, which she lighted again in order to cast a glance at the box containing the compass, and to assure herself that "it was still faithful," and "turned towards its master," and then opened the album at the place at which it always opened, and looked at his portrait once more; no, not at the portrait--that was detestable--but at the inscription, "With all my heart," and softly breathed a kiss upon it, and then quickly put the light out again, laid her head on the pillow, and sought in her dreams him to whom she was faithful waking and sleeping, and of whom she knew that he was faithful to her sleeping or waking. Ottomar had also, as soon as the last guests were gone, retired, with a "Good-night; I am tired to death; what has become of my father?" and had gone downstairs without waiting for the answer. In the passage leading to his room, he must pass his father's door. He stood still for a moment. His father, who had gone downstairs a few minutes before, was doubtless still up, and Ottomar was accustomed under similar circumstances to knock and, at least, wish him good-night through the open door. This evening he did not do so. "I am tired to death," he repeated, as if he wished to apologise to himself for this breach of his usual habit. But arrived in his room, he did not think of going to bed. It would have been useless so long as the blood coursed through his temples, "like mad," said Ottomar, while he tore off and threw down his uniform with the cotillon orders, and tore open his waistcoat and cravat, and put on the first garment that he laid his hand upon--his shooting-coat--and stationed himself at the open window with a cigar. The night was very fresh, but the cold did him good; a drizzling rain was falling from the black clouds, but he did not heed it; he stood there looking out into the dark autumn night, and smoking his cigar, confused thoughts whirling through his troubled brain, and the beating of the veins of his temples and the sighing of the wind in the trees prevented his hearing a twice-repeated knock at the door. He started like a criminal when he heard a voice at his ear. It was August.

"I beg pardon, sir. I knocked more than once."

"What do you want?"

"The General begs you will go to him at once."

"Is my father ill?" August shook his head. "The General has not yet undressed, and does not look exactly ill, only a little----"

"Only a little what?" The man scratched his head. "A little odd, sir. I think, sir, the General----"

"Confound you, will you speak out?" August came a step nearer, and said in a whisper, "I think the General had a disagreeable letter a little while ago; it may have been about half-past eleven. I did not see the man who brought it, and Friedrich did not recognise him, and I believe he went away again immediately. But I was obliged to take the letter to the General myself, and the General made a curious face when he read the letter."

"From a lady?" August could not help smiling, in spite of his sincere anxiety for his young master.

"Oh no!" said he. "They look different, one finds that out by experience; an important looking letter."

"Those infernal Jews!" muttered Ottomar. He could not understand what it meant; the next bill was only due in a week's time; but what else in the world could it be? His father would be in an awful rage again. Well, he would only have to propose a few days earlier, if he must propose, were it only to put an end to these everlasting worries, which left a man no peace even to smoke his cigar quietly in his own room at night. He tossed the cigar out of window. August had picked up his uniform coat, and was taking off the cotillon orders.

"What is that for?"

"Won't you put on your uniform, sir?" asked August.

"Nonsense!" said Ottomar. "It would only--" He broke off; he could not say to August, "It would only make this tiresome business longer and more solemn." "I shall simply tell my father that I do not mean to trouble him with these matters in future, but prefer to allow Wallbach finally to settle my affairs," said he to himself, while August went before him along the passage with the lamp, the gaslights having been extinguished, and stopped at his father's door.

"You may put the light down on the table and go to bed, and tell Friedrich to wake me at six o'clock." He had spoken louder than was necessary, and it struck him that his voice sounded strange, as if it were not his own voice. Of course it was only because the house was quite quiet, so quiet that he again heard the blood coursing through his temples, and the beating of his heart.

"Those infernal Jews!" he muttered again through his teeth as he knocked at the door.

"Come in!" His father stood at his writing-table, above which a hanging lamp was burning. On the console before the looking-glass also the lamps were still burning. The room seemed disagreeably light and formal-looking, although it was exactly as Ottomar had always seen it, as long as he could remember. He had better have put on his uniform after all.

"I must apologise for my dress, father; I was just going to bed, and August seemed to think you were in such a hurry." His father remained standing at the table, leaning on one hand, with his back towards him, without answering. The silence lay like a mountain on Ottomar's soul. With a great effort he shook off his vague dread.

"What do you want, father?"

"First that you should read this letter," said the General, turning round slowly, and pointing to a paper that was spread out before him on the table.

"A letter to me?"

"In that case I should not have read it; and I have read it." He had stepped back from the table, and paced slowly up and down the room with his hands behind his back, while Ottomar, standing where his father had stood just before, without taking the letter in his hand--the handwriting was legible enough--read as follows:

"HONOURED SIR,--I trust your honour will forgive your humble servant, the undersigned, for venturing to call your honour's attention to a circumstance which threatens seriously to endanger the welfare of your honoured family. It concerns the relations which have for some time subsisted between your son, Lieutenant von Werben, and the daughter of your neighbour, Herr Schmidt, the owner of the great marble-works. Your honour will excuse the undersigned from entering into details, with which he is thoroughly conversant, but which are better consigned to the obscurity in which the parties in question seek in vain to remain, and if the undersigned begs you to ask your son where, and in whose company he was this evening between eight and nine, it is only to prove to your honour how far the said relations have been carried.

"It would be both foolish and unpardonable to suppose that your honour is acquainted with all this, and has connived at it till your son is on the point of being betrothed to the daughter of an ultra-radical democrat. On the contrary, the undersigned can imagine beforehand the painful astonishment which your honour will experience on reading these lines; but, your honour, the undersigned has also been a soldier, and knows what military honour is, as indeed all his life long he has cherished it, and he cannot endure any longer to see the honour of such a brave officer so criminally trifled with behind his back, by him who more than any other appears called to protect that honour.

"The undersigned feels he need say no more in assertion of the great veneration with which he is of his honour and his honour's whole family

"The obedient, humble servant."

The General did not interrupt his son for some minutes, but as Ottomar still remained motionless, staring in front of him, his teeth pressing hard on his white lip, he stopped in his walk at the far end of the room, and asked:

"Have you any idea who wrote that letter?"

"No."

"Have you the slightest suspicion that the lady whom it concerns----"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Ottomar impetuously.

"I beg your pardon, but I am under the painful necessity of asking questions, as you do not appear disposed to give me the explanations which I expected."

"What am I to explain!" asked Ottomar half defiantly; "the thing is true."

"Short and conclusive," answered the General, "but not quite clear. At least, some points still require clearing up. Have you anything to reproach this lady with--I may call her so?"

"I must beg you to do so."

"Well, then, have you anything in the least to reproach this lady with, which, setting aside outward circumstances of which we will speak later, could prevent you from bringing her into Elsa's company? On your honour!"

"On my honour, nothing!"

"Do you know anything of her family, again setting aside outward circumstances, even the smallest fact, which would and ought to hinder any other officer who was not in your peculiar position from forming a connection with her family! On your honour!" Ottomar hesitated a moment; he knew absolutely nothing dishonourable of Philip; he only had the inborn instinct of a gentleman against a man who, in his eyes, is not a gentleman; but he would have considered it cowardly to shelter himself behind this vague feeling.

"No!" said he moodily.

"You have acquainted the lady with your circumstances?"

"In a general way, yes."

"Amongst other things, that you are disinherited if you marry a woman who is not of noble birth?"

"No."

"That was somewhat imprudent; however, I can understand it. But in a general way you say that she is aware of the difficulties which, under the most favourable circumstances, must stand in the way of a union between you and her?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever let her perceive that you have neither the will nor the power to remove these difficulties?"

"No."

"Rather have allowed her to believe, have probably assured her that you can and will set aside these obstacles?"

"Yes."

"Then you will marry her." Ottomar started like a horse touched by the spur. He had felt that this must and would be the end; and yet, as the words were spoken, his pride chafed against the pressure put upon his heart even by his own father. And in the background lurked again ghost-like the horrid sensation that he had had in the park; that he was weaker than she who so confidingly nestled in his arms. Was he to be always the weaker, always to follow, whether he would or no, always to have his path traced out for him by others?

"Never!" burst from him.

"How! never!" said the General. "Surely I am not speaking to a headstrong boy who breaks the toy that he no longer cares about, but to an officer and a gentleman who is accustomed to keep his word strictly." Ottomar felt that he must give a reason, or at least the shadow of a reason.

"I mean," he said, "that I cannot make up my mind to take a step in one direction that would compel me to do wrong in another."

"I think I understand your position," said the General; "it is not an agreeable one, but a man who pays attention in so many quarters should be prepared for the consequences. I must, however, do you the justice of admitting that I begin now to understand your behaviour to Fräulein von Wallbach, and that I only find wanting in it that consistency to which you have unfortunately never accustomed me on any point. In my opinion it was your duty to draw back once for all, the instant that your heart became seriously engaged in another direction. No doubt, considering our intimate acquaintance with the Wallbachs, this would have been extremely difficult and disagreeable, still a man may be deceived in his feelings, and society accepts such changes of mind and their practical consequences, provided everything is done at the right time and in a proper manner. How you are now to draw back, without bringing upon yourself and us the most serious embarrassment, I do not know; I only know that it must be done. Or have you carried your misconduct to its highest point and bound yourself here as you are bound there?"

"I am bound to Fräulein von Wallbach by nothing that the whole world has not seen; by no word that the whole world has not heard, or might not have heard, and my feelings for her have been from the first as undecided----"

"As your behaviour. Let us say no more about it, then; let us rather face the situation into which you have brought yourself, and deduce the consequences. The first is, that you have destroyed your diplomatic career--you cannot appear at the Court of St. Petersburg or any other court with a wife of low birth; the second, that you must exchange into another regiment, as you would never see the last of the collisions and rubs that must happen to you in your present

regiment if you had a Fräulein Schmidt for your wife; the third, that if the lady does not bring you a fortune, or at least a very considerable addition to your means, you will have for the future to live in a very different way from what you have been hitherto accustomed to, and one which I fear will not be in accordance with your tastes; the fourth consequence is, that in forming this connection, were it as honourable in one sense as I wish and hope it may be, you will, according to the literal words of the will, lose all right to your inheritance. I mention this only in order to put the whole matter clearly before you." Ottomar knew that his father had not said everything, that he had been generously silent with regard to the five-and-twenty thousand thalers which he had in the course of the last few years paid for his son's debts, that is to say, all but a small remnant of his own property, and that he could not soon repay his father the money as he had fully intended to do; perhaps would never be able to repay it. His father would then only have his pay, and later his pension, to depend upon, and he had often spoken lately of retiring. His eyes, which in his confusion had sought the ground, now turned timidly towards his father, who, as before, slowly paced up and down the room. Was it the light, or was it that he looked at him more closely than usual? his father seemed to him aged by ten years, for the first time he looked like an old man. With the feelings of respect and affection that he had always entertained towards him were mixed a sensation almost of pity; he would have liked to throw himself at his feet, and clasping his knees, to cry: "Forgive me the sins I have committed against you!" But he felt rooted to the spot; his limbs would not obey him, or go the way he wished; his tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth; he could utter nothing but: "You have still Elsa!" The General had remained standing before the life-sized pictures of his parents, which adorned one of the walls; an officer of rank in the uniform worn in the war of liberation, and a lady, still young, in the dress of that time, who strikingly resembled Elsa about the forehead and eyes.

"Who knows?" said he. He passed his hand over his forehead.

"It is late; two o'clock; and to-morrow will have its cares also. Will you be so good as to extinguish the gas-light above you? Have you got a light outside!"

"Yes, father."

"Good-night, then." He had himself extinguished the lamp in front of the looking-glass and taken up the other one. "You may go." Ottomar longed to ask for his hand, but he dared not, and with a good-night that sounded defiant, because he was ready to burst into tears, he moved towards the door. His father stopped at the door of his bedroom: "One thing more! I had forgotten to say that I reserve to myself the right of taking the next step. As you have delayed so long in taking the initiative, you will not refuse to grant me this favour. I shall of course keep you *au courant*. I beg that you will meantime take no step without my knowledge. We must at least act in concert, now we have come to an understanding." He said the last words with a sort of melancholy smile that cut Ottomar to the heart. He could bear it no longer and rushed out of the room. The General also had his hand on the door; but when Ottomar had disappeared he drew it back, carried the lamp to the writing-table, and took out a casket in which he kept, amongst other ornaments of little value that had belonged to his dead wife and his mother, the iron rings that his parents had worn during the war of liberation. He took out the rings.

"Times have altered," he said, "not improved. What, ah! what has become of your piety, your dutifulness, your chaste simplicity, your holy self-sacrifice? I have honestly endeavoured to emulate you, to be the worthy son of a race that knew no fame but the courage of its men and the virtue of its women. How have I sinned that I should be so punished?" He kissed the rings and laid them in the casket; and took from amongst several miniatures on ivory, one of a beautiful brown-eyed, brown-haired boy about six years old. He gazed long and immovably at it.

"The male line of the Werbens would die out with him, and--he was my darling. Perhaps I am punished because I was so unspeakably proud of him."

CHAPTER XI.

"Why did my brother ring for his coffee at four o'clock!" asked Aunt Rikchen in the kitchen.

"I do not know," answered Grollmann.

"You never do know anything," said Aunt Rikchen. Grollmann shrugged his shoulders, took the tray on which the second breakfast was prepared for his master and left the room, but came back in a few minutes and set down the tray, as he had taken it away, on the dresser.

"Well?" asked Aunt Rikchen irritably, "is it wrong again?"

"My master is asleep," said Grollmann. Aunt Rikchen in her astonishment almost dropped the coffee-pot from which she had just poured Reinhold's coffee. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "how can my brother sleep at this hour! He has never in his whole life done such a thing before. Is he ill?"

"I don't think so," said Grollmann.

"Has anything happened this morning?"

"This morning, no."

"Or yesterday evening?" asked Aunt Rikchen, whose sharp ears had detected the short pause which Grollmann had made between "this morning" and "no."

"I suppose so," said Grollmann, staring before him, while the wrinkles in his weather-beaten face seemed to deepen every moment.

"Miserable man, tell me at once!" exclaimed Aunt Rikchen, seizing the old man by the arm and shaking him, as if she wished to shake his secret out of him.

"I know nothing," said Grollmann, freeing himself; "is the coffee ready for the Captain?"

"Why does my nephew want it in his room to-day?" asked Aunt Rikchen.

"I don't know," answered Grollmann, slipping away with the coffee, as he had done before with the breakfast-tray.

"He is a horrid man," said Aunt Rikchen; "he will be the death of me some day, with his mysteries. He shall tell me when he comes back." But Grollmann did not come back, although Aunt Rikchen almost tore down the bell-rope. Aunt Rikchen was very angry, and would have been furious if she had heard Grollmann relating above to Reinhold unasked, with the minutest details, what he would not have told her for any money.

"For you see, sir," said Grollmann, "she is so good in other respects, Fräulein Frederike; but what she knows she must tell, sooner or later, if it cost her her life; and the master cannot bear that, especially from his sister, and we are the sufferers."

"What did happen?" asked Reinhold.

"This was it," said the old man. "About twelve o'clock last night he came back from the second meeting of the manufacturers; I lighted him to his room, as usual, turned up the lamps in his study, and went into his bedroom to shut the windows, which always stay open till he goes to bed, winter and summer; and there, close to the window, on the floor, lay, what I took at first for a piece of paper, till I took it up and found that it was a regular letter, which somebody must have thrown in from the street, and the small stone that had been fastened to it by a bit of packthread lay close by. I hesitated for a minute or two whether I would not hide the letter, without saying anything to the master, till it occurred to me that the letter might possibly be from a friend, and contain information of something which the master ought to know--a fire, an attempt at murder, or God knows what, of which the rabble are quite capable; so I took it in to the master and told him where and how I had just found it. The master just looked at the address and said: 'That is written in a disguised hand; I will have nothing to do with it; throw it into the fire.' But I urged him so that he at length gave way and opened the letter. The master was standing at one side of the table and I at the other, and of course I could see his face while he was reading; and I was terribly alarmed, for the blood rushed to his head, and the hand in which he held the letter trembled so, that I thought, begging your pardon, that he was going to have a fit. But it passed off; the master only let fall the letter and said: 'It is nonsense; I knew it before. They will not burn the house over our heads; you may go to bed in peace.' I went, but I was not in peace, and was not much surprised when the master rang for me this morning at half-past three--he is always particularly early when he has had any trouble or annoyance in the evening, or if he has anything in particular on his mind. This time it must have been something very bad; the master was in exactly the same dress in which he had come home yesterday evening, and the bed had not been touched. On the other hand, the bottle of wine which I always put in his room at night, and out of which he generally drinks only a glass or two, sometimes nothing at all, was empty to the very last drop; and he looked so wild and strange that I was naturally alarmed, and asked the same question that the Fräulein asked just now, if he was ill. He denied it however, said he had been very much vexed yesterday evening, and added something about the gentlemen who would not hear reason and were going to spoil all by their cowardice, and so on; but it all sounded confused and strange, as if, begging your pardon, he were not quite right in his head. I asked him if he would sleep now for a few hours, and was relieved when he lay down on the sofa and let me cover him up, saying, 'I wish to be woke at half-past eight, Grollmann.' And at half-past eight I went back again, but the coverlet lay on the ground near the sofa, and I saw at a glance that the master had not slept a minute. He had however washed and dressed himself, and now looked very ill. He said he had not been able to sleep, and had no time now. He wanted his breakfast in half an hour; at ten he had to be at another meeting, to which the workmen were going to send delegates. 'I promised to be there,' he said, 'though I had rather not go; I might meet some one there whom I had rather not meet to-day.' I did not dare to ask who the some one was, but I thought to myself, I am glad it is not me, for he gave a look, Captain, that filled me with terror. If

he would only go to sleep now, thought I to myself, for while he was speaking he had sat down on the sofa and stared before him as if he were half asleep already. Well, Captain, and sure enough when I went in just now with the breakfast, quite quietly, he was sitting asleep in the corner of the sofa. For heaven's sake, let him sleep, thought I, slipping gently out of the room with my breakfast; and now I only ask, Captain, shall I wake him when it is time, or shall I let him sleep? He wants it, God knows."

"Let him sleep, Grollmann," said Reinhold, after a short pause; "I will take the blame on myself."

"He won't blame you," said Grollmann, passing his hand through his grey hair; "he thinks too much of you; I will risk it."

"Do so," said Reinhold, "on my authority, and do not trouble yourself any more about it. I am convinced that your first idea was correct, and that it was a threatening letter. You know my uncle; he fears nothing."

"God knows it," said Grollmann.

"But it has vexed and excited him still more, when he had already come back vexed and excited from the meeting. These are troublesome times for him, which must be gone through. We must be prepared for bad days till the good ones come again."

"If they ever do come," said Grollmann. The old man had left the room; Reinhold tried to return to the work he had begun, but he could not collect his thoughts. He had tried to comfort the old man, yet he himself now felt uneasy and troubled. If his uncle did not learn to moderate himself, if he continued to look and to treat in this passionately tragical way an affair which, near as it lay to his heart, was in fact a matter of business and must be considered from a sober, business-like point of view, the bad days might indeed last long, inconveniently long, for all concerned--"to whom I myself belong now," said Reinhold. He stood up and went to the window. It was a raw, disagreeable day. From the low-hanging clouds was falling a fine, cold rain; the tall trees rustled in the wind, and withered leaves were driven through the grey mist. How different had it looked when a few days ago--it was only a very few, though it seemed to him an eternity--he had looked down here one morning, for the first time. The sky had been such a lovely blue, and white clouds had stood in that blue sky so still, it seemed as if they could not weary of contemplating the beautiful sun-lighted earth, on which men, surrounded, indeed, by the smoke of chimneys and distracted by the noise of wheels and saws, must earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, though the sun shone brightly and the birds sang cheerily in the thick branches--that earth on which there was so much pleasure, and love, and blessed hope, even in the heart of a poor blind girl, and a thousand times more for him who saw all this beauty spread out before him, doubly glorious in the reflection of the love which shone and glittered through his heart as the sun through the dewdrops on the leaves. And because the sun was now for a time hidden behind a cloud, was all the glory passed away? Because a few hundred idle men had cast their tools from their horny hands, must every one feel life a burden, and refuse to carry that burden any longer? No; a thousand times no! The sun will shine again; the men will return to their duty; and you, happy man--thrice happy man--for whom the sun shines in spite of all in your innermost heart, return to your work, which for you is no hard duty, but rather a joy and an honour. Reinhold greeted with eyes and hand the neighbouring house, one window of which he had long ago discovered between the branches of the plane trees, which he watched more eagerly than any star; and then hoped that Ferdinanda, whom he suddenly perceived in the garden, would take his greeting to herself if she had seen him. She could hardly have seen the greeting, and could not even have seen him at the window as she walked up and down between the shrubs, under the rustling trees, without appearing to notice the rain which was falling on her. At any rate she was without hat, without umbrella, in her working dress, without even a shawl; sometimes standing still and gazing up into the driving clouds, then walking on again, her eyes turned to the ground, evidently sunk in the deepest thought.

"Curious people, those artists," thought Reinhold, while he seated himself again at his work. "What a fool you were to think that her heart could beat for any creature of flesh or blood, or, indeed, for anything but her Reaping Girl and Boy, if she has a heart at all." In the meantime Grollmann was standing undecided at the top of the staircase, before the door leading to his master's room. His conscience was not quite satisfied by Reinhold's assurance that he would take the responsibility on himself, if the master overslept himself. Should he go downstairs? should he go in? He must make up his mind; it was a quarter past nine. "If only something would occur to oblige me to wake him," said Grollmann. At that moment he heard the door open on the lower floor, and some one came up the stairs. Grollmann looked over the banisters; an officer--a general--the old General from over the way. "That is curious," thought Grollmann, and stood at attention, as was fitting in an old servant who had been a soldier. The General had come up the stairs. "I wish to speak to Herr Schmidt; will you announce me?"

"It is not exactly his hour for receiving," said Grollmann; "and----"

"Perhaps he will receive me, however, if you tell him that I have come on most important business; here is my card."

"It is not necessary, General. I have the honour, General----"

"Take the card, all the same." Grollmann held the card undecided in his hand; but, if the business was so important--and he could not very well send a general unceremoniously away. "Will you excuse me a minute. General?" The old man slipped through the door. The General looked gloomily around on the broad carpeted marble steps with their gilt banisters, on the dark, gilded folding-doors which led on three sides out of the gallery in which he stood, while the fourth wall, in which was the window, was decorated with magnificent plants; on the polished stucco walls, on the richly decorated ceiling.

"I wish the man lived in a plainer house," murmured the General.

"Will you step this way, sir?" Grollmann had his hand on the door. "He has not slept all night," he whispered, as if he must apologise for his master, who would probably not do so for himself.

"I have not slept either," answered the General with a melancholy smile, as he walked with a firm, quiet step through the door, which the old man now opened and shut after him.

CHAPTER XII.

The two men stood opposite one another, each measuring the other's strength, like two athletes who are about to fight to the death, and yet cannot resist admiring each other's noble appearance, and thinking that whichever falls will have succumbed to a worthy adversary. And yet the General had all the time the sensation that, strong and powerful as was the man who stood before him, he himself was in that moment the more composed, the calmer, and therefore the stronger. He saw it in the sullen fire that smouldered in the man's eyes, in the trembling of the hand with which he pointed to a chair; he heard it in the deep voice which now said: "I did not expect your visit, General; but it does not surprise me."

"I conjectured as much," answered the General; "and it is for that reason that you see me here. I thought that every hour which passed unused by us, would diminish the probability of a friendly arrangement of the affair which brings me to you, as it would leave time for the miserable writer of this letter to spread his poison further and further. May I venture to give you the disagreeable task of reading this document?"

"Will you at the same time take the trouble of casting a glance at this production?" The two men exchanged the letters which they had received. That which the General now read with calm attention, ran thus:

"This then is the man who dismisses his work-people because they have not kept their word, as he says. Does he then keep his, he whose mouth is always full of the words liberty, equality, and fraternity; and boasts that he alone has held firmly by the old democratic flag of '48, and who now shuts his eyes while his son buys estates and builds palaces with the money he has stolen from honest people, and while his daughter runs after an officer of the Guards, who has a new mistress every six months, and leads the wildest of lives, but who will ultimately make Fräulein Schmidt into Frau von Werben? Or does Herr Schmidt know this? does he wish this? It is not unlike the great man of progress; for to think one thing and speak another, and to speak one thing and act another, has always been the practice of these gentlemen, which they carry on till at last some one finds them out and stops their dirty work, as in this case is resolved by one who is determined to stop at nothing."

The General gave back the letter and received his own.

"The man does not seem to have thought it necessary to put on any mask with you," said the General, "except in the handwriting."

"Which, however, I recognised at the first glance," answered Uncle Ernst; "it is that of a certain Roller, who was for several years overseer at my works, till I was obliged a few days ago to dismiss him for disobedience, under the circumstances to which he alludes at the commencement of his letter."

"I had heard of it," said the General, "and that explains sufficiently the man's brutal vindictiveness; and as for the way in which he has discovered what has up to this moment been a secret to both of us, we should not wish to follow him there if we could. Let us therefore set that point aside. Another appears to me more important. This man has not attempted to conceal his

handwriting in the letter which he has written to me; he evidently concluded, therefore, that we should not communicate with one another." The General, at these words, raised his eyes, as if accidentally; but his glance was sharp and piercing as that of the commander of a battery counting the seconds as he looks out for the spot to which the first shot shall be directed.

"That is the only point on which he and I agree," said Uncle Ernst. His voice, which had become calmer, trembled again, and he had cast down his eyes. The General saw that it would probably be easy for him to provoke an explanation which would relieve him from all further explanation on his part, but he had laid his plan, point by point, and he was accustomed to carry his plans out. He said therefore:

"Before I proceed further, will you kindly allow me to give you a slight description of my views, socially and morally, and of the situation in which I and my family are placed? Imagine, I beg of you, that this is necessary for some unimportant purpose, that I must speak and you must listen, although the one had rather be silent and the other had rather not hear." The General gave Herr Schmidt no time to deny him the desired permission, but continued, without pausing:

"I am descended from a very old family, and can trace my descent authentically through many generations, though we appear never to have been rich, and for the last two centuries must reckon ourselves as belonging to the poorer, not to say to the poor nobility. It is no doubt a consequence of this poverty that the male descendants of the family, which was never very widespread, and has often depended only on one life, have almost without exception passed their lives at Court, and in attendance on their princes, particularly the military ones, and even the women have often devoted themselves to the service of their princesses. I consider it again as a result of this consequence, that fidelity to their liege lords, or, to express it in modern language, devotion to the royal family, the feeling of duty, and the obligation of showing themselves grateful for favours received, have been handed down and held from generation to generation in my family as their dearest, and often as their only heritage; the almost countless names of the Werbens in the annals of war and in the army lists, the names of the many who have fallen honourably and nobly before the enemy, are a proof of this.

"And as it usually happens in old families that the children who have been brought up by their parents in the same ideas in which the latter were brought up by their parents, and not only in the same ideas, but also in the same habits, morally, socially, and professionally, resemble their parents, both bodily and mentally, more than is the case under other circumstances, and this resemblance is at first looked upon as a curiosity, and then, after the fashion of mankind, as an advantage, so it has been with us. I know that this family pride is in the eyes of others laughable, if not wrong. I have no intention of justifying it; I have, as I told you at first, no other object than to give you an insight into the innermost life and habits of the family from which I descend, and thus to facilitate the explanation of certain peculiarities of character and of the rule by which I regulate and have regulated what I do or leave undone in all cases, as, for example, in the following:

"One of my two sisters--there are three of us--married to a rich landed proprietor, had the misfortune to have been mistaken in her choice, and committed the fault of bearing her unhappiness unworthily, and even of making it an excuse for a passion which she conceived for a man whom she had met abroad, and who was wanting, not only in noble birth, but also in all those virtues and qualities which I require in every man whom I am to respect. Death brought about the separation to which my brother-in-law had refused his consent. His large property was to descend to my children. After long resistance and deep consideration, in order not to embitter the unhappy man's dying hours, I accepted the half for my children, under the same conditions which were imposed upon my sister for the possession of the other half, namely, that the inheritance should pass from her if she ever made a marriage contrary to the traditions of our family; I mean a marriage with a man not of noble birth. I may mention, by-the-way, that I myself had and have no resources but my pay, with the exception of what, to modern ideas, is a very small sum which I have saved out of that pay in the course of years. Even that small portion I no longer possess. My son has not inherited my economical habits; perhaps the spirit of the times, which is so unfavourable to the moderation which was recommended to us old people as the highest virtue is in fault. Perhaps I myself made a mistake when I allowed him to enter a regiment in which, as matters stand now, all the officers should be rich men; enough that my son has incurred debts which I have paid as long as it was in my power. For the reasons before mentioned, I can do this no longer, and I have unfortunately cause to suspect that my son's position is a very precarious one if he loses the revenues of the inheritance on which he entered a year and a half ago. There would result for him from a marriage contrary to the habits of his rank and the traditions of his family, other more or less great worldly disadvantages which I will pass over, as my intention is only to point out to you in a general way our moral and financial situation; to suggest the sensations with which I read that letter; and lastly, to denote the course of the conversation which I had last night with my son immediately after the receipt of the letter, and which led to the result which I will now, with your permission, communicate to you."

"I am sorry to be obliged to interrupt you, General," said Uncle Ernst. "If you thought it right to justify beforehand the result of your considerations, whatever it may be, I think I may reasonably claim for myself the same favour. I might possibly be suspected of having formed my resolution consequently upon yours. The possibility of this suspicion would be unbearable to me; I shall avoid it if you will allow me to state my circumstances as clearly as you have just done yours; the conclusion will follow naturally."

"I cannot refuse," said the General; "though I should have wished that you would allow me to add the few important words which I still have to say. I have a conviction that it would be better for all parties."

"I must insist, however, on my request," said Uncle Ernst. The General had again fixed his clear, steady glance on his opponent. His plans were crossed. "I ought to have proceeded more rapidly," said he to himself, "now I shall be forced to take the defensive, and the attack will apparently be hot enough."

"Pray proceed," he said, leaning back in his chair. Uncle Ernst did not answer immediately; when the General was announced, he had determined to be calm; and while the General was speaking he had constantly repeated this determination. He knew that he should have remained so if he had found the haughty aristocrat whom he expected, if the aristocrat had from the first explained to him with cold scorn, or with brutal warmth, that a union between his son and a girl of low birth was not to be thought of, and that he must request the father in future to keep his daughter under better control, if he wished to avoid scandal, and more to the same effect. But he had been deceived in his expectations. All that the man brought forward were only circumstances, explanations, insulting enough in reality, but the manner was courteous, was meant to be courteous, and he for his part was forced to swallow and choke down these polite insults with no less politeness. He was really half choked. And it was just this that threatened to deprive the passionate man of the last remains of his calm, that forced him to be silent for a few minutes longer, till he had so far subdued his raging heart, that he could at least preserve outward composure, and not betray himself by his first words. And now for it!

"I have no family history to relate, even briefly, General. In the ordinary sense of the word, I have no family to speak of at all; I do not even know who my grandfather was. My father never spoke of him; he appears to have had no reason to be proud of his father. My father was proud, but only of himself, of his herculean strength, of his untiring energy, of his dauntless courage. My father was the owner of a river boat: if an opportunity occurred at the bursting of a dyke to risk his life for that of others, or in the times of the French War to carry a dangerous message, or to undertake anything which no one else would undertake, my father did it, and carried it out. He was as passionate as he was proud. When the superintendent of dykes, a man of high rank, on one occasion had a quarrel with him and ventured to lay his hand upon him, my father knocked him down on the spot, and paid for his violence by a year's imprisonment.

"It seems that even people of no family have a right to talk of hereditary virtues and vices. My brother, the father of my nephew, who has the honour to be known to General von Werben, appeared to have inherited only the virtues; an intelligent, prudent, brave man, who left his home early, in order to seek his fortunes in the wide world, and died many years ago in the exercise of his calling as captain of a mail steamer at Hamburg. I, on the contrary, had inherited, besides the few advantages of which my father could boast, nearly all his weaknesses; I was proud, arrogant, haughty, and passionate, like him. I have never been able to understand how men could endure any restraint which they were able to throw off, I mean an unjust restraint, which does not necessarily result from the nature of man, such as sickness or death, or from the nature of society, such as law and order, but which one set of men have exercised over another, from arbitrariness, avarice or hard-heartedness, and which the others have borne out of stupidity, denseness or cowardice. I have therefore always instinctively hated the rule of kings and princes as an institution which only suits a people that is yet in its infancy, or a worn-out and aged people, but which must be rejected with horror by a strong nation, conscious of its strength; and I have especially hated the nobility as the refuse and chips of the material from which the idol is made; and I have hated all institutions which in principle tend towards royalty and nobility. To endure as little as possible of these restraints, to place myself in a position in which I could live according to my convictions, has been, as long as I can remember, the most absorbing passion of my mind. That I have not remained as ignorant as I came out of the village school, that I have worked my way up from my position as cabin-boy and steersman to be a man of property, I may thank that passion. It ran a little wild at first, before reason came to its aid and showed it ends to which it could attain, instead of the unattainable ones for which it struggled in its first heat; for instance, a free commonwealth, a republic of equal men, not enslaved or dishonoured by the exemptions or privileges of any one man." Uncle Ernst paused; he must once more conquer the stream that rushed roaring and raging from his heart to his brain. He must remain calm, now especially. Outside the rain was falling, a dull twilight reigned in the room. The General sat, his head resting on his hand, sunk in thought. There could only be a question now of an honourable retreat; the how would settle itself.

"Proceed, I beg!" said he.

"A day came," continued Uncle Ernst, "when this ideal appeared no longer to float in the clouds, but to be ready to descend upon the earth. I regret deeply to have to awaken recollections which must be painful and bitter to you, General; but I cannot unfortunately avoid it, as you will see.

"On the 18th of March I had been directing, in the heart of the Königsstadt, the erection of some barricades, against which, because they were in reality made with greater art and upon a settled plan, and also no doubt were better defended, the might of our opponents failed, in spite of the obstinacy and bitterness with which they fought, especially here, under the command of an

officer whose fearless courage must have excited the most sluggish to emulation. In fact he constantly exposed himself almost as if he wished to meet death. He would undoubtedly have found it here and in this hour had not our people been miserable marksmen, who could only fire into the mass, but invariably missed any single object. There was only one good marksman behind the barricade; that one was the leader, myself. The wild duck that swift as an arrow bursts through the sedges on the bank, had not been safe from my gun, and the officer sat for a full minute as quietly on his horse, in the midst of the hottest shower of balls, as if man and horse had been carved in stone. More than once was my rifle pointed; I said to myself that I must kill the officer, that this one man was more dangerous to the cause for which I was fighting than whole regiments; in fact that he was the personification of the cause for which he fought. I could not make up my mind. It was doubtless the respect that one brave man has for another--this time to my cost, for I was convinced that this man, if ever I were in his power, would kill me without mercy, like a poisonous snake; and he confirmed my expectations. The battalion that he commanded was ordered to retire; I saw that he exchanged warm words with the officer who brought the order; I fancied I could see that he debated within himself whether he should or should not obey the command, which he considered at once as stupid and disgraceful--and from his point of view rightly; we could not have held out five minutes longer. Military discipline conquered; he rode close in front of the barricade, and said, while he thrust his sword into the scabbard: 'I have orders to retire; if it depended upon me I would overthrow you all and put every man of you to the sword.' Then he turned his horse and rode back at a foot's pace. Even death by a shot from behind had no terrors for him in this moment. A few balls did indeed whistle past him, but the bullets which had spared his brave breast did not touch his back." Uncle Ernst was once more silent. The room had become almost dark; the drizzling mist had turned into heavy rain; the large drops beat against the window-panes, and the clock on the chimney-piece ticked loudly. The General had leaned his head heavily on his hand, and he did not raise it while he said, as before, in a curiously low, almost broken voice:

"Go on, I beg!" The battle was at an end here; but from the centre of the town was still heard the thunder of cannon and rattle of musketry. I hastened to the spot where there seemed to be still something to do. I had to cross the Königsstrasse if I did not wish to go a long way round; I made the attempt, although I was told that it was in the hands of the troops already almost as far as the Alexanderplatz. My attempt failed; a quarter of an hour later I was a prisoner in the cellars of the King's palace.

"I pass over the horrors of that night; a man must have experienced it, when the close poisonous air, around the hundreds that were huddled together, seemed to transform itself into grinning devils, which whispered and mocked ceaselessly: 'In vain! in vain! Fool, fool! The cause for which you fought is hopelessly lost--lost! A man must have experienced that!

"About four o'clock we were led away, driven, hunted to Spandau. My strength was not yet broken, but weaker men gave way. Near me was a pale youth, a delicate young student, in spectacles. He had held out bravely as long as he could, but he could bear no more. Though he clenched his teeth, the tears would burst forth when a blow in the back from the butt-end of a musket forced him to exertions of which he was no longer capable. Blood flowed from his eyes and mouth; I could no longer bear the sight of his sufferings, I rushed forward, throwing down all before me, towards an officer who rode alongside, and cried to him: 'If you are a man do not suffer such unmanly cruelties to be perpetrated close to you!' I was frantic; I believe I had seized his horse by the bridle. The officer may have thought it was a personal attack; he spurred his horse which reared and threw me down. I started up again immediately: 'If you are a man!' I cried again, once more throwing myself before him. 'Democrat!' and he gnashed his teeth, 'then die if you will have it so!' He raised himself in his stirrups, his sword whistled over me. My broad-brimmed hat and my thick hair lessened the force of the blow, but I sank on my knee, and for a moment lost consciousness. It could only have been a moment. The next I stood there again, determined to sell my life dearly, when another officer hastened up, bringing a message to the first, an order--I do not know what--on which the latter, exclaiming 'Is it possible?' turned his horse. At that moment the moon, which had been hidden behind black clouds, shone out; by its light I recognised distinctly in the officer my opponent at the barricade. He galloped away. 'We shall meet for the third time!' I cried after him, while I was forced back into the ranks with blows; 'perhaps it will be my turn then, and'--I swore a deep oath--'then I will not again spare you.'

"Since that night four and twenty years have passed; I have seen the officer often and often; naturally he did not know me; I should have known him among millions. Since that time our hair and beards have grown grey; I swear to God that I wished and hoped that that third time would be spared me. It was not to be; he and I now stand here for the third time face to face." Both men had risen in their excitement. Neither dared to look at the other; each shrank from saying the next word. The heavy drops rattled against the windows; the clock on the chimney-piece prepared to strike. The General knew the word that was to come as well as he knew the hour that was about to strike; still it must be spoken.

"And now," he said, "for the conclusion; I think it is my turn." Uncle Ernst looked up, like a lion whose victim has stirred again; the General answered his dark and threatening glance by a melancholy smile, and his deep voice sounded almost soft as he continued:

"It seems to me that we have exchanged the parts which are usually taken by the man of the people and the aristocrat. The man of the people remembers minutely a wrong that was done him a generation back, and has forgiven nothing; the aristocrat has not indeed forgotten, but he has

learnt to forgive. Or do you think that he has nothing to forgive? You said one must have experienced what you did on that night, in order to understand it. Well! can you, on the other hand, place yourself in the position of a man who saw, on that night, all that he held honourable and holy, all for which he had lived and for which his ancestors had shed their blood, fall to pieces in shameful ruin, and chaos take its place? But he has learnt more than merely to forgive; he has learnt to value the good qualities of his opponents wherever he can find them; he has learnt no longer to shut his eyes to the weaknesses of his own party; he has seen that the struggle must be fought out on different ground, on the ground of right and justice, and that the victory will remain with that party which understands how to seize first on this ground and to take the strongest root. For this reason the excesses committed by his party find no more inflexible judge than himself; for this reason he demands that every one shall be in private life an example and pattern of conduct and morals, and shall act justly, let it cost him what it will. What it has cost me to make this advance to you to-day, you must leave me to decide with myself and with my God--it is more and less than you can understand. Enough that I am here, and ask you to forgive my son, if on this matter, from a false, culpable, but not unnatural regard to the circumstances in which he is born, he has allowed himself to deviate from the straight road that led him to the father of the woman he loved. I ask you not to let the children suffer because the fathers have stood face to face with weapons in their hands; I ask you, in the name of my son, for your daughter's hand for my son." Uncle Ernst started back like a traveller before whom a piece of rock falls, blocking his path, while the precipice gapes near him, and no return is possible. Without, the storm raged; the clock struck the hour of ten. Uncle Ernst collected himself; the rock must be removed--it must!

"I have sworn that this hand shall wither sooner than that it shall touch the hand of General von Werben."

"But hardly by the God of goodness and mercy?"

"I have sworn it."

"Then remember what is written, 'That man is like the grass, that to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven.' We are neither of us any longer young; who knows how soon the morrow will come for us?"

"May it come soon, is my wish!"

"Mine also, perhaps, but till then? Remember that the father's blessing builds the children's house; but that we have no power to loose the bonds of two hearts that have found one another without our help--perhaps against our wish and will. Consider that the responsibility of the curse which must ensue from these unhallowed bonds henceforth rests on your head."

"I have considered it."

"And I have done my duty." The General bowed in his usual stately and dignified manner, and moved, courteously escorted by Uncle Ernst, towards the door. There he stood still:

"One thing more; the failure of consent on the part of the fathers hinders a marriage at least in this case, in which a portionless officer is the suitor. None the less will my son consider himself bound till your daughter herself releases him. I take it for granted that your daughter will not do this, unless her father exercises compulsion over her."

"I take it for granted also that General von Werben has exercised no compulsion on his son, in obtaining authority from the latter to make the proposal with which he has just honoured me." The stern eyes flashed, he had his opponent in his grasp; the crisis must come now. A look of pain passed over the General's face.

"The supposition would not be quite correct; the sense of duty was stronger in the father than in the son." He was gone. The wild fire in the eyes of him who remained behind had changed to a joyful gleam.

"I knew it! The brood are always the same, however they may boast of their virtue. Down! down! down with them!" He stood there, bending forward, moving his powerful arms, as if his enemy in reality lay at his feet. Then he drew himself up. His arms sank, the gleam disappeared from his eyes. The victory was not his yet; another struggle was before him, the hardest, the struggle with his own flesh and blood.

CHAPTER XIII.

For Ferdinanda the night had had no terrors, the morning no darkness. In her soul was brightest day, for the first time for many months; for the first time, indeed, she thought, since she knew what a passionate, proud, ambitious heart beat in her bosom. They had often told her--in former days, her mother; later, her aunt, her friends, all--that it would one day bring her unhappiness, and that pride went before a fall; and she had always answered scornfully, "Then I will be unhappy; I will fall, if happiness is only to be had at the mean price of humility, which always grovels in the dust before fate, and sings hymns of praise if the wheels of envious fate have only grazed and not crushed her. I am not like Justus or Cilli." And she had been unhappy, even in the hours when the enthusiastic artists--Justus's friends--had done homage in unmeasured terms to the blooming beauty of the young girl; when these men praised her talents, told her she was on the right road to become an artist; finally, that she was an artist--a true artist. She did not believe them; and if she really were an artist, there were so many greater ones--even Justus's hand reached so much higher and further than hers; laughing, and apparently without trouble, he gathered fruits for which she strove with the most intense effort, and which, as she secretly acknowledged to herself, must always be beyond her reach. She had told her woes to that great French artist, on whom her beauty had made such an overpowering expression. He had for some time only put her off with courteous and smiling words; at last he had said seriously:

"Mademoiselle, there is only one highest happiness for woman, and that is love; and there is only one talent in which no man can equal her--that is again love." The words had crushed her; her artistic talent was then only a childish dream, and love! Yes, she knew that she could love--unspeakably, boundlessly! But the man was still to be found who could awaken that love to its heavenward soaring flame; and woe to her when she found him! He would not comprehend her love, he would not realise it, and he would certainly be unable to return it; perhaps would shrink back before its fire, and she would be more unhappy than before. And was not this gloomy foreboding already sadly fulfilled? Had she not already felt herself unspeakably unhappy in her love for him who had come to her as if sent from heaven--as if he himself were one of the heavenly ones? Had she not already, countless times, with hot tears, with bitter scorn, with writhing despair, complained, exclaimed, cried out, that he did not understand or realise her love, never would understand or realise it? Had she not clearly seen that he trembled and shrank back, not from the danger which threatened him on the dark path of his love--he was as bold and dexterous as man could be--but before her love, before her all-powerful, but also all-exacting, insatiable love? She had experienced this again yesterday, at the very instant that followed that happy moment when she had received and returned his first kiss! And to-day; to-day she smiled at her doubts amidst tears of joy; to-day she asked pardon of her beloved, amidst a thousand burning kisses that she pressed in thought on his beautiful brow, his tender eyes, and his dear mouth, for every harsh or bitter word or thought she had ever had against him, and which she never, never would say or think again. She had tried to work, to put the finishing touches to the "Reaping Girl," but her hand had been hopeless, powerless, as in her first attempts, and she had recollected, not without a shudder, that she had vowed not to finish the group. The vow had been--contrary to her anticipations--a forerunner of happiness. What was to her this miserable image of jealous revenge? How worthless appeared to her all this extensive apparatus of her work--this lofty room, these pedestals, these mallets, chisels, modelling-tools; these casts of arms, hands, feet; these heads, these busts from the originals of old masters; her own sketches, attempts, completed works--childish strivings with bandaged eyes for a happiness that was not to be found here--that was only to be found in love, the sole, true talent of woman--her talent, of which she felt that it was unique, that it outshone everything that had till then been felt as love and called love! She could not bear her room this morning; even her studio seemed too small. She stepped into the garden, and wandered along the paths, between the shrubs, under the trees, from whose rustling branches drops of the night's rain fell upon her. How often had she hated the bright sunshine, the blue sky, that had seemed to mock at her anguish! She looked in triumph now up into the grey clouds that passed, dark and heavy, above her head. What need had she of sun and light--she in whose heart was nothing but light and brightness? The drizzling rain that now began to fall would only serve to cool the internal fire that threatened to consume her. Driving clouds, drizzling rain, rustling trees, whispering shrubs, even the damp, black earth--all was wonderfully beautiful in the reflection of her love! She went in again and seated herself in the place where he had kissed her, and dreamed again that happy dream, while near at hand was hammering and knocking, and, between whiles, chattering and whispering, and the rain rattled against the tall window--dreamed that her dream had the power to draw him to her, who now opened the door softly and--it was only a dream--came towards her with the tender smile on his dear lips and the beautiful light in his dark eyes, till suddenly the smile died on his lips, and only the eyes still gleamed, but no longer with tender light, but with the gloomy, melancholy depths of her father's eyes. And now they were not only her father's eyes; it was more and more himself--her father. Good God! She had started out of her doze; her limbs trembled; she sank back in the chair, and drew herself up again. She had seen at once in the glance of his eyes, in the letter which he held in his hand--seen with the first half-waking glance why he had come. She said so, in half-awake, wild, passionate words. He had bent his head, but he did not contradict her; he answered nothing but "My poor child!"

"I am your child no longer if you do this to me."

"I fear you have never been so in your heart."

"And if I have not been so, whose fault is it but yours? Have you ever shown me the love that a child is entitled to ask from its father? Have you ever done anything to make the life you gave me a happy one? Has my industry ever drawn from you a word of praise, or my success a word of acknowledgment? Have you not rather done everything to humble me in my own eyes, to make me smaller than I was in reality, to insult my art, to make me feel that in your eyes I was no artist and never should be one--that you looked on all this as nothing better than a large doll's house, which you had bought for me in order that I might trifle and idle away my worthless time here! And now, now you come to tear my love from me, only because your pride wills it so--only because you consider it an insult that such a poor, useless creature should will, or wish anything that you do not wish and will! But you are mistaken, father; I am, in spite of all, your daughter. You may repudiate me, you may drive me to misery, as you might dash me in pieces with that hammer, because you are the stronger; but you cannot tear my love from me!"

"I both can and will."

"Try!"

"To try and to succeed are one. Would you be the mistress of Lieutenant von Werben?"

"What has that question to do with my love?"

"Then I will put it in another form. Have you the face to make yourself the equal of those wretched, foolish creatures who give themselves to a man, whether without marriage or in marriage--for marriage does not mend matters--for any other price than that of love, for which they give their own in exchange? Herr von Werben has nothing to give you in exchange; Herr von Werben does not love you." Ferdinanda laughed scornfully. "And he has come to you, of whom he knew that you pursue him and his kind with blind hatred, to tell you that?"

"He has not come; his father was forced to take the hard step for him, for which he himself had not the courage, for which the father had to force the son's consent."

"That is----"

"Not a lie! On my oath. And further, he did not even go to his father of his own free will; he would not have done so to-day, he would perhaps never have done it, if his father had not sent for him to ask him if it were true what the sparrows said on the housetops, and what insolent wretches wrote in anonymous letters to the unsuspecting fathers, that Lieutenant von Werben had a love affair on the other side of the garden-wall, or--what do I know!"

"Show me the letters!"

"Here is one; the General will doubtless willingly let you have the other. I doubt whether his son will lay claim to it." Ferdinanda read the letter. She had taken it for granted that only Antonio could have been the traitor; but this letter was not from Antonio, could not be from Antonio. So that other eyes than the love-inspired, jealous eyes of Antonio had seen through her secret. Her pale cheek glowed in angry shame. "Who wrote the letter?"

"Roller; in the letter to the General, he has not disguised his hand." She gave the letter hastily back to her father and struck her hands together, as if she wished to remove all trace of its touch: "Oh, the shame, the shame!" she murmured; "oh, the disgrace! the horror of it!" The dismissed overseer had been at first received in the family, till Ferdinanda saw that he had dared to raise his eyes to her; she had taken advantage of a dispute he had had with her father first to loosen and then to put an end altogether to his relations with the family. And the insolent, evil eyes of this man--"Oh, the shame! oh, the disgrace!" she murmured again. She paced rapidly up and down, then hastened to the writing-table, which stood at the far end of the long room, wrote a few hurried lines, and then came back with the note to her father, who had remained motionless on the same spot: "Read it!" And he read:

"My father is ready to sacrifice his convictions for my sake and consents to my marriage with Lieutenant von Werben. I, however, for reasons which my pride refuses to write down, reject this marriage now and for ever as a moral impossibility, and release Lieutenant von Werben from any obligation which he has, or thinks he has, towards me. This determination, which I have made of my own free will, is irrevocable; any attempt on the part of Lieutenant von Werben to overthrow it, I shall regard as an insult.

"Ferdinanda Schmidt."

"Is that right?" He nodded. "Am I to send him this!"

"In my name." She turned from him, and, with a modelling-tool in her hand, went up to her work. Her father folded the letter and went towards the door. There he remained standing. She did not look up, but appeared quite absorbed in her work. His eyes rested on her with an expression of deep sorrow. "And yet!" murmured he, "and yet!" He closed the door behind him

and walked slowly across the yard, through whose wide, empty space the storm was raging.

"Deserted and empty!" he murmured, "all deserted and empty. That is the burden of the song for her and me."

"Uncle!" He started from his gloomy musings. Reinhold came hurriedly from the house towards him--bareheaded and excited.

"Uncle, for heaven's sake!--the General has just left me. I know all--what have you decided?"

"What must be."

"It will be the death of Ferdinanda."

"Better death than a life of dishonour." He stepped past Reinhold into the house. Reinhold did not venture to follow him; he knew that it would be useless.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

In a magnificent *salon* of the Hôtel Royal--a few days later--the Baroness Valerie von Warnow was pacing restlessly backwards and forwards. She had, by Giraldi's advice, sent this morning to the General's house to announce her arrival the evening before, adding that she was unfortunately too much fatigued to present herself in person, but hoped in the course of a few days, if not the next day, to make up for her delay.

"You must not expose yourself to the affront of being refused admittance," Giraldi had said: "I have every ground for suspecting that he has laid himself out more than ever for his favourite part of the knight with the helmet of Mambrinus; but virtuous fools are as little to be depended upon as other fools; possibly the unhoped-for happiness of seeing his *mauvais sujet* of a son at last betrothed may have softened him, and it will please him to act a part of magnanimity and forgiveness. We shall hear how he takes your message, and we can take our measures and make our arrangements accordingly." Valerie knew too well that her brother acted no part, that he always was what he seemed; and that if he ever forgave her, it would not be in consequence of a momentary impulse, but from the conviction that she could live no longer without his forgiveness, and that she deserved it if the deepest remorse, the most ardent wish to atone, as far as was possible for the past, entitled her to it. But that day would never come; to-day, as ever, he would reject with cold politeness her attempt at a reconciliation, would answer her through Sidonie that he regretted to hear of her indisposition and hoped it would soon pass off, so that she might as speedily as possible be able to resume her journey to Warnow, which he trusted might be a prosperous one. And only five minutes ago the answer had come; not in Sidonie's stiff, formal hand, but in a small, graceful writing, the very sight of which did Valerie good, even before, with eyes fixed and expectant, which at last filled with tears, she read:

"Dear Aunt,--We are so glad that you are here at last! Papa, who sends you his best love, has another meeting to attend this morning--the War Office is like a beehive just now--but we, that is Aunt Sidonie and I, will call upon you at twelve o'clock, if convenient to you, to ask you how you are, and I especially to make acquaintance at last with a dear relation, whom I have never seen, and whom I have often longed to see.

"Elsa.

"P.S. Ottomar had gone out when your note came: I will leave word for him, and will send also

to the Wallbachs, in case, as is probable, he has gone there, in which case he will probably call upon you with Carla and the Wallbachs."

"Dear, good child!" sobbed Valerie; "I have to thank you for his yielding, I am sure! I can see it in your dear, loving words!" She kissed the letter again and again. "Oh, if you knew how thankful I am to you, if I could tell you so on my knees as before God. Be my good angel. You do not know how much I need a good angel, with his pure, strong hand to save me from this fearful slavery. But you will not be able to save me if you would. What could you do against him? Your innocence, your goodness, your wisdom--even your courage, and you must be both wise and courageous to have braved and coaxed this from that obstinate, unapproachable man--he would throw it all into the dust, and tread it under his cruel feet, as he has thrown and trampled me in the dust." She wandered thus through the spacious room, now throwing herself into an arm-chair because her limbs threatened to fail her, and the next moment springing up and hurrying to the window to look at a carriage which had just stopped before the hotel; then again stepping before one of the large mirrors, and eagerly and anxiously examining her countenance; it must not betray her excitement when he came in--a quiver of the mouth, an unwonted degree of colour or of pallor in her cheeks, a brighter glance, a fainter light in her eyes--he saw and remarked everything, he had the key of her soul. How gladly would she have received the dear writer alone, how gladly would she at least have concealed the letter from him. But she dared not do even that; now less than ever, when her lips must say yes, while her heart cried no; when her lips must smile while hell raged in her bosom; when she must and would practise the lesson that had been taught her. She rang the bell and desired the servant who waited in the anteroom, which connected her rooms and Giraldi's, to beg the Signor to come to her for a minute. She gave the order in the most careless tone. The man, a young Frenchman, whom Giraldi had engaged in Rome, had only been a few weeks in her service; but he had no doubt been at least as long in Giraldi's pay as his predecessors. Hardly a minute had elapsed when she heard his step in the anteroom; he was today, as ever, ready to fulfil her slightest wish. She passed her hand once more hastily over her brow and eyes, and tried whether her voice sounded natural. "Dear friend, I have----" François opened the door to him at that moment. "Dear friend, I have already received an answer from my niece, so extremely kind that it can only be a trap." She had handed him the letter, which he appeared only to glance at, though he would know it by heart a year hence, as Valerie said to herself, and now, returning her the letter, sat down at the table by her.

"The letter could only be a trap if you took it seriously, in which case it would be a very dangerous one."

"What do you mean?"

"The young lady has written it on her own account; I mean without her father's knowledge, who had probably left the house before she wrote it."

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"She would not have dared to do it."

"What does a girl not dare when she thinks it becomes her? Do not you see that her hand faltered as she wrote the words, 'Papa, who sends you his best love,' and only became steady again when she had got to the truth, 'he has another meeting this morning?' It is interesting and promising to see that the girl cannot even lie with the pen in her hand. We shall be able to learn from her everything we want to know."

"But what do we want to know?"

"What?" The faintest glimmer of a smile passed over Giraldi's dark eyes.

"Mi fai ridere, cara mia--we! Why, you do not yet know half."

"Then it must be your fault, my dear friend, for only telling me half. What could I know without your telling me?" He bent over her and took her hand which he pressed to his lips.

"Could I know anything, soul of my soul, that I should not immediately impart to you, as the eye and the ear impart their impressions to the mind, whose servants and slaves they are? And as faithful servants, because they are faithful, do everything for the best interests of their master, so I come this morning with the rich spoils of the four and twenty hours that have passed since I was last with you, to lay them at your feet and receive my reward in the smile of your lips."

"And why only this morning, faithless slave?"

"Yesterday evening, lady, my pockets were still almost empty; since then----"

"A miracle has happened?"

"Scarcely less." Giraldi looked at the clock. "Half-past eleven; I have just time; in a quarter of

an hour I expect Councillor Schieler. I only want to speak to him for a few minutes--in continuation of a long conversation which I had with him yesterday evening--so I shall be at hand when your relations arrive, and shall be able to lighten for you the unpleasantness of the first meeting."

"And the Councillor is the miracle-worker?"

"The Councillor is a useful tool--*voilà tout!* so much the more useful that he is used by many, and in his vanity and stupidity, which are not the same thing, though they produce the same effect, always shows the traces of the hand that has last used him, as a trophy of his supposed importance and wisdom. It is as well that a certain person does not appear quite conscious that such a tool cuts both ways, or he would be more prudent in the use he makes of it. But that is not to the purpose. For the rest, we owe him gratitude so far as one can owe gratitude to a person who does one a great service without being aware of it. It was he who made us aware of the favourable opportunity of selling the property to Count Golm, when it became apparent to him and his company that they could obtain the Count, whom they wanted particularly, for no less a price. The Count snapped as eagerly at the tempting bait as they snapped at the Count; they do not see the angler who looks complacently on at the game, in order, when the right moment comes, to land the silly fish with one jerk of his line on the dry land at his feet, where it may gasp out its life. But this does not interest you."

"It does--it does!" exclaimed Valerie.

"I see by the absent smile on your lips and the fixed look of your eyes that you have hardly heard me. Luckily I have something else *in petto*, which may excite your interest."

"The miracle?"

"Not yet; I have only to tell you of natural events as yet. For what is more natural than that Count Golm wishes to obtain as cheaply as possible the property which he is so anxious to possess in order to round off his estate and arrange his affairs? And how could he get it cheaper than by receiving a third part as the dowery of his future wife, and another third as the probable inheritance of the said wife, that is to say both as good as given? There remains only one third, which unfortunately appears, since yesterday, to be irrevocably lost. Does my lady see now? It is only necessary to bring a little love into the game, the interest of the women is excited at once." Valerie's heart beat. How true had been her foreboding! The dear child, whom she had but now looked up to as to an angel, in the next moment drawn away, dragged down into the sordid game of intrigue by this cruel, inexorable hand!

"Does Count Golm love my niece?"

"I did not say that; in fact, without wishing to detract from the charms of the young lady, I am convinced that it is not the case. He has only known her a very short time--since the General's journey at the end of last month. Your North German country people are in general not very subject to the dangers of a Romeo-like passion; besides, a too strikingly material advantage is not very favourable for the blossoming of the tender plant, love, and therefore the young lady is either really affronted by the too evidently mercenary intentions of her suitor, or pretends to be so, in order to keep herself disengaged in another direction; I shall come to that presently. At least the Count complains bitterly of her behaviour towards him, and threatens, to the Councillor's alarm, to withdraw, only he has fortunately committed the imprudence of accepting from the Councillor earnest-money for the projected alliance in the form of a considerable advance, and is consequently bound for the present." Valerie's astonishment was great. Four and twenty hours had not yet passed since Giraldi, on receipt of the letter in which Sidonie informed them of Ottomar's betrothal to Fräulein von Wallbach, had burst into a furious rage, although they had long foreseen and expected this event; and to-day he appeared to encourage a second union, which would destroy, if not his fixed plans, at any rate, hopes that he had silently cherished and fostered. Giraldi read these thoughts on her countenance. He continued with a smile:

"I said, for the present, my dear friend; only till the simpleton--he is a simpleton, I had already spoken to him yesterday evening before you came--only till he has pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for us; then he may go, and the more he burns his fingers the better pleased I shall be. He must, however, for the present be bound to us, for the following reasons: We do not require the consent of General von Werben for the sale of the property, as he is already doubly outvoted by Herr von Wallbach and our friend the Councillor; but what we do positively want, if the bargain is to be struck, is the consent of the Government to the making of the line; and, the Councillor is here again my informant, if this consent is obtained, it will only be because the Count is mixed up in the affair and rejoices in special protection in certain high circles, whose influence in important ministerial regions is particularly powerful just now. I am again unfortunate in not having your attention."

"I am all attention."

"To reward you I will strike the chord of love again: it is for our most pressing interest, and it is my most particular wish, that you should casually--I mean at some opportunity which your cleverness will readily seize upon--give your niece to understand that you think this marriage a

particularly suitable one; and only wish, in order to avoid the appearance of desiring to derive a personal benefit from it in the sale of the property, that the affair should not be at once made public, or even settled--between ourselves let us say, not binding. This will make the young lady pause. I want no more till we are clear on the other side, and can then, as a reward for her obedience, perhaps do something to help on her particular inclinations. Do you quite understand?"

"Perfectly; to the minutest detail. You hinted before that my niece had a real inclination in another direction that would not interfere with us?"

"Which, in fact, when the time comes, I intend to forward by every lawful means, if it were only in order to pay the General back in the same coin for his past and present conduct towards a certain Signor Gregorio Giraldi, and a certain Signora Valerie--widowed Frau von Warnow, born Fräulein von Werben." The man's lips smiled, but his black eyes glittered like the blade of a dagger when it flashes out of the sheath. Valerie suppressed the shudder that passed over her. She said, with a smile:

"I know your sagacity, your powers of divination; but here you have really surpassed yourself. All that is now wanting is the name of the happy man, where they first met, and when they last met." Giraldi bowed.

"The name may wait, signora! But before I tell you more about your charming niece, I must tell you a little anecdote about your excellent nephew, which may serve as a proof of the reward which Providence grants to those who trust in it."

"The miracle, then?"

"Decide for yourself." The expression of his face had changed suddenly, the smile of superiority had vanished and had given place to deep earnestness; in the black eyes brooded melancholy night; even his voice sounded different--softer, more fervent--as he now, in his native tongue (he had hitherto spoken only German), continued in the tone of one who wishes to speak with all possible calm and clearness on a subject that moves him deeply.

"I went yesterday, after I had paid and received a few visits, to the Exhibition, and turned at once into the sculpture gallery. I had promised Guarnerio, Braga, and a few more of our friends in Milan and Rome, who had sent works there, to go at once and look after them, to see how they were placed, what impression they made, and whether the German sculptors bore comparison with them. They are wretchedly placed, and consequently produce little effect, and the German sculptors can quite hold their own with them. Your countrymen have progressed; they may boast of several talents of the very first order, such as Reinhold Begas, Siemering, and a third, whose name I read for the first time on a marvellous group of a Satyr, to whom a mischievous Cupid is holding a looking-glass--Justus Anders. I beg you will remember the name; it will appear again in my little history.

"Close to it, in a window, a life-sized figure first attracted my attention, because it was one of the few that was in a really good light. Doubtless a masterpiece, I thought, of which they are specially proud. But I was mistaken, it was not at least a work of the highest rank; finely conceived, but not so well carried out; a certain want of freedom in the technical part, which betrayed the pupil who has not long left school, and has for the first time attempted a higher flight. The subject also was not one to excite my interest--a young shepherd boy of the Campagna, in the ordinary costume, saying his Ave Maria, with raised eyes and clasped hands; but nevertheless the statue attracted me in a remarkable degree. Dare I acknowledge it? I thought I saw myself five-and-twenty, thirty years ago, as I so often roved through the Campagna and dreamed dreams over which I now smile; and looked up ecstatically into the glowing sky, which in my thought was peopled by bands of angels, and offered up ardent prayers, which I believed would be heard. And more curious still, the next moment I saw, not myself, but you, as I saw you on that memorable day when I was presented to you and your Princess in the park--the two Leonoras as you were then jestingly called--and with the first glance into your eyes I knew that I had lost myself in you, without dreaming that at that moment you were already lost to me." He passed his hands over his downcast eyes, which he then, as if accidentally, raised to her. She also had drooped her eyelids; but a pink tinge was on her pale cheeks. Was it the reflection of the sunlight of that evening? Giraldi hoped so; he did not suspect how wonderfully mixed were the feelings that these memories awakened in the heart of the unhappy woman. He hoped also that her eyes would be raised to his with a glance in which might still gleam a ray of the old love: but her eyelids were not raised. He must touch a deeper chord.

"And then again I saw neither you nor myself, or rather I saw us both in a third figure, the peasant figure--in which, in spite of all, by God's decree, and the will of the Holy Virgin, he perhaps now wanders on the earth."

"No! no! no!" she cried. She had started from her chair, but immediately sank back again, her slender hands pressed to her brow and eyes, while repeated shudders shook her tender frame.

"No! no! no!" she murmured again; "the righteous God could not permit that!" Then recollecting how fearfully ambiguous her words were, she added: "In peasant's dress! my son!"

"And mine!" said Giraldi softly. "Valerie, remember; is not life sweet because it is life; because it is sunshine and the chirping of the cicala, and moonlight, and the sound of the lute! Ah! how often I have wished I had never seen any other light, I had never heard any other music!"

"But he is no longer alive!" she exclaimed; "cannot be alive after all we heard! Who was it then who proved it to me with such terrible clearness at that time when I would have given all I had for a smile from him?"

"At that time? and now no longer?" A voice within her repeated, "No! no! no! for then the fetters which bind you to him would be unbreakable!" But she did not dare to speak the words, and once more bowed her head silently in her hands. His dark eyes were fixed firmly on her bowed figure. "And now no longer?" The question had not been answered. "Was it in reality only the pain of the wound which had taken so long to heal, and which she did not wish now to have torn open again? Was it the doubt that is quenched in despair, or did treason lurk in her silence? Was it one of those signs of which he had observed more than one lately; a sign of silently planned desertion, of secret rebellion against his mastery?" His dark glance sought the clock. "At this very moment I am still working and planning for her. Let her beware lest the time come when I do so for myself, and then necessarily against her! Let her beware of saying 'Now no longer!'

"May I continue, Valerie?" She nodded without speaking.

"I am almost afraid to do so. It is so seldom that I allow myself to be carried away by my feelings, when sober reason, which smooths the troubled work of life, should alone reign. I know it does not become me." In his voice there was not the slightest trace of the dark thoughts that were passing through his mind: there was rather a tone of pain, which he would have wished to conceal, a tone of reproach which resigns its rights and asks for pardon.

"When after a little while I turned away from the statue, I saw a few paces distant from it, leaning against the window-frame, a youth, evidently the original of the figure; the same height, at that moment even in the same attitude, with the same luxuriant curly hair, the same brow and mouth, and especially the same eyes--magnificent deep black velvet eyes, which were fastened with a curious expression of fixed melancholy on his own likeness. I saw at the first glance that the young man was an Italian, and in the first words he spoke I recognised a native of the Campagna. They were spoken in answer to the question whether the statue were his! It was not; he had only stood several times as a model for it. 'But you are an artist?' I asked again. 'I do not know,' he answered; 'I sometimes think so, and sometimes again I think not. I only know one thing for certain, that I am miserable, the most miserable of men.' He had murmured the last words to himself, as turning suddenly from me he was about to hasten away. I do not believe he meant me to hear them, but I had heard them and held him back by the arm. 'We are fellow-countrymen,' I said, 'fellow-countrymen should always stand by one another; doubly so in a strange land; trebly so when it is a case of bearing misfortune or giving help.'

"He looked at me with his large eyes, which gradually filled with tears. 'No one can help me,' he said. 'Even confession is a help, and often the greatest, most effectual to a heavy-laden heart.' 'Are you a priest?' 'Did the wounded man ask that who lay bleeding on the ground, when the Samaritan bent charitably over him?' Two large tears ran down his beautiful face, on which, while I spoke, the colour had come and gone. I had won him over. He promised--as I could not wait then--to meet me that evening in an Italian wine-shop, which he pointed out to me. We could talk better in a wine-shop than in a smart hotel.

"He was awaiting me impatiently, when, having been delayed by your retarded arrival, I at length went in search of him, drawn by that mysterious power which often compels me, against my inclination, even against my will, to do one thing or to leave another undone. So it was in this case. My passing interest in the young man had already vanished; my head was full of quite different things, so that I listened to the history of his life, with which he thought it necessary to preface his confession, with only half an ear. His name is Antonio Michele, and he is the son of miserably poor vine-dressers, in, or in the immediate neighbourhood of, Tivoli. A monk--his parents' confessor--has always behaved with particular kindness towards him. I suspect that the holy man is his father. Scarcely less poor than the parents, he could do little more for his favourite than teach him to read and write, and was forced in other matters to leave him to his fate. It was that of other poor and handsome boys in the immediate neighbourhood of Rome. He tended his goats on the hills of the Campagna. Some wandering artists found him, and enticed him to the city to act as model for their sketches. He idled about in the studios of painters and sculptors, on the Scala di Spagna, and the Piazza Barberini, till the day came when the fame of being the handsomest model in Rome--to which he could justly lay claim--no longer satisfied his ambition, and he wanted to become an artist himself. This was not so easy as he appears to have hoped; still in the course of time he might have become a good stone-carver, at least I conclude so, from the fact that a German artist, who had known him in Rome, invited him two years ago to come and work in his studio here. Antonio, who had no longer anything to bind him to Rome and his native place--his parents had fallen victims to the cholera in 1868--obeyed the call, provided only with the good brother's blessing and money for his journey, obeyed it as a man must obey his destiny.

"The artist in question was that very Justus Anders whom I mentioned before as one of the most distinguished of your countrymen. Antonio, however, does not consider him so, as he denies

him originality, inspiration, and in a word, all the higher qualities of an artist, and describes him, on the other hand, as filled with envy and ill-will towards all real geniuses, amongst which he doubtless considers himself to hold the first place. I am of course unable to decide how far the latter is true, but I suspect that an artist of such undoubted powers as Anders judges the young man quite rightly, and that if he does not allow him any great gifts, but continues to employ him as a mere workman, he has good reason for so doing. At any rate, this supposed neglect has not prevented our young countryman from remaining two years with the envious master, probably, as I gather, in order to be near a lady with whom he fell violently in love from the first moment in which he saw her, and who, if his rapturous description may be trusted, must be a marvel of beauty and grace.

"This lady is the daughter of a Herr Schmidt, who it appears carries on a very flourishing trade in marble and marble goods. She is herself an artist, and no insignificant one. The 'Shepherd Boy' came out of her studio, which is only separated by a door from Signor Anders's studio. I willingly spare you the details of the romance which was carried on from one studio to the other. It appears that Antonio, in spite of his assurances to the contrary, never had any cause to believe in the fulfilment of his extravagant hopes; it appears however, also, that the beautiful lady permitted the love of the handsome youth, perhaps only because she could not prevent it, without giving importance to a matter which was of no importance in her eyes; perhaps, also, because she dreaded his passionate jealousy. Her fears were not unfounded. She loved another, and was beloved by him. The immediate neighbourhood of their houses was favourable to the secret of their relations, which was only penetrated by Antonio's eyes, sharpened by jealousy. He followed with the cunning and craftiness of a native of the Campagna their secret traces, till, only a few days ago, he obtained undoubted proofs. With the assistance of a man who, for some reason, was willing to make common cause with him, he gave up these proofs into the hands of the fathers, who, besides being in very different ranks of life and also political opponents, as the accomplice knew, were divided by an old personal enmity. The well-aimed blow took effect unexpectedly deeply, on both sides. The fathers came to an explanation, at which were probably some high words. An hour later the lady was found lying insensible on the floor of her studio; another hour, and she was raging in a violent fever. In the neighbouring house nothing can have been known of this that day or the next, or a more suitable time would have been chosen to send out the announcement of a betrothal which had been long expected in the higher circles of society. The news of this betrothal reached us at Munich, and was that of Fräulein Carla von Wallbach with Lieutenant Ottomar von Werben."

"Good God!" exclaimed Valerie.

"It must have been God's will," answered Giraldi, with a dark smile; "otherwise the affair, which has been so long delayed, would doubtless have remained a little while longer in suspense. I should have made the young man's acquaintance before the catastrophe, which is as much as to say that the catastrophe would never have occurred. Instead of interfering blindly with the flame of jealousy and the sword of revenge, in a state of affairs that was so wonderfully favourable to us, I should have recommended it to the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and should have done, for my part, all that human wisdom can do to help it on and bring it to a successful termination. I should doubtless have succeeded, but some people would say it was not to be. I do not say so. I know only one opponent before whom I sheath my weapon, and that is Death. So long as I can count upon life I do count upon it, I hope all from it; and for the present the beautiful Ferdinanda still lives. What does my friend say to this second history?"

"That I wish my friend had known nothing of it."

"For what reason?"

"Because I know it will awaken in his restless mind a thousand hopes that can never be realised; it will give him a world of trouble which will all be useless."

"Not useless, if it be the will of the Blessed Virgin, and if my friend does not refuse me her assistance."

"What can I do in this matter!"

"Almost everything; everything at least that can be done at present. I mean, observe the parties in question, first and foremost the betrothed couple; see how they bear their happiness, whether with the modesty which would be appropriate under the circumstances in which it was born, or with that scornful pride which, according to your proverb, goes before a fall. A fugitive glance, a gesture, a turn of the eyes--what will they not say to one who is so well prepared as my talented friend? I recommend to her in particular the clever Carla, who will meet her with open arms; *les beaux esprits se rencontrent*; but, to return to my first story, and, like a good narrator, to weave it properly into the second, I recommend also to your kind care the more modest Elsa. With regard to this young lady, I have also a special request to make, that you will observe whether she shows particular interest when the name of a certain Herr Reinhold Schmidt is mentioned in her presence."

"What new idea is this, my friend?"

"The last instalment of my news, for which I have to thank the dear Councillor, who learnt it,

in his turn, from Count Golm. A little episode of jealousy, to which I attach particular importance, although I am still rather behindhand as regards the details. Still it is an interesting fact, that the gentleman in question, whose acquaintance your niece only made quite lately on the much-talked-of journey, is a cousin of the beautiful Ferdinanda, whose beauty had nearly made you the richer by half a million. The jealousy of the nobleman, and the angry contempt with which poor Antonio speaks of the Captain, lead me to suppose that the cousins are not unlike one another. You will agree with me that so delightful a family should be cultivated. I am dying to make their acquaintance." Giraldi had risen and gone a few steps to meet the servant, who had just come into the room with a visiting card. "Ah!" he exclaimed, taking the card from the waiter, "beg his Excellency to walk into my room. I will follow in a minute." He turned once more to Valerie.

"That is a happy yet unhappy coincidence--at the very moment when we were expecting your relations. I could send away the Councillor if necessary, the easier, that he is already behind his time. This gentleman is one of those who must be received at all hours and under all circumstances." He held the card to Valerie. "Who is it?" she asked, reading a name which in her bewilderment she could not recognise.

"But, cara mia!" exclaimed Giraldi, "who that is? The man who, half blind as he is, sees clearer than most men do with both their eyes; the man who, divested of all official authority, gives the Chancellor of the German Empire more to do than the plenipotentiary of a large state would do; the man, in a word, on whose feeble form the weight of the struggle which we have to fight in Germany rests almost wholly! But I am quite content that my lady should have no very lively sympathy for the troubles of our Holy Church, if she will bear her own sorrows with patience, if only the unhoped for, miraculous prospect of revenging the injustice of long years, perhaps at one blow, can allure her! There are thousands and thousands of brave men ready to take up the weapons which fall from the hands of the exhausted champions of the Almighty; here in this struggle I stand alone, and the Blessed Virgin will forgive me if even her cause is not dearer to me than that of the mother of my child!" There was a metallic ring in the man's soft, melodious voice, a curious fire burnt in his dark eyes, the slender elastic figure appeared to grow taller, as he now stood drawn to his full height, with one arm raised as if for the combat. Then, as if by magic, all the heroism vanished from voice, countenance, attitude and gesture. He bent down to the sitting figure, took her hand, on which he pressed his lips with respectful tenderness: "Addio, carissima! addio, anima mia dolce!" He was gone, again nodding a greeting to her at the door with a graceful movement, which she returned with an obedient smile, then sank back, as if shattered, into her seat.

"In vain! in vain!" she murmured. "I can never free myself, never. He is a thousand times the stronger, and he knows it only too well! That was the glance of the tiger at the deer that is in his grasp; those were the eyes of the serpent, fixed on the bird in its nest. Lost! lost! his sure prey, his obedient tool; forced to act, to speak, to smile, to breathe as he will! Do I know my lesson? alas for me if I have forgotten one word! He would find it out at once. 'Did you not see that? Why where were your eyes? Did you not hear that? Why, my dearest, it might have been heard with half an ear!' He, ah! he, with whom the demons are in league, whom they all obey with all their might, for whom they smooth his path along which he paces with the proud step of a conqueror driving his victim before him! What else is that Antonio but such a slavish demon, a messenger from hell, who is at hand when he is summoned? Here I am, master; what does my master command? To sow dissension between father and son, between father and daughter, between the lover and the beloved? I have done it already, at least tried to do it; pardon, master, your unskilful servant, who struck too soon with the whip; teach me how to chastise with scorpions; I shall soon learn in your service, I shall become worthy of you! And is there more to be done; to draw from a maiden's heart its tender secret and to give it up to you, that you may taint and defile it, may break and tear it to pieces with your unhallowed, cruel hands? No, that is already cared for; that is best understood by a woman, the well-trained accomplice of your hellish art. It is true she is related to your victim, could, and in the natural course of events ought to, be a second mother to her; so much the better! She will be able the better to creep into her secrets, the finer to spin threads in which the poor bird will flutter. Oh, my God, my God! how boundlessly must I have sinned, that you will not forgive me, that you have so utterly deserted me!" She pressed her hands to her face, her heart beat violently; but the weight did not become lighter, no tears came to cool her burning cheeks. She sat thus alone, in the spacious, sumptuous room, solitary, deserted, helpless, broken, longing for a word of comfort, of love--a singular, touching, moving picture in the eyes of a young girl, who had stood already for half a minute at the door, which she had gently opened and shut behind her, fearing to approach nearer, to give offence, to startle, and who now, casting timidity and fear from her, following the impulse of her heart, hastened with quick steps to the bowed-down form, and before the other could rise from her seat, or even understand clearly what had happened, or how it happened, was kneeling before her, and, seizing her hands, while she exclaimed: "Aunt, dear aunt! here I am! Don't be angry, I have so longed to see you; have you no kind word for me!" Valerie could not speak; her eyes were fixed on the young girl's face, which was glowing with tender shame and heartfelt pity. She suddenly flung her arms round her like a drowning man, who in the whirl of the stream grasps at the slender willow-stem; her head sank on the shoulder of the kneeling girl, and the tears which had been so long shut up in her troubled heart burst forth unrestrainedly.

CHAPTER II.

The outburst was so violent, and lasted so long, that Elsa became painfully embarrassed. How likely it was that the man of whom Aunt Sidonie had just said that he was sure to be present at their reception would come into the room--how soon Aunt Sidonie herself must follow her! She had only hastened up the staircase before her aunt, while the latter entered into conversation with the Councillor, who met them in the hall. While they were on their way to the hotel, she had been dreading all the time the solemn ceremoniousness of the good lady's behaviour on so important an occasion--the long-winded address, the offensive condescension with which she would meet her sister. She had silently regretted that she had persuaded her aunt to an immediate visit, and that she had not rather fulfilled her threat and gone alone. Now, thanks to her prompt decision, everything had happened so favourably; but now, too, poor Aunt Valerie must calm herself--must stop crying, and dry her tears, even if they were tears of joy--if she were really her good angel. So much the more indeed! Her good angel--she would try to be it, most certainly, and, oh, so willingly! She would never leave her again, at least in her thoughts and in her heart--would always be in thought and in heart near her, to comfort her, to help her, where she could, as much as she could; only now--now she must compose herself, and, quick, quick! let the black lace veil be arranged on her beautiful soft hair, and become again the great, dignified, proud lady that Aunt Sidonie had told her off, whom Aunt Sidonie must find there, or lose all belief in the penetration and knowledge of character on which she prided herself so highly. Thus Elsa comforted and coaxed and jested, till she had the pleasure of bringing a smile to the delicate pale lips and the mild brown eyes--the true Werben eyes, said Elsa; a melancholy smile, thought Elsa, but still a smile. And it came just in time, for the next moment the curly-headed young man in black coat, silk stockings, and knee-breeches, whose assiduity Elsa had with some difficulty escaped in the anteroom, opened the door and announced, in polite respect for the stately appearance of the lady whose card he held in his hand--"Madame Sidonie de Werben!" Sidonie rustled through the door, and found herself face to face with a slight, pale lady, who, supporting herself on Elsa's arm, held out her slender white hand, and who must be her sister Valerie, only that she did not in the least resemble the Valerie whom she had known, and whom she had last seen seven and twenty years ago. Not that the lady who stood before her was not still elegant and distinguished looking--she was even more so than formerly, Sidonie thought--she was still handsome too in her way, very handsome indeed; but the brilliant glance of the dark eyes, the rich carnation of the fair cheeks, the fascinating smile of the small red mouth, the luxuriant masses of her splendid chestnut-brown hair, which had formed a rich crown over her brow, and knotted loosely together at the back, had fallen in a few scented locks over her round, white shoulders, where were gone those magical charms over whose worldliness and sinfulness she had so often sighed and lamented? Sidonie was bewildered, almost dismayed. The little speech which she had prepared on the way was meant for the vain, pretentious, coquettish Valerie of former days, and was evidently quite unsuited to the Valerie of to-day. But her hurried efforts to think of something else to say were quite unsuccessful. Besides, the longer she gazed on the pale, noble countenance that was turned with a gentle smile towards her, and at every moment discovered an expression that brought back to her the former Valerie, the more she was overcome by a curious mingled sensation of the old love and of a new pity, so that, interrupting herself in the midst of the formal phrases through which she was labouring with a heartfelt "Dear Valerie, dearest sister!" she opened her arms, kissed Valerie on both cheeks, and then, as if terrified at this unjustifiable ebullition, sat down in stiff dignity in an arm-chair, and looked as severe and unapproachable as her short-sighted, good-humoured eyes would allow her. But the ice was broken, and Elsa took care that it should not form again, although there were some difficult points to be got over still. When Aunt Sidonie had mentioned casually that her brother had already left the house when Valerie's letter came, and consequently knew and could know nothing of their visit, "though he would doubtless have given his permission for it," Elsa blushed for Aunt Sidonie when she saw how painfully Aunt Valerie's lips quivered at the thoughtless words. She hastened to say that, after the letter received yesterday from her aunt, her father had only expected her on the evening of this day, when it occurred to her that her father's message would now seem very improbable, and, blushing again at the contradiction in which she had involved herself, she was silent.

"Never mind, dear Elsa," said Valerie, kindly pressing her hand, "I am grateful enough as it is. Everything cannot come right at once;" and she added, to herself, "Nothing will come right so long as I am in the power of my tyrant, who has once again seen, with one glance of his unerring eyes, what was hidden from my longing heart." In the meantime, Aunt Sidonie had entered on a subject which had occupied all her attention since the day before yesterday, and which she talked of now with the greater pleasure that she considered it a perfectly safe one:

"Though I hardly know, my dear Valerie, how far your long absence may have influenced your interest in the joys and sorrows of your family. Here it is only a question, of joys. You need not raise your eyebrows, Elsa--it does not improve your looks; besides that, it shows a want of confidence in my discretion, which, to put it mildly, is not very flattering to me, and is so much the more out of place that you ought by this time to be convinced of the groundlessness of your

doubts and fancies. It is certainly not saying too much if I declare that I guessed the truth before any one, not even excepting Ottomar himself. The worldly advantages of the connection, its suitableness from all points of view--good heavens! no reasonable person could doubt it or ever has doubted it, as Baroness Kniebreche assured me yesterday, and she would certainly know if the contrary were the case, and if any one voice had been raised against it. The Baroness, dear Valerie, born a Countess Drachenstein, of the Drachenstein-Wolfszahn branch, the widow of the Lieutenant-General, a comrade and friend of our late father--eighty-two years old, but still astonishingly fresh, an extremely clever, delightful old lady, whose acquaintance you would be charmed to make--very intimate with the Wallbachs, and whose particular favourite our Carla always was. You have upset my ideas with your unnecessary grimaces, my dear Elsa, and it is your fault if I appear to your Aunt Valerie as absent as I am usually collected. You know me of old, Valerie, and Elsa herself knows best what strong concentration of thought is necessary for the conception and carrying out of my 'Court Etiquette.'" Elsa here tried to keep her aunt to her usually favourite topic, but in vain.

"There are moments," said Sidonie, "even in the lives of those who, like myself, most perfectly estimate the whole moral and political necessity of the growth and prosperity of the smaller courts, in which the firmly-rooted love and fidelity to the highest personages must not, indeed, be overpowered by family interests--that would be an improper expression--but allow the latter somewhat more liberty than usual; and in my mind that moment has now arrived." Sidonie now went on to describe the happiness that she felt at the aspect of the betrothed pair, who were themselves so happy, if they delicately refrained from giving to their happiness that expression which to less observant eyes might seem necessary or at least desirable, but for those who, during a long life at court, had learnt the requisite knowledge of humanity was neither necessary nor desirable. She, at least, must confess that Ottomar's modest gratitude and Carla's timid reticence moved her to the bottom of her heart, and all the more that she was constantly reminded by it of the bewitching idyl of the budding love of her Princess towards the then hereditary Prince, now the reigning sovereign; and if Elsa, as it seemed, intended to make the objection that the marriage in question had to be broken off later on account of higher interests, they were higher interests which had nothing to do with the present question, and never could have. Elsa had given up the attempt to stem her aunt's inexhaustible flow of words; she hardly dared, for fear of drawing upon herself fresh reproaches for her unkindness and frivolity, even to raise her eyes to Aunt Valerie, who, leaning back in her chair, listened with an attention which Sidonie pointed out to Elsa as "exemplary." Neither she nor Elsa suspected what feelings were tearing the heart of the poor woman, while her smiling lips from time to time put in a courteous, kindly word of interest. She must take notice of every turn of the conversation if she would go through the examination which her inexorable tyrant would impose upon her later. Woe to her if she had overlooked or failed to hear anything! Woe to her if she contradicted herself! Thrice woe to her if she had exclaimed what her heart cried within her: "I know it all already, better than you, foolish sister, or you, dear child! Poor things, do you not see that you are in the tiger's den, to which there are many tracks that lead, but none that come out again?" And then her anxious glance turned to the door. How did it happen that he left her alone for so long? What was his intention, he who never did anything without intention?

CHAPTER III.

It had not been Giraldi's intention to remain away go long. He had expected the visit to be only one of civility, in return for that which he had paid his Excellency the day before; but the clever, loquacious gentleman had still so much to say, so much to add with regard to the business that they had apparently concluded the day before, even when he stood at the door with his hand on the lock, sometimes putting the hat which he held in the other hand before his half-blind eyes, hidden behind large grey spectacles, to protect them from the light that streamed too dazzlingly through the window opposite.

"It seems foolish to warn the most prudent of men," he said, with a sarcastic smile which looked like a tearful grimace on his odd face.

"Particularly when the warning comes from the bravest of men," answered Giraldi.

"And yet," continued his Excellency, "he is wise too; you undervalue his wisdom. He too is brave, even to rashness; he gives proof of it daily. I do not think men like him can be understood at a distance; at least half the magical power that they exercise over their contemporaries lies in their personality. One must know such people personally, quarrel with them in the Chambers, see them enter at a court reception, to understand why the beasts grovel in the dust before this lion, and even where they mean to oppose him, only get so far as to wag their tails. Believe me, my

honoured friend, distance in space is as unfavourable to the estimation of such real historical greatness as distance in time. You in Rome think you can explain by the logic of facts all that depends solely on the overwhelming personality of the man, exactly as all-wise philosophers of history quite calmly construe the wonderful deeds of an Alexander or a Cæsar even to the minutest details by the necessity of the circumstances of the time, as if circumstances were a machine which completes its task all the same, whether set in motion by the master or by a workman." Giraldi smiled: "I thank your Excellency in the name of his Holiness, for whose ears this witty little lecture was doubtless meant. And it is no doubt as well that his Holiness should occasionally be shown the reverse side of the medal, in order that he may not forget the fear which is the beginning of all wisdom, and may be mindful of the necessity of our counsels and of our support. Only at this moment, when the shadows of the clouds which threaten our horizon on all sides lie dark on his soul, I would not willingly represent to him the situation as more difficult, or the man of the situation as more dangerous, than we ourselves see them to be who have learnt to see. Therefore I purposely took advantage of my farewell audience to raise his failing courage a little. May I give your Excellency a proof of the necessity of this? Well, then, his Holiness spoke in almost identically the same words of the demoniacal power of the arch-enemy of our Holy Church; he called him in turns a robber, a giant with a hundred arms, a murderer, a Colossus whose feet trod the two hemispheres, as that of Rhodes did the two sides of the harbour. Can your Excellency guess what I answered him? 'I see already the pebble falling from the skies, which will shatter the feet of the Colossus.' His eyes gleamed, his lips moved; he repeated to himself the words; before long he will proclaim them, *urbi et orbi*, as he does everything that we whisper to him. Our enemies will laugh, but it will comfort the feeble spirits amongst us, as it evidently sufficed to comfort the poor old man."

"I wish it were as true as it is comforting," said his Excellency.

"And is it not true?" exclaimed Giraldi. "Does not the Colossus in reality stand on feet of clay? Of what avail are all the boasting speeches about the power and splendour and civilising historic mission of the German Empire? The end of the song, which he purposely suppresses, or at least only allows to be heard quite faintly, is always and only the powerful kingdom of Prussia. What avails him that he restlessly throws himself from one character into another, and to-day proclaims universal suffrage, to-morrow thunders against Socialism, the day after again reprimands the puffed-up middle classes like so many ill-behaved school-boys? He is and will always remain the majordomo of the Hohenzollern, though he may strive against it in moments of impatience at the occasional prudent hesitation of his gracious master, of anger at the intrigues of the courtiers, or whatever else may chafe his proud spirit. Believe me, your Excellency, this man, in spite of his perpetual display of liberalism, is an aristocrat from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, and in spite of his vaunted enlightenment is full of the romantic fancier of the middle ages, and never can and never will from his heart wish for anything but a kingdom by the grace of God. But while he wishes for a kingdom by the grace of God, he works for one by the grace of the people. What else is it, when he uproots from the people all reverence for the priesthood, not the Catholic alone? the interests of all orders of the priesthood have always been identical, and the sympathy which the ill-used Catholic clergy obtain from the Protestant priesthood will soon be seen. Without priests, however, there can be no God, and no kingdom by the grace of God; in other words, he is sawing off the branch on which he sits. Or if he does not take the matter so seriously, if he is, what I do not believe, so narrow-minded and frivolous that he only sees the whole matter in the light of a dispute about etiquette, a quarrel for the precedence which he wishes to claim by the power he has arrogated to himself as head and chief over the priests, the affair will again lead him *ad absurdum*, as there is no doubt that the priests will never accept this subordination, will at least only endure it if they cannot help themselves. We are what we always were and always shall be. And, your Excellency, his vulnerable point is that he does not grasp this, that he believes that he can frighten us by threatenings and terrors and make us the creatures of his will. As soon as he perceives that he cannot succeed by this means--and I hope he will not perceive it yet--he will try to temporise with us, and step by step will be drawn into the reaction; will be forced ever more and more openly to expose the contradiction between his aim--the kingdom by the grace of God--and his means which he has borrowed from the armoury of the revolution; and this contradiction into which he is being hopelessly driven, and from which must proceed the revolution--for no people will endure the long continuance of so contradicting a rule--is the pebble that is already rolling, and which will loosen the avalanche and shatter the Colossus."

"Serve him right! and good luck go with him," said his little Excellency, with his sarcastic laugh; and then, after a short pause, "I only sometimes fear that we shall make the *salto mortale* with him, and--"

"Shall stand firmer than ever on our feet," interrupted Giraldi quickly. "What have we to fear from the revolution or from the people?--nothing, absolutely nothing. If to-day they dance round the golden calf, to-morrow they will prostrate themselves the deeper in the dust before Jehovah; if to-day they place the Goddess of Reason on the throne, tomorrow like frightened children they will fly back again into the bosom of Mother Church. And if in reality, as you said yesterday, Darwinism is to be for Germany the religion of the future, so be it; we will be the Darwinians *par excellence*, and with holy zeal will teach the new faith from the chairs of the universities. We know that nature draws her veil the closer, the more impatiently the too-forward scholar tries to lift it. And when he has gazed into the hollow eyes of Nothing, and lies shattered on the ground, we will come, will raise up the poor fool, and comfort him with the words--Go, and sin no more.'

And he will go, and will sin no more in the foolish thirst for knowledge, for the burden of ignorance is lighter and her yoke is easier--*quod erat demonstrandum*." The corners of his Excellency's mouth were drawn as far apart as possible; even Giraldi smiled.

"I wish I had you always here," said his Excellency.

"To tell your Excellency things which you have long ago proclaimed from the tribune."

"I generally speak from my place."

"And always in the right place."

"It is often nothing but empty sound, and no one knows that better than myself; one counts upon the echo."

"And not in vain; for us beyond the mountains the little silver bell is the great bell of a cathedral, whose iron clang reminds loiterers of their duty and spurs the brave to fiercer struggles."

"And that reminds me that at this moment I am a loiterer myself, and that a fiercer struggle awaits me in the Chamber to-day." His Excellency, who had some time before seated himself on a chair near the door--Giraldi remained standing--rose again.

"Your Excellency will not forget my little request," said Giraldi.

"How could I?" answered his Excellency; "in fact, I hope soon to have an opportunity of setting the affair in motion. Of course, it cannot be done without a small *douceur*. Nobody does anything there for nothing. Happily we have the means always ready. The promise to give one turn less to the screw in Alsace-Lorraine, not to disturb the childish pleasure of the old Catholics in Cologne too rudely, not to sound the alarm too loud in the impending debate on the courageous Bishop of Ermeland, any one of these small favours is worth a General, particularly when the latter has such unpractical antediluvian ideas of State, society and family."

"And it can be done without scandal?"

"Quite without scandal. Ah! my worthy friend, you must not consider us any longer as the honest barbarians described by Tacitus; we have really learnt something since then. Good-bye!"

"Will your Excellency allow me to escort you to your carriage?"

"On no account. My servant waits in the anteroom. Will you let him come in?"

"Will your Excellency permit me to be for the moment, as ever, your devoted servant?" Giraldi was in the act of offering his arm to the half-blind man, when a fresh visitor was announced.

"Who is it?" asked his Excellency, with some anxiety; "you know I must not be seen here by everybody."

"It is Councillor Schieler, your Excellency."

"Oh! only him. However, do not trust the sneaking fellow more than you can help! He has got some very useful qualities, but must be handled with care. Above all, do not trust him in the matter in question; it would be quite useless. His great protector can do nothing in the matter."

"And therefore it was that I took the liberty of applying to your Excellency."

"Advice to you always comes too late. One thing more. For the little family war which you have to wage here with these North German barbarians you require three times as much of the needful as for the great war. Are you fully provided?"

"I have always considered that war should maintain itself. However, I can draw on Brussels to any extent if it should be necessary."

"Perhaps it may be necessary. At any rate, keep the game in your own hands. In spite of your sanguine hopes for the future, in which I fully concur, there are a series of lean years impending; we shall have to live like marmots, and the prudence of the marmot is more than ever necessary to us. You will keep me *au courant*?"

"It will be for my own interest, your Excellency." The Councillor had entered. His Excellency held out his hand: "You come just as I am going--that is unfair. You know there is nobody I like better to talk with than you. How blows the wind to-day in the Wilhelmstrasse? Have they slept well? Did they get out of bed on the right side? Nerves down, or steady? Country air asked for, or no demand? For heaven's sake do not let me die of unsatisfied curiosity." His Excellency did not wait for the answer of the smiling Councillor, but again pressed the hands of both gentlemen, and, leaning on the arm of the servant who had entered meanwhile, left the room.

"Is it not wonderful!" said the Councillor; "such incredible elasticity, such marvellous promptitude, such quickness of attack, such sureness in retreat! The Moltke of guerilla warfare!

What an enviable treasure does your party possess in that man!"

"Our party, Councillor? Pardon me, I always have to remind myself that you do not belong to us. Will you not sit down?"

"Many thanks, but I have not a minute to spare. I can only hastily tell you what is most important. In the first place, they are furious at the Ministry of Commerce at a vote just passed by the General Staff on the harbour question, which, as I am told by a colleague--I have not yet seen it myself,--is as good as a veto. The report is by a certain Captain von Schönau, but the actual author--did you ever hear of such a thing?--is himself a member of the War Office, and is of course no other than our friend the General. This throws us back I do not know how far or for how long. I am furious, and the more so that I can see no way of getting over this difficulty. To be sure, a man has influence, and could, if necessary, bring this influence to bear even against an old friend; but one would not like to do it except in the direst necessity. What do you advise?"

"That we should not tarnish the purity of our cause by mixing in it such odious personalities," answered Giraldi. "If you think yourself bound to spare an old friend, you know that there exists between the General and me an enmity of long standing; and everything that I should do or allow to be done against him would appear justly in the eyes of all as an act of common revenge, which God forbid! If it is His will He will surely bring about an event which will make our opponent harmless, and that need not be an accident because men call it so."

"You mean if he were to die?" asked the Councillor, with a hesitating glance.

"I mean nothing positive, and certainly not his death. As far as I am concerned, may he live long!"

"That is a noble and Christian-like wish," answered the Councillor, rubbing his long nose, "and no doubt spoken from your heart; still his opposition is and remains a stumbling-block to us, and I wish that were our only hindrance. But now, Count Golm tells me--I have just come from him; he will have the honour almost immediately; I only hurried on before him because I have something to say about him presently--Count Golm tells me that his efforts--he went over there in his present semi-official capacity as future chairman of the board--that his efforts with the President in Sundin have been quite useless. He had made up his mind and could not alter it, however willingly he would give way to the Count, for a thousand reasons of neighbourly feeling and personal good-will, and so forth. Golm, who between ourselves is clever enough and certainly not bashful, naturally allowed the great sacrifice to be perceived that we have determined to make--all in vain. In fact Golm thinks that he has rather done harm than good in the matter."

"As is the case with all half measures," said Giraldi.

"With half measures, my dear sir. How do you mean?"

"What was he offered?"

"Fifty thousand thalers down and the first directorship of the new railway, with six thousand a year fixed salary, besides an official residence, travelling expenses, and so forth."

"Then about half what he demands?"

"He demands nothing."

"A man does not demand under those circumstances; he lets it be offered to him. Authorise the Count to double it, and I bet you anything the business is done."

"We cannot go so far as that," answered the Councillor, rubbing his closely-cropped head; "our means do not allow it. Besides the rest of us--and then Count Golm himself is satisfied with fifty thousand for the present, we cannot offer the President twice as much without offending Golm. He is not particularly pleased with us as it is, and that is the point I want to talk to you about before he comes. Is it really impossible for you--I mean for the Warnow trustees--to sell the property directly to us, the provisional board?"

"Over the Count's head!" exclaimed Giraldi. "Why I fancy, Councillor, that you are bound to the Count in that matter by the most positive promises."

"True, true, unfortunately! But Lübbener, our financial adviser and----"

"The Count's banker--I know."

"You know everything! Lübbener thinks we might find some pretext in the case of a gentleman who, like the Count, is always getting into fresh difficulties and is always inclined or forced to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. At the same time we do not wish or intend to act contrary to your intentions, and if you insist----"

"I insist upon nothing, Councillor," answered Giraldi; "I simply obey the wishes of my client, which are on this point identical with those of Herr von Wallbach."

"Good heavens!" said the Councillor impatiently. "I can quite understand that for the sake of

appearances you would prefer to sell to a man of position rather than to a provisional board, although the man of position in question is a member of that very board; but you must not forget that we should pay you as much, or nearly as much, directly as we must afterwards pay to the Count."

"The Count will not get off so cheaply either as you seem to think."

"Then he will sell so much the dearer to us," said the Councillor; "and it will be so much the worse for us."

"Nevertheless I must refuse my support in this matter, to my great regret," answered Giraldi decidedly. The Councillor looked very much disgusted. "The best of it is," he said sulkily, "that he cannot find the money--not even a hundred thousand, and still less the million or whatever sum we decide upon as the price of the land. He must come to us then; I know nobody else who would advance him so much at once, or even in instalments. I can tell him, however, beforehand, without being Merlin the Wise, that we shall not let him have the money cheap, so it will come to the same thing in the end. But now, my honoured patron, I must make room for the Count and take leave of you. Give my best regards to the lady, whom unfortunately I have not yet the honour of knowing, but for whom I have always had the deepest respect, and for whom I have broken many a lance in knightly fashion. And not in vain, for this family visit--I met Fräulein Sidonie in the hall, Fräulein Elsa had hastened on in front--is a concession which I may, without vanity, look upon as the result of my powers of persuasion. Apropos of my dear old friend Sidonie, you wished to know yesterday what it was that had actually decided the matter of the betrothal and put an end to Ottomar's obstinate resistance."

"Well!" asked Giraldi, with unfeigned curiosity.

"I do not know," said the Councillor, with his finger on his long nose; "that is to say, my dear friend does not know, or she was sure to have told me. According to the servant's evidence--that was all she could tell me--an interview took place the night before between the father and son; but I have every reason to suspect that the subject was no romantic one, but on the contrary, the equally prosaic and inexhaustible one of Ottomar's debts. Farewell, my dear and honoured patron!--You will keep me informed?"

"Be assured of it." The Councillor was gone. Giraldi's dark eyes were still fixed on the door; a smile of the deepest contempt played upon his lips. "*Buffone!*" he murmured.

CHAPTER IV.

He stood sunk in the deepest thought, his slender white fingers stroking his dark beard. "It is amusing to be the only well-informed man amongst the ignorant; amusing and sad. I feel it for the first time, now that I can no longer share my thoughts and plans with her. She has brought it on herself, and she is heaping wrong upon wrong. A little while ago and the measure was nearly full. If a spark of the old love remained in her she must have taken it differently. That pallor, that terror, that 'no!' at the mere vision of what formerly her soul thirsted for, as the thirsty traveller in the desert longs for the stream of water in the oasis. Only because it was a vision? Because it was not the truth? And if it were made truth?" Giraldi slowly paced the apartment. "His parents are dead, the monk may be disposed of, and the handsome youth can have no objection; he is vain and false, and in love; any one of the three would suffice to induce him to play the part. And then the likeness--it is not very striking, but she cannot convict me of falsehood when she sees him; and she must see him." In the anteroom was a stir as of several people moving; Giraldi, who was near the door, advanced a step nearer and listened; doubtless the visit announced in the niece's note. They were all pressing round her now; they who had formerly avoided Valerie as an outcast and castaway hastened to her now that she was their equal and doubly as powerful. They would try to make up by the flatteries and caresses of one hour for what they had for long years committed against her in their stupid shortsightedness. She had said once that she longed for this hour, in order that she might set her foot on the necks of her persecutors, and pay them back in their own coin for their treatment of her. He had just now repeated the words that had often been mentioned between them, but she had not taken them up. The old German love of family was moving in her towards her blood-relations, while her own flesh and blood--his own-- He struck his forehead with his clenched fist. "That was the only foolish action of my life. What would I give if I could undo it!" All was quiet again in the anteroom; Giraldi opened the door and beckoned in François, who handed him a number of visiting cards.

"I brought them out again, monsieur," said François; "I was not sure of being able to remember those German names."

"You must practise," said Giraldi, letting the cards run through his fingers; "Privy Councillor Wallbach, Frau Louisa von Wallbach (née Herrenburg Semlow), Ottomar von Werben, Carla von Wallbach--*mon Dieu!* it is not so very difficult--I can remember twenty names that I have heard mentioned."

"Oh yes, you, monsieur!" said François, bowing with a cringing smile.

"I expect the same of you. How did madame receive the lady who came first, the young Fräulein Elsa von Werben!"

"Mademoiselle shut the door when I wanted to follow her. I could not do it with the best will in the world. Mademoiselle seems to be very determined."

"You are a fool. And the second lady, the older one, Fräulein Sidonie von Werben, or were you out of the way again?"

"Oh! no, monsieur! She is a great lady who gives herself airs; there was no difficulty with her. She walked ten paces forward and then made her curtsey. Oh, monsieur! such a curtsey! I could not help thinking of Madame la Duchesse de Rosambert, from whose service I came into monsieur's."

"Good! and madame?"

"Madame could not help smiling--a melancholy smile, monsieur, that went to one's heart." And François laid his hand with a hypocritical look on his dazzlingly white closely-plaited shirt-front with its large gold studs.

"You may dispense with those grimaces in my presence! Go on."

"Madame, who had passed her left arm through mademoiselle's, and did not let it go now, held out her right hand and said: 'Ah, que nous----'"

"In French?"

"No, monsieur, in German."

"Then repeat it in German; the same words, if you please."

"Do we meet again thus after eighty-seven years?"

"Twenty-seven, idiot! But the actual meeting?"

"It was such a confusion, monsieur! I could not distinguish anything in particular; it was impossible, monsieur!" Giraldi shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"If Count Golm calls, tell him that I am at home to him, and add that monsieur can only spare him a few minutes because he is himself expected in madame's salon. Then mention, casually, who is in the salon. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur."

"One thing more; I do not pay two hundred francs a month to people to whom anything is impossible. You must perfect yourself if you wish to remain any longer in my service."

"I will do everything to satisfy monsieur, and to prove myself worthy of the confidence with which monsieur honours me." François bowed himself out of the door.

"That is to say," said Giraldi, "you have confided too much in me already to dare to send me away at a moment's notice. It is our misfortune that we cannot live without these creatures. In Machiavelli's time people took the precaution of not letting them live long. In these days one has to pay double without assuring one's safety. Ah! the Count." François had opened the door to Count Golm; the Count entered with hurried steps. He looked out of temper and absent; his attitude and the tone of his voice showed the carelessness of the man of rank, who does not think it worth his while to conceal his dissatisfaction.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said; "but I will not take up your time for long; I have only come to tell you that in all probability nothing will now come of our bargain."

"I should be sorry for that for your sake, Count," answered Giraldi.

"Why for my sake?"

"We make nothing by the bargain, Count Golm."

"Which is as much as to say that I should gain by it! I should be much obliged, sir, if you would tell me what."

"If the Count, who proposed the bargain, does not know, we cannot pretend to do so."

"And who are 'we,' if I may venture to ask, in this case; the trustees of the Warnow property, or yourself?"

"In this case the Baroness von Warnow, whom I have the honour to represent." There was so much calm superiority in the Italian's coolly courteous manner, his black eyes shone with such a steady light, that the Count could not bear their glance and looked confusedly on the ground.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I--I did not mean to offend you."

"And I am not offended," answered Giraldi; "I never am when I see that people vent on me the vexation which I have not caused; it is like a letter that has been addressed to me by mistake. Shall we sit down?" The Count accepted the invitation unwillingly.

"I cannot, however, consider you exonerated from all blame; it was you who told me yesterday that it would not be difficult for me to raise the first instalment of the purchase-money. As I take it for granted that you are in a general way acquainted with my circumstances, and on the other hand, you have been so long intimate with the Councillor, I could not but believe that between him and you on the one side, and him and Herr Lübbener on the other, some conversation had taken place upon the matter in question, and that you were authorised by those gentlemen to make an advance to me in their names, which could not be made by the gentlemen themselves to whom I am to sell again, though only in their capacity as directors of the new railroad. Good! I went this morning to Lübbener; he professed great astonishment, said it was very strange, might create bad feeling if it were known that he had advanced the money, still--to please me, as I was determined to be the seller--in short, he made conditions--impossible, degrading conditions, I tell you--for which I could have horsewhipped the--the fellow! I went away furious, and went straight to Herr Philip Schmidt. Herr Schmidt, you must know--"

"I know--a merchant-captain, much thought of by the Werbens. The Councillor spoke to me about him." Giraldi played with his watch-chain while he said these words in a careless, conversational tone, and looked up in astonishment when the Count exclaimed eagerly:

"Heaven forbid! What could I have to do with him! Herr Philip Schmidt is, as I learnt unfortunately too late, a cousin of that otherwise utterly insignificant fellow, who has, with incredible audacity, forced himself into the best circles; a man of no birth----"

"I beg your pardon; Herr Philip Schmidt then, to whom you went----"

"Is the contractor for the Berlin-Sundin Railroad, and is to build our line also--a successful man, fairly presentable, and immensely rich. Polite reception, as I expected, assurance on assurance of meeting my wishes; but his money was tied up in every possible undertaking; his new house had cost him fearful sums; he must keep a balance in hand for the contract for our new railroad, and--in short, scarcely better conditions than those of Lübbener. Now you see how easily I can raise the half million which you demand as an instalment." The Count pulled at his fair moustache; his pale blue eyes looked angrily at Giraldi. He made a motion to rise, but on a sign made by the latter with his white hand, remained sitting, as if rooted to his chair.

"I must again ask your pardon," said Giraldi "I thought I had made myself clear enough yesterday. I had forgotten that German ears are--I will not say duller than Italian, but different to them. I could otherwise have spared you an unpleasant morning; for what could be more unpleasant for a nobleman than to be obliged to deal with crafty men of business, still more when these men, as is apparent, are in collusion! I hope that with us you will be relieved from this and any other unpleasantness."

"'With us?' With you?" asked the Count in the greatest astonishment.

"I must again say 'we' and 'us,'" answered Giraldi, smiling; "for if I am myself only the manager, still the savings of an income of ten thousand thalers could not have increased to so large a sum without--what shall I say--some speculation by a lucky hand. For the last few years the money has been really lying idle, and I herewith offer it to the Count in the name of the Baroness." The Count stared at Giraldi; but the man's dark eyes shone as calmly as before. It could not be a joke.

"In the name of the Baroness?"

"If it so pleases you."

"The entire half million?"

"As it appears to us--this time I mean the trustees--that the payment of half the purchase-money at once is necessary for the better regulation of the property."

"And the conditions?" asked the Count, after a short pause, with a somewhat hesitating voice. Giraldi stroked his dark beard.

"We make really none, with the exception of one special condition, for the registration of the debt as a first mortgage on the property--which, as the Count knows, is quite free from debt--and the low interest of four per cent, can hardly be called conditions, but rather natural securities,

which the Count----"

"Certainly, certainly," said the Count; "quite natural. And the special condition?"

"That the Count pledges his word of honour not to tell any one, be they who they may, or even to hint from whom he has obtained the money." Giraldi held out his hand with a pleasant smile. "It is the hand of a friend, not of a usurer, that we hold out to you." The Count was ashamed of his momentary hesitation. "There you have my hand and my word!" he exclaimed, laying his hand in that of the Italian. "I will speak of it to no one."

"Not even to the Baroness," continued Giraldi "She wishes to be entirely unconcerned; that is to say, quite free. The Count will understand this womanly delicacy, not to say weakness."

"Perfectly," said the Count.

"Even her name--that is her particular wish--must not appear in any part of the transaction; so that the mortgage must be made out in my name. Do you agree!"

"Of course," said the Count. Giraldi dropped, with a friendly pressure, the hand which he had till then held in his, and leaned back in his chair.

"Then we are agreed," he said. "I on my side consider myself fortunate in having delivered a nobleman, whose intelligence and energy had won my entire sympathy even before I had the happiness of making his personal acquaintance, from the unclean hands of these roturiers, and in having placed him in a position which, as it appears to me, confers on him that leading position in this affair which in every way is his right. I at least see the road quite clear before him. To raise the second half of the purchase-money--let us for the present fix the 1st of March as the term--I say to raise the second half of the purchase-money cannot be the least difficult, as by that time you will have long ago sold the property to your associates for double the money; you must not on any account agree for less than two millions. And now, Count, if it is agreeable to you, allow me to conduct you to the Baroness, who is longing to make your acquaintance, as I am sure you will be happy to become acquainted with a lady whom no one can know without loving and honouring her." Giraldi had risen; the Count stood embarrassed and undecided.

"You will easily believe that I should prize the happiness proposed to me at its fullest value; but--your servant--there are a lot of people--nearly all the family--in the salon. I fear I should be looked upon as a stranger and an intruder at such a moment."

"But if," answered Giraldi, "it should just be in the presence of her family that the Baroness especially needs the friendship of men of position and weight? If she lays the greatest stress on showing that wherever she appears the friendship of those men is secured to her."

"Let us go!" exclaimed the Count.

"One word more," said Giraldi. In the hitherto calm eyes of the Italian a deeper fire burned. The Count stood breathless; he had an undefined feeling that now he was to hear the solution of the riddle which, in spite of all, was still a mystery to him.

"And if," continued Giraldi slowly, as if weighing every syllable, "the Count should imagine that the Baroness does not expect to buy his friendship by doing him a service in a matter of business, but rather by using all her influence in his favour, in case he should have the wish, once for all, to make the reproach of being a stranger and intruder in the family impossible. I need say no more, if the Count understands, and I dare say no more if he has not understood me." The blood mounted into the Count's face.

"If he dared to understand you!" he exclaimed, seizing the hand of the Italian and pressing it warmly--"if he dared!"

"That would be my smallest fear," answered Giraldi, with a crafty smile; "but I feel neither that nor any other. Only let prudence go hand in hand with courage, and let Count Golm kindly trust in this delicate business to the experience and knowledge of the world of an older man."

"I will not take a step without you--not a step!" They had already reached the door when François entered with a card, which Giraldi, after glancing at it, handed to the Count.

"You see. Count Golm! II n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte! The cost is not counted on that side! Ask Herr von Werben to come in." François opened the door for Ottomar.

"I come at the general wish of the ladies," said Ottomar. For the first time he saw the Count, The sarcastic smile left his delicate lips; his bright eyes took a gloomy shade.

"I beg pardon," said he; "I thought I should find you alone, or I would have chosen a better time----"

"To me any time is right at which I make the acquaintance of the nephew of my highly revered friend," answered Giraldi. "Besides, the Count and I were on the point of going to join the ladies in the drawing-room; now, indeed, I must ask the Count's permission to enjoy the honour of Herr von Werben's society here for a few minutes more."

"*Au revoir*, then!" said the Count, leaving the room, and considering as he crossed the anteroom, accompanied by François, whether he ought to be affronted or amused at Ottomar's distant manner. He came to the conclusion that he had more cause for the latter. Ottomar, indeed, had now reached the important goal; but it was extremely probable that he never would have reached it at all if a certain other person had arrived in Berlin a few days earlier. Everybody said so; and that it was only jealousy which had brought Ottomar's indecision and faint-heartedness to an end. Faint-heartedness, indeed! To satisfy a woman like Carla von Wallbach, a man must have very different qualifications to any that Ottomar von Werben could boast--must, in short, be a Count Golm. Well, he had kindly released the family from the anxiety which he had caused them--Fräulein Elsa, too, who had evidently trembled for her brother. They owed him some gratitude, and all of them, excepting Ottomar, would feel that--they would be eager to show him that gratitude. And if when he rose that morning he had not quite made up his mind about the other matter, he had done so now. Favoured by the lady here, whom the whole family had hastened to visit the very morning after her arrival, the remaining difficulties would vanish that opposed themselves to his entering that family as a highly desirable member--if he chose to do so! Of course, he should reserve his liberty of decision to the last moment! The Count lingered a little at the door to follow up his agreeable train of thought to the end, and to arrange his fair wavy hair and long moustache to the best advantage, before he desired François, who was waiting respectfully, to open the door for him; no special announcement was needed as he was expected. François obeyed with a low bow the order given him in French, and then behind the closed door, with a still lower bow, said: "Monsieur le Comte, vous parlez français--comme une vache espagnole---je vous rends cette justice, ah!" and drawing himself up the man shook his fist: "que je déteste ce genre là!"

CHAPTER V.

It was not so much the wish of the ladies, as the request of Carla that Ottomar had acceded to when he came in search of Giraldi. Carla was burning with curiosity to become personally acquainted with the man, of whom she had heard such an "immense number of the most interesting things;" it would be dreadful to lose such a pleasure! Could not Signor Giraldi get rid of his Excellency or of the Councillor? Could not Ottomar make a diversion by going in himself, and cutting short the Catholic question, or whatever other matter of high importance they might be discussing? Ottomar was so clever! Do ask him, Elsa! He will do anything for you! Elsa could do no less than say, "Pray oblige Carla!" and even then Ottomar had sat still, muttering that he did not speak Italian, till the Baroness said with an absent smile, "That need not prevent you, my dear Ottomar; Signor Giraldi speaks most European languages, and German in particular like a native." "Oh! why can't I go myself!" cried Carla. "If you wish it, my dear aunt," said Ottomar, and went. With very mixed feelings, however. He had only joined in paying this visit because Elsa seemed to wish it so much, and the Wallbachs had asked him so pressingly. But that he who, after his father, represented the family, should be the first to seek out the man whose name his father would never pronounce; the man who, if he might believe his father, had brought such sorrow and shame upon the family--this was too much for his pride. And yet in this very circumstance lay a demoniac charm which Ottomar, as he crossed the anteroom, with grim satisfaction allowed to take effect upon him. Had not his father just now forcibly interfered in his life, robbed him by his imperious proceedings of the woman he loved--now more than ever, made that life miserable, and brought her to the edge of the grave, perhaps to the grave, itself? Should he bow here again before the mere threatening shadow of paternal authority, or not rather rejoice that an opportunity was given him to set it at defiance? And this defiance had curled his lips in an ironical smile as he met the much-abused man. It seemed like an evil omen that instead of the Councillor whom he expected to find here, he should meet the Count, the last man he would have wished for as witness to a step which was almost a crime against the family honour, and was at least very hazardous. The words he would have spoken died on his lips, and the dark look with which he followed the retreating figure could hardly have been misinterpreted by a less shrewd observer.

"You have no love for that gentleman," said Giraldi, waving his hand after the Count.

"I have no cause to love him," answered Ottomar.

"No, indeed," said Giraldi; "for two more opposite natures could hardly be brought together. In the one, openly expressed, supreme satisfaction with noble qualities which exist only in his imagination; in the other, perpetual gnawing doubt of the admirable gifts which Nature has so freely lavished upon him; in one, the miserable narrowness of a hard heart divided between vanity and frivolity; in the other, an overflow of love, falling into despair because all its blossoms do not ripen." Ottomar looked up, startled. Who was this man whom he now saw for the first

time, and who read his inmost heart as if it had been an open book; who at the first moment of meeting not only could, but dared to say this, as quietly as if it were a matter of course, as if it were not worth while to respect the miserable fetters of social conventionalism even for a moment; as if he could wave them away with a single movement of the slender, white hand? He looked into the black eyes as if asking for an explanation, and as he did so there crossed his mind the recollection, of a woodland pool by which he had often played as a boy, and which was said to be unfathomable.

"I have surprised you," said Giraldi. "I might perhaps make use of your astonishment to appear to you--if only for a short time--in a mysterious light, and steal into your confidence by pretending to be in possession of heaven knows what secrets of yours. But I am no charlatan; I am not even the adventurer to whom you have come half-unwillingly, half-curiously; I am only a man whose dearest hopes and warmest wishes have been so long crushed and broken that he has forgotten how to hope or wish, and that only one feeling is left to him, that of pity for all sorrows wherever he may meet them, and especially when the sorrow is so plainly expressed on a young man's face, at a moment when other faces are beaming with joy and gladness. And now, son of the man who is my enemy because he does not know me, give me your hand and tell me that you are not offended at my freedom!" He extended both hands with a fascinating gesture half of entreaty, half of command, and Ottomar seized them with passionate eagerness. He had suffered so much in the last few days, and had had no one whose band he could grasp, no one to whom he could unburden his overfull heart! And now from the eloquent lips of this handsome, strong, singular man came the first words of comfort! Were miracles possible then--or, as the man himself said, did the miracle only consist in the fact that one must be unhappy oneself to understand those who suffer? His heart overflowed; his beautiful eager eyes filled with tears, of which he was ashamed, but which he could not check. Giraldi released his hands and turned away, passing his hand across his eyes. When after a brief pause he turned back, there was a look of humble joy upon his expressive countenance, and his voice sounded softer than before as he said: "And now, my dear young friend, you will not forget this hour, nor what I now say; I am a poor man in spite of what people say; but anything in my power shall be done for you, for a glance of the eyes so wonderfully like those for which I would go to meet death this day as cheerfully as I would go to a feast. Come!" He put his arm familiarly within Ottomar's, and led him to the door which he opened and let his guest precede him. Ottomar did not turn; if he had he would have been appalled at the convulsively distorted face of the man who was holding the handle of the door in his left hand, while he raised the outstretched fingers of the right hand like a vulture's claws as he strikes down his victim from behind. The Count's entrance into the drawing-room had greatly surprised the Baroness; but a moment's reflection had been enough for her quick wits to guess at the state of affairs, and that this surprise was the work of Giraldi, the result of which she was to observe and by-and-by to report upon. Such an incentive was not needed, indeed; Elsa had become so dear to her in this one hour; every look of the joyous brown eyes, which, she well knew, could look so earnest too, every word that came from the little mouth, every movement of the slender, graceful figure--all, all was balm to her aching heart, that was languishing for true affection, for beautiful, undefaced humanity. How far behind the tender grace of her favourite must the brilliant Carla stand! Carla, with whom everything, every tone, every gesture, every turn of her eyes, every movement was called into play by an insatiable thirst for admiration, which did not by any means always attain its object, and often far outstripped its aim. She had closely compared the two girls, and each time told herself that a man who had Elsa for a sister could not really love Carla, and that no good would come of the engagement for Ottomar, even if he had not passed the threshold to it, so to speak, over the body of the forsaken beauty who was breaking her heart now in despair. To her who had been initiated into the secret by her tyrant, the remorse which devoured him spoke only too plainly in the nervous glitter of his beautiful eyes, in his sullen silence or the forced speech to which he again roused himself, and in the constant gnawing of the delicate lip between his sharp teeth. And she, who had given her hand and her word to the unhappy man, seemed to see and suspect nothing of all this! She could chatter and laugh, and flirt with the Count exactly as she had done a minute before with her betrothed, only that her frivolous game was evidently not wasted now, but eagerly and sincerely admired, and gratefully responded to to the best of the man's ability. And then her observant look returned to Elsa and met a pair of eyes which she had already learned to read so well, and in which she now thought she could perceive the same feelings that moved herself; sorrow, pity, astonishment, blame--all indeed in a lesser degree, as was natural in the young girl, who probably did not know the sad secret of her brother's engagement. And this sisterly sympathy was certainly not mixed with any selfish feelings. When the Count entered so unexpectedly, he had been welcomed by no joyful lifting of the eyes in which every thought was reflected, no brighter crimson in the cheek on which the colour always came and went so quickly; nothing but a look of astonishment which was little flattering to the new-comer, and which proved to Valerie how well her tyrant was kept informed by his spies, Everything that she had seen and heard in this last hour tallied in every particular with what he had foretold. And now he would appear, accompanying poor Ottomar, whom in these few minutes he would have won, fascinated, enchanted as he did all who came within his reach--he would enter like a sovereign who appears last, when well-trained officials have appointed each guest his place, so that the eye of the ruler need not wander inquiringly, but may glance with a satisfied smile over the assembly which only waits for him. He came in at last, only leaning on Ottomar's arm long enough for every one to have time to remark the confidential relations that already existed between him and the nephew of their hostess; and then hastening his step and leaving Ottomar behind him, he advanced to the party grouped round the sofa, whose conversation died away at once, as all raised their eyes curiously and wonderingly to the man they had been so eagerly expecting. And however many

proofs Valerie had already received of the man's tact, she was again forced against her will to admire the consummate art with which--she could hardly herself have said how--he became almost immediately the centre round which everything else revolved, from whom came every impulse and interest, to whom every thought and feeling returned. Even Frau von Wallbach had raised herself from the comfortable attitude in her arm-chair which she had taken after the first words of civility and had retained unchanged till now, and stared with half-open mouth and eyes which looked almost wide awake at the strange apparition. Elsa had evidently forgotten for the moment everything that had been troubling her before; and as she turned after a little while to her aunt and drew a long breath, there lay in her countenance the silent acknowledgment: "This is more, far more than I had expected." Carla had the same feeling, and took care by her looks and gestures to let everybody know it, even before she openly expressed it.

"In these days," cried she, "when the want of lively sensibilities and of courage to express the little that still exists is doubly felt, I have reserved to myself the child-like habit of naïve admiration wherever and however I find what is admirable, and the privilege of Homer's heroes of giving unveiled expression to my admiration. And when among the insipid faces of the north--present company, gentlemen, is always excepted--I see a face for whose description even the sun-bathed portraits of a Titian, a Raphael or a Velasquez do not suffice, which I can compare to nothing but that miraculous picture to which I owe my most sublime impressions, to that indescribably dignified and yet most divinely benignant Head of Christ over the high altar in the Cathedral of Monreale at Palermo--I must speak it out though Signor Giraldi does raise his hand so deprecatingly, thereby increasing his resemblance to the picture, which will be to me henceforward indeed only a portrait."

"I am delighted to offer a humble theme to so lofty an artistic imagination as undoubtedly inspires Fräulein von Wallbach," answered Giraldi.

"I think we must be going," said Frau von Wallbach, with an absent look at the ceiling.

"Good heavens! Half-past two!" cried Carla, starting up; "how time flies in such interesting company!" The company dispersed; Giraldi, who had gone with them to the door, came back slowly, his head raised, his dark eyes gleaming with triumph, and a smile of contempt curling his lip. Suddenly, in the centre of the room, he stood still, and for a moment his face grew dark as night, but the next he was smiling again, and with a smile he asked:

"Is that the look of a victor after the battle?" Valerie had sunk back, with closed eyes, utterly exhausted in her chair, believing that he had left the room. At the first sound of his voice she started.

"Which you have won!"

"For you!" He bent down to her as he had done before and raised her hand to his lips.

"My lady's hand is cold, however warm I know her heart to be. The noise of the battle is not fit for her sensitive nerves. We must take care that she retires betimes to a quieter spot, where she may await the end in peace."

"What do you mean?" asked Valerie with a smile, though a shudder ran through her.

"It is a plan which has just taken shape in my mind, and which--but no, not now, when you need repose! not now; to-morrow, perhaps, when these eyes may shine more boldly, when the blood will run more warmly in this dear hand--the day after to-morrow--there is no hurry; you know that Gregorio Giraldi does not make his plans for a day."

"I know it," answered Valerie. He now really left the room; Valerie listened, she heard his door shut, she was alone. She rose trembling limbs and tottered to the chair in which Elsa had sat, and there fell upon her knees, pressing her forehead against the back.

"And Thou knowest it, Almighty God! Thou hast sent me Thy angel, in token of Thy grace and mercy. I will trust in Thee faithfully. Thou wilt not suffer that this tyrant shall destroy Thy beautiful world."

CHAPTER VI.

Autumn had come, and was boisterously asserting his authority; the weather was dark and gloomy, even in Reinhold's eyes. "The gloomiest and darkest I ever experienced," he said each morning to himself as the same spectacle always presented itself when he opened his window:

dark, lowering clouds, trees swaying to and fro, from whose branches blustering winds were stripping the brown leaves and whirling them through the moist, foggy atmosphere across the roofs of the workshops, which looked so drenched and miserable that one would only have expected tombstones to be made there.

"And yet I have got through darker and gloomier days without losing heart," philosophised Reinhold further; "it is not the weather out of doors, it is that whichever way I turn I see people in need and trouble, as if I were on board a ship that must sink shortly and could do nothing to save it, but must sit with my hands before me, and look on idly at the catastrophe." Reinhold could do nothing; of that he had only too soon convinced himself ever since that terrible morning when the General had come to his room, and in the deepest agitation, which even his iron strength could hardly master, had informed him of the conversation he had just had with Herr Schmidt, and its miserable results.

"T made every advance to your uncle," said the General, "which was possible to a man of honour. I offered to him and to your family the reparation which, at least in the eyes of the world, would put everything straight, and would secure to the young people the possibility of that happiness which they have so recklessly pursued. If they will find it in this way, God only knows, but that is their affair, and must be theirs. What I feel about it, what hopes I bury here, what a sacrifice I make of my personal convictions, is a matter that lies between my God and me. May God guide your uncle's heart, that he may put his trust in Him, as I do, in the inward conviction that our own wisdom will not help us here. I have come to you, my dear Schmidt, to say all this to you, not that I wish that you should try to influence your uncle; according to my judgment of him, that would be labour lost; but because I cannot endure the thought of being wrongly judged by a man whom we all think so highly of, and who, besides, is connected with me as a brother soldier, even if only for a short time." Reinhold had, notwithstanding, followed the impulse of his heart, and attempted the impossible. He had been, for the first time since they had been together, harshly repulsed by his uncle, and had been forced to own to himself that neither he nor any other man could persuade the fiery-tempered old man to retract a decision once made "because he must." But when Aunt Rikchen, unable to rest from fear of the terrible *something* in the air which yet she could not comprehend, found Ferdinanda an hour later lying senseless on the floor of her studio; when the unfortunate girl was raving in high fever, and the family doctor came and went with anxious looks, and soon returned in company with a colleague, and in the evening the two were joined by a third physician, who seemed no less helpless before this strange seizure--then, when Reinhold's first words, "It will kill her!" seemed likely to be so terribly soon fulfilled, he bethought himself of the General's fervent prayer that God might guide his uncle's heart, and sought his uncle, who had not left his room again since the morning, and asked him whether he would really allow his child to die when it was in his power to save her.

"I am convinced that you can save her," he cried; "that a word from you would pierce to her troubled mind through all the horrors of a fevered fancy, and that she would awake to a new life."

"And what would that word be?" asked Uncle Ernst.

"If your heart does not tell you, you would not understand it if I spoke it."

"My heart only tells me that it would be a lie," replied Uncle Ernst; "and as I understand life, no lie will restore it. What life would it be to which she would awake! Life at the side of a man whose courage holds out just so long as the darkness in which he has followed his course of intrigue; who only steps forth from that darkness when a villain tears off his mask, and he cannot endure his father's eye upon his miserable face; who would do what he must to-day, driven on by the reproaches of his conscience and fear of the world's opinion, only to repent it tomorrow from the same fear, and to hint it to her at first in a thousand different ways, and say it at last to her face. Is that a lot for a father to prepare for his child? No, never! Better a thousand times death, if she must needs die. Every man has his own way of looking at life, and this is mine; and no general officer, with I know not what confused ideas of honour and love, and no relation, however dear he may be to me, who in his good-nature would like to accommodate what never can be put straight, will ever teach me another. And if God Himself came and said to me, 'You are wrong,' I should answer, 'I do right in my own eyes,' and no God can demand more of man."

"But you ought not to have urged Ferdinanda to a decision which cannot possibly have come from her heart."

"Are not you attempting something of the same kind at this moment?"

"I have no authority over you, and your mind is not torn by conflicting feelings as Ferdinanda's must have been in that unhappy hour."

"So much the better, that one of us at least should know what he wishes and wills." That had been Uncle Ernst's last word, and he had said it with a calmness that to Reinhold was more terrible than the wildest outburst of passion would have been. And yet not so terrible as the smile with which the stubborn old man a few days later received the news that Ferdinanda was, in the doctor's opinion, out of danger. Reinhold could not forget that smile; it haunted him even in his dreams. He had never seen the like on any human face; he could not even describe it to Justus, to whom he had repeatedly mentioned it, till one day he stopped with a sudden exclamation at a face that stared at him from the wall in a remote corner of the studio.

"Good heavens, Anders, what is this!"

"The mask of the Rhondonini Medusa," said Justus, looking up from his work.

"That was my uncle's smile."

"I dare say it was something like it," said Justus, coming up with his modelling-tool in his hand, "although I cannot quite reconcile Uncle Ernst's beard with the Medusa; but one sees sometimes such diabolical resemblances." Justus's friendship was invaluable to Reinhold in these dark days; when he was almost giving way, the artist's perpetually cheerful temper would keep him up. "I cannot understand you," said Justus; "I certainly have every possible respect for Uncle Ernst's splendid qualities, and I take really a sincere interest in Ferdinanda, to say nothing of Aunt Rikchen, poor soul, who will soon have cried her eyes out; but sympathy and pity and all that sort of thing, like everything else in the world, must have its limits, and if anything of the kind affects my own life and incapacitates me from working--why, then, you see, Reinhold, I say with Count Egmont: 'This is a foreign drop within my veins!' and--out with it! Have you written to the President?"

"Three days ago."

"That's right. Heaven knows how sorry I shall be to lose you; but you have been here too long already. You ought to have a ship's planks under your feet again, and a northeaster whistling in your ears; that would soon blow your melancholy and hypochondria and all that well out of you, and clear your brain and your heart--you may take my word for it!"

"If only it comes to anything," said Reinhold; "I almost fear, as the answer is so long in coming, that my report may have roused bad feelings in the other department as well, as the General prophesied it would."

"Then we must think of something else," answered Justus; "so smart a vessel must not be left to rot in the stagnant waters of a port. For the present you can sit to me occasionally as a model for my bas-relief; not that I want you yet, but one must gather the roses ere they fade. I will take your head now at once, life-size, to be sure of you in any case." Justus set aside all other work, and busied himself over the designs for his bas-reliefs from morning till night, which came only too early for the busy worker. Two of them, the "March out" and the "Battle," were already finished, and the "Ambulance preparations" had made great progress; but what was to be done about the "Return"? Heaven only knew! "And the idea was such a splendid one," cried Justus. "You had been promoted to be an officer meanwhile, and were to be standing at attention in the right corner, your eyes left towards the charming burgomaster's daughter, who, with the wreath in her hand, also turned her eyes right towards the smart lieutenant, while the two elders exchanged the most beautiful sentiments about union, peace, fraternity, and the like. Heaven help us! beautiful sentiments they have exchanged certainly! Those confounded politics! for after all they are at the bottom of all this trouble. Why must that old Berserker go running about upon the barricades in '48! And he calls himself a Liberal now, and bottles up his anger for four and twenty years, and so spoils my splendid idea, for the idea was fairly embodied in those two. Who the devil is to make bas-reliefs from disembodied ideas! I, for one, can't do it; I gladly renounce the doubtful glory of being an inventor; my motto is: 'Seek, and you shall find!' I have held by it, and it has held by me. I have always found just what I wanted for the moment; it has fairly fallen in my way, I must have been blind not to see it; and this time it was just as if Abdallah's wonderful cave had opened before me: 'Diamonds, emeralds, rubies, only the way between them is narrow ... the camels laden almost beyond their strength;' and now--just turn a little more to the right, my good fellow!--'one only, the last, remained to the dervish.' Admirable, my dear Reinhold, but, excepting you, every one of my splendid models has left me in the lurch; Uncle Ernst, the General, Ferdinanda--absolutely impossible! Aunt Rikchen declares that in such a time of trouble she cannot have anything to do with such nonsense--it would be quite wicked!--is not that good? Old Grollmann's face, I positively cannot see through his melancholy wrinkles; our worthy Kreisel, since he has given up Socialism and taken to speculation, has shrivelled up into a mere grasshopper; dear Cilli even has only occasionally the sweet smile with which, gift in hand, she was to grope for the superintendent's table; and among the new workmen I cannot find a single decent model. A parcel of stupid, coarse, sullen faces; and all comes from politics--those confounded politics!" Thus Justus lamented, and between whiles laughed, over his own "splendid" idea, while he kneaded and moulded the wet clay incessantly in his busy hands, whose dexterity seemed miraculous to Reinhold, and then stepped back a few paces, nodding his half-bald head backwards and forwards, and shaking it gravely if he did not think he had succeeded, or whistling softly and contentedly if he was satisfied--which he generally had reason to be--in any case taking up again outwardly the work which he had not for a moment ceased mentally to carry on.

"I never know which to be most amazed at," said Reinhold; "your skill or your industry."

"It is all one," answered Justus; "a lazy artist is a contradiction in terms, at the best he is only a clever amateur. For what is the difference between artists and amateurs? That the amateur has the will and not the power--the will to do what he cannot accomplish; and the artist can accomplish what he will, and wills nothing but what he can accomplish. But to this point--to comparatively perfect mastery over the technicalities of his art and knowledge of its limits--he attains only through unremitting industry, which is no special virtue in him, but rather his very

self, his very art. Or, to put it differently, his art is not merely his greatest delight, it is everything to him; he rises with his work as he went to bed with it, and if possible dreams of it too in the night. The world vanishes for him in his work, and it is just, therefore, that he creates a new world in his work. Of course this makes him one-sided, narrows him in a hundred other directions--you must have discovered long ago that I am insufferably stupid and ignorant; but ask the ants, who pursue their way, because it is the shortest, right across the beaten tracks, or the bee who commits murder so jovially in the autumn, and roves about in such idyllic fashion in the spring, or any of the other artistic creatures--the whole tribe of them is stupid, and narrow-minded, and barbarous, but they accomplish something. Look at my Antonio; he will never accomplish anything but hewing a figure out of the marble after a finished model, and working it up till it is ready to receive the last touches at the artist's hands, that is to say, being a first-class workman. Why? Because he has a thousand follies in his head, and in the front rank his own precious, conceited self. And then a feeling heart! Goethe, who was a real, true artist, though he did draw and paint some bad things, had his thoughts about that. The fellow--I don't mean Goethe, but Antonio--was good for nothing during the first days of Ferdinanda's illness, so that I had to send him away from his work altogether. What is Ferdinanda to him? Or, at any rate, what is she to him more than to me? and I have been able to work splendidly all these last days. And Ferdinanda herself! such a pity! She was absolutely standing on the threshold of the sanctuary, and yet she will never enter because she cannot grasp the stern saying over the door: 'Thou shalt have none other gods but me.' She has begun to work again, indeed, since yesterday; but defiance, and despair, and resignation, and all that--it may be all very fine; but it is not the muse. And neither is love the muse of art--let people say what they will. All this yearning of heart to heart, it is all very well, but just let a man try to work with a yearning heart, and see how soon his art gives way to the yearning! The artist must be cool to the centre of his heart. I have kept it so till now, and intend so to continue, and if ever you see the name of Justus Anders in a register of marriages, you need no longer look for it in the golden book of art; you would see a line drawn through the space where it may once have stood in alphabetical order." Reinhold would not allow this, any more than he would accept Justus's theory of the necessary one-sidedness of artists. He saw in the artist rather the complete, perfect man, to whom nothing in humanity was strange; the more than complete man even, who poured out his exuberant wealth, which otherwise must have overwhelmed him, in his works, and thus, beside the real world in which ordinary men dwelt, created for himself a second ideal world. And if Justus maintained that he had never loved, it might be true, although for his part he ventured slightly to doubt the strict truth of his assertion; but even if it were so, this great finder had merely not yet found the right object, and as he boasted of always finding the right object at the right moment, here, too, at the right moment the right object would certainly present itself.

"That is a most unartistic view of the matter, my dear Reinhold!" cried Justus. "We, who according to your ideas are something of demi-gods, know better with what groans and creaks these beautiful creations are brought into life, and that at the best of times, when things go as smoothly as possible, you cannot boil anything without water. And as for love, you certainly have more experience in that, and experience, said Goethe's grey friend at Leipzig, is everything; but very often it is better to be without that experience." And Justus hummed the tune of "No fire, no coals, no ashes," as, with his modelling-tool grasped in both hands, he worked at the forehead of his clay figure.

"Do not give expression to such profane notions this evening at the Kreisels'," said Reinhold.

"Why not? It is the simple truth."

"May be so; but it hurts good little Cilli to hear such things, especially from your mouth."

"Why especially from my mouth?"

"Because she sees in you her ideal."

"In you, I should think."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Justus!"

"Not at all. She fairly raves about you; she talks about nothing but you. Only yesterday she said to me that she hoped to live to see you as happy as you deserved to be, on which I ventured to observe that I considered you as one of the happiest men under the sun, notwithstanding your temporary want of employment, whereupon she shook her pretty head and said, 'The best indeed, but happy?' and shook her head again. Now I only ask you! You not happy!" And Justus whistled the tune of "Happy only is the soul that loves," and exclaimed, "There, now I have got rid of the wrinkles in your forehead, and now we will stop for today, or we shall make a mess of it again, as we did yesterday evening." He sprinkled his figures with water, wrapped Reinhold's half-finished head in wet cloths, and wiped his hands.

"There, I am ready!"

"Won't you at least shut your desk?" said Reinhold, pointing to a worm-eaten old piece of furniture, on and in which Justus's letters and other papers were wont to lie about.

"What for?" said Justus. "No one is likely to touch the rubbish. Antonio will put it all in order;

Antonio is order itself. Antonio!" The other workmen had already left the studio; only Antonio was still busying himself in the twilight.

"Put these things a little tidy, Antonio. Come!" The two young men left the studio.

"Do not you leave too much in Antonio's hands?" asked Reinhold.

"How so?"

"I do not trust that Italian; so little indeed that I have repeatedly fancied that the fellow must have had a hand in betraying Ferdinanda." Justus laughed. "Really, my dear Reinhold, I begin to think that Cilli was right, and that you are an unhappy man! How can a happy man torment himself with such horrid ideas? I will just run up and make myself tidy. You go on, I will follow you in five minutes." Justus was just hastening away, when the door of Ferdinanda's studio opened, and a lady came out dressed entirely in black, and muffled in a thick black veil. She hesitated for a moment when she saw the two, and then with hasty step and bent head passed them on her way to the yard. The two friends thought at the first moment that it was Ferdinanda herself; but Ferdinanda was taller, and this was not her figure or walk.

"But who else could it have been?" asked Reinhold.

"I do not know," said Justus. "Perhaps a model--there are shy models. I hope at any rate that it was one. It would be the best sign that she was going to work again, that is to say to come to her senses." Justus sprang up the steps which led to his apartment. Reinhold continued on his way. As he turned the corner of the building, the black figure was just disappearing through the entrance to the house. Antonio also, who had begun to tidy Justus's desk as soon as the two friends had left the studio, had observed the lady in black as she glided past the window. He threw the papers which he held in his hand into the desk, and was about to rush out, but remembered that he could not follow her in his working dress, and stopped with much annoyance. The lady in black had been with Ferdinanda at the same hour yesterday, but as the studio was full, he had not been able to make his observations through the door. She was no model--he knew better than that! But who could it be, if not an emissary from the man he hated? Perhaps she would come for the third time at a more convenient hour. He must find out! He returned to the desk. "Bah!" said he, "what is there to be found here? accounts, orders--the old story! And what use is it to listen to their conversation? Always the same empty chatter. I can't think why he wants to know what the Captain talks about to the maestro!" He knew that Ferdinanda was no longer in her study, but yet his gleaming eyes remained fixed on her door as he sat here brooding in the twilight.

"I will do everything that he commands. He is very wise, very powerful, and very wealthy; but what good can he do here? Is not she now even more unhappy than she was before? And if she should ever find out that it was I--but the signer is right there, one thing always remains to me--the last, best of all--revenge!"

CHAPTER VII.

Latterly, while Ferdinanda still kept her bed, Uncle Ernst hardly left his room, and the Schmidt family circle therefore was to a great extent broken up, the two friends had divided their evenings between it and the Kreisels pretty regularly as they said, or very irregularly as Aunt Rikchen said. Reinhold was forced to agree with his aunt, and attempted no further excuses, as he did not want to tell any untruths, and could not acknowledge the true reason. The real truth was that his aunt's perpetual complaints threatened to destroy his last remnant of cheerfulness, while on the contrary he found the comfort and consolation that he so greatly needed in the atmosphere of sunshine which the sweet blind girl diffused around her. Latterly, indeed, even this sunshine had been a little clouded. The two friends had a suspicion, which they did not however impart to the poor girl, that the eccentric old gentleman, having made up his mind, as he said, that he could no longer with honour remain a Socialist, had sacrificed his dislike to speculation to the darling wish of his heart, to provide for Cilli after his own death, and had been speculating eagerly with the scanty means that he had toilsomely scraped together in the course of years. He was very mysterious about it indeed, and denied it roundly when Justus laughingly taxed him with it; but Justus would not be deceived, and even thought he could gather, from a casual expression the other had let fall, that it was the doubtful star of the Berlin-Sundin Railway to which the old man had confided the fragile bark of his fortunes. It seemed some confirmation of this opinion that latterly, when the almost worthless shares had become, in consequence of the new and dazzling prospectus, an object of the wildest speculation, and had consequently risen to double their value, the old gentleman's cheerfulness had returned also, and he had even ventured

upon some of the dry witticisms which he only uttered when he was in the brightest spirits. Cilli said that now everything went well with her, and Reinhold, as she asserted this with her sweet smile, tried to stifle another and much worse anxiety--an anxiety which he had once hinted to Justus, whereupon the latter had replied in his careless fashion: "Nonsense! Love is a weakness, angels have no weaknesses; Cilli is an angel, and so--basta!" He found Cilli alone in the modest little sitting-room, in the act of arranging the tea-things on the little round table in front of the hard, faded old sofa. She performed such small household duties with a confidence which would have quite deceived a stranger as to her infirmity, and with a grace which always had a fresh charm for Reinhold. She would not permit any assistance either. "It is cruel," said she, "not to let me do the little that I can do." So he sat now in the sofa corner, which was always his place--the other belonged to her father when he came in from the office--and looked on as she came and went with her gliding step, and as often as she returned to the table seemed smilingly to bid him welcome again and again.

"Where is Justus!" asked she.

"He has just gone to dress."

"How far has he got with you?"

"I shall be finished to-morrow, or the day after."

"Then it will be my turn; I am looking forward to it so--I mean to the portrait. I should so like to know what I look like. However often I do so"--she drew her soft finger slowly along her profile--"and that is just like looking in the glass, yet you never know how you look till a great artist shows it to you in your portrait. Justus is going to do me in life-size too."

"But he might have given you that small satisfaction long ago."

"It is not a small thing, even though he does work so wonderfully quick," answered Cilli eagerly; "every hour, every minute is precious to him; he owes them all to his work. Now that he can make use of me for his work, it is different of course."

"Do you know then, dear Cilli, what we all look like?"

"Perfectly; you are a tall man, with curly hair and beard, and a broad forehead, and blue eyes. Justus is not so tall, is he?"

"He is a little shorter, dear Cilli."

"But only a very little," Cilli went on triumphantly; "and his hair is not so thick, is it?" The last words were said with some hesitation.

"Not at the temples, dear Cilli."

"Only not at the temples, of course!" said Cilli quickly; "but his great beauty is in his eyes--great, flashing artist's eyes, which can take in a whole world! Oh, I know what you both look like, and my father too! I could draw his portrait!" She laughed happily and then suddenly became grave.

"That is why I am distressed, too, when the faces I love are not cheerful. Justus's face is always cheerful, but then he is an artist, and can only live in sunshine; my father, too, has recovered his old cheerfulness, and now you must return to what you were at first--do you remember?"

"Indeed I do, dear Cilli. So many things have happened since then; you know what I mean. They have troubled me, and trouble me still. And then Justus is right, I am an idler; I must manage to get to work again."

"How did the General receive your work?" Reinhold looked up in astonishment; there was nothing surprising indeed in the question. He had mentioned the subject, as he had nearly all, excepting one, the most important--often enough at the tea-table here; but the tone in which Cilli had asked was peculiar.

"How do you mean, dear Cilli?" he asked in return.

"I only wanted to remind you that you had not been idle even here," said Cilli. She was standing opposite to him at the other side of the tea-table, and the light of the lamp fell full upon her pure features, on which was expressed some uneasiness. She seemed to be listening for the step of her father or Justus on the stairs. Then, as everything remained still, she felt her way round the table, sat down on the edge of the sofa, and said, while a deep colour suffused her whole face: "I did not tell you the truth; it was for another reason that I asked you. I have something else to ask you--a very great, very bold request--which you will perhaps grant me, if you are sure, as you ought to be, that it is not idle curiosity that prompts me, but heartfelt sympathy in your weal and woe."

"Tell me, Cilli; I believe there is nothing in the world that I would deny you."

"Well then, is it Elsa von Werben?"

"Yes, dear Cilli."

"Thank God!" Cilli sat still, with her hands in her lap; and Reinhold was silent too; he felt that he could not have spoken at the moment without tears. Cilli knew that he was not ashamed of his confession, but she had to a certain degree forced it from him, and as if in apology, she said: "You must not be angry with me. Good as Justus is, one cannot confide such things in him. I think he would hardly understand it. And you have no one else here excepting me; and I thought perhaps it would not be so hard for you if you could speak openly of your feelings even to blind Cilli." Reinhold took her hand, and carried it to his lips.

"I am as grateful to you, dear Cilli, as a wounded man is when balm is poured upon his wounds, and I know no one in whom I would rather confide than in you, purest, kindest, best!"

"I know that you like me and trust me," said Cilli, warmly returning the pressure of Reinhold's hand; "and I am well punished for my cowardice in having, notwithstanding, kept silence so long; for, only think, Reinhold, I believed at first----"

"What did you believe, dear Cilli?"

"I believed at first that it was Ferdinanda; and I was very, very unhappy about it, for Ferdinanda may be as beautiful as you all say, and as talented, but you would never have been happy with her. You are so kind and so good-tempered, and she is--I will not say ill-tempered, but haughty. Believe me, Reinhold, I feel it, as a beggar feels whether what is given him is from kindness or only to get rid of him. I have never put myself in her way, God knows; but He knows also that she has never gone a step out of her way to say one of those kind words to me which fall so readily from your lips, because your heart is overflowing with them. For some time, too, I trembled for Justus, till I learned to understand his nature, and saw that an artist--inasmuch as he is unlike other men--cannot love either like other men. But you, with your tender, loving heart, how should you not love--and love immeasurably--and be immeasurably unhappy if your love is misplaced! I have said this often to Justus when we were talking about you--at first; now I do not do so any more, for he chatters about everything that comes into his head, and I have observed how carefully you have guarded your secret."

"That I have indeed!" cried Reinhold. "I might almost say from myself; and I cannot think how you have discovered it."

"It seems almost a miracle, does it not?" said Cilli; "and yet it is not one, if you seeing people knew how well the blind hear, how they pay attention to every trifle, and to the tone in which you mention a particular name, as you bring it in at first shamefacedly, and then a little more boldly, as soon as you feel secure, till at last all your conversation is full of the music of the loved name, as in the East the dawn is filled with the name of Allah, cried by the Muezzins from the roof of the minaret. And ah! what sadness there often was in the tone in which you spoke it! What trembling hope of joy breathed in it, when you told me the other day that you were going to spend the evening with her, to pass hours in her company at that large party! They were your only happy hours, my poor Reinhold, for the very next day fell the frost upon the young green shoots, and since then the beloved name has never passed your lips. Are you then quite in despair now?"

"No, dear Cilli," answered Reinhold; "I only see a happiness which I thought I might grasp with my hand, as a child thinks it may grasp a star, vanish from me in grey distance." And Reinhold related everything from the beginning, and how he was certain, though she had never spoken a word of love to him, not even on that delightful evening, that she understood him; and that so noble and high-minded a creature could never trifle with a man's silent, respectful devotion, and therefore the favour with which she distinguished him--her kind words and friendly looks--could not be mere trifling, and if not love was yet a feeling that under happier circumstances might have blossomed into true, perfect love. But circumstances could hardly be more unfavourable than they were at present. So melancholy an event as that which had occurred would in any other case have united the other members of the two families in sympathy; in fact it could only have occurred between two families, the heads of which were so utterly opposed in their social views as were the General and Uncle Ernst. He was himself quite independent of his uncle, and should always assert that independence, particularly in his love-affairs; but Elsa was most especially the child of the house, the daughter of a father she so justly and highly honoured, and he feared the reaction which such an event might produce upon the General, who otherwise--from affection for his daughter and regard for him--might perhaps have sacrificed his class-prejudices, but now--and who could blame him?--would intrench himself doubly and trebly behind these very prejudices, which in his eyes were none. And there was another thing I From some remarks made by the General, at the dinner-table at Golmberg, he had taken the Werbens for one of the many poor noble families; and now Elsa suddenly appeared to him as a wealthy heiress, to whom, if she were really prepared to sacrifice her inheritance to her love, as would be necessary, he had nothing to offer but a faithful heart, and such a modest livelihood as a man like him could at best provide. Under these circumstances every prospect seemed so closed to him, every hope so crushed and forbidden to him by the feelings of simple propriety, that there could be no question of wooing on his part, and that it would require a positive miracle to change for the better the present miserable state of affairs. Cilli's face had reflected every sentiment that Reinhold expressed, as the crystal surface of a calm mountain lake reflects the light and shadows of the sky. But now the last shadow faded before the sunny smile with which she said:

"Love is always a miracle, Reinhold; why should not a second happen? Did you not tell me that Elsa understood and did not resent the silent language of your eyes? And even if, as I suppose, the late sad events have been concealed from her, she must have known the conditions of the inheritance, and also her father's character and views, and yet she had no fear and saw nothing impossible in it, but believed, and so surely still believes, that all things work for the best with true love."

"A pious belief, Cilli, such as well beseems a woman, but very ill beseems a man who is expected and rightly to understand and respect the world and the laws which regulate the world."

"Understand!" said Cilli, shaking her head, "yes! But respect them! How can any one respect what is so senseless, so godless, as that must necessarily be which will not allow he union of two hearts that God has formed for each other? What God has joined together let not man put asunder!"

"Ferdinanda and Ottomar might say that for themselves too, dear Cilli."

"Never!" cried Cilli. "God knows nothing of a love which believes in nothing, not even in itself, and therefore bears nothing: no delay, no remonstrance, however just; no obstacle, however unavoidable; and proves thereby that it is itself nothing but pride, arrogance, and adoration of self. No, Reinhold, you must not do yourself the injustice of comparing your modest, noble love, with that dark, unholy passion! And you ought not either to have such a difficult road before you as those unhappy people. Your path must be free and light as your love; you owe that to yourself and to the woman you love."

"Tell me what I ought to do, Cilli. I will believe in you as if an angel spoke to me!"

"Only be yourself, Reinhold; neither more nor less. You, who have so often opposed a bold front to the merciless, raging elements, must not stoop your head before your fellow-men; you must, when the hour comes, as it perhaps soon will, speak and act as your pure brave heart prompts you. Will you?" She put out her hand to Reinhold.

"I will," said Reinhold, taking her hand.

"And, Reinhold, as surely as these eyes will never see the light of the sun, will that sun shine on your path, and you will live to be a joy to yourself and a blessing to mankind."

"Good gracious, Cilli!" said Justus, opening the door and standing still on the threshold; "are you celebrating Christmas in November?"

"Yes, Justus!" cried Reinhold; "Christmas, for Christmas it is when the heavens open and the messengers of love come down to announce peace."

"Then," said Justus, shutting the door, "I strongly recommend to them my Memorial Committee, which will not hold its peace, but is always plaguing me with suggestions of which each one is wilder and more impossible than the last. I have just found another letter four pages long, which I have answered in as great a heat as it put me into. And now, Cilli, give me a cup of tea with a little rum in it to cool me, for such--ah! here comes Papa Kreisel! and in the best spirits, as I can see by the twinkle of his eye. Berlin-Sundins have gone up another half per cent.; now we shall have a jolly evening!" And a jolly evening it was, and when Reinhold went to his room late at night, he found a letter from the President, containing the official announcement that the Minister approved of his appointment, and he must present himself at once at the place in question, as he must enter upon his duties on the 1st of December at latest. Reinhold let the letter slip from his hand musingly.

"The hour may soon come, she said, and here it is already; it shall find me worthy of her who is purity and truth personified."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Must I really pay the driver twenty silver groschen for my small self and my small box?" asked Meta, bursting into Elsa's room.

"Good gracious, Meta!"

"First answer my question!"

"I do not know."

"Fräulein Elsa does not know either, August!" cried Meta into the passage; "so pay him what he asks. And now, you dear, darling, best of creatures, tell me if I am welcome!" Meta threw her arms round Elsa's neck, laughing and crying both at once. "You see, here I am at last, without any letter, after announcing my arrival fifty times. I could not bear it any longer. As often as papa said, 'You can have the horses tomorrow,' it never came to anything; for when to-morrow arrived the horses were always wanted for somebody or something else. So when he said it again this morning, as we were having our coffee, I said, 'No! not to-morrow, but to-day, immediately, on the spot, *tout de suite!*'--packed my box--that is why it is so small, my clothes had not come home from the wash--you must help me out--and here I am. And as for the cabman, that was only because my papa said: 'Take care you are not cheated!' and my mamma said: 'Cheated! nonsense! if only she has her wits about her!' And so on the way I vowed most solemnly to be desperately wise and not to disgrace you, and so I began at once with the cabman, you see." And Meta danced about the room and clasped Elsa round the neck again, and exclaimed: "This is the happiest night of my life, and if you send me away again early tomorrow morning it will still have been the happiest night!"

"And I hope that this evening will be followed by many happy ones for both of us. Oh! you do not know, dear Meta, how glad I am to see you!" cried Elsa, taking Meta in her arms and heartily returning her kiss.

"Now that I know that," said Meta, "I do not in the least want to know about anything else; that is to say I should like it dreadfully, but it is a point of honour with me now to be wise and discreet, you know; and you do not know that side of my character yet--neither do I myself. We must make acquaintance with me together, that will be awfully amusing. Good gracious! what nonsense I am talking just from sheer happiness!" Meta's presence was for the house in the Springbrunnenstrasse like a sunbeam penetrating a chink in the shutters of a dark room. It is not broad daylight, there are heavy shadows enough still; any one who happens to pass a looking-glass starts at the dim reflection of his own sad face; and people move carefully so as not to stumble, and speak with bated breath for fear of what may yet be hidden in the darkness. But still they move and speak; there is no longer the former silent darkness with all its terrors. Hardly a week had gone by, then, before the bright, talkative little girl had become the favourite of one and all. The General, who had almost entirely shut himself up in his own room lately, now spent a few hours every evening, as he used to do, with the rest of the family, unless, as had happened several times already, they were going out. He allowed himself to be instructed by Meta in agricultural matters, in which she declared herself to be an authority even with her papa--and that was saying a great deal--and permitted her to question him as to "what a battle really was like?" "Did Moltke sometimes yawn when it lasted too long?" and "Might a lieutenant wear varnished boots in battle?"

"It makes me shudder when I hear it all, Elsa; your friend is quite an *enfant terrible*," said Sidonie; but was calmed and consoled at once when Meta expressed the greatest interest in her "Court Etiquette," and declared that it was a very different sort of thing from Strummin etiquette. One found oneself always in the best society with highnesses and serene highnesses; and if one did sometimes come down to the backstairs, in her eyes a page of the backstairs was a person highly to be respected.

"She really has very considerable talents," said Sidonie, "and a great desire for instruction. I have given her the first part of Malortie's 'High Chamberlain;' you might read it aloud together for half an hour this evening, instead of chattering till two o'clock in the morning. Heaven only knows what you find to talk about!" Even Ottomar, who since his engagement was hardly ever seen at home--"He is not with us," said Carla--appeared again now, if he knew that his father would not be there, and made so merry with the mischievous girl, "that it cuts one to the heart," thought Elsa. The servants even were enchanted with the strange young lady. Ottomar's man protested that she would suit the Lieutenant ten times better; the lady's-maid praised her because one could at any rate quarrel with her, which was quite impossible with Fräulein Elsa; and August said she was A 1. In society, too, Meta made many conquests. Old Baroness Kniebreche thought her *tout à fait ridicule, mais délicieuse*. The saying went the round, like all that came from that toothless old mouth, and *la délicieuse ridicule* was welcomed everywhere. Wartenberg was of opinion that the girl "always brought life into the place." Tettritz was always reminded by her of the shepherd's flute in "Tristan;" Schönau said she was an original; and Meta, in return, found everybody and everything charming. She had never thought there were so many charming people; "but you are the best of all, Elsa, and nothing else really signifies!" And indeed while the kindhearted girl seemed to give herself up entirely to the enjoyment of the gay bustle of society, and often indeed to be quite absorbed in it, she really had only one serious interest, and that was to love and please Elsa. She had come because the melancholy tone of Elsa's last letters had startled and distressed her, and she thought she knew better than any one else the cause of this depression. That her brother's engagement, however much against Elsa's wish, should distress her friend so deeply, she could not believe; that the differences between her father and her Aunt Valerie and their consequences could depress and discourage the usually cheerful brave temper, she could not make up her mind to, either. Elsa, however, had put forward no other reasons, and either could not or would not give any others, as the actual connection of the tragical circumstances attending Ottomar's betrothal was happily a secret to her and to Aunt Sidonie, and her own secret was carefully guarded by her modest pride. So carefully, that even

now in the confidential talks which to Aunt Sidonie's horror extended so far into the night, when after tea with the family, or on coming home from a party, they retired to their rooms, no word passed her discreet lips, and Meta began to doubt her own acuteness. All the more as the engagement which distressed Elsa so much, really did look much more serious when looked at closely than it had seemed to Meta from the brief, written accounts. Meta had now made acquaintance personally with Ottomar and Carla; Ottomar, although Elsa said he was only a shadow of his old self, had fascinated her, and Carla was the only lady of their whole acquaintance whom she thoroughly disliked. She too began to think that the union of such a dissimilar couple could not possibly bring happiness, that Ottomar indeed was already unhappy. Added to this was the uncomfortable state of affairs which according to Elsa had certainly existed even before the betrothal, between the father and son, but which now, when everything was apparently put straight, had grown much worse, and for which Elsa could discover no reason excepting Ottomar's still doubtful, perhaps desperate, financial condition. Meta had been taken also to see the Baroness Valerie, had learned to sympathise with Elsa in her feeling for the interesting, and evidently most unhappy woman, and here too stood with Elsa on the threshold of a dark and terrible mystery. What were the relations between this woman and the man whom she must have passionately loved, when she sacrificed to him what is most dear to a woman; whom she must love still, as she still made such sacrifices to him, sacrifices which yet seemed to be so difficult to her! Had she not again and again said to Elsa that she could no longer live without Elsa's love, or without her brother's forgiveness? And yet in Giraldi's presence she did not venture to show the smallest sign of love to Elsa, she did not venture to fulfil the condition imposed by the General, if there was to be any questions between him and her of a real reconciliation, of anything more than a mere superficial renewal of social intercourse--did not venture to separate from Giraldi, but seemed rather to stand now as ever under the absolute dominion of that hateful man!

"It is a dreadful state of things of course," said Meta; "but I do not see why you are to wear out your bright young life over it. Dear me! there is something of the kind, after all, in every family. I do not like my sister-in-law at all; my brother is a true Strummin, always jolly and light-hearted, and she is a real wet blanket, who drives the poor man wild with her dry matter-of-factness and perpetual considerations. And as for one's uncles and aunts--there I really may speak. Uncle Malte--at Grausewitz, you know, ten miles from us--we only see once in three years, and then he and papa quarrel dreadfully; Uncle Hans--he was a soldier, went into the Austrian service later, and afterwards into the Brazilian--we have not heard of him these six years; Aunt Gusting--who married a Baron Carlström in Sweden--has grown so fine that she only stayed half a day with us when she came to Strummin last autumn; she wrote afterwards that the combined smell of tobacco-smoke and plum-jam had been too disagreeable to her, and I could tell you a thousand other heart-breaking stories of our family. My papa always says: 'If a man is to be responsible for all his relations, there is an end of all pleasure.'" So spoke Meta to comfort her friend, as she plaited her long red-gold hair, of which she was rather vain now since Signor Giraldi had said, at a large party at Aunt Valerie's, that it was of the true Titian colour; or sat prattling coaxingly by the side of Elsa's bed as she had done on the first evening at Golmberg. Meta often recurred to that evening. "It had been the birthday of their friendship," said Meta; and the sight of Count Golm, whom they met at every party, and who had even lately once or twice joined their family circle at tea-time, kept the dear remembrance always fresh. But though Meta seemed inclined to be always indulging in recollections, she had no idea of doing so in reality, and her supposition that Elsa did not care a bit about the Count had been confirmed every time she saw the two together; but when she spoke of all that had happened at Golmberg, of the evening meal and the morning walk, it was quite natural, quite unavoidable that amongst others a name should be mentioned which Elsa never voluntarily allowed to pass her lips, and which Meta was convinced sounded day and night in Elsa's heart. Just because it never passed her lips. "There must be a reason for that," said Meta to herself; "and also for his never appearing here where he has been invited and, as I hear from Aunt Sidonie, was so kindly and even warmly received; and the reason must be one and the same, and can only be a sorrowful one, and that must be why Elsa is so sad." But any remaining doubt of the justice of this conclusion vanished when one day, quite accidentally--she had not been looking for it, really not, but her clothes had the most obstinate disposition to get mixed up with Elsa's--she felt a hard substance in the pocket of the blue tarletane dress that Elsa had worn the evening before at the Sattelstädts', which she took at first for a purse, and as she did not quite trust the lady's-maid she thought it best to take it out; and when she had taken it out she found to her great surprise that it was a pocket-compass in a pretty little ivory box. And in the inside of the box was engraved in very small, but quite legible, golden letters, a certain name which Elsa seemed quite to have forgotten. Meta had thought that as wisdom and discretion were now a point of honour with her, she could not do better than keep silence as to her discovery; had closed the box again--not without a most indiscreet smile--slipped it back into the pocket, and sat down in the window to write to her mamma, and was so deeply absorbed in her writing that she never looked up once when Elsa, who had only gone to look after her household affairs, returned and walked up and down the room two or three times without saying a word, each time coming a little nearer to the tarletane dress, which was hanging carelessly over the back of a chair; and at last--Meta had again got into trouble with her writing and could not of course look up--took the dress from the chair and hung it up in the wardrobe. And in doing so the case must have fallen out, though Meta heard nothing drop; at any rate, there was nothing now in the pocket, as Meta assured herself when Elsa again went out--not by accident this time. "I must know how matters stand," said Meta, "for her sake!" During the next few days Meta was most palpably false to her rule. Very contrary to her custom, she was silent and absent in society, and, on the other hand, exhibited a most indiscreet curiosity towards the

servants concerning the circumstances and customs of the neighbours, particularly of the Schmidts, carrying her indiscretion even so far as to talk of her approaching departure, and that it was high time to pay various visits to friends of her parents whom she had most shamefully neglected until now. She did, in fact, go out several times without Elsa, and on the afternoon of the third day in particular disappeared for several hours, and, though she came back to tea, was so extraordinarily agitated that even Aunt Sidonie observed it, and Elsa began to be seriously uneasy. But she was horrified when, both having retired earlier than usual, Meta flung her arms round her, and with a flood of tears exclaimed, "Elsa, Elsa! you need have no more fear or trouble! I swear it to you by what is to me most sacred--by our friendship--he loves you! I know it from his own lips!" The first effect of these words did not seem to be that wished and hoped for by Meta, for Elsa too burst into tears; but Meta, as she held her friend in her arms, and pressed Elsa's head against her bosom, felt that her tears, however hot and passionate, were not tears of grief; that the dull anguish that had so long oppressed Elsa's poor heart had been removed at last, and that she might be proud and happy to have done this service to her friend, and broken the spell.

"And now let me tell you how I set about it," said she, as she drew Elsa down to the sofa beside her and took her hands in hers. "The whole difficulty, you see, was in speaking to him; for how could I speak to a man who never comes here, whom we never meet anywhere, either in society or in the streets, although we live next door to each other, and whom one cannot visit, even with the best intentions in the world? So I laid myself out to hear what the servants had to say. August gave me the most information; he is some sort of cousin to the old servant over the way, and I heard from him, in addition to what I knew already, that he always spends the morning at work in his room, and the afternoon in the studio of a sculptor called Anders, who is 'modulating' him, according to August. I thought it might be modelling, although for my part I did not know what that was either. Well, perhaps you will remember that on Thursday evening, at your Aunt Valerie's, there was a great discussion about art, and Signor Giraldi repeatedly mentioned Herr Anders, and that he had long intended to visit Herr Anders some day in his studio, and look at his newest production, since, unfortunately, the Satyr and Cupid was already sold. I hardly paid any attention at the time, but now I remembered it all word for word, and my plan was made. I paid a visit yesterday to Aunt Valerie, brought the conversation again round to art, and said how immensely I should like to see a sculptor at work for once, and would Signor Giraldi take me some day to a studio, and if possible to that of Herr Anders, because he lived so near us and my time was getting so short now? Signor Giraldi, I must allow him that, is more courteous than any of the other gentlemen, so he was ready at once; and your aunt agreed to go too, but only, I thought, because Signor Giraldi wished it. And I was right; for when this afternoon, punctually at four o'clock--that was the time settled--you are not angry with me now, are you, that I ran away from you?--I went there. Signor Giraldi received me alone. I must put up with him--your aunt had got a headache; all said with his polite smile that you know so well. But his eyes looked wickedly dark: I thought at once, 'There has been a scene.' I was dreadfully sorry, and the thought of making the expedition alone with Signor Giraldi was not particularly consoling; but you were in question, and I would have gone through the Abruzzi with Rinaldini--keeping my eyes open, you know. However, it was not so bad after all, for just as we were going out, who should appear but your heavenly aunt, with red eyes, alas! and looking very ill, but dressed and ready to go out. Signor Giraldi kissed her hand--Ottomar himself could not have done it so well--and whispered a few words in Italian at which your aunt smiled. I tell you, he can twist her round his little finger. So out we went; and now pay attention, you dear, sweet, darling creature!" Here the two friends embraced each other tearfully, till Meta, in her wisdom, sobbed out: "I am sure I do not know why you are crying, and you do not know either, you see; and if you get so excited and spoil the thread of my story I cannot tell it properly, you see! So now, were you ever in a studio? Of course not. Imagine to yourself a room, like our church at Strummin--you do not know it, by the way; imagine, then, a room as wide and high as you please, and the whole high wide room full--no, it is indescribable, particularly for a young girl. I assure you I did not know sometimes where to turn my eyes; but he--no, you really must be a little sensible now--he helped me safely over everything, and only took me about wherever it was quite, or at least very nearly proper; and then we had--oh, dear! I had arranged everything so nicely while we were at tea, and now I have forgotten it all. I only know that when we came in, quite unexpectedly, you know, he jumped up from his chair as if he had been electrified, and turned quite red with pleasure; and when at last we were able to say a few words quietly together, he said nothing but, 'Fräulein von Strummin! how is it possible! how is it possible!' Dear me, Elsa, it was really quite unnecessary for him to say anything more; I knew all about it now! But of course we did not stop there. I had to tell him how it was possible, and that I had been here for a fortnight with you--and--you must not think, Elsa, that I was foolish or indiscreet--we talked about you, of course, and why he never showed himself now--I was obliged to ask that! And then he said, 'How gladly I would come I need not assure *you*'--with an emphasis on the *you*, Elsa, you know--'unfortunately'--now listen, Elsa!--'there are circumstances so powerful that with the best will in the world we cannot set them aside; and I beg you to believe that I suffer more from these circumstances than I can or dare say.' And then he passed his hand across his brow and said, 'I will certainly come once more, however, before I go away.' 'Where?' 'I had a letter yesterday evening from'--you will never guess, Elsa; he had a letter from the dear President, and--only think, Elsa!--he really has got the post of Superintendent of Pilots at Wissow--at Wissow, Elsa! I really did not know what to say for joy, but he read my feelings in my face, and smiled and said, 'We shall be almost neighbours, then, Fräulein von Strummin.' 'And we will be neighbourly,' said I. 'That we will,' said he. 'And if we ever get a visit from Berlin,' said I--'And you honour me with an invitation,' said he--'you will come?' said I. And then he said,--no, then he said nothing, Elsa; but he pressed

my hand! There, Elsa, take it back, for it was not meant for me, but for you, you dear, dear sweet thing!" The two friends held each other in a long embrace, and then there ensued a searching investigation of the important question: What could Reinhold have meant by "circumstances!"

"We shall never get to the bottom of it," said Meta at last; "the circumstances are just the circumstances that you are called Elsa von Werben and he is called Reinhold Schmidt, and that you are a wealthy heiress and might if you pleased marry the richest and most distinguished man, and that he is poor; and wife of the Superintendent of Pilots certainly does not sound so well as baroness or countess. Perhaps he has heard, too--people hear everything in Berlin--that you would lose your inheritance if you followed the dictates of your heart, and so he really is right in talking of 'circumstances,' dreadful circumstances." Elsa agreed with her in it all, but still could not see any reason why he had not come again to see them, and why even her father apparently avoided his name. She would confess now for the first time that three days ago she had been rejoicing exceedingly at the thought of the Sattelstädts' party, because she knew that Reinhold had also been invited, and even there he had sent an excuse--a proof how he avoided every possibility of meeting her even on neutral ground.

"I will get to the bottom of it," said Meta.

"How would it be possible?" Meta laughed; "I never do anything by halves, to-morrow I shall go there again. Will you come with me?"

"Meta!"

"You would not do, either," said Meta; "it must be an old lady, and a lady of some position. We have got one, however; tomorrow morning I shall pay her a visit, and to-morrow afternoon, as I said, we will begin."

"But for goodness' sake, Meta, what are you talking about?" Meta said it ought to have been a surprise; but she could not manage it under three sittings at the best, and she could not keep it secret so long, so that after all it might be better to confess everything at once.

"We were obliged, you see," said Meta, "to break off our conversation at last, and take a little notice of the others, who, meanwhile, had been wandering about the studio and talking Italian together, which Herr Anders speaks beautifully, Signor Giraldi says. There was an Italian there too, such a handsome man, with a paper cap on his raven-black hair. 'They all wear paper caps on account of the marble dust,' said Herr Anders, who certainly is not handsome himself. I never could have believed that an artist, and such a great one as he is said to be, could look so little dignified and be so small. And when you hear him speak, you cannot believe it at all; for the way he chatters, Elsa, is just like me, you know; and he laughs, Elsa, I cannot describe how he laughs, so that one laughs too with all one's heart only to see and hear him laugh. You never saw anything so funny, excepting his little curly poodle, which is just as funny as himself. We were standing then before Reinhold's portrait--round, you know, and raised--in relief they call it, and such a likeness! fit to be kissed, I assure you.' 'For whom is that?' asked I. 'For the future wife of the original,' said Herr Anders; 'she can wear it on a black velvet ribbon round her throat as a locket.' Just think, Elsa, what nonsense! a locket as large as a small carriage-wheel! he always talks like that. 'It is a study for that design,' said Reinhold. So then we looked at the designs--exquisite, I assure you. A battle, that would suit your papa! and 'Ambulance preparations,' with an old gentleman sitting behind a table, and a blind girl coming up with her gifts--I nearly cried when I saw that, and your aunt had tears in her eyes--and other women and girls. 'How delightful to be one of them,' cried I, quite from the bottom of my heart. 'You might have that pleasure at any moment, and give me the greatest possible satisfaction at the same time,' said Justus--that is his Christian name--funny one, is not it? 'How so?' said I. 'Look, here is a splendid place still,' said he--he says splendid, you must know, at every third word--'for a really bright cheerful face, such as I have been wanting for a long time, because the thing was getting too sentimental to please me, only I had no good model for it; do, please, be my model!' Dear me, Elsa, I did not know in the least what that might be, and as I told you before, there were some wonderful things in the studio; but I just looked at your Reinhold, and he said, 'Yes, do it,' with his eyes, like that, you know! and so I said quite boldly, 'Yes, I will do it;' and Signor Giraldi said that a queen might envy me the honour of being immortalised in such a work of art, and so the day after to-morrow I am to be immortalised!" Elsa could have listened all night long; but Meta, who had gone through such an eventful day, and had never quite got over the habit of being tired to death at ten o'clock at latest, could hardly keep her eyes open while she talked, so Elsa put her to bed and kissed the good little thing, who put her arms round her neck and murmured sleepily: "Is it not, Elsa--blue tarletane--compass--one more kiss!" and before Elsa had drawn herself up again was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

Meta carried out her heroic design without allowing herself to be intimidated by anything, even by Aunt Rikchen's spectacles, "And they are no joke," said Meta, when in the evening she reported the result of the first sitting. "I could easier hold out against Baroness Kniehreche's eye-glasses. Behind those there is nothing but a pair of old blind eyes, of which I feel anything but fear; but when Aunt Rikchen allows her spectacles to slip to the end of her nose, she then begins really to see so clearly, that one would feel anxious and uneasy if one had not so good a conscience. And do you know, Elsa, that something particular must have occurred between you and the Schmidts--what, I am quite in the dark about, as the good lady mixes everything together higgledy-piggledy; but she is very angry with you Werbens, as papa is with the Griebens, our neighbours, who are always trespassing on his boundaries, he says; and you must have been trespassing on the Schmidts, and that is the reason, you may depend upon it, why Reinhold has got so distant. We shall hear nothing from him; but Aunt Rikchen never can keep anything to herself, and we are already the best of friends. She says I am a good girl, and that after all I really had nothing to do with it, and the dove who brought the olive branch from the earth did not know either what it had in its beak: and then I saw that Reinhold, who was in the studio with me, looked at her, and Herr Anders also looked quite grave, and glanced again at Reinhold. They three know something, that much is clear, and I will find it out, you may depend upon it." But Meta did not find it out, and could not do so, as Aunt Rikchen did not herself know the exact state of affairs, and the others were most careful to keep her in ignorance. Meta's communication therefore by no means contributed to Elsa's peace of mind, and if Elsa had at first, at least, had the happiness of hearing of Reinhold through Meta, how he had come to the studio and kept her company for a long time, and what he had said, and how he had looked, even this source of consolation was now decreasing, and seemed gradually to be drying up altogether. One day he had scarcely been there for five minutes, another time only just passed through the studio, a third time Meta had not seen him at all, a fourth time she could not even say whether she had seen him or not. Elsa thought she knew the meaning of this apparent negligence. Meta had found out something which she could not tell her, or had in some other way become convinced of the hopelessness of her love; and the ample details which she gave from her other experiences and observations in the studio, only served to conceal her embarrassment. It was therefore with a very divided heart that Elsa heard how Meta daily grew in favour with Aunt Rikchen, who was really a most excellent old lady, and whose heart was in the right place, if her spectacles did always get crooked, or slipped to the end of her nose. And how there was something especially touching to her in the good lady, for she herself would look just like that fifty years hence. But far more touching to her was a lovely young blind girl, who now came every day, because Herr Anders wished to bring the two together in one group. "When she spoke it was just as if a lark were singing high up in the blue sky on a Sunday mornings when all is still in the fields; and Justus said that Nature had never before produced such a contrast as she and Cilli made, and if he succeeded in reproducing it, no one could speak to him again save hat in hand. There was also next to Justus's studio another which aroused all her curiosity, because the owner of it never allowed herself to be seen, and she could form no idea of what a lady could be like who modelled in clay or hammered at the marble, least of all of such a beautiful, elegant lady as Justus said Fräulein Schmidt was, for you know, Elsa, a sculptor looks like a baker, only that he has clay in his fingers instead of dough, and is powdered with marble-dust instead of flour, and you would hardly take such a queer-looking creature for a respectable gentleman, much less for a great artist, and Justus says the one who looks cleanest and most elegant in spite of his working blouse, and is handsomer than any one I ever saw in my life, is no true artist, as he can do nothing more than point and block out; but you, poor child, do not know what pointing is. Pointing, you must know, is when you take a thing like a stork's bill, you know--" And then followed a very long and very complicated explanation, out of all which Elsa only gathered Meta's desire to talk of everything excepting what alone lay near her own heart. "The work will soon be finished," said Elsa to herself, "and the whole result of the fine plan will be that I can no longer consider Reinhold's holding back as a mere chance," But the work did not seem likely to be finished.

"Such a countenance had never before come under his notice," said Justus. "You might as well model the spring clouds, which every moment change their form." And again, when the portrait for the bas-relief was finished, "You can have no idea how dreadfully absurd I look, Elsa, like a Chinese!" Justus had begun to work at the completion of the "Ambulance preparations." "And I cannot leave the poor man in the lurch after all his trouble, for you know, Elsa, it is no longer a question of the head only--that is done--but of the whole figure, the attitude, gesture, in a word, a new subject, you know; but I really believe, poor child, you do not know what a subject is. A subject is when a man has no idea what he shall make, and then suddenly sees something, where in reality there is nothing to see--say a cat or a washing-tub--" This was the longest, but also the last explanation which Meta gave to her friend out of the fulness of her newly-acquired knowledge. For the next few days Elsa had more than usual to do in the household, and another matter imperiously claimed her attention. The final conference over the future management of the Warnow estates took place at her father's house, after two months of discussion backwards and forwards over it, and the three votes of Herr von Wallbach, Councillor Schieler, and Giraldi, as the Baroness's proxy, in opposition to the General's single voice--who recorded his dissentient view in a minute--had determined the sale of the whole property at the earliest possible opportunity, and Count Axel von Golm had been accepted as the purchaser in the event of his agreeing to the conditions of sale settled at the same by the trustees. Her father appeared after the long conference paler and more exhausted than Elsa had ever seen him.

"They have done it at last, Elsa," he said. "The Warnow property, which has been two hundred years in the possession of the family, will be sold and cut up. Your aunt Valerie may justify it if she can, since she and she alone is to blame that an old and honourable family falls miserably to the ground. Had she been a good and faithful wife to my friend--but what use is it harping upon bygone things? It is folly in my own eyes, how much more so then in those of others, to whom the present is everything! And I must confess the gentlemen have acted quite in the spirit of the age, cleverly, rationally, and in your interests. If the results are as brilliant as the Councillor flatters himself, you will be at least twice as rich as before. It is very unnatural, Elsa, but I hope he triumphs too soon. The Count--whom he proposes as purchaser--can only pay the outrageous sum named--for the entire property is really scarcely worth half a million, let alone a whole million--if he is certain that so great a burden will be immediately lifted off his shoulders; that is to say, if the scandalous project is carried out, the danger and folly of which I so strongly urged with the help of the staff and Captain Schmidt. If it does, however, come to anything, if the concession is granted, it would be an affront to that small authority which I can lay claim to, but which I do claim, so that I should look upon it in the same light as if I had been passed over in the approaching promotions. I should at once send in my resignation. The decision must be made soon. For Golm it is a question of life and death. He will either be utterly ruined or a Crœsus; and I shall be his Excellency or a poor pensioner--all quite in the spirit of the age, which is always playing a game of hazard. Well, God's will be done! I can only win, not lose, since no one and nothing can rob me of the best and highest--my clear conscience--and the knowledge that I have always stood to the old colours, and have acted as a Werben should act." So said the father to Elsa in a state of agitation, which, hard as he tried to control it, quivered and broke out in his words, and in the very vibrations of his deep voice. It was the first time that he had given her such a proof of his confidence, as to let her be a witness of a struggle which formerly he would have fought out in silence in his proud soul. Was it chance? Was it intentional? Was it but the outpouring of the overflowing vessel? Or did her father suspect or know her secret? Did he mean to say to her, "Such a decision may soon be awaiting you also. I trust and hope that you, too, will stand to the colours which are sacred to me, that you also will prove yourself a Werben." This had taken place in the morning. Meta, after another sitting, had unexpectedly received an invitation to dinner from a friend of her mother's. She should not return till the evening. For the first time Elsa scarcely missed her friend. She was glad to be alone, and to be able to give way to her thoughts in silence. They were not cheerful, these thoughts. But she felt it a duty to think them out, so as to see her way clearly if possible. She thought she had succeeded, and found in it a calm satisfaction, which, as she said to herself, was truly her whole compensation for all she had renounced in secret. And in this resigned frame of mind she received with tolerable composure the news which Meta brought on her return home, which otherwise would have filled her with sorrow, that Meta was going--must go. She had found at the lady's to whom she had gone a letter from mamma, in which mamma made such terrible lamentations over her long absence, that she could not do otherwise than go at once--that was to say, the first thing tomorrow morning. What she felt she would not and could not say. It was an extraordinary frame of mind, in any case, as whilst she seemed to be drowned in tears, she broke into a smile the next moment, which she in vain attempted to suppress, until the smiles again merged into tears; and so she went on for the rest of the evening. The next morning this state of mind had reached such a pitch that Elsa became really uneasy about the extraordinary girl, and begged her to postpone her journey until she was somewhat calmer. But Meta stood firm. She was quite determined, and Elsa would think her quite right if she knew all; and she should know all, but by letter; by word of mouth she could not tell her without dying of laughter, and she did not wish to die just yet, for reasons which she also could not tell her without dying of laughter. And so she carried on the joke till she got into the carriage, in which August was to take her to the station. She had absolutely forbidden any one else to accompany her, "for reasons, Elsa, you know, which--there! you will see it all in the letter, you know, which--good-bye, dear, sweet, incomparable Elsa!" And off drove Meta. In the evening August, not without some solemnity, gave Elsa a letter which the young lady had given him at the last moment before starting, with strict injunctions to deliver it punctually twelve hours later, on the stroke of nine in the evening. It was a thick letter, in Meta's most illegible handwriting, from which Elsa with difficulty deciphered the following:

"6 o'clock p.m.

"Dearest Elsa,

"Do not believe a word of what, when I return home, I--ah! that is no use. You will not read this letter till--I write it here at Frau von Randon's, so as to lose no time--August will give it to you when I am gone. Well, it is all untrue! My mother has not written at all. For the last week I have deceived and imposed upon you abominably, as since then I have no longer been on your behalf, and it would have been quite useless if I had; for it is now clear to me that your Reinhold has discovered long since how matters stood with us, and kept out of the way, even before we ourselves had a suspicion; for you may believe me, Elsa, that when two men are such good friends, they stand by one another in such matters as well as we girls could. And before dear blind Cilli we did not think it necessary either to have any reserve, because she always smiled so merrily when we teased each other; and then she could not see, and in such cases, you know, the eyes play a great part. It began, indeed, with the eyes, for till then everything had gone on quite properly; but when he came to them he said, 'I shall now have an opportunity of finding out exactly what colour your eyes are; I have been puzzling my brains about it all this time.' I

maintained they were yellow, Aunt Rikchen said green, he himself brown; and Cilli, to whom the decision was left, said she was certain they were blue, because I was so cheerful, and cheerful people always had blue eyes. So we went on joking about it; and every day he began again about my eyes, and as you cannot very well talk about eyes without looking into them, I looked into his eyes while he looked in mine, and--I don't know whether you have made the same discovery, Elsa, but when one has done so for a few days, one begins to see more and more clearly--quite down to the bottom of them--quite curious things, I can tell you, which makes one turn hot and cold, and one often does not know whether to laugh and to give the man who looks at you like that a box on the ear, or to burst into tears and fall on his neck.

"I had felt like this already once or twice, and to-day again, only rather worse than before. The assistants had gone to dinner, and Aunt Rikchen to see after her household affairs; there were only he and I, and Cilli, and Justus wished to go on working if we did not mind, that he might finish once for all. But he did not work so industriously as usual, and because I saw that, I also did not sit so still as usual; and we--that is, he and I--played all sorts of tricks with Lesto, who must lie down and pretend to be dead, and who barked furiously at me when I pretended to beat his master, and other nonsense, until we suddenly heard the sound of the door shutting which leads to the garden, and--good gracious, Elsa! how can I tell you?--Cilli had gone away without our having noticed it. We thought we must have gone rather too far then, and so became quite quiet--as still as mice--so that you might have heard a pin fall; and I was so embarrassed, Elsa--so embarrassed, you know--and getting every moment more so, when he suddenly knelt down right before me--my knees were trembling so, that I had sat down--and again looked so into my eyes, and I--I was forced to, Elsa--I asked quite softly what he meant. 'I mean,' said he--but also quite softly--'that you must do what I ask you.' 'I shall box your ears if you do not get up directly,' said I, still more softly. 'I shall not get up,' said he, but so close to me that I could no longer box his ears, but instead fell upon his neck, upon which Lesto, who evidently thought that his master's life was in danger, began to bark furiously; and I, just to quiet Lesto and to make Justus get up off his knees, said 'Yes' to everything he asked--that I loved him, and would be his wife, and everything else that one says in such a terrible moment.

"And now only think, Elsa, Elsa! when, in the course of five minutes, we had quieted Lesto and were going out--as I said I had sworn to be discreet and to do you credit, and that I would not remain a second longer with so dangerous a man in so lonely a place, with all those dreadful marble figures--and as we went out arm-in-arm, Cilli suddenly stepped towards us from between two of the statues, herself as white as marble, but with the most heavenly smile on her sweet face, and said we must not be angry with her, as the door had shut itself and she could not get out, and she had heard all--her hearing was so acute, and there was such an echo in the studio. Oh, Elsa, I almost sank into the floor, for I think there had not been words only. But that divine creature, as if she had seen how red I grew, took me by the hand and said I need not be ashamed; there was no need to be ashamed of a true, honourable love; and I did not yet know how happy I was, how proud I ought to be; but I should learn it gradually, and then I should be grateful for my proud happiness, and love Justus very, very much, as an artist needed far, far more love than other men. And then she took Justus's hand, and said, 'And you, Justus, you will love her like the sunshine, without which you cannot live.' And as she said so, a ray of sunshine fell through the studio window right upon the dear thing, and she looked transfigured--so marvellously beautiful, with the poor blind eyes turned upwards, that at last I could not help crying, and she had great difficulty in quieting me. And then she said: 'You must not remain here in this state of agitation; you must at once return home and tell your mother, and no one before her, for my knowing it is a mere chance for which you are not to blame.' And I promised her all she wished, and I feel now how right the dear angel was, as I am quite mad with delight, and should certainly have done some folly for very joy; and that I must not do, since I have sworn to be sensible and to do you credit. I shall start to-morrow morning, and shall be home to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, by half-past shall have told mamma all, and at nine August will give you this letter, as after mamma you are, of course, the next. I told Cilli so at once, and she quite agreed to it; and her last words were, 'Pray to God that your friend may be as happy as you are now.' And I will do so, Elsa, you may depend upon it; and in all other respects also depend upon your ever loving, wise

"Meta.

"P.S.--Of course, 'he' is an exception to the 'all.' I am very sorry, but it cannot be helped, you know."

"The dear, foolish child!" said Elsa, as she finished the letter, with a deep sigh; "I congratulate her with all my whole heart." And as she sat there and thought over how wonderfully it had all come about, and how happy the two must be in their love, her eyes became more fixed, her breathing ever harder, and then she covered her eyes with her hands, bent her head upon Meta's letter, and cried bitterly.

CHAPTER X.

Three days later--the autumn sun was going down, and it was already getting dusk in the large room--Giraldi sat at his writing-table near the window, reading the letters which had arrived for him. A considerable number had accumulated in the course of the day, which he had spent since early morning in important business in the town, for the sale of the property to the Count had taken place to-day; there were political letters from Paris and London, ecclesiastical matters from Brussels and Cologne, a detailed report from a trusty friend at Strasburg upon the state of affairs in Alsace-Lorraine, business letters of the most varied kind--English, French, Italian, German. Giraldi read one as easily as the other; he even made his marginal notes always in the same language as his correspondent wrote in. "It grows and grows," murmured he: "we are not far now from the crisis; and how delightful it is to hear from the mouths of others as extraordinary news, things that could not have happened without us. Unfortunately they are beginning to find out here the importance of the untitled and undecorated Signor, the mere private secretary to a lady of rank, and the best part of my working powers will be lost. So long as one is a nobody one can hear everything and hear it correctly; but the moment people begin to point at one, one learns very little, and that little wrong. That is the curse of royalty." He took up a letter, which he had before thrown on one side, taking it from its shape to be one of the begging letters which he constantly received from poor fellow-countrymen, or from native *chevaliers d'industrie*. "It is a priest's hand," he said. "Ah! from my correspondent at Tivoli. Well! the worthy man has kept me a long time waiting for an answer." He hastily opened the letter, ran through the contents, and then leaned back in his chair with a look of annoyance.

"H'm!" he muttered, "the old fox will not fall into the trap. He has understood me, that is clear. He admits that there are many wonderful dispensations of Providence, he even hints that the boy's birth is shrouded in mystery, which means, in Italian, that he is not the son of his parents, only that circumstances are too much against my paternity. Idiot! He must himself know that best; or is he not so stupid? Have I not offered him enough? I ought to have left the price to himself. I would pay anything. I----" He had got up, and slowly paced up and down through the darkening room. "That is to say, I do not care to throw away my money, and the first experiment has miserably failed. Her reluctance to see the boy was decided enough, and she will not even discover a trace of likeness; says he is the type of the Roman peasants, such as are found at Albano, and Tivoli, and everywhere. Not even his beauty will she allow. There is no soul in the countenance, only the commonplace, brilliant stamp of a strong, sensual nature. And to that she holds with an obstinacy which she has never shown in anything else. It seems that the mother's instinct cannot be deceived. Bah! what deception cannot be carried out, if a man only sets about it in the right way! I have been too hasty, that is what has startled her. I must allow that I have been, too sanguine, must play at resignation, and then perhaps like a woman, out of sheer caprice, she will come round herself--

"What is it, François?"

"The lady in black, monsieur."

"Once for all, she is to be shown in to me by the other passage."

"They are working in the other passage to-day, monsieur."

"Never mind. You will take her back by the other passage."

"Very well, monsieur; can she come in?"

"One moment. Madame dines at home. I dine out, at Herr von Wallbach's--the carriage for me at half-past five. Let madame know, and that at a quarter-past five I will come and take leave of her. Has Signor Antonio been here in the course of the day?"

"No, monsieur."

"No one else is to be admitted. Let the lady come in." Giraldi did not get up as the lady entered, and now only gave her a sign to take a place near him at the writing-table.

"I was expecting you. How are we getting on?"

"No better than on the first day."

"That is bad."

"It is very wearisome," said Bertalda, throwing back her veil, "very wearisome. I have come to tell you so; I am sick of the whole thing." She lay back in her chair, with a look of ill-humour, knocking the tips of her boots against each other.

"Bah!" said Giraldi, "how much do you want?" and he stretched out his hand to a casket which

stood before him on the table.

"I want nothing," said Bertalda. "I told you at once, the first time you sought me out, that I only did it out of pity for poor Werben, and because I have a weakness for him, and because I wish to annoy that fine Philip, who behaved so abominably to Victorine, and I wish from my heart that his sister should be no better."

"I have told you already that it was not from Herr Schmidt that I learnt that Herr von Werben is visiting you again."

"Then you heard it from Count Golm, and I cannot abide him; he will have to wait a long time before I give him a good word, and now----"

"My dear child, permit me to observe that you are not very judicious," said Giraldi, smiling. "You have half a dozen personal reasons for doing what you are doing; I pay you besides, and beg you moreover to consider me at your disposal in that matter, and you want to give the whole affair up because----"

"It bores me! I can bear anything except being bored."

"What is it that bores you? Explain that to me."

"What is there to explain?" cried Bertalda; "it is just tiresome. If one is foolishly in love with a man, and he comes and weeps in one's arms, and one hears from others why he weeps, why should one not do him a kindness and help him to gain the woman he loves? Why, goodness me, there is nothing very hard in that; I am a good-natured creature, and if there is a little acting to be done--why one learns to cut a few capers in the ballet, and it is all the more amusing. And the acting you suggested was very pretty so far, and there is no great harm in standing as a model for a couple of days, when there is nothing to be done but to hold up your bare arms, and half the time is spent in talking too; but on the third day one ought to be able to say, So-and-so is waiting for you at such a place, and make an end of it!"

"I gave you permission yesterday to hint at the real state of affairs."

"Oh yes, hint!" cried Bertalda. "I told her the whole story to-day. There!" Giraldi half started from his chair, but immediately recovered himself, and asked in his quiet way:

"What do you mean by the whole story, my dear child?"

"Why, that I am not a model, and that I have come on Herr von Werben's account--"

"Sent by Signor Giraldi----"

"What! as if I would have allowed myself to be sent if I had not chosen."

"Of your own accord then--so much the better! And how did she take it?" Bertalda burst into a ringing laugh.

"My goodness!" cried she, "it was a farce! She did not know whether to thank me on her knees, or to trample me under her feet. I think she mentally did first one and then the other, whilst with clasped hands, and crying as I never saw a girl cry before, she stood in front of me, and then raged about the room with uplifted arms, as I never saw any one rage before either. First she called me a saint, a penitent Magdalen, I don't know what all, and a moment after a hussy, a--well, I don't know what either. It went on so for at least an hour without pause, and the end of the story was----"

"That you were not to presume to return?"

"Heaven forbid! To-morrow I was to return, and then it would all begin over again, and it really is too wearisome, I say, and I shall not go there again to-morrow." Bertalda got up with one last energetic tap of her boots. Giraldi remained sitting, stroking his beard.

"You are right," he said; "do not go there again to-morrow, nor the next day; on the third day she will come to you." Bertalda bent forward to look more closely at the man, who said this with such certainty, as if he were reading it from a paper which lay on the table before him.

"Supposing, of course," continued Giraldi, "that you do not answer the letter which she will write to you on the second day, and that altogether you play at drawing back a little as a person whose kindness has been misunderstood, and so on. If you can and will do this we remain friends; if you will not--it is not well to make an enemy of me, believe me." Bertalda rose and went behind her chair, and leant both her elbows on the back.

"If I only knew," she said, "what you have to do with it all?"

"And if you knew?"

"Then I should know what to do myself. I am not afraid of you--what can you do to me? but I fear for poor Ottomar. I do not wish that any harm should happen to him." Giraldi got up also,

seated himself sideways in the chair on which Bertalda leant, and took her hands in his.

"Good girl!" he said; "and if I swear to you that I am Ottomar's best friend, that he has no secrets from me, not even that of his debts; that it is I who have just now helped him up again, that it is from me that he has the hundred-thaler notes, of which, perhaps, one or two have found their way into your pocket; and if in case you will not believe me, I show it to you in black and white, in Ottomar's own hand, what would you say then?"

"Nothing at all," answered Bertalda. She had, while he still held her hands, come round the chair, and suddenly sat down on his lap, with her hands, which she now freed, stroking his soft black beard. "At most, that you are a charming uncle, such as are scarce, and that you deserve a kiss, and--there, you have one." She had wound her arms round his neck, and kissed him, first teasingly, then with a passion which seemed to surprise even herself, and which also deprived him for the moment of the full use of his faculties, so that he did not hear the knock at the door, and only let Bertalda slip off his knee when François was already in the room. Bertalda gave a shriek of surprise, and hastily drew her veil over her face.

"What do you want?" cried Giraldi hotly.

"Monsieur Antonio, monsieur!" said François in a whisper; "he begs so urgently."

"All right," said Giraldi. "Show mademoiselle out. I will let in the young man myself. I shall hear from you, mademoiselle. For the present, adieu." He walked hastily to the door of the anteroom, whilst Bertalda, conducted by François, rushed to another door leading into his bedroom, and from thence into the second corridor, and only opened it as Bertalda was on the point of disappearing behind the portière, one side of which François had drawn back for her. Antonio, who, standing close to the door and listening, had heard Bertalda's shriek, and whose mind was filled with the image of Ferdinanda, had immediately concluded that he recognised her voice, and at once stepped in; Bertalda could not so quickly get out. In her embarrassment she had run against the side of the portière which was down, and entangled herself in it, and it was a moment or two before, with François' help, she was free, long enough for the sharp-eyed Antonio to discover that the lady whom he was putting to flight was not Ferdinanda herself, but the mysterious unknown who had lately come so regularly to Ferdinanda's studio, and whom he had taken for an ambassador from his deadly enemy. So she did not come from him, but from here! And why should she run off so hastily the moment he was admitted? If the signor mentioned the lady--well, perhaps it was all right--he would try and trust him still, as heretofore; if he did not mention her, he would never believe another word that passed his lips--never! These thoughts flew through Antonio's mind as he made his bow; meanwhile Giraldi had recovered from his surprise, and taken his resolution. He had taken it for granted that Antonio, from the studio in which he worked, would remark the coming and going of the black-veiled lady to the other studio, and had consequently enjoined the utmost circumspection upon Bertalda. Antonio was not to learn who she was, least of all that she had any connection with him. Now, in consequence of the youth's hasty entry, the secret was within a hair's-breadth of escaping; but that he should have seen, or in any way recognised Bertalda, was quite impossible. The end of the great room was buried in almost total darkness, and as his own attention had been entirely centred on the door by which Antonio would enter, the delay in Bertalda's departure by the other had escaped his notice. "A second later would have been too late," he thought to himself, as he took the youth's hand and--now completely master of himself--said in his usual quiet, friendly tone:

"Welcome, my dear Antonio--no, no, my son--I am not consecrated yet." Antonio, bending low, had raised the hand which Giraldi had offered him to his lips. "The less you trust him the more submissive must you be," said Antonio to himself.

"You are sacred to me, signor," he said aloud. "The good Brother Ambrose, the benevolent guardian of my wretched youth, is not in my eyes more revered and sacred than you are."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Giraldi. "The best ornament of youth is a grateful disposition. As a reward for it I can impart to you the good brother's blessing. I have just received a letter from him. But of that later. First, as to your business here. Have you at last again seen and spoken with her?"

"Only seen, signor--as she left her studio just now to go home. I do not venture to speak to her. She talks, they say, to no one, and no one dares go into her studio except----"

"Her father, probably."

"A lady, signor, in black, and thickly veiled, who goes to her studio regularly every afternoon. The students take her to be a model." It must be decided now; Antonio's heart beat till Giraldi's answer came.

"A lady in black and thickly veiled," repeated Giraldi slowly, as if he was deeply considering the matter; "and only a model? That is surely very unlikely, and very suspicious. We must try to get to the bottom of this." He lied. It flashed like lightning through Antonio's mind that to this man he had confided his secret, the treason which he contemplated, his criminal desires, the very plan of his revenge; he had given all--all into his hands, as to the priest in the confessional, and he lied!

"I have tried to get to the bottom of it, signor," he said, "but in vain. As she comes and goes while our studio is full of men, I cannot watch her through the door, nor absent myself without causing a sensation. Yesterday I tried under some pretext, but I was too late. A carriage--not an ordinary cab, signor, but a fly--was standing a few yards from the house under the trees near the canal; the unknown got in, and vanished from me in a moment."

"He will be more cunning next time," thought Giraldi; "she must on no account go again."

"At what time does she come?" he asked.

"Between five and six at first; now, I suppose on account of greater security, between four and five."

"Good! To-morrow I will myself keep watch in my carriage; she shall not escape us, you may depend upon it. And now to continue, has nothing of importance transpired in the conversations between your maestro and the Captain? The name in question not been mentioned?"

"No, signor; on the contrary, since the young lady went away----"

"I know, three days ago."

"They have been very prudent, and speak so low, that it is impossible to catch more than a word here and there. But instead I have just found this letter, which the maestro received to-day and has read through at least a dozen times, and also showed it to the Captain, who came in the middle of the day."

"It was dangerous to steal a letter which awakens such interest."

"The maestro threw it into his desk, as he does all his letters, and when he went out, locked it up, and took the key with him; but I have long known how to open that frail lock without a key. To-morrow he will find the letter again in his desk."

"Who is it from?"

"From the young lady, I think. It is an abominable handwriting, signor."

"Give it to me!" Giraldi took the letter out of Antonio's hand, and stepped to the window to get the advantage of the last gleam of daylight. A superstitious dread ran through Antonio, as he saw the extraordinary speed with which the man at the window ran through the sixteen pages of the letter, of which he, who so prided himself on his knowledge of German, had hardly been able to read a line. How could he venture to enter into a struggle of cunning and skill with him, who saw through everything, knew everything as if he were in league with the evil one? And yet, one thing he did not know, that he would have pierced him with his dagger as he stood in the window, with the evening light shining like an aureole round his head with its black locks, did he venture to deceive and betray him, as he had undoubtedly deceived and betrayed all the world besides. Giraldi had read the last two pages more slowly than the first ones. He now read them over again. Then without saying a word, he lighted the candle which stood on his writing-table, sat down, and began as it appeared to copy out these two last pages. The pen flew over the paper almost as quickly as his eyes before over the pages. In a few minutes it was done, and he gave the letter back to Antonio. "There! now return it again to its place with the greatest care, and bring me every letter in the same handwriting. You will thereby be doing me the greatest service, and my gratitude will keep pace with your willingness to help me."

"I do what I do for your sake, signor," said Antonio; "without hope or expectation of reward. The only one for which I care, even you cannot give me."

"You think so," answered Giraldi. "Boy, what do you know of what I can or cannot do? I tell you that kings tremble when they feel that Gregorio Giraldi's hand is upon them; that the Holy Father in Rome even, only knows himself to be infallible so long as I am near him. And shall I not fulfil the desire of your heart? Not give into your arms that beautiful woman, whom you may possess at any moment you choose? Are you not young and handsome? Are you not strong and courageous? What is impossible to a handsome and young man who is strong and courageous, where a woman is in question? I tell you that the times of Saul are not yet gone by, who went out to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom. The letter in your pocket might prove it to you. Do you fancy yourself worth less than that clumsy German sailor? Surely not. And he has won the love of a German maiden, to whom men of his position would not generally dare to lift their eyes. And now you! Do you not know that God has ever specially loved shepherds and shown Himself gracious to them? Have you never, as you drove your goats on the mountains near Tivoli, heard a voice out of the thundering cataracts of the Arno, or out of the sighing of the wind in the oak trees of Arsoli, which said, 'Poor sunburnt, ragged boy, in a few years you, a beautiful youth, dressed like the gentlemen who approach yonder in their smart carriages over the dusty roads, shall walk through streets of the capital of the northern barbarians, whose very names you do not yet know?' Believe me, my son, such voices may be heard by all, only one must understand them, as I have always understood those which speak to me. Or if you will not trust my guidance, let me speak to you through the mouth of the worthy man who protected your tender youth, and whom you may thank, that you do not still tend your goats. I had written to him about you, and how wonderful it was that you, favoured with these gifts of mind and body, should be of such low birth

as are the people you have respected as your parents. And what does he reply?" Giraldi had seized the priest's letter, and read: "'A miracle, truly, my dear sir, but are we not surrounded by miracles, so that they often appear no miracles just because they are so near us? And has God lost His omnipotence because the serpent of doubt and unbelief lifts its head now higher than ever? Can He not breathe His Spirit into a clod if He will? make the dead to live again? lighten the darkness in which the origin of so many men, and--I must admit--of our good Antonio also, is enveloped? Can He not raise up for a man who stands solitary and pines for love, a dear relation in a seeming stranger?' Look, Antonio! there it stands, written in your honoured friend's own hand." He held out the letter to Antonio---just long enough for the youth to be certain that it really was his old preceptor's hand. He might not see what immediately followed; that according to all human calculation Antonio could not possibly be the son that Giraldi had so long lost, and whom he had so eagerly sought after, and still sought in spite of all disappointments, and for whose recovery no reward was too great. As if overcome with emotion, he had thrown the letter into the drawer and stretched out both his hands: "Now go, in God's name, my son, and remember that no father could more truly mean well towards you than I do!" Antonio bent down and kissed the outstretched hands, moved and conquered by the superior mental power of the man, his mind filled with a confusion of ambitious hopes and dazzling dreams of satisfied love, as quickly followed by the fear that all was but a dream and an illusion, and that this great magician was playing with him, as he himself as a boy had often, enough done with a bird fluttering on a string. He was gone. Giraldi touched the bell. François came in.

"I told you that no one was to come in, without exception!"

"Monsieur had always received the young man, and he was so pressing."

"It may pass for this time; the next time you commit such a blunder, you are dismissed without appeal--mind that." He locked his letter into his drawer.

"I will dress without assistance; see that the carriage is ready in ten minutes." He went into the next room through which Bertalda had previously taken flight. François shook his fist behind him, and then again smiled his fawning smile, as if he would not admit even to himself that he had ventured to threaten the mighty man.

CHAPTER XI.

"You will see, Carla, he will not come to-day either," said Frau von Wallbach, trying to find if possible a more comfortable position in her arm-chair.

"Je le plains, je le blâme, mais----" Carla, who was sitting at the piano, played a scale very softly with her right hand.

"And Fräulein von Strummin has also gone away without paying us a farewell visit."

"Silly little thing," said Carla, repeating her scale.

"And Elsa has never once been here to apologise for the omission."

"So much the worse for her," said Carla.

"I wash my hands of the blame," said Frau von Wallbach, slowly rising and going into the reception-room which some of the dinner guests were entering. Carla was also getting up, but remained sitting when she heard that it was a lady, and moreover one of little importance. She let her hands fall into her lap, and looked thoughtfully down before her.

"He is not half so clever, he often evidently does not understand what I say; I think even he is *un peu bête*. But he--adores me. Why should I give up my adorers for a betrothed who never troubles himself about me? He would soon drive them all away." The door behind her into the anteroom was opened. Only intimate friends at small entertainments ever entered through this apartment--her room. The new-comer must be either Ottomar or the Count. She had heard nothing, and as the steps came nearer over the thick carpet, let her fingers wander dreamily over the keys, "Already sends the Graal to seek the loiterer----"

"Fräulein von Wallbach!"

"Ah! my dear Count," said Carla, looking up a little, and giving the Count her left hand over her shoulder, whilst the right played "My trusty Swan." "Will you not go first and say 'how do you do' to Louisa? She is in the drawing-room with Frau von Arnfeld." The Count lifted the carelessly-

given hand to his lips, "And then?" he asked.

"You can return here--I have something to say to you." The Count came back in half a minute.

"Draw that chair here--not so near--there--and don't let my strumming disturb you. Do you know, my dear Count, that you are a very dangerous man!"

"My dear Fräulein von Wallbach!" cried the Count, as he twirled his moustaches.

"You must be so, when even Louisa already thinks so. She has just preached me the most charming sermon."

"But what have I done? All the world worships you; why should I not dare what all the world may do?"

"Because you are not all the world."

"Because----" Carla lifted her eyes; the Count was always bewitched when he could look into those blue eyes, unhindered by glasses, under whose weary, drooping eyelids a secret world of tenderness and archness seemed to him to be concealed.

"Because I have come too late," he whispered passionately.

"A man should not be too late, my dear Count; it is the worst of faults in war, in politics, in everything. You must bear the consequence of this fault--*voilà tout*." She played:

"Only one year beside thee,
As witness of thy bliss, I asked."

The Count gazed before him in silence.

"He takes it for earnest," thought Carla. "I must rouse him up again a little."

"Why should we not be friends?" she said, reaching out her right hand to him, whilst the left played:

"Return to me! and let me teach
How sweet the bliss of purest truth."

"Certainly, certainly!" cried the Count, imprinting a long, burning kiss on the offered hand; "why should we not be friends?"

"Friendship between pure souls is so sweet, is it not so? But the world is not pure. It loves to blacken all bright things. It requires a security. Give it the best possible under the circumstances. Marry!"

"And that is your advice to me?"

"Mine more especially. I shall gain immensely by it; I shall not quite lose you. More, I cannot--more, I do not expect." And Carla played, with both hands:

"Let me convert thee to the faith,
One bliss there is, without remorse."

"Good God, Carla--my dear Fräulein von Wallbach! do you know that something similar--almost in the same words----"

"You have heard from Signor Giraldi," said Carla, as the Count paused, embarrassed. "You may say it out, I do not mind. He is the cleverest of men, and one can keep nothing secret from him, even if one wished to do so, and--I do not so wish; you also--need not wish it. He is very fond of you. He wishes you well; believe me and trust in him."

"I believe it," said the Count, "and I should trust him implicitly, if the engagement which is in question did not also include just a little touch of business. You are aware that I have to-day bought the Warnow estates, I should hardly have taken such a tremendous risk upon myself, indeed could not have done so, if it had not appeared that at least half the money in the form of dowry----"

"*Fi donc!*" said Carla.

"For heaven's sake, do not misunderstand me!" cried the Count. "It is evident that this suggestion could only come from Signor Giraldi, and from no one else. The thing is simply that Signor Giraldi, as the Baroness's agent----"

"Spare me anything of that sort, my dear Count," cried Carla. "Once for all, I understand nothing about it. I only know that my sister-in-law is a delightful creature, and that you are a terribly *blasé* man, whom every well-behaved girl must really be afraid of. And now go into the drawing-room, I hear Baroness Kniebreche, and she would never forgive you if you have not kissed her hand within the first five minutes."

"Give me courage to go to execution," whispered the Count.

"How?" The Count did not answer, but took her hand off the keys, covered it with passionate kisses, and hurried in a state of emotion which was half affected and half real, into the drawing-room.

"He is a good creature after all," murmured Carla, turning, and looking after him with her glass in her eye.

"That he is," said a voice close to her.

"Mon Dieu! Signor Giraldi!"

"Always at your service."

"Always at an opportune moment. You have not yet been into the drawing-room? Of course not. Come! let us have a few minutes' chat. A *tête-à-tête* with you is a much envied privilege, which even Baroness Kniebreche herself would respect."

"And then this respectable *tête-à-tête* is not quite so dangerous as the preceding one," said Giraldi, sitting down by Carla on a little sofa, which stood at the end of the room beneath a candelabra on the wall. "Did you speak to him?"

"Just now!"

"And what did he answer?"

"He understands everything--except----"

"Not everything then?"

"Do not smile ironically; he is not quite a nonentity. He is clever enough, for example, to ask what the special interest is which you can have in his engagement with Elsa."

"Do not be angry if I still smile a little," said Giraldi. "What, the Count inquired as to the interest I have in the matter--he, on whose side the whole profit lies! But there! I confess the sale would have been delayed for a long time, as the General out of sheer obstinacy would not consent at all, and your brother, from some reasons of propriety, would not sell direct to the provisional board, and insisted upon a go-between; I further admit that the Count is not only in every other respect more convenient and more suitable than any one else, but he is also more lucrative to us, because as a neighbour he can really pay more than any one else. But that is an advantage on our side, which we fully compensate to him by granting him other advantages, with the details of which I will not trouble you. Believe me, my dear Fräulein von Wallbach, that the Count knows all this as well as I do, and he only affects ignorance and consequently hesitation for reasons which I will set before you. Firstly: It is always well not to see the hand which throws fortune into your lap; you can then, if convenient, be as ungrateful as you please. Secondly: He loves you, and--who can blame him?--he does not consider the matter quite hopeless, so long as you remain unmarried. Thirdly: It is not absolutely certain that Fräulein von Werben will accept him, and he has in fact better reasons for this uncertainty than his philosophy and vanity combined will allow him to imagine."

"You are again referring to the fancy that Elsa is supposed to have for the handsome merchant-captain," said Carla. "Much as I admire your acuteness, my dear Giraldi, here you pass the limits of my belief."

"But supposing I have unquestionable evidence? supposing I have it in black and white, from the hand of Elsa's most intimate friend, that little Fräulein von Strummin, who went off in such headlong haste, to startle us, from the security of her island, with the news of her engagement to the sculptor, Justus Anders. Pray do not laugh. What I am telling you is absolutely true. Herr Justus Anders, again, is the Captain's most intimate friend; the two pairs of friends it appears have no secrets of any sort between them; Fräulein von Strummin also has none from her betrothed, and she writes in her letter, which arrived this morning, word for word--" Giraldi had taken an elegant pocket-book from his coat pocket, and out of it a paper, which he unfolded.

"If any one comes in, it is supposed to be a letter from the sculptor, Enrico Braga, from Milan. She writes the following, word for word--I am not responsible for the peculiar style:

"'One thing more, dearest man, over which Lesto would howl himself to death with joy if he could understand it, and you also will rejoice like a child, as you always are. My Elsa loves your Reinhold with all her heart and soul, and that is saying something for any one who knows as I do that she is all soul, and has the most divine heart in the world. I have no permission, still less any

commission, to tell you this. But we are never again to play at hide-and-seek with one another, you know, and must also inspire our poor friends with courage, and the best way to do that is to be always saying to them, "He," or in your case, "She loves you!" I have proved it at any rate with Elsa. Ah! my dearest heart, we ought indeed to feel ashamed of being so happy, when we think how unhappy our friends are, and only on account of these horrible "circumstances." If I only knew who had devised these "circumstances" I should just like to have a few words with him, you know.'"

"This is wonderfully interesting," said Carla; "and it will interest the Count extremely."

"Without doubt," said Giraldi, returning the letter to his pocket-book. "By the way, what a wonderful woman you are, never once to have asked where I got this. In the meantime, I propose that we do not communicate this until you are certain of one thing."

"And that is!" Giraldi bent towards Carla and looked straight into her eyes.

"That you do not finally prefer to bestow your hand upon Count Axel Golm, instead of on Ottomar von Werben."

"You are really too bad. Signor Giraldi, do you know?" said Carla, flicking him on the hand with her pocket-handkerchief.

"If you say so! But look here, my dear young lady! any communication with regard to Elsa's maritime fancy would in the end determine the Count to give up his suit; and until now it has appeared to us most convenient for all parties to marry him to Elsa. If you want him for yourself, and it seems so, well, that may also be managed; but in your place I would not be too hasty. We can keep the game going as long as we like. Why not drain the sweetness of courtship to the last drop? The more so that Ottomar--great minds are never shocked at truth--scarcely appears to appreciate, at its true worth, the happiness which awaits him in the arms of the cleverest and most agreeable of women."

"Which means, if I am not mistaken," said Carla, "that Ottomar must do as you wish; you have got the whip-hand of him. Well I know, dear friend, how powerful your hand is; but I confess that in this case I do not understand where the power lies. That Ottomar has had mistresses--very likely has them still--well! I have read Schopenhauer, who says nothing about monogamy, because he could nowhere discover it, and I should not like to be the first woman to find her beloved the less interesting because he is pleasing to other women. His debts? Good gracious! name any one to me who has none! and my brother says they are really not so bad. My brother urges our hastening on our wedding, and so does my sister-in-law now. The General is, as you know, most inconveniently obstinate in carrying out his plans; and society will be greatly injured if we are not on our wedding tour by the beginning of March; on the 15th Ottomar must enter upon his office at St. Petersburg."

"Let us make our arrangements accordingly then, if we are otherwise agreed," answered Giraldi. "By the middle of February you will discover that your finely organised nature will no longer stand the strain of the season, and that, before you enter upon the new period of your life, you absolutely require quiet and repose, which you cannot procure in town, and can only find in the retirement of the country. And then it falls in admirably, that at that very time the Baroness, my dear friend, impelled by the necessity of rest, seeks a shelter in quiet Warnow. I have for this purpose reserved the castle and park from the Count, who this morning became the possessor of the property. He will be delighted that Fräulein von Wallbach should share the retirement of her betrothed's aunt. Not alone! The Baroness, at her own urgent request--mark that--will be accompanied by Fräulein Elsa. The Count, whose business at that time--and particularly the harbour works at Warnow--makes his residence in the country a duty, will do everything to cheer and enliven the ladies' solitude. Your brother--I myself--will come and go. What a spectacle, to watch the spring awaking in the country, on the shores of the ocean, perhaps to see the further blossoming of dear Elsa's quiet fancy for the man of her choice, who has gone to his new post--he has lately been made Superintendent of Pilots--I think they call it so--at Wissow, just the same distance from Warnow as the Count is at his house. How do you like my little plan?"

"Charming," said Carla, "*à deux mains*. But is it practicable?"

"Leave that to me. Give me your two pretty hands upon it, that you will support me."

"There, you have them."

"And I impress my lips upon both of them in confirmation of the agreement."

"I really must venture to disturb your *tête-à-tête*," said Herr von Wallbach, entering from the drawing-room. "The company have all arrived. Only Ottomar, whom we must again give up, and the Baroness still fail us."

"I forgot to tell you," said Giraldi, as he greeted Herr von Wallbach, "that the Baroness begged me to make her apologies--an indisposition--her nerves are so shaken----"

"What a pity," said Herr von Wallbach. "Will you have the kindness, Carla, to tell Louisa? It makes no difficulty, as I was to have taken in the Baroness. Baroness Kniebreche claims you.

Signor Giraldi." Giraldi bowed. Carla had gone. "One moment," whispered Wallbach, holding back Giraldi by the arm. "I am glad, very glad, that the Baroness is not coming. This is a day of surprises. To-day, to our inexpressible astonishment--Lübbener cannot get over it at all--Golm paid the half million down! The concession, for the publication of which we feared we should have weeks to wait, as there was still some difficulty about the security, will appear to-morrow in the *Gazette*. Yes, my dear sir, you may rely upon it. I know it for certain from Herr von Stumm, who implored me not to betray him. It was to be a delightful surprise, on the part of the Ministers, for us; and--and--my dear friend, I am not easily put out of countenance, but *c'est plus fort que moi*--from the same unquestionable source I have learnt that the General's name does not appear in the *Military Gazette* which will be published to-morrow."

"Which means?" asked Giraldi.

"Which means that he is passed over, and that, according to our ideas, he will be forced to send in his resignation."

"How extraordinary!" said Giraldi.

"There is no doubt about it," continued Wallbach excitedly; "I could certainly understand the step, even see its necessity, if it had been the only means by which our affair could have been carried through; but as we have the concession in our pocket without that, it is----"

"An unnecessary cruelty."

"Is it not? and one which will have further consequences. I prophesy that Ottomar will not go to St. Petersburg."

"But that would be more than cruel, it would be absurd," said Giraldi.

"You do not know our ways. There is great consistency in such things with us." Giraldi was spared an answer. In the doorway to the drawing-room appeared, supported on Carla's arm, the bent form of an old lady who was waving an immense black fan up and down, and cried out loudly in a cracked voice:

"If Signor Giraldi will not come to old Kniebreche, old Kniebreche must go to Signor Giraldi."

"I fly, my dear madam!" said Giraldi.

CHAPTER XII.

Elsa's old cook sat on her stool, with her elbows resting upon her knees, staring at the brick floor; August, who was leaning against the window, went on silently cutting his nails with his knife; and Ottomar's servant was perched upon the table, swinging his long legs.

"It has just struck twelve," said the cook, with a despairing look at the hearth, on which the kettle still hung in solitary state over the fire, as it had done since early morning. "Can neither of you at least open your mouths?"

"What is there to say?" answered August "It will always be likely to happen with us soldiers."

"It's a sin and a shame!" said the cook.

"A 1," affirmed August. The Dutch clock ticked, the kettle bubbled. Friedrich let himself slide off the table, and stretched his arms.

"I can't say that I am generally much in favour of these parades," he said, "but it is my opinion that to-day we servants might as well have joined it."

"Yes; the young master always has the best of it," said the cook. "It is well to be out of range of the firing. If I had been in his place, I would have paraded them to-day." She smoothed down her apron. August shook his head.

"With us military men, that would----"

"Oh, stuff!" interrupted the cook. "Military here, military there! If any one dismissed my father, I should dismiss him, and that pretty sharp, too!" She gave her apron another energetic pull, stood up, walked to the hearth, turned the kettle round, and then, as that manifestly did not help matters, began to cry vehemently, from a sense of her helplessness.

"Hullo!" said the lady's-maid, who just then stepped into the kitchen, "have the lamentations broken out here also?" She sat down on the stool from which the cook had risen, and stroked down her black silk apron as the other had her coarse kitchen one.

"There, I've had enough of it! I can't stand playing at nursing old women who faint every time anything goes wrong in the house! And to be turned out of the room by the young lady because one treads too heavily, and told to send that stupid goose Pauline, doesn't suit me any better! And, moreover, I am not accustomed to a party once a fortnight at the outside, and now I suppose even that will come to an end! No, I thank you! To-morrow they may look out for another lady's-maid, if such like require another lady's-maid, indeed! And----"

"There, I've had enough of that!" said the cook.

"I may talk, I suppose, if I like!" said the lady's-maid.

"But not in my kitchen!" cried the cook, sticking her still strong arms akimbo, and walking up to the audacious speaker. "What! you will talk about 'such like' here, in the face of an old, respected servant, who has been twenty years in the house, or eight years like August, to say nothing of Friedrich, although he also is a respectable man, and would rather have gone to the parade to-day than sit here and see such misery! Do you know who 'such like' are? All your tag and rag, from whom you ran off to us--they are 'such like,' with their yard-long trains, and fallals and crinolines! And you are 'such like,' you shameless hussy, you! and if you don't leave off grinning this very minute, and get up off my stool, and clear out of my kitchen, I'll give you a couple of boxes on the ear that will make you remember 'such like' to the end of your days!"

"I shall not dispute with you," said the lady's-maid, getting up in haste, and slipping towards the door from under her antagonist's raised arm. "You are too----"

"Out with you!" said the cook.

"Too vulgar!" And the lady's-maid slammed the door behind her.

"That is one of the A 1's," said August.

"A regular one," said Friedrich.

"And you are dunderheads," cried the cook, "to put up quietly with such a thing!"

"One should not enter into any discussion with such a person," said Friedrich.

"The house-door bell has rung," said August, delighted to be able to break off the conversation, which was taking so disagreeable a turn. "Our master can hardly be back yet? And we cannot receive any one to-day?"

"That depends," said the cook. "Our poor young lady has not seen a soul to-day, and the poor thing must want to speak out. But it must be to a real friend."

"Of course," said August, buttoning his livery-coat, "one of the A 1's. Herr von Schönau or----"

"Well, make haste and go upstairs."

"Ah! the Captain!" cried August, seeing Reinhold in the anteroom. The Captain stood high in August's favour, and the Captain, who always looked so amiable, looked so grave to-day.

"The Captain, of course, knows all about it already," said August.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Reinhold, "what has happened? Is any one ill in the house?"

"Ill--yes," said August, "but only from fright. Fräulein Sidonie fainted immediately, and so of course we heard all about it. The Lieutenant is, of course, gone to the parade, and will not be back till evening, as he is on duty afterwards at the barracks; and I had to put all the General's orders on his uniform, and he went to his Excellency the Minister and the other Excellencies to say so-and-so; and our young lady is with Fräulein Sidonie; but she will certainly wish to see you, and if you will come in here and wait----" August had ushered Reinhold, who, in his bewilderment, followed him mechanically, up the stairs, and opened the door of the drawing-room. Reinhold remained alone for a few anxious moments. What could have occurred to have caused the family such a shock as he saw reflected even in the servant's face? And to-day, of all days! As if his heart were not heavy enough already! A light step crossed the floor of the dining-room and over the carpet in the next room, and Elsa stepped in, holding out her hand to him.

"You have come to take leave. I know all from Fräulein--from Meta."

"I have come to take leave," answered Reinhold; "but before we speak of that, tell me, if you can, what misfortune has happened to you? It must be some misfortune." He still held her hand in his, and gazed, himself pale from emotion and sympathy, into her pale lovely face, with the beloved brown eyes, which, formerly so bright and happy, now looked so anxious and sorrowful.

"My father would reproach me if he heard me call that a misfortune of which he affirms

himself to be proud. And yet--who knows how it appears to him in his heart, or how he bears it in his heart, and how he will bear it?" She suppressed her sorrowful emotion with a deep-drawn breath, and offering Reinhold a chair, and herself taking a place on the sofa, continued in a calm voice:

"My father has been passed over in the promotion for which he stood next! You know what that means. He has just gone to offer his resignation in person to the Minister!"

"Good God!" said Reinhold, "an officer of his high character, of his vast services to the nation--is it possible!" Elsa sat there, her fixed burning eyes looking down, a bitter smile trembling on her lips, while she slowly nodded her head once or twice. Reinhold saw how forced was the self-command with which she had come to meet him, how deeply she felt the insult which had been offered to her father.

"And to think," he said in a low voice, "that I myself assisted to bring about this catastrophe. Your father has repeatedly impressed upon me what difficulties he had to struggle with, how precarious, how insecure his position was, and that a mere trifle might suffice to make it untenable----" Elsa shook her head. "No, no!" she said, "it is not that. My father was determined to retire if ever this unhappy concession was carried through against his will. But that they should not even have waited, even given him time to carry out his resolution, that is what he resents, and what I fear will make his proud heart bleed." The tears ran from her fixed eyes down her pale cheeks. Reinhold's heart was full to overflowing with love and sympathy. A voice within him cried out, "My poor, poor darling," but he dared not speak out yet. Elsa had dried her tears with her handkerchief.

"You must not look so miserable," she said, trying to smile; "my father has done his duty, and you have done your duty. Is not the consciousness of this the best, the only consolation in such a case as this, which we must accept whether we will or no?"

"Certainly," said Reinhold; "and yet how sad it sounds from such lips."

"Because I am a girl," said Elsa. "I think it is just we girls who can do so little for ourselves, who are often so helpless in the face of circumstances, who are not early enough impressed with this idea. What would have become of me in these last few days if I had not done so. If I had not at least tried to do so, so far as lay in my power. And now to-day, when I have heard every thing from my father about Ottomar----" Reinhold looked up startled. Elsa's eyes had fallen, a burning colour had come into her cheeks; she went on slowly in a low voice, "I have learnt everything!"

"Could not that, at least, have been spared you?" said Reinhold after a silent pause.

"I think not," said Elsa, again looking up. "I think that my father followed a right impulse this morning when he told me everything, as to a friend (and, oh! how thankful I am to him for it, and proud!), told me of his position, of our position--confided to me even that. Oh! I cannot get rid of the thought that it would have been better, that it would have turned out better--for us all, if I had known it, if not from the beginning, at least after that terrible morning. Only a woman's hand could, had it still been possible, have smoothed out the entangled threads of all the faults and follies there and here. What would I not give for the minutes that have been irreparably lost. Ah! I know I should have found the words to touch Ottomar's and your cousin's hearts. Poor Ferdinanda! What must she have suffered? What must she suffer? And my poor Ottomar, too! He is really not so guilty as he perhaps appears to you. It is not your fault that you have not learnt to know him better, that the wish of my heart has not been fulfilled--that you might become true friends. We know now why he shunned you, as indeed he did even his best friends, Schönau and the others--even myself--all of us. And so he has strayed so far, so helplessly away in the loneliness of his heart. And yet I know him from earlier, better days, how tender, how loving and affectionate his heart was; how susceptible he was to all that was beautiful and good, even if he had not the strength to let it ripen in him, to live for that alone. But it must be very difficult in the life that he leads, that he must lead, which I also have led in my way, and have enjoyed myself in it--all these prejudices of rank, these social fetters, which we no longer feel as such, because we have grown up amongst them and can never free ourselves without a hard struggle. And if he failed in this struggle, the strange circumstances of our family will certainly have contributed to it; and, lastly, the rebuff which he has experienced in the person of his father, whom, I know, in the bottom of his heart he deeply reverences. I will not defend him, when, passionate and hot-headed as he is, he rushed out of the house--we none of us knew what he intended--and returned engaged to Carla; but he must not, he cannot be utterly condemned." She gazed anxiously, with clasped hands, into Reinhold's face, a bitter feeling was stirring in him. If she spoke so eloquently of the singular position in which her brother was at the decisive moment, was not this position hers also? Would not she so speak at the last moment for herself? So decide for herself? or was it already on her account that she spoke? Had she so decided? Was he to read her decision between the lines?

"I always find it difficult," he said, "to condemn any one--in men's hearts there are so many depths, which no lead can reach--and I have not condemned your brother. On the contrary, I have for his sake and--I cannot deny it--for yours----" His voice shook, but he collected himself by a strong effort and went on quietly, "Done every thing which a brother would at such a time do for a brother. I have even set my uncle's friendship and affection, which are very dear to me, at stake, and I fear, lost them. That it was all in vain, that I must let that be, which I foresaw would

be to those most nearly concerned a deadly blow, which would more or less recoil upon us all without exception--I do not know whether I need tell you how hard this has been to me, how hard it is!"

"You do not need," said Elsa. "Take the thanks of the sister for the brother. You do not perhaps believe how grateful I am to you, and how your words have comforted me. Since this morning, through all the trouble which has come upon us, I have continually asked myself how you would be affected by it. I have longed to hear these words from you. Now that I have heard them my heart feels lighter, and now, between us two at least, all will be again as it was."

"Do you believe that? do you really believe it?" asked Reinhold. The smile died away upon her lips. She gently drew back the hand which she had given him, and which he firmly held; the blood flew again into her cheeks, which then became whiter than before.

"Have I been mistaken?" stammered Elsa.

"I do not think so," said Reinhold, "because, forgive me, I cannot think that at this moment you have been quite sincere. And--you have yourself said it--what brought ruin upon your brother, and upon my cousin, save that they were not open, neither to themselves, nor to each other, nor to their friends--that they never had the courage of their opinions--that they never had the true courage of their love? Well! I, for my part, will not and dare not burden my soul with this reproach. I will keep my conscience free, however heavy my heart may remain. May I speak out what is in my heart? and will you answer me as your heart dictates?" She sat there, pale and motionless, only the hand which she had given him, and which now lay in her lap, trembled.

"I will," she said, in a low voice.

"Well then," said Reinhold, "I came to take leave of your father, and before I took leave of him, to thank him from the bottom of my heart, for the kindness with which he had overwhelmed me, and for the confidence with which he honoured me. Perhaps, thought I, since I still remain in your neighbourhood, and my duties will also often bring me here, he would then have said that he hoped and wished to see me again. And I must have replied, that as an honourable man I could only take advantage of this permission under one condition. And I should have said 'That condition, General, is impossible. I have had the fullest opportunities in this unfortunate business, and in the many confidential conversations with which you have honoured me, of entering into your thoughts and feelings; you have condescended even to initiate me into the circumstances of your family, and I am convinced that you will never of your own free will, grant me the hand of your daughter whom I love.'" Elsa neither answered nor stirred, only her bosom rose and fell wildly.

"'Whom I have loved,'" continued Reinhold, in a voice trembling with emotion, "'I may say from the first moment that I saw her. Since then I have thought of her every hour of the day; and when I lie awake at night, her image stands out before my soul, clear, steadfast, immovable, like the north star; and I am as sure as that I am a living man, that this love can only end with my life.' That is what I should have said to your father."

"And then," said Elsa softly, "then should you have come to me?"

"Yes," said Reinhold, "then I should have come to you." A lovely colour lay upon her cheeks; her eyes resting full and steadfastly upon him, gleamed through tears, whilst her voice seemed as if it would cry out for joy, and again trembled with emotion.

"I should have said to you, that I was unutterably happy in the knowledge that I was loved by you, and that I love you with my whole, whole heart, and will so love you for evermore." They held one another in a close embrace. He kissed her hair, her forehead, her lips; she leant her head, sobbing, on his shoulder.

"Oh! my God! is it possible? This morning--even when I came in at the door--here, see! see! I wanted to give you this--my treasure! I meant to part with it, to renounce all happiness. And now, now! I may keep it, may I not, and look to my lord, as the needle does to the pole? I have learnt it from it." She kissed the compass and let it slip again into her pocket, and threw her arms again round Reinhold, and said:

"And now, my dearest, that you know that I will be true to you, waking and sleeping, and will be your wife, and will follow you to the ends of the world whenever you call me, do not call me yet, but leave me here with my father, whose support and comfort I am in this affliction, with my Aunt Valerie, who clings to me in the anguish of her heart. Ah! there is so much suffering which I only partly guess, but which does not therefore the less exist, and which I know will overflow so soon as I turn my back. It will perhaps come even now, and I cannot check it, but I shall have done my duty, you know, as Meta would say." The old sweet smile gleamed in the brown eyes which shone upon him. "We must just have patience and be sensible, and love each other very, very much, and then everything must come right, will it not, my darling?"

"The man who knows himself beloved by you," whispered Reinhold, "can only fear one thing in this world--not to deserve your love."

CHAPTER XIII.

The two friends wandered up and down the brightly-illuminated platform of the station, waiting for the train. Uncle Ernst's carriage which had brought them, had come very quickly, the train was only just being made up, they had still nearly half an hour.

"You will not stop in Sundin?" said Justus.

"Only to-morrow," answered Reinhold; "I hope that will suffice to present myself before the President, and my immediate superiors, the Government surveyor, and the other gentlemen, and to receive my instructions."

"I think the President has been here," said Justus, "for the last four days. He is to be Chairman of the Board for the new railway. They made him the most splendid offer, I am told."

"So the papers say, but I do not believe it," answered Reinhold. "A man like the President could not agree to such a project, and moreover, if he were here, he would certainly have sent for me."

"And the day after to-morrow you will be at your post with a north-easter whistling in your ears, and will swagger about in your pilot coat. What a lucky man you are!" Justus sighed; Reinhold looked at his friend, who, with downcast eyes walked dejectedly beside him, and then burst into a fit of laughter.

"It is all very well to laugh," said Justus; "'laden with foreign treasures, he returns to his former home,' but how do I stand? A leafless stem."

"Do not cry yourself down, Justus."

"Ah! cry myself down!" said Justus; "do you mean to say that it is not enough to drive a poor fellow mad! I meant to have spared you this to-day, so as not to disturb your happiness and joy; but perhaps it is better for me to tell you now, instead of writing to you as I intended. You will be in his immediate neighbourhood, and will surely do me the kindness to go over some day and appeal to the old gentleman's conscience--though I don't believe he is old."

"Alack!" said Reinhold, "blows the wind in that quarter?"

"And how it blows!" cried Justus, "so that one can neither see nor hear. You know that Meta wrote to me on her arrival that every thing was going capitally. Mamma was, as she foresaw, entirely on her side, but papa, of course, made a tremendous row--only then, as she also foretold, to give in utterly a little while after, supposing that the 'stone-cutter' could maintain his daughter suitably, as he could give her nothing--not a shilling--he was a poor, ruined man. Good! I accept the ruined father-in-law, and he accepts me upon my showing that I had already for some years made--but you know all about that, and I only repeat it now to set before you in its proper light the abominable treachery of this man." Justus had halted under a lamp, and took a letter out of his pocket. "If the spelling leaves something to be desired, the letters are big enough, as you see, and the interpretation is clear enough from one point of view at any rate." Justus struck the crumpled leaf with the back of his hand, and read:

"'Sir' (the first time I was 'Dear Sir'),

"'In consequence of a telegram that I have just received from Berlin, the state of my affairs is so completely altered, my daughter's future prospects are so entirely changed, that the position which you can offer her at the best no longer appears sufficient to me; and before I give a final answer'--as if he had not done so already, the Jesuit!--'I must, as a conscientious man and provident father, beg for a few weeks delay, until the fortunate conjuncture of circumstances which has just occurred for me can be completely gone into.

"'Sincerely yours,

"'Otto von Strummin,

"'Lord of the Manor of Strummin,
Member of the Assembly, Vice-President
of the Agricultural Society of ----'

"I can't read that--but it is enough!" And Justus crumpled up the unfortunate letter, and with a scornful snort stuffed it again into his pocket.

"Am I not right, Reinhold? Every possible difficulty stands in your path, I admit, but through it all, at the worst, you have to deal with a man who is the very soul of honour, and on whose word once given--and he will give it--you may rely. You can build your house upon a solid foundation, but how can a man build a house upon sand--treacherous quicksand, which, when he thinks he is as firmly fixed as the Colossus of Rhodes, gives way under his feet? If I only knew what the 'Lord of the Manor' really means! It is my belief that the whole story--telegram, conjuncture, every thing--is all dust which he wants to throw into my eyes to get rid of me--don't you think so?"

"Of course he wants to get rid of you," answered Reinhold, "and the man's meaning is pitiful enough; but the matter to which he alludes has some truth in it, and I think I can tell you what it all means. Herr von Strummin has probably, for some reason or another, been kept in the dark as to the position of the question of the concession, so as to shut him out of a share of the first rich booty, possibly has been persuaded that the concession will not be granted. Disordered as his affairs appear to be, perhaps in a desperate condition, he was delighted to see his daughter provided for, and shut both eyes (which, by the way, are somewhat prominent) to the 'stone-cutter's' position. Now he has been informed that the concession is a *fait accompli*, some additional promises--God knows what--have been made to him, and everything looks bright to him. He reminds himself that he is lord of the manor and so forth, and that it is his duty to protect his daughter from a mesalliance. You see it is again the old pitiful bargaining with men's hearts, sticking to insane prejudices at the expense of all sound morality. But console yourself, Justus, it is not you, but Herr von Strummin who has built his house upon sand. He will find it out soon enough, and he will come to you and say, 'My dear sir, I have been terribly in the wrong, and here is my daughter's hand.'"

"That would be splendid," said Justus, smiling in spite of his trouble, "only--I do not believe in it."

"Justus! Justus!" cried Reinhold; "do I hear this from you? From whom have I learnt that sandstone is hard to work, but marble much harder, and that whoso works all his life in sandstone and marble must take life easy, if he would not have the devil take possession of him. Do you really mean him to take possession of you?"

"You may well say that," answered Justus; "I do not recognise myself any longer. It is as if gipsies had stolen me in the night, and left a miserable, dismal, incapable sneak in my place. All that I have lately done has been rubbish, which I would undo were I not certain that I should make it still worse. Oh! this love! this love! I have always foreseen it, I have always said it would be fatal to me; it always has been fatal to every artist. To-day, whilst you were paying your visit, I glanced into Ferdinanda's studio. She is working at a Bacchante--in her present mood! but there is genius in it, only it is carried to madness, to absolute caricature. That is what she has got by it, that glorious creature! Uncle Ernst is all right again. He has allowed himself to be elected delegate of the city, because he has not got enough to do, and next year will have himself elected to the Chamber of Deputies and the Imperial Diet, and will stupefy himself with work, which is at any rate more wholesome than wine. But poor, poor Ferdinanda! I think, Reinhold, you must get in." The platform had meanwhile filled with travellers, some of whom hurried into the opened carriages, or after taking possession of their places, stood chatting at the doors. Amongst the latter was a party of young men in shooting dress, whom the two friends had just passed.

"I don't think he will come," said one of them, in whom Reinhold thought he recognised Herr von Tettritz.

"Seems so," said another--Herr von Wartenberg, as Reinhold, turning his head, convinced himself. From the door of the waiting-room hastily appeared a gentleman, also in shooting-dress, followed by a soldier-servant carrying the game-bag and gun over his shoulder. It was Ottomar. And Ottomar, for all his haste, had at once recognised the two friends. They saw how he started, and then, as if he had remarked nothing, passed on, but suddenly turned round.

"I am not mistaken. Good-evening, gentlemen. You are coming with us?"

"I am," said Reinhold, "to Sundin."

"Ah! I heard as much from my sister, who, I think, had it from Fräulein von Strummin, and also at Wallbach's, from whom I have just come. You have got the post; I congratulate. Sorry I was not at home this morning. Parade, barracks--nonsense! You may be thankful that you have nothing more to do with such stuff. I envy you, by Jove! It's shameful that we have seen so little of each other lately. It's a little your fault too; you might have let yourself be seen again. I shall heap coals of fire on your head, and visit you at Wissow--next spring. Golm has invited me to shoot snipe--best in all Germany, so he says, and I believe him--for once. My sister will very likely come earlier--to Warnow; perhaps Fräulein von Wallbach also. My aunt Valerie, who finds this place too noisy, has invited both the young ladies. *Au revoir*, then, or will you--but that will not do--we are already six. We are only going as far as Schönau, a property belonging to an uncle of the Captain's. *Au revoir*, then. I will soon pay you a visit too, if you will allow me--it was delightful in your studio. I must also see Fräulein von Strummin; I hear she is wonderfully----"

"Take your seats, gentlemen!" said the guard.

"Werben, Werben!"

"Coming! Good-bye, good-bye!" Ottomar shook hands with the friends in passing, and hurried to his clamouring companions.

"Does he know?" asked Justus.

"No--by-and-by, perhaps; it is, for the present, a strict secret between Elsa and me. I shall write to the General from Wissow."

"It is better so," said Justus. Reinhold did not answer. The evening of his arrival stood out suddenly, with all its details, in his memory. How eagerly Ottomar had then sought his friendship, how heartily Uncle Ernst had received him, how Ferdinanda herself had welcomed him! And now! It was not his fault--that was at least a consolation.

"Here is an empty carriage," said Justus.

"Farewell, my dear Justus! Say goodbye again to Cilli for me, and Herr Kreisel, and tell him not to trust in the Sundin-Wissow; and hearty thanks for your friendship and affection."

"Not a word more, or--I am desperately sentimental to-day. This love--this horrible----" Justus smothered the rest of his blasphemy in a mighty embrace, pulled his broad-brimmed hat over his eyes, and rushed away.

"Good fellow!" said Reinhold to himself, as he arranged his goods in the carriage. "I never should have credited him with it. Strange! What has restored to me courage, and the old feeling of security, has robbed him of his ready creative power and his cheery humour. And yet the impediments which lie in his way are child's-play compared to those that surround us. God grant he may soon smile again! Cilli is right--he cannot live without sunshine." Reinhold had seated himself. The signal for starting had already been given, when the door was again thrown open, and a gentleman was hastily bundled in by the guard.

"Here, please, I have no more empty carriages. Your ticket at the next station!" The guard shut the door.

"Good-evening, President; allow me," said Reinhold, taking the President's great travelling-bag and putting it in the net.

"Good gracious! is it you?" cried the President. "Where are you going?"

"I would not fail to present myself before you in Sundin on the 1st of December, according to your orders," answered Reinhold, rather surprised.

"Yes, yes, of course!" said the President. "Pardon me--such a stupid question! I am so worried, so perplexed--once more, forgive me!" And he stretched out his hand to Reinhold with his accustomed gracious friendliness.

"It is quite unnecessary, President," said Reinhold; "I know that you are busied about more important things and men."

"Yes, yes, more important things," said the President--"evil things! And the men--these men, these men--pray sit opposite to me! One can talk so much better, and I am very glad to see an honest face again." The President wrapped his rug round his knees. His fine, clever face looked pale and worn, and the touch of quiet irony and sarcastic humour which Reinhold had noticed at their first meeting had altogether failed him.

"I have been four days in Berlin," said the President, "and should certainly have begged you to come and see me, only, to confess the truth, I have been skulking about like a criminal with the police after him, so as not to be seen by any respectable men, if I could avoid it. Perhaps you know what took me to Berlin?"

"The papers, President----"

"Yes, yes, the papers. Unfortunately there is no longer any decent obscurity. Everything will come out, and if it were only confined to the truth!--but unfortunately it is generally neither the whole truth, nor even the half. What falsehoods have not people--that is to say, the gentlemen concerned in the matter--told about me! I was concerning myself actively in the existence of the railroad, working for it, dinning into the Minister's ears that the concession must be granted--I, who have fought against it from the first, and warned the Minister most strenuously against it! Then, as that would not do, they attacked me from the other side. I had been an opponent, a determined opponent--I had been convinced at last--Saul had become Paul. That sounded more probable, but not probable enough. I was not convinced--I was simply bought. That was believed at once--it spoke for itself. A President, with his few thousand thalers salary, notoriously devoid of private fortune, the father of six children--how could he withstand such inducements! It is a shame and disgrace that it was believed, as it will be believed to-morrow, that there was not enough offered! The crafty fellow knows only too well what he is worth; he will quietly bide his

time, watch for his opportunity, and feather his nest well!' That is the worst, you see. Confidence, is shaken in the honour and integrity of our officials. It is the beginning of the end for me--the threatening cloud which foreshadows a future which I pray God I may never live to see!" The President tugged here and there at his rug which he was generally so careful to keep smooth, unfastened his kid gloves which he had just buttoned, and drew them off his trembling hands. Reinhold himself was moved by the intense emotion of a man usually so cautious and so shrouded in diplomatic mists.

"It would be presumption in me," he said, "if I ventured to contradict a man of your great experience and judgment. Nevertheless I cannot refrain from suggesting that, just because the case concerns you so nearly, you may perhaps see it in too black a light."

"May be, may be!" said the President, "but this is no isolated case; there are others which unfortunately speak on my side, where high officials have succumbed to the temptation put before them. And then----" He was silent for a few minutes, and then continued even more excitedly:

"If the higher powers only had tact, I say--only tact not to strengthen this most dangerous, and I confess exaggerated, tendency of the public mind to suspicion and distrust. But you will feel it painfully--the slightest acquaintance was sufficient to make one honour and respect the man--General von Werben----"

"I know, President," said Reinhold, as the President again became silent; "and my acquaintance with that excellent man has not been a transient one."

"Well then, what do you say to this?" cried the President. "Differences have existed between him and the Minister, I know; differences which must have been settled by a superior authority. It is difficult, it is almost impossible to work with any one who is determined not to act in concert. One must give way, and of course the inferior; but just at this time that should have been avoided. It will throw fresh oil into the fire, as if it did not burn fiercely enough already, as if matters had not already been made easy enough for these promoters! They will laugh in their sleeves: 'Do you see that? do you hear that? We had just intended, modest as we are, to take our shares into the market to-morrow at 75; but now we ask 80--85! Paper that can send a General von Werben flying, cannot be difficult to float!'

"You will see, my dear sir, they will trumpet it in all the papers, and--even if it is all false--if the General's position were untenable, the mob goes by outward appearance, judges by outward appearance, and--outward appearance is against us." The rug slipped from his knees, but he never seemed to observe it.

"And if that were all! But we, of whom our illustrious sovereign has so rightly said that we are appointed by fate to eat our bread in the sweat of our brow, we begin to desire to live for show, for glittering useless show. Take this railway business; it is all show whichever way you look at it--good high roads, decent communal roads are all that we need for the moderate requirements of our island, which the prospectus boastfully calls the 'granary of Germany.' Show is the security upon the ground of which alone the concession can be obtained; I know that they could not raise even the few hundred thousand thalers. The subscriptions according to rule from 'good and substantial houses,' are show--shameful show; the only real subscription is from Prince Prora, through whose territory nearly a third of the railway passes; the other ten million are from Count Golm, and Co.--and not one thaler is paid up, or ever will be paid. So it goes on, so it must go on. You can't gather figs from thistles, and as to what is to be expected from that magnificent harbour which is to crown the whole, well, you know all about that as well as or better than I do." The President stood up and went to the window, through which the lights of the town were already disappearing. Then he came back to his place and said as he leant over towards Reinhold, in an almost mysterious voice:

"Do you remember a conversation on the evening when I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance at the Count's table at Golmberg? I have so often thought of it lately. Your storm--I hope to God it may not come--but if it comes as you have prophesied, I should take it for a parable of what is hanging over us. Yes! for a sign from heaven! to awaken us, to startle us out of our criminal intoxication, out of our empty, visionary life, to withdraw the glittering show from our eyes, to show us, as Fichte says, 'that which is.' Ah! where is the hand which would now write us 'Speeches to the German nation?' I would bless that hand. Instead of it our philosophers prate about the intellect, which is meant for nothing but to lead the will into absurdities, and to crush and destroy all joy and cheerfulness which is yet the mother of all virtues; and our poets are disciples of the French school, and learn how to be frivolous and disreputable to the heart's core without offending external proprieties, or wander, poor creatures, with their beggar's staves in the ruins of the age, and try to make us believe that the clouds of dust that they raise are creatures of flesh and blood; and our composers show forth the *blasé* impudence, the shameless sensuality of the age in music which fairly bewilders the moral and æsthetic feelings of the great and small world, or heats the fevered blood to madness.

"It cannot remain so. It is impossible; a nation cannot continue to dance before the golden calf and sacrifice to Moloch. Either it will be overwhelmed in the flood of its sins, or it must cling to the saving Ararat of honest, manly, and middle-class virtue. God grant that our people may have strength for the latter. There are times when I despair of it." The President leant back and closed

his eyes. Did he wish to break off the conversation? Was he too much exhausted to pursue it further? At any rate, Reinhold did not venture to express the thoughts with which his heart was full. Each sat silent in his corner. The last lights of the town had long disappeared. Over the broad, dark plain, through which the train rushed, lay a light covering of snow, from which the woods rose up gloomily. Above, in the darkening sky, sparkled and shone, in countless numbers, the eternal stars. Reinhold's eyes were gazing upwards. How often had he so gazed from the deck of his ship on stormy winter nights with an anxious, fearful heart! And his heart had again beat high with courage, if only one of the loved and trusted lights illuminated his lonely path. And now, when they all beamed upon him, those silver stars--and greater, mightier than all, the star of his love--now, should he lose courage? Never! The storm might come--it would find him ready; it would find him at his post.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

Dinner had been over an hour at Castle Warnow. Frau von Wallbach, Elsa, and Count Golm, who had been invited to dinner, were sitting in the drawing-room round the hearth, on which but a small fire was burning. Although only just the end of February, the day had been wonderfully sultry. François even had to open the window, and it was not to be wondered at that the Baroness should have been seized with one of her bad headaches at dinner, and directly they got up from the table should have begged leave to withdraw. Carla had gone to put on her habit, not wishing to lose the opportunity of riding once more, escorted by several gentlemen. Herr von Strummin, who had paid a neighbourly morning visit and remained to the early country dinner, now wished, or was obliged, to return home, and had gone to see after the horses. Count Golm, who had really intended to spend the evening at Warnow, now thought it would be better, in consideration of the Baroness's indisposition, to return to Golm after the ride without again dismounting, and at once took leave of the ladies. He had hoped that Elsa, to whom he had addressed himself, would have protested, at least with some polite phrase, which he might have accepted as genuine. But Elsa was silent, and Frau von Wallbach with difficulty concealed a fit of yawning, as she leaned back in her arm-chair, and with her hand before her mouth, seemed to be making a minute inspection of the ceiling. The Count bit his lip.

"I am afraid we have not been very lively company for the ladies," he said. "Strummin was really unbearable. I believe he drank three bottles to his own share, and spoke about as many words. I think such silence must be catching, or is it in the air? It is really just like May, when the first thunderstorms come. What a pity that Captain Schmidt did not accept your aunt's invitation, Fräulein Elsa! he might, perhaps, have told us the meaning of this wonderfully sultry state of the atmosphere. I wonder why he did not come?" The Count seldom missed an opportunity of reflecting upon Reinhold in what he imagined to be a peculiarly sarcastic and witty manner. It could only be the consequence of the blind hatred with which, from the first he had honoured him. Reinhold had once visited Warnow during the last week, and that for an hour only. They had certainly never given any one the slightest indication by which a clue could be found to the nature of their mutual relations, yet the Count's last remark sent the blood up into Elsa's cheek.

"Captain Schmidt only expressed his regret that he had no time to avail himself of our invitation to-day," she said.

"I should like to know what a man like that has to do," returned the Count. "He does not, so far as I know, manage the boat himself, but looks on comfortably from the shore. A mere sinecure, it seems to me."

"Perhaps you do not clearly understand the duties and cares of a man in such a position, Count Golm?"

"Very likely. For instance, I cannot understand why it is his duty, or why he gives himself the

trouble to interfere in the strangest and most perverse way with my harbour works. Amongst other things, I know it for a fact that we owe to his suggestion, or rather his denunciation----"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," said Elsa; "the gentleman of whom you are speaking possesses the regard, I may say the affection, of my father; he is my--friend, received by my aunt at Warnow. I do not think it right to allow him to be cried down here--in his absence."

"But," cried the Count, "you completely misunderstand me. I had not the slightest intention of maligning that gentleman. I call it a denunciation, because----"

"Perhaps you will be so kind as to take some opportunity of mentioning the matter before him; I am certain that he will give you a satisfactory answer. Dear Louisa, will you excuse my going to see after my aunt? she may want me." Elsa bent over Frau von Wallbach's chair, then, drawing herself up, made the Count a civil but cold bow, and left the drawing-room.

"This is too much!" said the Count, looking after her; "what do you think of that, Frau von Wallbach? To make such a fuss about this man, who cavils at everything. Just imagine that he may manage to bring matters to such a pass, that we shall not dare to demolish the dunes on the left of Ahlbeck, in spite of the position being absolutely necessary to us as a depôt for our materials! He asserts that the dunes are a protection for the whole coast. Just fancy! Sixty feet of beach at the narrowest part, and then to talk of protecting the coast! Absurd! And our dear President of course----"

"My dear Count," said Frau von Wallbach, turning her head towards the Count, "what does it all matter to me?"

"Pardon me, my dear lady," said the Count; "I thought----"

"And I am already bored to death," exclaimed Frau von Wallbach; "good gracious, how bored I am! This week--oh! this week! If I could only write to Wallbach to come and fetch me back!"

"We should miss you dreadfully," said the Count.

"I think you would get on very well without me," said Frau von Wallbach; "and besides, my dear Count, this cannot go on any longer. Either you must make up your minds, or you must give it up. Do you think Elsa is blind?"

"Bah!" said the Count, "Fräulein Elsa has got her interesting Superintendent of Pilots!"

"Yes," said Frau von Wallbach; "you are always talking about that; but I have lately watched them both closely, and I tell you it is nonsense."

"I have it on the best authority."

"From Signor Giraldi, of course; he knows everything! And yet it was Signor Giraldi who originally interested himself in your engagement to Elsa. I cannot understand it. It is such a bore to be groping in the dark like this." The Count, for whom there were also many obscure points in this delicate affair, thought it high time to break off the conversation.

"I think the horses must have been brought round," he said, rising and kissing Frau von Wallbach's hand; "excuse me for to-day; to-morrow, if you will permit it, I will call again. I want to show Fräulein Carla the harbour works. She interests herself very much about them. I hope that you will be of the party. *Au revoir!*" He hurried away without waiting for the lady's answer. As he passed hastily through the anteroom, from which doors opened on all sides, Carla came towards him, holding her whip in one hand and in the other her hat and gloves.

"Your sister-in-law is still in the drawing-room," he said out loud.

"Thank you," replied Carla equally distinctly. He made her a sign with hand and eye.

"Have you examined this charming old painting yet?"

"Which one!"

"This one, here! look!" They had moved so far on one side that they could not well be seen from the drawing-room, of which the portières were open.

"One only," whispered the Count.

"You are mad!"

"The first--and last to-day." She put up her lips to him.

"Angel!"

"Really charming!" said Carla out loud; and then in a whisper, "For heaven's sake, go away!" She vanished into the drawing-room, and the Count rushed into the corridor. Neither had remarked, their whole attention being directed to the drawing-room, that at the moment when

their lips met the portière of a second door, which led to the inner apartments, was lifted, and as quickly dropped again.

"Is Elsa gone?" asked Carla. "I wanted to say good-bye to her." Frau von Wallbach turned her head so far as to be able to see Carla if necessary. "I have spoken to him."

"What did you say?" asked Carla eagerly.

"That it is too boring here, and I cannot stand it any longer."

"That was all?"

"It was enough for me. You must manage for yourself."

"But Edward himself thinks your presence necessary here."

"Your brother cannot expect that I should bore myself to death for you." Carla shrugged her shoulders. "You will be in a better temper to-morrow. Good-bye!"

"I go to-morrow, you may depend upon that." To hear a decided resolution from her sister-in-law was something so extraordinary, that Carla, who was already at the door, turned round again. "But, Louisa----"

"Well, I do not see it at all," said Frau von Wallbach. "Elsa is always amiable to me, much more so than you are. I was really sorry for the Baroness to-day, to see the trouble she took without receiving the slightest thanks from you, and I am sorry for poor Ottomar. Whatever he may be, he does not show me that he thinks me a fool, as you do, and I do not think it seemly that behind his aunt's back in her own house----"

"Warnow has long belonged to the Count," said Carla.

"It is all the same. We are staying here with the Baroness, and not with the Count. If you wish to stay with the Count, marry him--for all I care. But I think you would be sorry if you gave up Ottomar, and I do not see how it would be possible now. However, do as you please--I go!" The unheard-of obstinacy of her sister-in-law began to make Carla really uneasy. She laid her things down on a chair, knelt by Louisa's side, and as she held and stroked her hand, said in a soft coaxing voice, "My sweet pet will never hurt me so. She will not leave poor Carla in her need. Ottomar is too bad. I know now, from Giraldi, why he proposed to me, because he was refused by Ferdinanda Schmidt, and he is still madly in love with her, and is making use of his former mistress to win her back. And Giraldi says that he has so many debts that his whole inheritance would not pay them, even if Elsa--and Giraldi knows everything, everything, I tell you--married that man; and you yourself would hardly wish to have the wife of a Superintendent of Pilots for a sister-in-law--would you, my sweet pet!"

"That is all nonsense," said Frau von Wallbach, with a feeble and fruitless attempt to draw her hand away from Carla's. "You never had scruples about Ottomar's mistresses formerly. I am certain that the Count also has his mistresses--all men have; and the same with regard to his debts. The Count has certainly as many--and perhaps more."

"But not such bad ones," said Carla hastily. "He has terrible debts, Giraldi says."

"The fact is," said Frau von Wallbach, "you are over head and ears in love with the Count."

"And if I say yes, will my sweetest Louisa remain here?" whispered Carla, suddenly throwing her arms round her sister-in-law and laying her head on her shoulder.

"You will see, no good will come of it." François looked into the room. "I beg pardon, but the Count has sent to ask if mademoiselle----"

"I am coming," cried Carla, stretching out her hand for her hat. "You will, will you not, sweet pet?--please fasten the elastic of my hat behind--you will remain! Thanks! Adieu, sweet pet!" She once more embraced her sister-in-law, took her gloves from the chair, and hastened away, her skirt trailing far behind her.

"If it were only not such a bore!" said Frau von Wallbach, sinking back in her chair. When the Count came down, the horses had just been brought round. Herr von Strummin was sitting on a bench which encircled the trunk of a wide-spreading lime-tree, and playing with the point of his riding-whip in the fine gravel.

"You have come at last?" he said, looking up angrily.

"Fräulein von Wallbach wishes to say good-bye again to the ladies," said the Count, seating himself by the side of his friend, "and it is rather a long business. We shall still have some little time to wait."

"So much the better," said Herr von Strummin; "I have not for a long time had the pleasure of speaking to you for a minute alone. So, without any beating about the bush--I am very sorry, but I must have back my five thousand thalers."

"I am very sorry too, my dear Strummin," replied the Count, laughing, "because I cannot repay them."

"Cannot repay me!" exclaimed Herr von Strummin, as the colour grew still deeper in his red face. "But you told me that I could count upon it at any time."

"Because I naturally supposed that you would not choose just the most unsuitable time. You know that I must pay off that mortgage to-morrow."

"Why did you give notice to pay it off? It was most imprudent. I told you so from the first."

"I wanted to save the interest; and if you can get back two million for one--in the meantime--of course--as things stand at present----"

"You may be thankful that the directors have postponed the date of payment of the second instalment, which was due to-morrow."

"Certainly," said the Count; "it is very kind of the gentlemen. I should have been in a terrible position; but it has not made my situation even now particularly pleasant. That confounded mortgage! My creditor is most disagreeably pressing; he says he must have the money back."

"Perhaps it may now transpire who this creditor really is whom you make such a mystery about?"

"I have given my word of honour----"

"Then say nothing. It is all the same to me, moreover; and if you can pay half a million to-morrow to the gentleman in question, you can also raise my five thousand!"

"I do not know yet whether I shall be able to pay!" cried the Count impatiently--"Lübbener--Haselow and Co.--I could not stand Lübbener any longer--unlimited orders to sell; but if to-morrow our shares go down still further--they stood the day before yesterday at forty-five----"

"And yesterday at twenty-five!"

"Impossible!" cried the Count.

"Good heavens, man! have you never troubled yourself to inquire, then?"

"I--I--my letters lately--the presence of the ladies here--there are so many claims upon me----"

"So it seems," replied Herr von Strummin, taking a letter out of his pocket. "I got my banker to write to me yesterday, as I saw what was impending, and have carried his letter about with me since this morning. I have already been over to Golm, too, to tell you of it." He unfolded the letter: "Sundin-Wissows were offered freely to-day at thirty-five; no buyers. They then rose to forty-five on large purchases. When it became known, however, that Lübbener himself was the buyer, merely to keep up the price, they fell rapidly, and closed at twenty-five! Please telegraph distinct orders whether to sell at any price. A further fall is inevitable.' There you have the whole affair."

"It is certainly bad," murmured the Count.

"And whom have we to thank for all this?" cried Herr von Strummin. "You--you only! You first led us into the affair, and promised all sorts of things, and then prudently left us in the dark until you had pocketed your profits as promoter. Then we fell further into the trap, and had to pay up heavily; and finally you throw half a million into the market, and bring down the value of our own shares. And I, like a fool, gave you the last penny I had; and instead of looking after your own affairs, as it was your bounden duty to do, you hang about here with the women, and----"

"I think that last clause has nothing to do with the matter." said the Count, getting up.

"Nothing to do with it!" cried the other, also springing to his feet. "Very well! very well! ruin yourself if you please, but at least leave other people out of the game. And I tell you, that if by twelve o'clock the day after to-morrow my five thousand thalers, which I lent you on your word of honour, are not lying on my table at Strummin to the uttermost farthing----"

"For heaven's sake do not speak so loud," said the Count; "you shall have your money, although I am convinced that the great trousseau is only a pretext----"

"A pretext? a pretext?" cried Herr von Strummin, raising his rough voice if possible still louder; "pretext indeed! when Meta is herself gone this morning to Berlin, to----"

"This morning?" said the Count, with a jeering laugh; "excuse my remarking, *mon cher*, that was very imprudent of you! Our shares may rise again, and--the stone-cutter will not run away." Herr von Strummin's light blue eyes almost started out of his burning face. He became suddenly hoarse with passion.

"What, what, what!" he snarled. "A stone-cutter? An artist! and a great artist, who every year

makes his six to ten thousand--a stone-cutter?"

"I only say it because you always call him so yourself."

"I can call my son-in-law anything I choose, but if any one else permits himself to do so, he shall eat his words as sure as I----"

"You gentlemen must certainly have grown very impatient," said Carla, who came out of the door just at this moment.

"Not at all," said the Count, turning on his heel and hastening towards her.

"Yes, very impatient!" cried Herr von Strummin, who had suddenly recovered his voice. "I was only waiting to take my leave; I must be at Strummin in half an hour. I hope the conversation will get on better without me; I have the honour----" He snatched the reins of his great strong-boned black horse out of the groom's hand, swung himself into the saddle, and sticking his spurs into the animal's sides, galloped out of the courtyard.

"Good gracious!" whispered Carla, "what does it mean?"

"A little row," said the Count, hiding the excitement into which the altercation had thrown him as well as he could under a forced smile; "nothing uncommon between old friends."

"And the cause?"

"A last attempt, it seemed to me, to get a Count for a son-in-law, before accepting a sculptor." The Count had assisted Carla into her saddle, put the riding-whip into her hand, and was now arranging her skirt. Carla bent towards him: "You bad man, I will give you a lecture on the way."

"Pity it cannot be without a witness," whispered the Count, with a look towards the groom, who was holding the reins of the other two horses.

"You are really too bad!"

"At your service," said the Count out loud, and he stepped back and signed to the groom. He swung himself on to his horse, and started off with Carla, followed by the groom at a considerable distance. He had had some trouble in getting into his saddle.

END OF VOL. II.

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